

Esad Kurtović, *Extracts from the Lawsuit Books of the Dubrovnik State Archives (Lamenta de foris I–L, 1370–1483)* 1–3, Sarajevo: University of Sarajevo – Institute of History, 2022, 1535 p.

The latest publication by Professor Esad Kurtović from the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, titled *Extracts from the Lawsuit Books of the Dubrovnik State Archives (Lamenta de foris I–L, 1370–1483)*, is part of the edition “Sources for the History of Medieval Bosnia,” established by Professor Kurtović himself in 2014. This edition had its first book of sources related to extracts from the *Debita Notariae* series, or the debt books of the Republic of Ragusa. Since then, up until this book, Professor Kurtović has published a total of 5 books within this series, containing extracts from archival documents from various series of the Dubrovnik State Archives. It’s important to mention one book from the *Lamenta de foris* series, which hasn’t received sufficient attention and has largely gone unnoticed. This book is titled *Extracts of Sources for the History of Medieval Bosnia: Lamenta de foris IV (1419–1422)*, published by the author independently in 2020. This book includes the fourth volume in the lawsuit series of the Dubrovnik State Archives. This volume is an integral part of the current publication.

In regard to publication of this kind, an elementary question arises: What does the publication of extracts from medieval archival documents of the Dubrovnik State Archives entail? Transcribing unpublished archival material requires specific scholarly skills, such as exceptional proficiency in Latin and Italian languages, excellent knowledge of medieval Latin paleography characteristic of Mediterranean writing style, historical context, and historiography. This is an exceptionally demanding task for which only a few prominent historians specializing in the medieval era in our region are qualified. A complete process of creating a book of this type includes research, selection, digitization, transcription, and publication preparation. The work presented here represents decades of effort and labor that can be challenging for members of the historical profession, let alone general

audiences. The extent of the work accomplished can also be quantified: according to a rough estimate, 50 volumes of the series *Lamenta de foris* encompass more than 30 thousand pages of documents. In this context, it's important to emphasize that the creation of such a work represents a significant financial expense for the author, given the limited funding for scientific research projects in our country.

The series *Lamenta de foris* from the Dubrovnik State Archives contains records of complaints filed regarding criminal offenses committed outside the territory of the Republic of Ragusa, in which Ragusans were involved as either perpetrators or aggrieved parties. Occasionally, a scribe made a mistake and included complaints that took place within the Republic. The complaints come in various formats and forms. The shorter ones consist of just a few lines and provide a standardized overview of basic information. It is often the case that long complaints were recorded on several pages, providing an abundance of information and serving as a valuable repository of information. In addition to the complaints, additional insight and information regarding the progress of the cases were added below, which at times can complicate the understanding of the structure of the text. These criminal offenses mostly include various forms of theft, assaults, beatings, murders, and other ways of causing harm to individuals and illicitly gaining material profit. The victims were often Ragusan merchants, craftsmen, businessmen, as well as various officials who traveled between Ragusa and the interior of the Balkan Peninsula and vice versa. Given the deeply rooted economic connections documented since the time of Ban Kulin and the expansive territory of the Bosnian state in the late 14th and throughout the 15th century, which saw the most important trade routes passing through it, the majority of complaints concern the territory of the medieval Bosnian state, thus involving the residents of Bosnia, also known as Bosnians. It is important to emphasize that judicial records do not solely serve as a source for tracking legal aspects but also various other phenomena. During travels, commonly stolen items include traded goods, money, jewelry, weapons, livestock, and clothing. Occasionally, a detailed description of the stolen

items and their value is provided. The complaints document the identification of accused individuals, their names, occupations, places of residence, social affiliations, or specific hierarchies. Longer complaints frequently contain more detailed statements from the plaintiff, statements from the defendants, witnesses, appointments of representatives, and verdicts.

Documents from this archival collection were written on paper and parchment. Despite the passage of time, the overall preservation of this collection is at a satisfactory level. Given the extensive time span of document creation, spanning 113 years, the documents were handwritten by a large number of scribes, posing a unique challenge for the author due to the need to adapt to the specific handwriting style of each scribe.

All of these documents constitute a true treasure trove for researchers, from which they can gain much-needed new insights. With their rich content, the books of complaints offer starting points for investigations into various thematic frameworks. This series provides sources for historians who wish to provide an overview of inter-state political relations, as well as researchers who wish to examine the history of a particular family or individual, legal regulations, trade, social structure, daily life, economics, agriculture, and crafts. Therefore, in addition to historians, this publication is of significant value to legal professionals, linguists, cartographers, and numerous other scholars. The sources published in these three volumes offer a wealth of new topics for exploration, defining new foundational bases that enable an approach to contemporary trends in European medieval studies. While the author primarily focused on publishing documents related to the territory of the medieval Bosnian state, the book contains abundant data of exceptional importance for the broader region of cities along the Adriatic coast and the nearer interior of the Balkan Peninsula. By publishing 4001 documents across 1535 pages, numerous individuals, settlements, and details of ordinary people's daily lives have been transferred from archival volumes into scholarly and public discourse, becoming accessible to all interested parties. The book includes over 16 thousand

names of individuals, many of whom are mentioned for the first time in this context, as well as over a thousand names of inhabited places, many of which are encountered only in this type of source. Excerpts suggest that travelers sought to avoid notorious locations where robberies frequently occurred. Through these documents, it is possible to identify certain minor noble families, whose presence solely in this type of source indicates that various forms of robbery, theft, and plundering were their primary occupations and sources of income. The publication of these extracts has greatly expanded our knowledge of banditry – a widely prevalent yet little-known aspect of earning a living in the Middle Ages. Consequently, this type of source offers essential indicators for defining the foundations of the legal and judicial system in the medieval period. This publication represents a significant contribution to both domestic and foreign historians and researchers, considering that Latin and Italian are universal languages of the medieval era.

With this publication, the path to new sources has been greatly shortened and facilitated, benefiting both younger generations of historians who haven't had the opportunity to visit the Dubrovnik State Archives, as well as older historians who, even in their later years, haven't been equipped to work with sources from the medieval period. Understanding the sources is also made easier, as each extract is accompanied by a detailed summary in the Bosnian language, which greatly assists future researchers in identifying the elements that are relevant to them. The index facilitates navigation within the publication's three volumes. It's important to commend the author's work on the exceptionally high-quality and extensive index, as well as his tireless and exhaustive inclusion of all personal names and geographical terms in all possible variations found within this type of source.

In terms of quality and significance, this publication is far superior to the current publishing output in the field of Bosnian-Herzegovinian medieval studies. Although its full significance and credit may not be fully appreciated today, it serves as a foundation for many future works

and publications in the decades and centuries to come. Similar fate has befallen works by scholars who now hold legendary status in South Slavic medieval studies, such as Ljubomir Stojanović, Šime Ljubić, Franz Miklosich, Mihailo Dinić, Georg Fejer, Tadija Smičiklas. Historians still rely on their publications of archival transcripts today, which were published over a century ago. Esad Kurtovic's prolific work in publishing medieval sources has earned him a place among these eminent scholars. This recognition will be fully acknowledged by the generations that come after us.

Enes Dedić