

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BAN AND KING TVRTKO I AND THE SERBIAN NOBILITY

### Abstract

The relationship between the Bosnian Ban and King Tvrtko I and the nobility from the territories of the Serbian Empire in the second half of the 14th century represents a topic that has not been the subject of comprehensive research in current historiography. Existing historiographical knowledge can be expanded through historical sources published in various source editions, most extensively through information available from neighboring regions. This paper examines the relations of Ban and King Tvrtko I with Serbian rulers and nobles from the territory of the Serbian Empire who, following the collapse of centralized state power, established domains under their own control, such as Lazar Hrebeljanović, Vojislav Vojinović, Nikola Altomanović, Vuk Branković, and the Balšić family.

**Keywords:** Bosnia, Tvrtko I, Serbian nobility, Lazar Hrebeljanović, Nikola Altomanović, relations, conflicts, conquests.

## ODNOS IZMEĐU BOSANSKOG BANA I KRALJA TVRTKA I I SRPSKE VLASTELE

### Apstrakt

Odnos između bosanskog bana i kralja Tvrtka I i vlastele sa teritorija Srpskog carstva u drugoj polovini 14. stoljeća predstavlja tematski okvir koji u dosadašnjoj historiografiji nije bio predmetom zasebnog istraživanja kao cjelokupan proces. Dosadašnja historografska saznanja moguće je nadopuniti historijskim izvorima publiciranim u okviru različitih izdanja izvora u najvećem obimu kroz informacije sa kojima su raspolagali susjedi. U okviru ovog članka obrađeni su odnosi bana i kralja Tvrtka I sa srpskim vladarima, te vlastelinima sa prostora Srpskog carstva koji su nakon nestanka državne vlasti formirali oblasti pod svojom upravom poput Lazara Hrebeljanovića, Vojislava Vojinovića, Nikole Altomanovića, Vuka Brankovića, te sa Balšićima.

**Ključne riječi:** Bosna, Tvrtko I, srpska vlastela, Lazar Hrebeljanović, Nikola Altomanović, odnosi, sukobi, osvajanja.

## Disintegration of the Serbian Empire: Introduction of the Figures

After the death of Emperor Dušan in December 1355, the functioning of the state system changed fundamentally. The Serbian state began an unstoppable decline and suffered territorial losses on both its northern and southern borders. Dušan was succeeded by his son Uroš, who had already been crowned king in 1346. However, it turned out that Uroš lacked the capability to continue the development of the state in the same direction as his father, who had managed to double its territory. Even before Dušan's death and shortly after Uroš came to power, Byzantine nobles succeeded in reclaiming Thessaly, the southern part of Epirus, Cephalonia, cities along the Aegean coast, and Kani-na and Valona were detached from the Serbian state. On the other hand, in the summer of 1359, the noble family Rastislalić entered the service of the Hungarian king Louis I, resulting in Uroš losing control over Braničevo and Kučevo. Alongside these territorial losses, Uroš also had to contend with a rival claimant to the throne, Dušan's half-brother Simeon. During Dušan's reign, Simeon had received the title of despot and possessions in the conquered territories. After Dušan's death, Simeon proclaimed himself emperor, however, without the support of the nobility and the patriarch, he was defeated in the summer of 1358 near Shkodër, ending his ambitions to assert himself as ruler of the Serbian Empire. In mid-1359, after defeating Despot Nikephoros II, Simeon managed to regain control over Thessaly. With Thessaly and Epirus, he established his own domain, which he continued to rule under the title of emperor.<sup>1</sup>

Uroš's reign was marked by the emergence, strengthening, and increasing independence of the nobility, who began to conduct more autonomous internal and foreign policies in the territories they governed, separate from the imperial crown. This phenomenon first became apparent in the regions that Dušan had conquered in "Romania", south of the Skopje-southeastern Adriatic and Ionian coast line, where the self-proclaimed emperor Simeon particularly stood out. However, over time, this process spread across the entire Serbian Empire. In 1357, a previously unknown nobleman named Žarko appeared as the self-proclaimed lord of Zeta, to whom the Venetian authorities granted the status of their citizen. However, Žarko is not mentioned again in

1 Jireček, 1978, 238–241; Dinić, 1953, 139–143; Mihaljčić, 1989, 14–24, 27–29; Isti, 1981(a), 566–571; Isti, 1981(b), 573–576.

the sources and was likely soon removed by the central authorities. Uroš's mother, Empress Jelena, governed the region of Serres in eastern Macedonia. Initially, she recognized the authority of the central government, but by 1361 at the latest, Emperor Uroš formally acknowledged her as the sole ruler of the Serres region.<sup>2</sup>

Among the nobles who were the earliest to transform their inherited domains into regions ruled independently from central authority were the Vojinović family. Their ancestral lands were located in the area of Gacko and Rudine. The earliest known generation included the brothers Vojin and Hrvatin. Vojin was a prominent noble during the reign of King Stefan Dečanski, and he had three sons: Miloš, Altoman, and Vojislav. Vojin was succeeded by his youngest son, Vojislav, who is first mentioned in sources in October 1333 when, on behalf of King Dušan, he managed the St. Demetrius tribute. Initially, he held the title of *stavilac*, and later, *knez* (prince). He was granted the honor of Venetian citizenship in 1362. Although he was not especially prominent during Emperor Dušan's reign, he became one of the most powerful men in Rascia at that time. In a short period, he managed to annex the territories of smaller neighboring nobles and ruled regions positioned in the counties of Dabar, Drina, Gacko, and Rudine. He frequently clashed with Ragusa and its subjects. Before his death in October 1363, Vojislav ruled lands between the Drina River, Kosovo, Rudnik, and the Adriatic Sea, including the counties of Dračevica, Konavle, Trebinje, and Popovo Polje. He was succeeded by his wife, Gojislava, along with their underage sons Stefan and Dobrovoj.<sup>3</sup> It is evident that rivalry among the nobility within the Serbian Empire was intensifying, which directly contributed to the destabilization of the central government. Their inherited lands gradually transformed into independent territories, ruled autonomously by individual nobles or noble families.

The Balšić family ruled over a significantly smaller territory. The first mention of the Balšić noble family comes from a letter written by Uroš in 1360, at which time they controlled a narrow area between Lake Skadar and the Adriatic Sea, and also held the town of Bar. The family was led by three brothers: Stracimir, Đurađ, and Balša. According to Orbin, the progenitor Balša was a poor nobleman during the reign of Emperor Dušan. However, later events suggest that the Balšićs were already a notable force within the Serbian state by the time they first appear in

2 Ferjančić, 1965, 3–6; Mihaljčić, 1981, 26–27, 29–30; Isti, 1981(b), 577.

3 Zečević, 1908, 1–5; Dinić, 1932, 3–7; Mihaljčić, 1981(b), 578–579; Tomović, 2011, 355–361; Andrejić, 2012, 3–8; Dragičević, 2021, 65–66.

historical records. Their independent foreign policy stance became evident during the war that Vojislav Vojinović launched against Ragusa in 1361. In this conflict, the Balšićs sided with Ragusa and became its citizens during that period. Their role in broader political processes at the time is also reflected in a decision by the Venetian authorities in July 1362, when they were granted the status of Venetian citizens. The Balšićs maintained good relations with the Mrnjavčević family, due to the fact that Vukašin was Đurađ's father-in-law. In the following years, the Balšićs managed to push out smaller nobles to the east of their possessions and solidify their rule over Lower Zeta. However, they avoided conflict with the much stronger Vojinović, who in March 1363 was preparing an attack on the Balšićs, something the authorities in Ragusa reminded him of, noting that both noble families were under the same overlord. By the following year, the Balšićs were at war with Karl Thopia, during which one of the brothers, Đurađ, was captured. After the death of Vojislav Vojinović, the Balšićs managed to seize Upper Zeta from his widow, Gojislava, and unsuccessfully attempted to besiege the town of Kotor. In the summer of 1371, the Balšićs entered an alliance with King Vukašin against Nikola Altomanović. However, after the defeat of the Mrnjavčevićs, the Balšićs occupied their city of Prizren. Furthermore, following the downfall of Nikola Altomanović, and although they were not part of the victorious coalition, the Balšićs took control of Trebinje, Konavle, and Dračevica, along with the right to collect the St. Demetrius tribute. With these territorial expansions in the 1370s, the Balšićs became, alongside Prince Lazar, the most prominent noble family in the former territory of the Serbian Empire.<sup>4</sup>

