

IN THE SERVICE OF THE MIGHTY KING: POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE COUNTS OF BLAGAJ AND KING SIGISMUND OF LUXEMBURG*

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The Counts of Blagaj were descendants of the noble Babonić family, which was one of the most powerful magnate families not only in medieval Slavonia, but in the whole medieval Realm of Saint Stephen (Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia), during the second half of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century. While the second half of the 14th century represents the period of their decline, the same cannot be said of the very end of the 14th and the first four decades of the 15th century, which was when King Sigismund of Luxemburg was on the Hungarian-Croatian throne. The latter period was significantly marked by the dynamic and not always beneficial relations between the Counts of Blagaj and King Sigismund of Luxemburg. Therefore, the main goal of this paper is to analyse various questions concerning the political relations between the Counts of Blagaj and King Sigismund of Luxemburg during his long reign as the king of the Realm of Saint Stephen. First of all, it shall be analysed how resolute and firm the Counts of Blagaj were as opponents of King Sigismund in the last decade of the 14th century, that is, during the period of his constant abject struggle to gain and keep the Hungarian-Croatian throne. Further on, it shall be analysed what kind of socio-political mechanisms and family connections had influenced the change of this political position in the first decade of the 15th century. Moreover, several other questions will be asked – did all members of the Blagaj Dynasty have the same political agenda towards King Sigismund; was there among them any individual who defined the

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family policy towards the King; what did it actually mean to serve the King faithfully; and finally, was there any and, if so, how important was the economical and geopolitical benefit of loyal service to King Sigismund of Luxemburg for the Counts of Blagaj.

Key words: the Counts of Blagaj, King Sigismund of Luxemburg, Realm of Saint Stephen, beginning of the 15th century, political relations, socio-political mechanisms

1. Introduction

In the middle of the summer of 1395, while preparing his military campaign against the rebellious Bosnian nobility, Sigismund of Luxemburg, king of the Realm of Saint Stephen (Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia), has deprived the Counts of Blagaj of the property of the castle of Ostrožac.¹ It was one of the most important economical and geostrategic urban centers of the middle Pounje region, and it used to be held by the ancestors of the Counts of Blagaj since the year 1321.² This deprivation of the Ostrožac castle is one of the earliest accounts of the interaction between the Counts of Blagaj and King Sigismund of Luxemburg that is preserved in primary sources.³ In contrast to that,

¹ Duje Rendić-Miočević (ed.), *Codex diplomaticus Regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae. Diplomatički zbornik Kraljevine Hrvatske, Dalmacije i Slavonije* (hereafter: CD), vol 18 (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1990), pp. 54-55. At the same time, King Sigismund also deprived the Counts of Blagaj of the castle of Krupa. Krupa and Ostržac were among the most important urban settlement in the Valley of Una River at those times. Never the less, more will be said about these events in the following chapters.

² According to the charter issued by the Chapter of Zagreb on November 2nd 1321, the brothers Nicholas III and Dujam, the leading Counts of Blagaj, had bought the Ostrožac estate, located in the County of Pset, from Dobromer, son of Junk, Stephen, son of Vojin and Wolf, son of Veliša (CD 9, p. 35). In the following decade they had built there a fortified castle (*castrum*), as was attested in the final confirmation of ownership of Ostrožac, given by the King Charles Robert to the aforementioned brothers (CD 9, p. 536). About these events, as well as about the economical and geostrategic significance of the Ostrožac castle in the historical development of the Babonić family, the ancestors of the Counts of Blagaj, see: Hrvoje Kekez *Plemići rod Babonića do kraja 14. stoljeća [The Noble Babonići Kindred until the End of the Fourteenth Century]*, unpublished doctoral thesis, (Zagreb: Hrvatski studiji Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2012), pp. 338-344.

³ In spite of the fact that they played a significant role in the historical development of medieval Slavonia, there was not much research done on the historical development of the Blagaj dynasty and its ancestors, the noble family Babonić. One of the first studies on that subject was written in Hungarian, in 1897, by Lajos Thallóczy, in the form of an introduction to the edition of medieval documents on the Counts of Blagaj (Lajos Thallóczy, "A Blagay család eredete", in: Lajos Thallóczy – Samu Barabás (eds.) *A Blagay-család okleveltára. Codex diplomaticus comitum de Blagay* (hereafter: CDCB), (Budapest: Tud. Akadémia Könyvtár-Hivatala, 1897) pp. VI-CLXXXIII). In the following year, Thallóczy had published the same, if slightly enlarged, study in German, in the form of a monograph (Lajos Thallóczy, *Die Geschichte der Grafen von Blagay*

in the last year of his long reign, King Sigismund had returned the Ostrožac castle to the Counts of Blagaj, on April 24th 1436.⁴ The king had done that due to their loyal service, mostly demonstrated by their helping Sigismund's military campaigns against the Bosnian nobility, who had allied themselves with the Ottomans.

