

Enes Dedić, *Bosansko kraljevstvo i Srpska despotovina (1402-1459)* [*Bosnian Kingdom and Serbian Despotate (1402-1459)*], Sarajevo: University of Sarajevo – Institute of History, 2021, 482 p.

The history of modern and contemporary Southeast Europe, in which Bosnia and Herzegovina went through various international contexts, pressures, appropriations, divisions, and attacks, created burdens in all aspects, including in the definition and interpretation of earlier history. Although Bosnia and Serbia represent two separate medieval organisms developed in different feudal frameworks and which in certain periods in specific situations had points of contact that recognize their neighborly relations, modern and contemporary literature was not able to sufficiently free them from their daily political projections. The set thematic framework in the treatment of Bosnian-Serbian relations in the 15th century is the first comprehensive and serious attempt to confront historiography with modern projections. Pioneers come from Bosnia and Herzegovina, although the scientific machinery of Serbian historiography is traditionally stronger, more numerous, and financially and organizationally far more involved. The book before us has its starting point in the PhD thesis defended in January 2017 at the History Department of the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo.

Analyzing the communication between two neighbors implies knowing their history. In the case of the Bosnian Kingdom and the Serbian Despotate (hereinafter: Bosnia and Despotate), it is a demanding but inevitable precondition. In that sense, Dr. Enes Dedić (hereinafter: the author) has proven himself, from a research point of view, not only as an expert in older publications, with classic, indispensable approaches that historiography has used for decades and even centuries, but also in numerous newer publications that are difficult to grasp, and literature from the wider region. In reviewing the historiographical endeavors, the author is recognizably

guided by a set and maintained assessment of the relevance of the publications, carefully observing the literature that is based on sources, critically singling out the observed excesses in the written work, sometimes even hypercritically, probably wanting authors to confront their time, partially condemning the literature and not the time in which it was created. On the other hand, sometimes encouraging newer specialized synthetic and fragmentary publications, the author has a clear intention to present fresher approaches as models of contemporary historiography which, in far more difficult conditions with fewer new sources but with more tact and consideration, achieve small but significant developments in knowledge of the medieval times.

The modest domestic medieval sources for the treatment of this topic, poorly preserved, especially in the Bosnian context, were supplemented with data from foreign archives through a large number of published collections consulted by the author. Thanks to the published and especially unpublished materials of the State Archives in Dubrovnik, the proverbially more modest fund of sources from the Middle Ages for the time frame treated in this book, proved to be relatively rich and crucial for the topic of the relationship between Bosnia and the Despotate. General political developments in the context of the politics of Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, full of turning events that were reflected on the internal relations of the two small countries, found their reflection in Ragusa as well. Although they existed on some different and similar feudal, political, social, economic, religious and cultural bases, Bosnia and the Despotate, as the author shows, are two separate feudal subjects with different and sometimes the same suzerain. From the Ragusans' point of view, in their economic and political strategy towards the hinterland, Bosnia and the Despotate represented the same economic space. Therefore, the Ragusans registered everything that was problematic and that often, on the Drina river, or in Srebrenica, or on the caravan route across Bosnia towards the rich in ore areas in the Despotate, indicated a political or economic disturbance, i.e. what threatened their present and future. By recognizing the quality of the sources

for deepening the knowledge on this topic, the author, it turns out, made a crucial but not an easy choice, because archival materials, after all, like older publications based on them, have never been prepared or adapted for this newly-chosen topic.

The author overcame the scarcity of sources by utilizing numerous small fragments that can be found in the decisions of certain Ragusan councils. In a sea of mostly unpublished, sometimes unidentified, unclear, and non-contextualized information, the author managed to achieve enviable control and to successfully arrange it in a methodologically well-planned and established chronological and thematic framework of his work. Although there were longer letters and wider communication in Ragusan correspondence with Hungary, Turkey, the Despotate, and Bosnia, the author did not have the opportunity to encounter more concrete correspondence that was suitable for his topic, but remained condemned to smaller, incidental indicators that were even more difficult to detect in letters. In this sense, the author showed an enviable research endeavor and with the achieved results *de facto* once again emphasized and encouraged archival work as an essential basis for further research in the modern age.