Vukašin and Uglješa Mrnjavčević held state functions from the mid-14th century during the reign of Emperor Uroš. Their starting positions are not precisely defined, but they are associated with possessions they had in Macedonia. In 1365, Uroš declared Vukašin as a co-ruler, making him king. In the battle against the Ottomans in September 1371 on the Maritsa River, the armies of Vukašin and his brother Uglješa were defeated, and both were killed. Vukašin's son, Marko, inherited the title of king and co-ruler with Uroš. However, Marko became an Ottoman vassal, king in name only, without any significant influence, reduced to the level of an average nobleman.<sup>5</sup>

4 Jireček, 1978, 243–244, 248; Ćirković, 1970, 6–33; Mihaljčić, 1981(b), 579–582; Isti, 1981(c), 591; Jovović, 2011, 137–145; Šekularac, 2011, 21–40.

5 Jireček, 1978, 246–249, 251–252; Škrivanić, 1963, 82–93; Ferjančić, 1965, 6–19; Mihaljčić, 1989, 186–196; Isti, 1981(c), 585–590; Mihaljčić, 1981(d), 593–602.

Župan Nikola Altomanović was the son of Altoman, brother of Vojislav Vojinović, and Vitoslava, daughter of Voivode Mladen, the progenitor of the Branković family. In 1347, Altoman held the title of župan in the area around Ragusa, and he died in 1359. His possessions were inherited by his son Nikola. The consolidation of Nikola's territory can be traced back to the 1360s. Since his father had died earlier, Nikola also inherited a portion of his uncle Vojislav's possessions. He was first mentioned in historical sources in November 1366. Due to the weakness of Emperor Uroš and the preoccupation of co-ruler King Vukašin, Altomanović managed, without obstruction, to seize the southern territories of Vojislav's former possessions by 1368, territory which had been under the control of Vojislav's widow, Goislava, and also took control of Rudnik. Župan Nikola's rise was rapid and effective: in a short period, he became one of the most powerful nobles in Serbia, ruling a territory that stretched from Ragusa to Rudnik. He frequently clashed with most of his neighbors. In the fall of 1373, he was defeated in conflict with a broader coalition, and his territories were divided.<sup>6</sup>

The formation of Lazar Hrebeljanović's domain developed much more slowly. According to Orbin, he was the son of Pribac Hrebeljanović, a logothete and *veliki peharnik* during the reign of Emperor Dušan. In the early years of Emperor Uroš's rule, Lazar resided at his court with the title of *stavilac*. After leaving court service in 1365, sources trace his activities to his native Prilepac in the Topolnica region near Novo Brdo, with parts of his possessions also located in the regions of Izmornik and Morava. His significantly smaller territory was bordered by the much larger territories of the Mrnjavčević and Altomanović families. These neighboring lords posed the main threat to Lazar's survival, leading to frequent conflicts with them. He was married to Milica, daughter of Prince Vratko, a distinguished military commander under Emperor Dušan who descended from a cadet branch of the Nemanjić dynasty. Under circumstances that remain unclear, Lazar took advantage of internal conflicts between the lords of Rascia and the Mrnjavčević family in 1370, managing to expand his territory to include Rudnik, which he soon lost to Župan Nikola. However, after the deaths of the Mrnjavčević brothers in the battle against the Ottomans in September 1371, Lazar seized Novo Brdo, Priština, Lipljan, and the Lab region. Following the complete downfall of Župan

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6 Jireček, 1978, 249–250; Dinić, 1932, 4–28; Mihaljčić, 1981(c), 591–592; Tomović, 2011, 358, 361–363.

Nikola, Prince Lazar came into possession of Rudnik and territories extending to the Drina River. By the end of the 1370s, Lazar's territory encompassed Raška, Moravica, Topolica, Hvosno, Novo Brdo, Lim, Rudnik, Braničevo, Prizren, Skopje, as well as the ecclesiastical centers of Peć and Žiča, making him the most powerful nobleman in the territory of the former Serbian Empire.<sup>7</sup>

Among the prominent Serbian noble families that emerged in the territory of the former Serbian Empire, the Branković family held significant importance. The earliest known member of the family was Voivode Mladen, who served under Kings Milutin, Stefan Dečanski, and Dušan. He had a son named Branko Mladenović, who was first mentioned in a document from 1328. Their hereditary possessions were located in Drenica, in Kosovo. The family possessions were inherited by Branko's son Vuk, who was married to Mara, daughter of Lazar Hrebeljanović. By the 1370s, Vuk had consolidated his domain, ruling over territories that included Kosovo and Metohija, part of Polimlje, the Pešter Plateau, and Skopje in the southeast.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Fate of Neighbors: Inevitable Clashes and Interactions**

Ban Tvrtko actively participated in the events unfolding within the territory of the Serbian Empire. The preserved sources, though limited in scope, trace his connections with the Serbian nobility during the disintegration of the Serbian Empire, as well as in the period after the death of Emperor Uroš, when a Serbian state no longer existed. By the 1350s, instead of a centralized Serbian state as in earlier times, Bosnia bordered the domains of various independent Serbian nobles, who were no longer loyal to a central authority and were frequently in conflict with one another and with their neighbors. Bosnia, as a centralized state under a single ruler, was stronger than the now fragmented and ideologically divided parts of the former Serbian realm. This opened up opportunities for Bosnian territorial expansion toward the south and southeast. However, Tvrtko did not immediately engage more actively in Serbian affairs following Dušan's death, mainly due to complicated relations with the Hungarian King Louis, who, as previously noted,

7 Mihaljčić, 1981(c), 592; Mihaljčić, 2001, 17–77; Mišić, 2014, 7–13; Šuica, 2017, 14–17; Dragičević, 2021, 133–139.

8 Dinić, 1960, 6–14; Spremić, 2005, 238; Spremić, 2005, 127–131; Šuica, 2014, 21–46; Dragičević, 2021, 37–63.



posed a potential threat to Bosnia's independence throughout the following decade.

Towards the end of the 1350s, significant changes occurred in the political landscape of this region. After Emperor Uroš ascended to the throne, friendly relations were recorded between him and the Ragusan authorities. The Serbian emperor guaranteed Ragusan citizens the privileges and status they held during his father's reign, promised to eliminate the arbitrariness of certain nobles who had caused them harm, and offered compensation for the damages done. The situation changed considerably when Ragusa recognized the sovereignty of the Hungarian crown, primarily due to the fact that King Louis of Hungary began launching attacks on the northern territories of the Serbian state in June 1359. The war between Hungary and Serbia was exploited by the Serbian nobleman, Prince Vojislav Vojinović, who, by July 1359, began looting and capturing Ragusan merchants, attacking Ragusan territory, demanding the extradition of individuals who had taken refuge in Ragusa, and threatening to attack the town and occupy Ston and Pelješac, claiming those territories as his own since he referred to himself as the Prince of Hum.<sup>9</sup> Vojinović's possessions bordered the southeastern parts of Bosnia, stretching from Upper Podrinje to Ragusa. As was their usual diplomatic practice, the Ragusan authorities responded to these attacks and threats by seeking assistance. In early August, they appealed to their overlord, King Louis, to the Croatian Ban Nikola Šzéchy, and to the Bosnian Ban Tvrtko. However, at the same time, they also decided to offer Prince Vojislav up to four thousand perpers in exchange for peace, through their envoy.<sup>10</sup> Ragusans maintained regular communication with their potential allies. In a letter sent to their envoys at the Hungarian court, they emphasized that the news of Vojislav's actions had been conveyed to Ban Tvrtko, among others. An interesting detail is found in a letter from the Ragusan authorities to King Louis, in which they listed the damages Vojislav had caused, highlighting that they had informed both the Dalmatian-Croatian and Bosnian bans of these events. Of note is how the Ragusan authorities identified Tvrtko in the letter to Louis, as holding the position of ban in Bosnia under Louis's authority.<sup>11</sup> In the letter to Ban Niko-

9 Tkalčić, 1882, 277–286; Zečević, 1908, 5–24; Jireček, 1959(b), 350–356; Jireček, 1978, 241–242; Mihaljčić, 1981 (b), 578–579; Isti, 1989, 42–44.

10 (9.8.1359) Tkalčić, 1882, 278. (13.8.1359) Smičiklas, 1914, 597–598.

11 Tkalčić, 1882, 280–281; Ruvarac, 1894(a), 231–232; Zečević, 1908, 26–27; Ćirković, 1964, 127. At the same time, they wrote to Hungarian Palatine Nicholas Kont. Smičiklas, 1914, 600–601.

la Széchy and Ban Tvrtko, Ragusans outlined the damages inflicted on their merchants by Vojislav, the looting of their territory, and the capture of their citizens, as well as threats to attack all of Ragusan territory under the supposed authority of Emperor Uroš. They also pointed out that both bans had been ordered by their shared overlord to defend Ragusa from anyone intending to harm it.<sup>12</sup> However, assistance clearly did not arrive, and the situation with Vojislav's attacks became increasingly difficult to endure. It is evident that by late August the situation had become extremely complicated for Ragusans, leading them to choose the option of making peace with Vojinović. According to the agreement, they consented to pay him four thousand perpers to cease his attacks, release the captured Ragusan citizens, and return their seized property. By the end of August, the Ragusan authorities informed Ban Tvrtko of the concluded peace, among others. From the letter, it can also be inferred that the Bosnian ban had in the meantime sent letters to Ragusa regarding this issue, although their contents are not known.<sup>13</sup> From these events, it is clear that Ragusans expected some form of help from Tvrtko, not only because they considered him a subject of Hungary in their dealings but also because they had traditionally maintained stable and friendly relations with him and his predecessors.

Ragusan doubts about the peace reached with Prince Vojislav, expressed in a letter to their envoy at King Louis's court, soon proved to be correct. In the winter of late 1359 and early 1360, Vojislav once again sent threats to Ragusa, stating that he would attack their territory during the summer. He also introduced new customs duties on his lands for Ragusan merchants and continued to harass Ragusan citizens, about which Ragusan envoys complained to Emperor Uroš in the autumn of 1360. It is evident that even Uroš's desire to protect Ragusan subjects carried little weight in what he himself referred to as the "state" of Prince Vojislav. The unstable relations between the Serbian ruling family and the Ragusans were also demonstrated by Empress Jelena's demands in January 1360 for Dušan's legacy. In response to these actions and Vojislav's threats, whom they tried to pacify through diplomacy, Ragusans lodged a complaint to King Louis the very next

12 (26. 8. 1359) Smičiklas, 1914, 609.

13 (26. 8. 1359) Tkalčić, 1882, 283. Similar letters were simultaneously sent to King Louis I, Hungarian Palatine Nicholas Kont, and their envoy at Louis's court, Marin de Goze. Tkalčić, 1882, 283–285; Zečević, 1908, 27–28; Ćorović, 1925, 10.



month. The legacy in question consisted of money and goods that had already been returned, yet Emperor Uroš demanded it again in April 1361. Such behavior by the royal family enabled the nobility, particularly those with border possessions, to take a more active stance against Ragusa. This is precisely what Prince Vojislav initiated at the end of 1360, and by January 1361, his military commander had launched an attack on Ragusan territory at Žrnovnica. The conflict on the Ragusan-Serbian border was further intensified by Louis's preparations to attack Serbia. The most eager for war was once again Prince Vojislav, who planned to seize Ston and Pelješac. He was supported by the authorities in Kotor, and nominally, Emperor Uroš also participated in the war by inertia. The conflict began in the summer of 1361, with Uroš ordering the imprisonment of the Ragusan merchants within his territory. The response from the Ragusan authorities was a naval blockade of Kotor and a ban on the export of goods, with exceptions made for the territory of the Balšić family and a few coastal towns that did not support the Serbian emperor and other nobles against Ragusa. Special attention was given to banning the export of grain and salt, which were their main commodities. In July 1361, during heavy attacks on the Ragusan territory, the Ragusan authorities announced a reward for the killing of Vojislav and his sons. For the defense of Ston and Pelješac, the Ragusans received assistance from the Ban of Croatia and Dalmatia. The city walls of Ragusa were not threatened during this war, but the surrounding Ragusan territory up to the city walls suffered the most due to Vojislav's attacks. As in the previous war of 1359, this time too Ragusans did not receive significant aid from its suzerain, King Louis I. However, they did receive some help through a diplomatic move by drawing the Balšić family into the war on their side by granting them Ragusan citizenship. This action by the Balšićs, along with the neutrality of several coastal towns, was a clear sign of the disunity and disintegration of the Serbian state.<sup>14</sup>

During the war against Prince Vojislav and Kotor, the Ragusan authorities maintained frequent correspondence with all political entities from whom they expected assistance. From December 1360, it is possible to trace their accusations and pleas for help addressed to King Louis I, the Croatian-Dalmatian Ban, the Hungarian Palatine, Emperor

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14 Tkalčić, 1882, 289, 266; Tkalčić, 1895, 40–42, 56, 58, 62, 71–72, 74, 81–82, 87–217; Orbin, 1968, 58; Jireček, 1959(b), 356–361; Zečević, 1908, 30–71; Jireček, 1978, 242; Mihaljčić, 1981(b), 579–581; Isti, 1989, 44–45, 48–54.

Uroš, Empress Jelena, the Balšić family, and other Serbian nobles.<sup>15</sup> The Ragusan authorities also communicated with Ban Tvrtko and his subjects regarding the issue with Vojislav. At the beginning of January 1361, they informed Tvrtko's nobleman, Župan Sanko Miltenović, about the latest developments related to Vojislav's plans.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the Ragusan council discussed the increased expenses of their envoy at Ban Tvrtko's court, although the details of this mission remain unknown.<sup>17</sup> It is certain that there was ongoing communication and interaction between the Bosnian ruler and neighboring Serbian lords, particularly with Prince Vojislav. In early July, the Ragusans informed Sanko that they had received his earlier letter, thanked him for being a sincere friend and for showing goodwill toward Ragusans, and informed him that Vojislav's army was looting, burning, and destroying the Ragusan territory up to the city gates. They pleaded with Tvrtko's vassal to act and respond to these events in a way that would honor both his lord and himself, emphasizing that they placed their hope in him.<sup>18</sup> Following the introduction of the salt export ban to Serbia, the Ragusan authorities became concerned that this trade might continue through Bosnian territory. Not long after corresponding with Sanko, the Ragusan authorities issued permits to the subjects of Župan Sanko and Ban Tvrtko for the export of salt, under the condition that they would not transport the salt to Vojislav's territory or distribute it to his subjects. At the beginning of August, a decision was made to allow the delivery of salt to Tvrtko's and Sanko's subjects and Vlachs in the town of Slano. By the end of August, it was also permitted to deliver salt to them in Ragusa under the same conditions.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, due to the situation in which they found themselves, having to defend their territory from Vojislav and his allies, the Ragusans were unable to provide Tvrtko with the galleys he had requested. It is evident that Tvrtko remained uninvolved in the ongoing conflict, as noted by the Ragusan authorities, who stated that the Bosnian Ban was such a lord that he could, if he wished, reach beyond Ragusa via his own land.<sup>20</sup>

15 Tkalčić, 1895, 266–267.

16 (7. 1. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 59.