In addition to the analysis of the historiography and the sources, in the introductory part, the author also offered an informative overview of the history of Bosnia and Serbia until the end of the 14th century, in order to provide a starting point for his topic. And it turns out that, with a short demonstration, he showed the profession how much new, more detailed insights into the history from the time of Stjepan II and Tvrtko I Kotromanić, on the one hand, and the Nemanjić era Serbia, on the other, are needed.

The author's methodological framework begins with an overview of political history, combined with observing the situation in Bosnia and the Despotate. The presented material is divided into four large chapters with numerous subchapters, in which the quantity varies, and is arranged in accordance with the found and processed sources and elaborations of the

literature. The author clearly conceptually finds and follows the relations of Bosnia and the Despotate according to the general trends that dictated the history of Southeastern Europe. First, in the problematic foundations of Hungarian internal and foreign policy until 1415, when their relationship was predetermined, and in which the Despotate, perforce, found the place of a vassal and was in a better position than Bosnia. Then, in the action of the Ottomans in Bosnia and against Hungary and the supremacy of the Ottomans in the Despotate until 1459, especially emphasizing the time of mutual conflict that was in a peculiar way limited by the Wars of Konavle (1430-1454). Finding themselves in different situations, the Bosnian king and the Serbian despot react differently or in the same manner pressed by the hammer and anvil between the alternating polarities of the Hungarians and the Turks. The author successfully recognizes the different models that the Hungarians apply to Bosnia and the Despotate, according to their interests, by adjusting other people's possessions along the Hungarian border towards the Ottomans. Through exhaustive analysis of the fragmented archival material from Dubrovnik, the author succeeds in bringing to light numerous episodes and in them recognizing the reasons why kings and despots agreed, disagreed, or clashed. The despot Đurađ Branković maneuvered relatively successfully in the general currents. By changing sides and entering into risky arrangements with the Ottomans, he lost and regained possessions, remained on the remnants of despotism, but failed to avoid attacks and being the opposing side to the Bosnian rulers and nobles. As well as the Bosnian rulers and nobles the other way around.

All of them relied only on their estimates and tried to secure and preserve their possessions, depending on the situation, with the Hungarian or Ottoman ruler. The actions of the Kosačas, Zlatonosovićs, Dinjičić-Kovačevićs, and Pavlovićs, who mainly lived near the Despotate, were described in episodes of numerous Ottoman incursions and conflicts or joint actions with the despot, problems in Zeta where Venice appeared as a stable factor, and above all in the two Wars of Konavle in which the Ragusans found a counterbalance to the Bosnian nobles and rulers in the Despotate. Calling

the Bosnian episode of the rule of the Bosnian heir to the throne, despot Stjepan Tomašević, and the collapse of the Despotate in 1459, a kind of climax and finale in the treatment of his topic, the author does not consider it the epilogue of long-term relations, excessive ambition or Bosnian guilt, but the usual continuation of the implementation of the Hungarian plan to protect the southern borders and in those circumstances the Despotate began to live but also to decay.

The common framework in which Bosnia and the Despotate are located appear under the Hungarian auspices at the beginning of the second decade of the 15th century, as it turns out, by following the later development, having different Hungarian standards and unresolved possessions problems in the border area from the start. The silver-rich mining area of Srebrenica was transformed by Hungarian interference into a continuous basis of problems for its neighbors almost until the collapse of the Despotate, thus shaking otherwise not too complex or significantly nurtured mutual communication. Therefore, in the author's methodological framework there is a distinct chapter dedicated to Srebrenica, which the author aptly calls the bone of contention in the relations between Bosnia and the Despotate, and a separate connecting chapter on the economy and the mutual communication of the neighbors. The author opens up a series of problems related to the activity of the local nobility, for example Dinjičićs, in the wider area of Srebrenica which is still insufficiently clearly contextualized, and therefore can be an inspiration for further work. Basically, the silver ore of the Srebrenica area and economic circulations are the core that remains a recognizable feature of this thematic framework. The author undertook an enviable research endeavor in the presentation of large and small fragments of the political and economic history of Srebrenica and the rich economic circulations on the route the Despotate – Bosnia – Ragusa. The essence of the success of the author's patiently laid out presentation lies in the recognition of the levers that the participants used in their economic policy. The Ragusan interests in continuous and lively economic circulations produced a reflexively dependent correlation of raw material-rich