17 Tkalčić, 1895, 63.

18 (6. 7. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 90; Zečević, 1908, 61.

19 (20. 7. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 97. (23. 7. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 97. (5. 8. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 102, 104. (31. 8. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 117.

20 Tkalčić, 1895, 99; Ćorović, 1925, 14.

In an effort to mediate peace in September 1361, Župan Sanko sent his envoy to Ragusa, upon which the Ragusan authorities sent their own envoys to Sanko's court with a detailed list of the damages they had suffered and a proposal that each side compensate the damages it had caused. Sanko then forwarded these conditions to Prince Vojislav. At the end of the letter, they mentioned that they had learned of Vojislav's intentions to attack Ston with his army and requested assistance. From the instructions issued by Ragusans, it is evident that they regarded Sanko as their negotiator and entrusted him to advocate on their behalf as effectively as he could.<sup>21</sup> In mid-October, news arrived in Ragusa that the negotiations between Sanko and Vojislav had failed. The Ragusan authorities expressed their gratitude to Sanko for his efforts, stating that they could by no means accept Vojislav's demands, although already the following month they continued to emphasize the potential for reconciliation through Sanko's mediation.<sup>22</sup> Sources shed only fragmentary light on the correspondence between the Ragusan authorities and Ban Tvrtko during this period. In November, they discussed sending a delegation to Tvrtko and instructed the delegation headed to King Louis I to stop by the Bosnian ban and inform him that a special delegation would be sent to him shortly.<sup>23</sup> The Ragusan councils spent more time than usual deliberating over this delegation to Ban Tvrtko, and the mission was finally dispatched at the beginning of December.<sup>24</sup> It is evident that this communication was far more frequent and substantial. Behind these lesser-known missions was Tvrtko's attempt to mediate reconciliation between the Ragusans and Vojislav. Judging from later data, it is quite certain that Tvrtko's diplomatic involvement took place during December. Ragusan councilors were expecting a response from the Bosnian ban in December, and there were even suggestions that this should dictate whether to send envoys to Hungary.<sup>25</sup> In the first half of January 1362, news from Bosnia reached Ragusa. At the same time, decisions were made to recall Ragusan envoys from Bosnia and to forward the received news to King Louis.<sup>26</sup> Tvrtko's efforts were described

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21 (19. 9. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 121–123; Tadić, 1935, 67–68; Restius, 1893, 141; Zečević, 1908, 86–88; Mijušković, 1961, 24.

22 (20. 10. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 130. (3. 11. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 136; Zečević, 1908, 89–90.

23 (9. 11. 1361) (11. 11. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 138–139.

24 (17. 11. 1361) (22. 11. 1361) (2. 12. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 142–143, 145.

25 (9. 12. 1361) Tkalčić, 1895, 148.

26 (11. 1. 1462) Tkalčić, 1895, 154.

in a letter addressed to King Louis composed in mid-January 1362. At that time, they emphasized that Tvrtko had sent his own envoy to Vojislav proposing peace, but Vojislav refused to even consider negotiations. Thus, this mission ended as yet another futile attempt.<sup>27</sup>

During the continued course of the conflict, the Ragusans once again relied on Župan Sanko and Ban Tvrtko as potential mediators in their reconciliation with Vojislav, despite their earlier unsuccessful efforts. In the following months, they maintained frequent contact with Sanko.<sup>28</sup> At the time of mediation efforts by the Venetian authorities regarding a potential meeting between the Ragusan envoys and Vojislav in February 1362, one of the proposed locations for the meeting was the territory of Župan Sanko.<sup>29</sup> It was precisely to Sanko that they sent a diplomatic mission in early April, in which they, among other things, pointed out the damages and murders committed by Vojislav's men in Rijeka dubrovačka (Ombla), and noted that they had not received the promised assistance from Sanko in these cases.<sup>30</sup> Despite the fact that Sanko had significant potential in the negotiation process, the Ragusan authorities adhered strictly to their policy of confiscating goods from individuals who were supplying their enemies. In mid-April, they issued an order to their captains near Kotor to confiscate grain if any of Sanko's subjects attempted to deliver it, and they sent the same warning to Župan Sanko himself.<sup>31</sup> It is evident that communication and trade between Sanko's and Vojislav's men and the people of Kotor were much more frequent than the preserved sources suggest. Direct communication between the Ragusan authorities and Ban Tvrtko and Sanko regarding their mediating role can be traced back to mid-May, when decisions were made to send them letters with updates. By late May, in a letter to Sanko, they emphasized that they were not to blame for the war and that peace did not depend on them, attempting to encourage him to once again take on the role of mediator.<sup>32</sup> Although they entered into correspondence with Emperor Uroš regarding his mediation for reconciliation with Vojislav, the Ragusan authorities also sent the nobleman Blasius de Gradi to Sanko in mid-

27 (13. 1. 1362) Tkalčić, 1895, 155. Smičiklas, 1915, 201.

28 (14. 1. 1362) (6. 2. 1362) (27. 3. 1362) (31. 3. 1362) Tkalčić, 1915, 156, 160, 172–173.

29 (21. 2. 1362) Tkalčić, 1895, 163; Zečević, 1908, 97.

30 (1. 4. 1362) Tkalčić, 1895, 174.

31 (18. 4. 1362) Tkalčić, 1895, 180.

32 (16. 5. 1362) (19. 5. 1362) (28. 5. 1362) (5. 6. 1362) Tkalčić, 1895, 191–195.

June to motivate him to take on the role of mediator.<sup>33</sup> The Ragusan authorities clearly had great trust in their neighbor, as shown by the numerous attempts to involve him in the reconciliation process. However, it became obvious that neither Ban Tvrtko nor Župan Sanko had any significant influence over Vojislav. Given that they did not receive adequate support from King Louis during this war either, their only remaining option was to involve Emperor Uroš in the negotiations. Through the mediation of the Serbian emperor, who evidently still had influence over Prince Vojislav and the authorities in Kotor, peace was achieved in the second half of August 1362. The peace agreement was signed in Onogošt, regulating damages and restoring neighborly relations without any active involvement from actors in Bosnia.<sup>34</sup> Tvrtko's inactivity regarding these issues clearly indicates the limits of Hungarian influence over the Bosnian Ban at that time. This was also noticed by the Ragusans during 1361 and 1362, and they established much broader correspondence with the Croatian-Dalmatian Ban than with the Bosnian ruler.

Further relations between Ban Tvrtko and the nobility from the territory of the Serbian Empire are reflected through the actions of Župan Nikola Altomanović. After the death of Vojislav in September 1363, his wife Gojislava took over the administration of his possessions together with their underage sons. There is no information on Nikola's initial actions after his father's death, but it is certain that he managed at least part of his father's possessions. He is first mentioned in historical sources in November 1366, and by July 1367, he appears as the lord of Rudnik. Nikola took advantage of the situation following Vojislav's death and, between July 1367 and November 1368, he assumed full control of his uncle's possessions by driving out his widow, Gojislava.<sup>35</sup> By military means, Nikola came into possession of Trebinje and Konavle, thus becoming a neighbor to both Bosnia and Ragusa. The Bosnian ruler undoubtedly maintained good relations with Vojislav's widow after his death. They certainly shared common interests, and the Ragusan authorities sent the same diplomatic missions in November 1366 to both the Bosnian ban and Gojislava.<sup>36</sup> Tvrtko traveled through

33 (12. 6. 1362) Tkalčić, 1895, 197.

34 Miklosich, 1858, 169–171, 174–175; Tkalčić, 1895, 197–217; Jireček, 1978, 242; Zečević, 1908, 101–109; Čorović, 1925, 16; Jireček, 1959(b), 362–364; Mihaljčić, 1989, 60–64; Isti, 1981(b), 580–582.

35 Jireček, 1978, 249; Isti, 1959(b), 369–370; Dinić, 1932, 8–10; Mihaljčić, 1989, 74, 130–134; Isti, 1981(c), 591–592.

36 (5. 11. 1366) (28. 11. 1366) Gelcich, 1896, 66, 72.

her territory to reach Ragusa in May 1367.<sup>37</sup> According to earlier historiography, after being defeated in a conflict with Nikola, Gojislava traveled through Ragusa towards Albania, accompanied by Ban Tvrtko.<sup>38</sup> At the same time as he was engaged in a war against his brother Vuk and part of the nobility who supported Vuk as the Bosnian ban, Tvrtko also had to confront the fact that, from autumn 1366 onward, he could no longer rely on his nobleman Kaznac Sanko. From Ragusans' perspective, it is known that the ban stayed with Sanko in July 1366, while by November, the Ragusan council had decided to offer Sanko the opportunity to send one of their diplomatic missions on his behalf to Tvrtko's court.<sup>39</sup> The reasons for this mission are not known, but later events suggest a potential motive for this diplomatic move. During Tvrtko's stay in Ragusa in May 1367, Sanko was not with him in the city, nor did he appear as a signatory of the charters issued on that occasion.<sup>40</sup> At the time of preparations for the Bosnian ban's arrival, the Ragusan authorities decided to act in favor of Sanko and even left the possibility open for his arrival in Ragusa.<sup>41</sup> Amid the polarization of forces in Bosnia and the war between the brothers and noble factions, Župan Nikola sought to take advantage of the unfolding events and increasingly became a significant force on the southeastern Bosnian border. In this context, one should also view the fact that Vuk and Tvrtko were fighting on the far eastern Bosnian frontier and that Tvrtko was staying in the Gacko area in May 1367.

It is not known whether, from the very first signs of disagreement between Tvrtko and Sanko in the autumn of 1366, there was contact between Sanko and Župan Nikola, or whether their split was due to other reasons not illuminated by diplomatic sources. The Ragusan chronicler Restius states that Sanko participated in a noble uprising together with the Ban's relative Dabiša. He writes that the rebels managed to occupy certain areas, but after being defeated by the Ban, they withdrew to Ragusa, upon which Tvrtko demanded their extradition. According to his account, Tvrtko's arrival in Ragusa did not yield results and the matters between them remained unresolved, leading Sanko to ally himself with Župan Nikola. Interestingly, Restius high-

37 "Quod sicut galea ire debebat ad Slanum pro domino bano, nunc ire debeat ad civitatem veterem." (28. 5. 1367) Gelcich, 1896, 92; Dinić, 1932, 10.

38 (20. 11. 1368) Gelcich, 1896, 109; Dinić, 1932, 10.

39 (13. 7. 1366) Gelcich, 1896, 45; Ćorović, 1925, 23-24; Mijušković, 1961, 26-27.

40 Ćorović, 1925, 25-26.

41 (18. 5. 1367) Gelcich, 1896, 90; Mijušković, 1961, 27.



lights later missions by Ragusan nobles tasked with persuading Sanko to abandon his alliance with Nikola and reconcile with Tvrtko.<sup>42</sup> Instructions for these missions are preserved. It is likely that reconciliation between Tvrtko and Sanko occurred during the second half of 1367. Evidence of this is Sanko's presence in Tvrtko's charter issued to Prince Pavle Vukoslavić, as well as the fact that the Ragusan authorities duly paid the tribute called *mogoriš* to Sanko in early September 1367.<sup>43</sup> According to Restius and Orbin, Sanko's initial defection could not be solely attributed to the actions of Župan Nikola, though they do not completely rule him out either.

In a relatively short period, Sanko once again defected from Tvrtko. According to preserved diplomatic documents, Sanko was in some form of alliance with Nikola no later than November 1368, when a Ragusan noble was sent to him as a mediator. Another envoy was sent to Sanko in January 1369 with instructions to persuade him to return to the allegiance of the Bosnian Ban, identified as his natural lord. They emphasized that reconciliation with Tvrtko would be honorable and beneficial for him, as his alliance with Nikola was dangerous to himself, and Nikola's triumph would be short-lived, while the Bosnian banate was eternal. The Ragusan authorities had additional news meant to persuade Sanko to side with Tvrtko. They promised Sanko that they were ready to send their envoys to mediate the reconciliation, assuring him that Tvrtko would not do anything contrary to what he had promised them. If, as a result of this reconciliation, Nikola were to attack him, they guaranteed that Sanko could count on asylum in Ragusa.<sup>44</sup> Sanko's response is not known, but judging from Ragusans' continued initiative, he was evidently inclined toward reconciliation. That same month, the Ragusan authorities selected noble Blasius de Gradi, who was to wait for a response from Sanko, either by meeting him in person or receiving an answer through messengers. In that case, he was instructed to take the response to Ban Tvrtko and arrange their reconciliation. Gradi was to inform Tvrtko that reconciling with Sanko would make it easier to take revenge on Župan Nikola for the damage he caused, and he was instructed to extract oaths from both parties. The Ragusan authorities attempted to soften Tvrtko by promising that

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42 Restius, 1893, 147–149. A similar description is also provided by Orbin. Orbin, 1968, 150. Ruvarac, 1894(a), 234–237; Mijušković, 1961, 27.

43 Mijušković, 1961, 28.

44 Gelcich, 1896, 99–100, 110; Ćorović, 1925, 27; Dinić, 1932, 11–12, 40; Mijušković, 1961, 29; Mihaljčić, 1989, 134–135; Đulović, 2021, 98.

if Sanko were to break the oath, they would not offer him hospitality in any future conflict.<sup>45</sup> Archival documents do not shed light on the further course of this conflict. Orbin writes of war, attacks on the Bosnian border territory, and damage inflicted by Nikola, noting that one such attack, at Sanko's invitation, was carried out in the region of Bišće.<sup>46</sup> According to the chronicler Restius, reconciliation between Tvrtko and Sanko occurred only after a military confrontation in which Tvrtko emerged victorious, and Sanko sought refuge in Ragusa. After Tvrtko's army withdrew, Sanko reconciled with the Bosnian ruler. According to Restius, during the attack by Župan Nikola on Ragusa, Sanko led the Bosnian army that came to assist the Ragusans, and he was killed in the process.<sup>47</sup> According to Orbin's account, after reconciling with Tvrtko, Sanko was granted governance over the area around Nevesinje, while his other possessions were handed over to other noblemen. In his version as well, Sanko was killed in the battles against Nikola Altomanović in Trebinje.<sup>48</sup> The common occurrence in chronicles of merging several distinct events into a single narrative also prevents a precise reconstruction of the chronology in this case. A conflict certainly occurred between Ban Tvrtko and Župan Nikola, as well as between Nikola and Ragusa, but these should be viewed as two separate events. The existence of a conflict between Ban Tvrtko and Župan Nikola is also supported by surviving records of their reconciliation, which took place in August 1370. From Ragusans' instructions to their nobleman sent to Tvrtko's court, it is evident that they were informed Tvrtko would soon sign a peace treaty with Nikola. They sent a letter in the Slavic language addressed to the Bosnian ruler and instructed their envoy to ensure that Ragusa would also be included in this agreement.<sup>49</sup> It is apparent that a peace agreement was indeed signed at that time between the Bosnian ban and Nikola. The exact date of Sanko's death is unknown, but earlier research places it between July 1370 and July 1372. It is evident that before his death, Sanko had reconciled with the Bosnian ban and participated in his conflict against Nikola.<sup>50</sup>