areas and possessions in the hinterland. Novelties (Bosnian: *Novoštine*) as additional measures of enrichment threatened the existing laws of economics. The pressure was exerted by banning the movement of merchants and capital, controlling roads, changing trade routes and channels, increasing customs duties, introducing new taxes and similar changes to established rules that protected the centuries-old tradition and historical right of business on the eastern Adriatic coast. The author finds these levers in all the participants, finding numerous episodes in which the primacy and winning position in the face of the natural force of economic flows was of deceptive and changeable fortune for all the participants, even for discerning Ragusans.

The Ragusan observation of political and economic conditions in the hinterland is rich in the true sense compared to information related to religious aspects. This is the essence of the Ragusan reality: the absence of a religious organization in its own political bodies and the mapping of such a profile to the foreign policy orientation towards the Slavic hinterland. This was significantly reflected in the ability of the author, as well as earlier researchers of Dubrovnik archival materials, to treat this issue equally. The author points out the general religious currents in which the traits of the Bosnian Church, Catholicism and Orthodoxy are recognizable, but he finds the most problems in following the church organization of Orthodoxy in Bosnia The Serbian Orthodox Church, with the loss of its political support on the possessions incorporated by the Bosnian state during the 14th century, withdrew its organization into the contours of the new borders of the Serbian state. Such moves in the new environment, in Bosnia, which was left to a less recognizable local church organization and the Orthodox population, predetermined the strong competition and influence of more organized Catholicism, above all in the activities of the Franciscans, but also of the Bosnian Church, which was favored by the nobility. The author is not satisfied with numerous foreign and domestic approaches (Boris Nilević's, first of all), because they did not define the problems in cognition that had been and remained unresolved for a long time in religious issues in

medieval Bosnia. On the contrary, moving along the beaten path of Mihail Dinić's work, the author easily solved, in a dedicated chapter, the issue of the borders between Bosnia and the Despotate. More recent approaches, which unilaterally posed numerous unresolved issues, were more subject to questioning. This is the border that went through the most changes in the 15th century. The author especially emphasizes the instability of the border around Srebrenica, Zvornik, and Višegrad.

The relationship between the Bosnian kingdom and the Serbian Despotate is like a typical sinking river, which in some places gives a sparkling surface image of its flow. Such are the sources for studying the history of the Middle Ages, but the picture of mutual relations between these two neighbors in the 15th century is not only like that because of the archival materials, but because, it turns out, it really was like that. The sources show that those are two different entities that have their own points of contact, distributed more in the places of general movements than in the structure of mutual interpenetration. With the presented views, the author shows that numerous connections and observations of the common development, and comparative observations of the history of Bosnia and the Despotate in literature were not objective, because they mostly refer to the commonality of goods, economic procedures or foreign merchants, primarily of Ragusans.

Dr. Enes Dedić's book, *Bosnian Kingdom and Serbian Despotate (1402-1459)*, enriched historiography in the research and knowledge of the history of medieval Bosnia. The gap in the study of relations between Bosnia and its neighbors during the 15th century was significantly filled and attention was drawn to the analysis of mutual communication between Bosnia and Serbia in earlier periods. Enes Dedić undertook an enviable research endeavor in working on unpublished archival material and published collections, he also made use of existing literature, elaborated a huge number of fragmentary and abundant starting points necessary for the elaboration of his topic, and in the methodological sense, he showed an exemplary framework by

solving insufficiently known issues by supporting and confirming solved, and highlighting unresolved episodes. With his approach, starting from sources of information and being unburdened by daily political projections, Dedić successfully presented a demanding thematic framework. With numerous metaphors and parallels, in the recognizable writing style of his professor and role model Dubravko Lovrenović, Dedić successfully avoided the dry academic style of writing with which books of this type usually have to be written. Before us is a book that is deservedly considered a professional and scientific work because it contains elements of literary durability, and it represents a kind of methodological model thanks to the definitions of solved and unsolved questions and good initial elements of ubiquity in future elaborations. In addition to the professionals, the presented book and current thematic framework will justifiably deserve interest among lovers of antiquity and a wider readership.

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