45 Gelcich, 1896, 98; Ćorović, 1925, 26; Dinić, 1932, 12, 40; Mijušković, 1961, 29.

46 Orbin, 1968, 58–59.

47 Restius, 1893, 149–152.

48 Orbin, 1968, 150; Mihaljčić, 1989, 135.

49 Tadić, 1935, 203; Dinić, 1932, 45; Ćorović, 1925, 33; Mihaljčić, 1989, 137; Đulović, 2021, 99.

50 Mijušković, 1961, 29–30; Dinić, 1932, 12–13.

It is particularly interesting during this period to observe the relations between Tvrtko and other nobles from the territory of the Serbian Empire. Preserved letters from Pope Urban V from April 1370 indicate frequent communication between the Bosnian and Serbian courts at that time. Urban V wrote letters to King Louis I, his wife Elizabeth, and to Ban Tvrtko. In the letters to Louis and Elizabeth, he stated that he had received information that the daughter of Prince Grgur II of Bribir was staying at the Bosnian court, where she was being raised, and that when she reached the age for marriage, she was supposed to be wed, with her parents' approval, to a nobleman of suitable standing. According to the pope's information, Tvrtko and his mother were planning to marry her off without the parents' consent to the son of the King of Rascia, which, in the pope's view, endangered the girl's soul, insulted her parents, and violated the Catholic faith. He urged Louis to intervene so that the girl would be returned to her parents or transferred to his (Louis's) court, and married to someone reliable and acceptable to her family. In the letter to Tvrtko, Urban V repeated almost the same points, adding that he strictly forbade Tvrtko from allowing the girl to be married to any heretic, infidel, schismatic, or anyone else who was not of the Roman Catholic faith, and demanded that she either be returned to her parents or sent to King Louis's court.<sup>51</sup> Given that the letter explicitly mentions the "King of Rascia," and considering that Emperor Uroš had no male heirs, historiography generally agrees that this was most likely referring to Marko, son of King Vukašin Mrnjavčević. This episode vividly illustrates the type of relationship the Bosnian royal court maintained with the then co-ruler of the Serbian Emperor Uroš.

Immediately after the Ragusans learned of the peace agreement between Ban Tvrtko and Župan Nikola in the autumn of 1370, Nikola's army launched an attack on Ragusan territory. Altomanović demanded retroactive payment of the St. Demetrius tribute for previous years from the Ragusan authorities. However, the Ragusan authorities responded that this was a tribute they paid to the rulers of Rascia. In response to this, Altomanović continued in the spring of 1371 with looting and devastation of Ragusan territory, enslaving the local population. Even the involvement of King Louis I did not help the Ragusans. Under circumstances that remain unclear, a coalition was formed against Altomanović, which included, along with the Ragusans, the Balšić family and King Vukašin. By June, the allies had already gathered

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51 (6.4. 1370) Theiner, 1860, 97; Jireček, 1978, 247; Ćorović, 1925, 31.

near Nikola's possessions, but the planned attack was not carried out because the Ottomans threatened Uglješa's lands, and his brother, King Vukašin, left in July to assist him. With the death of King Vukašin in the Battle of Maritsa and the death of Emperor Uroš, the situation in the former Serbian Empire changed significantly, which worked in Nikola's favor. Left with no other option, the Ragusans reached a peace agreement with Nikola in the spring of 1372 and agreed, under the new circumstances, to pay him the St. Demetrius tribute.<sup>52</sup> It is interesting to note that although later Ottoman sources mention that the Mrnjavčević brothers could rely on Bosnian forces in the Battle of Maritsa, their potential involvement in these events has been dismissed.<sup>53</sup> Contemporary sources do not shed light on Tvrtko's role in the war between Ragusa and Župan Nikola. However, much later, in January 1432, the Ragusan authorities reminded Tvrtko's son, then King Tvrtko II, that his father had aided Ragusans in the war against Župan Nikola.<sup>54</sup>

In May 1373, the Ragusans informed their suzerain, Louis I, that a coalition was being formed against them, consisting of Župan Nikola, the Balšić family, and Venice. However, it is not known whether the allies took any concrete action.<sup>55</sup> The events of the summer of 1373 can be followed through the account of the chronicler Orbin. According to his report, the rivalry between Župan Nikola and Prince Lazar was the trigger for major changes. After Nikola attempted to assassinate Lazar in a deceitful manner, Lazar made an agreement with King Louis I, offering money and loyalty in exchange for help in the fight against Nikola. In addition, he also reached an agreement with Ban Tvrtko, who had already been an enemy of Nikola. According to Orbin, Louis sent an army under the command of Nicholas I Garai, while Tvrtko led his own forces. With three armies, they launched an incursion into Altomanović's lands. Realizing he could not resist them, Nikola attempted to retreat to the coastal region, then to Trebinje and Konavle, but due to the betrayal of his own nobles, he was not received in any of those places. Eventually, he withdrew to his city of Užice. Soon after, Prince Lazar besieged and captured the city, handing Nikola over to the nobles he had previously been in conflict with, and they blinded

52 Jireček, 1978, 251–252; Jireček, 1959(b), 374–375; Dinić, 1932, 25–26; Isti, 2003, 733; Mihaljčić, 1982, 21–25; Isti, 1989, 158–161, 219–222.

53 Trako, 1974, 171–175.

54 (19. 1. 1432) Jireček, 1959(b), 379; Dinić, 1932, 13.

55 (16. 5. 1373) Gelcich, 1896, 139–140; Tadić, 1935, 273–274; Dinić, 1932, 23–25; Mihaljčić, 1989, 222–227.

him. According to Orbin, after spending some time in various places, Nikola settled in the territory of the Balšić family, where he eventually died. His lands were divided between the allies, Prince Lazar and Ban Tvrtko, with the exception of Trebinje, Konavle, and Dračevica, which were taken by the Balšići, even though they had not participated in the war. Orbin states that Tvrtko acquired all of Nikola's territory that bordered Bosnia during this campaign.<sup>56</sup> According to Serbian chronicles and a charter issued by the Balšićs, which clearly shows they governed former territories of Nikola in the coastal region, historians have concluded that the attack on Altomanović took place between early September and the end of November 1373.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, the Serbian chronicles only record Prince Lazar's victory over Župan Nikola, while Ban Tvrtko is not mentioned at all in these sources.<sup>58</sup>

Evidence of Tvrtko's army's involvement in the attack on Nikola's territories is found in later records. In July 1374, before the Ragusan court, four female slaves from Budimlja (territory previously under Nikola's control) testified that they had been captured and sold by the men of nobleman Radivoj from Bosnia.<sup>59</sup> It is quite certain that these were inhabitants of Nikola's territory enslaved during the war in the autumn of 1373. The lasting consequence of Tvrtko's involvement in the war against Nikola was the annexation of parts of Nikola's territories to the Bosnian state. According to later sources, historical consensus holds that during this campaign, Ban Tvrtko annexed the western and southern parts of Nikola's lands, which included the region of Drina, Upper Polimlje, part of Central Polimlje with Mileševa and Prijepolje, Gacko, Bileća, Onogošt, the lower and central courses of the Piva and Tara rivers, and the valley of the Ćehotina River.<sup>60</sup>

In the context of Tvrtko's relations with the nobility of the former Serbian Empire's territory, and within the scope of the territorial expansion of the Bosnian state into these regions, the conquest of the strategically important areas of Trebinje, Konavle, and Dračevica certainly falls. According to the mentioned accounts of chroniclers, these areas were occupied by the Balšić family during or after the allies' war

56 Orbin, 1968, 59–61, 150; Grujić, 1926, 12; Ćorović, 1925, 35–36; Dinić, 1932, 27–28; Mihaljčić, 1932, 227–230; Rudić, 2018, 241–242.

57 Miklosich, 1858, 183–184; Dinić, 1932, 27; Isti, 2003, 733; Mihaljčić, 1989, 236–237; Isti, 2001, 65–68; Maksimović, 2023, 44–45.

58 Stojanović, 1927, 214.

59 (7. 7. 1374) Dinić, 1933, 257; Isti, 1967, 31.

60 Ćorović, 1935, 39–40; Mrgić, 2004, 59; Đulović, 2021, 110–113; Maksimović, 2023, 55.

against Župan Nikola. As early as November 1373, Đurađ Balšić issued a charter to the Ragusans which clearly shows his governance over these territories. In that context, the Ragusan authorities promised to pay him the St. Demetrius tribute, which had previously been paid to Serbian rulers, and after the death of Emperor Uroš, to Župan Nikola. The Ragusan authorities secured themselves by adding a clause to this agreement stating that they would be obligated to pay this income to Đurađ Balšić as long as he ruled the coastal areas near Ragusa, or until someone became "emperor and lord over the Serbs, the nobility, and the Serbian land".<sup>61</sup> Ragusans' caution may have been influenced by multiple factors. Primarily, they were aware of previous complications with the payment of this tribute, and it is very likely that the political situation in their hinterland at the time motivated their caution as well. Sources from the period after the Balšić family occupied these areas point to tense relations between Ban Tvrtko and Đurađ Balšić. In January 1376, according to instructions from their authorities, Ragusan envoys who were staying with Tvrtko were instructed, if he requested they accompany his army advancing toward Hum, to explain that their presence in the camp of the Bosnian Ban could cause problems for their merchants in the territory of Đurađ Balšić.<sup>62</sup> The unstable relations between the Bosnian and Zetan rulers are also evidenced by a letter from Đurađ to Ragusa in which he permits Tvrtko's men to pass through his territory on their way to Ragusa. However, if a conflict between the two rulers were to arise, he would inform the Ragusans in advance.<sup>63</sup> Chroniclers Orbin and Restius also mention the tense relations between Tvrtko and Đurađ over Trebinje, Konavle, and Dračevica, which lay on the border of their lands. Restius highlights Tvrtko's agreement with the people of Trebinje and the refusal of the Ragusan authorities to guarantee the fulfillment of that agreement. Chroniclers note that due to disputes over these territories, a meeting between Tvrtko and Đurađ, mediated by the Ragusans, was held on the island of Lokrum. However, no agreement was reached, as each side asserted its own right to the lands. According to Orbin, not long afterward, Trebinje, Konavle, and Dračevica defected from the Balšić family and submitted to the Bosnian Ban. For chronological comparison, it is im-

61 (30.11.1373) Miklosich, 1858, 183–184; Stojanović, 1929, 106–107. Interpretations of the charter in: Jireček, 1959 (b), 380; Dinić, 1932, 28; Ćirković, 2011, 31; Mihaljčić, 1989, 236.

62 (25. 1. 1376) Gelcich, 1896, 145–146; Jireček, 1959(b), 381; Ćorović, 1925, 39–40.

63 Miklosich, 1858, 185–186; Jireček, 1959(b), 381–382.



portant to note that Orbin reports that Tvrtko crowned himself king of Rascia after these events.<sup>64</sup>

The dimension of unstable relations between Tvrtko and Đurađ is confirmed by the statements of the Ragusan authorities to their envoys at Đurađ's court from February 1377, when they said they did not want to interfere in matters between the two rulers, although contacts between Tvrtko's men and the people of Trebinje are also evident.<sup>65</sup> This piece of information, in combination with a reference from July 1388 mentioning an earlier rebellion in Konavle during Đurađ Balšić's rule, has been recognized in earlier historiography as confirmation of a revolt and secession of these territories from the Balšići, and their allegiance to Tvrtko, as described by Orbin, which most likely occurred in February 1377.<sup>66</sup> A comparison of archival data and chroniclers' notes from this period shows that these reports are consistent and form a coherent narrative already recognized in historiography. Directly related to Tvrtko's assertion of authority over Trebinje, Konavle, and Dračevica is his coronation, which most likely took place in October 1377. However, this coherent narrative is disrupted by a record from November 1377 noting the collection of the St. Demetrius tribute by a representative of Đurađ Balšić.<sup>67</sup> The Ragusan authorities were extremely cautious when it came to paying tributes to neighboring rulers and lords and would often suspend payments if the political situation was unclear. Therefore, the payment of tributes is generally a reliable indicator of the actual situation on the ground. It remains entirely unclear what happened with these territories after the mentioned rebellion and secession, as well as after Tvrtko's coronation. It is also possible that there were differing understandings of ownership over these territories by Tvrtko, Đurađ, and the Ragusans. It is evident that possession of these regions was not definitively resolved on the ground. This is also indicated by Orbin's account that, after learning of the secession, the Balšićs gathered an army of ten thousand men and, together with Karl Topia, passed through Onogošt and advanced to Nevesinje, destroying all of Tvrtko's lands, and then returned to Zeta. According to Orbin, this campaign took place three months before Đurađ's death, i.e., approximately in October 1377.<sup>68</sup> A letter from the merchant Radič

64 Orbin, 1968, 69–70; Restius, 1893, 162–163.

65 (23. 2. 1377) Gelcich, 1896, 153; Dinić, 1932, 35; Jireček, 1959(b), 382.

66 (5. 7. 1388) Kurtović, 2019, 182; Dinić, 1932, 34–36; Ćorović, 1935, 40; Mihaljčić, 1982, 34–35; Isti, 1989, 238–240; Mrgić, 2004, 59.

67 Jireček, 1892, 38; Dinić, 1932, 33, 36; Isti, 2003, 733.

68 Orbin, 1968, 70.

reveals that, at that time, Tvrtko, by then already king, was preparing a military campaign.<sup>69</sup> These are fragmentary data that are difficult to reconcile. The issue of the possession of these territories was definitively resolved by Đurađ's death in January and Tvrtko's charter from April 1378, in which the Ragusans recognized his right to the St. Demetrius tribute as long as he ruled over Trebinje, Konavle, and Dračevica.<sup>70</sup> For the first time, the Ragusans paid the St. Demetrius tribute to Tvrtko's protovestiarios Ratko at the end of September 1378, citing Tvrtko's proclamation as King of Rascia as the reason for transferring the tribute. In this document, it is also stated that the feast day of St. Demetrius would mark one year since his coronation.<sup>71</sup>

Tvrtko I's ambition to establish his direct rule over a much wider territory than the Bosnian Kingdom encompassed at the end of 1377 is illustrated by the statements made by the Ragusan authorities to the Hungarian king Louis I in November 1378. At that time, the Ragusan authorities emphasized that Tvrtko had previously defended them whenever they asked for his help, but that they were no longer sure whether he would be able to support them due to his obligation to safeguard his interests in Rascia.<sup>72</sup> By linking his obligations to the "regno Rassie", the Ragusan nobility indicated that they, too, were aware of Tvrtko's ambitions for future actions. From their perspective, these were activities already known at the Hungarian court, so they did not elaborate further. On the other hand, the reactions of the Serbian nobility to Tvrtko's coronation remain entirely unknown. Due to the lack of sources, it is difficult to provide a more detailed explanation of Tvrtko's involvement in the territory of the former Serbian state. What is known about Tvrtko's activities during 1378 is framed by the chronicle of Mavro Orbin, who mentions that after the death of Đurađ Balšić, Tvrtko seized many places that had belonged to the "Kingdom of Rascia", from the Ragusa and Kotor coastlines to Mileševa, and also subjugated the Vlachs, numbering over a hundred katuns.<sup>73</sup> A few years after his coronation, Tvrtko managed to extend his rule over Kotor in 1384.<sup>74</sup> In the period following his coronation, it became evident that Tvrtko did not exercise real control over the territories of the Serbian

69 Tadić, 1935, 356.

70 Dautović-Dedić, 2016, 230.

71 (24. 9. 1378) Kurtović, 2017, 19; Dinić, 2003, 734.

72 (15. 11. 1378) Gelcich, 1896, 177–178; Gelcich-Thallóczy, 1887, 701.

73 Orbin, 1968, 51.

74 Rudić, 2018, 244–245.

lords, who had established their own domains and ruled independently. During the following years until Tvrtko's death, during which no records are preserved regarding his efforts to assert authority over the entire territory of the former Serbian state, and the shifting of his focus toward western expansion, indicate that this concept was ultimately abandoned.

The sources allow for the reconstruction of yet another of Tvrtko's engagements directly connected with Serbian lords, this time, however, against a common enemy: the Ottomans. In the 1380s, the Ottomans increasingly attacked the territory of Prince Lazar, and during this period, the Ottoman conquests of the important cities of Sofia and Niš were particularly significant. In 1386, the Ottomans even briefly invaded Bosnia, and during another incursion in 1388, Ottoman detachments were defeated near Bileća by Voivode Vlatko Vuković. The Ottoman incursions into Bosnian territory were clear signs that the domains of the Serbian lords no longer represented a strong enough barrier to the Ottoman advance toward the west and north of the Balkan Peninsula. At the time of Tvrtko's active campaign to capture Dalmatian cities, the Ottoman army led by Sultan Murad I launched a military offensive. The goal of the Ottoman expansionist plans was the conquest of Kosovo, a region that represented a key geostrategic point for further Ottoman advancement on the Balkan Peninsula. The Ottoman attacks on the southern Serbian regions posed a threat not only to Serbian nobles but also to many neighboring rulers. In opposition to Sultan Murad I, who led the Ottoman army, a coalition was formed, under circumstances and conditions that remain unclear, consisting of Prince Lazar, his son-in-law Vuk Branković, and King Tvrtko I. The involvement of the Bosnian king in this battle must be viewed through the lens of his understanding of the Ottoman threat and his desire to protect his country, which had already been targeted by Ottoman attacks in previous years. The allied forces confronted the Ottomans at the Battle of Kosovo on June 15, 1389. Due to the conflict with the Ottomans in the southern regions, likely under the command of Vlatko Vuković, a portion of the Bosnian army was withdrawn from Dalmatia, where they had been laying siege to the Dalmatian cities for several years. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the Bosnian army could not be present in full force in Kosovo. Although there are quite a few surviving sources, they provide vague, confusing, and contradictory information about the outcome of the battle. One of the main challenges in properly interpreting the available data lies in the fact that most of the chronicles offering details were written long after the bat-

tle itself. The most evident outcome of the battle was the death of two key figures: Prince Lazar and Sultan Murad I. Due to sparse, fragmentary, and highly contradictory information about the outcome of the battle, historiography has not reached a firm consensus. King Tvrtko I's perception following the Battle of Kosovo is presented in his famous letters sent shortly afterward to Trogir and Florence, where he described the battle as a significant victory for his forces, especially considering that the Ottoman state had lost an exceptional ruler and that the Bosnian commander returned safely to Bosnia with the majority of his army. From that perspective, the Bosnian role in the Battle of Kosovo could only be interpreted in such a manner immediately after the battle. These documents, however, do not provide any insight into Tvrtko's view on Lazar's death in the battle, leaving the relationship between the allies rather unclear. In the following years, as the Ottomans continued their rise under Sultan Bayezid I, the recognition of vassal status by the Serbian noble houses of the Hrebeljanović and Branković families, who controlled the largest territories, clearly indicates that the Ottomans emerged from the Battle of Kosovo as the strategic victors.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

The relationships between Ban and later King Tvrtko I during his reign and the nobility from the territory of the Serbian Empire typologically fit into the broader picture of Bosnia–Serbia relations during the Middle Ages. The methodology used to present these relations is shaped by the fact that a very small number of preserved sources of Bosnian and Serbian origin offer data on these connections. This is a common occurrence. The reconstruction of Bosnia–Serbia relations within any chronological framework relies mostly on the records of neighboring states, primarily Ragusa, and is therefore conditioned by the perspective from which those neighbors observed the events. What is presented primarily refers to Tvrtko's involvement in Serbia during the time of significant and abrupt changes following the death of Emperor Dušan, which marked the beginning of the disintegration of the Serbian Empire. Tvrtko's role became more pronounced after the death of

75 Ćorović, 1925, 80–83; Dinić, 1940, 133–148; Perojević, 1942(d) 339–340; Dinić, 1964, 53–63; Mihaljčić, 2001, 125–132; Kampuš, 1989, 1–15; Prlender, 1989, 97–102; Lučić, 1989, 91–95; Tošić, 1990, 101–106; Šuica, 2014, 111–117; Tošić, 2002, 248–249; Šuica, 2015, 153–169; Filipović, 2019, 104–120.

Emperor Uroš, when the nobility carved out their own territories where they ruled independently, leading to internal conflicts. During the 1360s and 1370s, Tvrtko's activities in the resulting war conditions were mainly focused on consolidating his position in coastal regions and expanding his state territory. Given the poor preservation of domestic sources, Tvrtko's coronation in 1377 as king remains entirely unknown from the perspective of the Serbian lords. The lack of a stronger reaction from the Serbian nobility to this event, enough to leave a more significant mark in the written legacy of Dalmatian centers, perhaps adequately illustrates the reach and consequences of Tvrtko's coronation in these areas. Tvrtko's crown encompassed only those territories over which he had real authority and which were defined as the Bosnian Kingdom. According to the preserved sources, after his coronation, Tvrtko focused on territorial expansion in a completely different direction. Joint military actions from later times suggest ordinary neighborly relations, but these were dictated by the shared threat of the Ottomans and the attempt to preserve the existing status quo.

### Zaključak

Odnosi bana i kralja Tvrtka za vrijeme njegove vladavine sa vlastelom sa prostora Srpskog carstva tipološki se uklapaju u širu sliku odnosa Bosne i Srbije tokom srednjeg vijeka. Metodologiju prikazivanja ovih odnosa karakteriše činjenica kako vrlo mali broj sačuvanih izvora bosanske i srpske provenijencije nudi podatke o ovim odnosima. To je uobičajena pojava. Rekonstrukcija odnosa Bosne i Srbije u bilo kojem hronološkom okviru svedena je na saznanja susjeda, u prvom redu Dubrovčana, a samim tim uvjetovana je posmatranjem događaja iz te perspektive. Prezentirano se u najvećoj mjeri odnosi na Tvrtkov angažman u Srbiji u vrijeme velikih i naglih promjena nastalih nakon Dušanove smrti kada je nastupio proces dezintegracije Srpskog carstva. Tvrtkova uloga izražena je i nakon Uroševe smrti kada su formirane oblasti vlastelina u kojima su potpuno samostalno vladali što je dovelo do međusobnih sukoba. Šezdesetih i sedamdesetih godina 14. stoljeća Tvrtkov angažman u nastalim ratnim okolnostima u najvećoj mjeri je vezan za učvršćivanje njegove pozicije u primorskim oblastima i proširenje državnog teritorija. S obzirom na predstavljeno stanje po pitanju očuvanosti domaćih izvora Tvrtkovo krunisanje 1377. godine za kralja iz perspektive srpskih gospodara ostaje potpuna nepoznanica. Nedovoljno snažna reakcija srpskih gospodara na ovaj događaj da bi

ostavila značajnijeg traga u pisanoj zaostavštini dalmatinskih centara možda adekvatno ilustruje domete i posljedice Tvrtkovog krunisanja u ovim oblastima. Tvrtkova kruna pokrivala je samo one oblasti nad kojima je imao realnu vlast i koji su definirani kao Bosansko kraljevstvo. Prema sačuvanim izvorima Tvrtko se nakon krunisanja angažirao u širenju državnih teritorija u sasvim suprotnom pravcu. Zajednički vojni nastupi iz kasnijeg vremena ukazuju na uobičajene susjedske odnose, ali su oni bili diktirani zajedničkom prijetnjom od Osmanlija i pokušajem zadržavanja aktuelnog stanja.

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