These two events represent the two ends of the arch of historical events constituting the dynamics of political relations between the Counts of Blagaj and Sigismund of Luxemburg, King of Hungary-Croatia and later Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. It is a period longer than four decades during which Sigismund of Luxemburg completed the trajectory from often desperate, and eventually victorious, struggle for the crown of St. Stephen, which he almost lost several times, to the position of the most powerful ruler in contemporary Europe.⁵ In the same manner, it was also a very dynamical period for

(Wien: Selbstverlag, 1898)). In the following century, there were several authors who researched various aspects of the historical role of the Babonići family during the high middle ages, but a complete survey of their role in history in general was finally written in 2012 by the author of this paper, in his doctoral thesis (Kekez, *Plemićki rod Babonića*, pass; for a detailed bibliography on the Babonići family see pages 12-13). The same can be said of the research of the role of the Counts of Blagaj in the history of the 15th and 16th century. Although the Counts of Blagaj were frequently mentioned in various surveys of Croatian medieval history, it has to be said that after Thallóczy's study, written in 1898 (Thallóczy, *Die Geschichte*, pp. 91-99), there were not many authors who focused their research solely on the role of the Counts of Blagaj in the 15th or 16th century. Of those who did, it was Grgin who dedicated a chapter in his paper on the situation and the role of Croatian noble families in the period of several decades before the Battle of Krbava, which took place in 1493, to the Counts of Blagaj (Borislav Grgin, "Hrvatski velikaši u desetljećima pred Krbavsku bitku" ["The Croatian Magnates in the Decades before the Battle of Krbava"], *Krbavska bitka i njezine posljedice* (Zagreb: Hrvatska matica iseljenika - Zavod za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1997), pp. 44-46). Furthermore, the author of this paper has recently published a paper in which he describes and contextualizes the importance of the castle of Blagaj and the political position, as well as the historical role, of the Counts of Blagaj in the region of the County of Sana during the final decades of the 15th and the first three decades of the 16th century (Hrvoje Kekez, "Knezovi Blagajski i tvrđi grad Blagaj nakon osnutka Jajačke banovine 1464. godine" ["The Counts of Blagaj and the Blagaj Castle after the foundation of the Jajce Banate in 1464"], in: Ante Birin (ed.), *Stjepan Tomašević (1461.-1463.) – slom srednjovjekovnog Bosanskog Kraljevstva. Zbornik radova sa Znanstvenog skupa održanog 11. i 12. studenoga 2011. godine u Jajcu* (Zagreb-Sarajevo: Hrvatski institut za povijest - Katolički bogoslovni fakultet u Sarajevu 2013), pp. 151-177.

⁴ King Sigismund had referred to the Ostrožac castle as heirloom of the Counts of Blagaj (... *castrorum eorum hereditarium Ostrosacz vocatu...*, CDCB, 321-324).

⁵ Sigismund's imperial and royal rule is well researched. See, for example: Henrik Horváth, *Zsigmond király és kora. König Sigismund und seine Zeit* (Budapest: Budapest székesfőváros, 1937); Wakounig, Marija, *Dalmatien und Friaul: die Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Sigismund von Luxemburg und der Republik Venedig um die Vorherrschaft im adriatischen Raum* (Wien: VWGO, 1990); Elemér Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund in Ungarn 1387-1437* (Budapest: Akadémiai kiadó, 1990); Josef Macek – Ernő Marosi – Ferdinand Seibt (eds.), *Sigismund von Luxemburg: Kaiser und König in Mitteleuropa 1387-1437: Beiträge zur Herrschaft Kaiser Sigismunds und der europäischen Geschichte um 1400: Vorträge der internationalen Tagung in Budapest vom 8.-11 Juli 1987 anlässlich der 600. Wiederkehr seiner Thronbesteigung in Ungarn und seines*

the Counts of Blagaj, who started this period, among the opponents of King Sigismund, just to become some of the most loyal of his servants at its end. This change of policy was in the end rewarded with the return of the castle and estate of Ostrožac to their property. Even more, at the end of this period the Counts of Blagaj have managed to reestablish their political and economic domination in the middle Pounje area.

Therefore, the main goal of this paper is to analyse political relations between the Counts of Blagaj and King Sigismund of Luxemburg during his long reign on the throne of Saint Stephen. First of all, it shall be analysed how resolute and firm the Counts of Blagaj were as opponents of King Sigismund in the last decade of the 14th century, that is, during the period of his constant abject struggle to gain and keep the Hungarian-Croatian throne. Further on, it shall be analysed what kind of socio-political mechanisms and family connections had influenced the change of this political position in the first decade of the 15th century. Moreover, several other questions will be analysed – did all members of the Blagaj dynasty have the same political agenda towards King Sigismund; was there among them the leader of the family policy towards the King; what did it actually mean to serve the King faithfully; and finally, was there any and, if so, how important was the economical and geopolitical benefit of loyal service to King Sigismund of Luxemburg for the Counts of Blagaj.

550. *Todestages (Warendorf: Fahlbusch, 1994)*; Jörg Konrad Hoensch, *Itinerar König und Kaiser Sigismunds von Luxemburg 1368-1437* (Warendorf: Fahlbusch, 1995); Pál Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895-1526* (London-New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), pp. 195-277; Michel Reinert - François Pauly (eds.), *Sigismund von Luxemburg: ein Kaiser in Europa: Tagungsband des internationalen historischen und kunsthistorischen Kongresses in Luxemburg, 8.-10. Juni 2005* (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 2006); Dubravko Lovrenović, *Na klizištu povijesti (sveta kruna ugarska i sveta kruna bosanska): 1387-1463 [At the Rink of History (Holly Crown of Hungary and Holly Crown of Bosnia): 1387-1463]* (Zagreb-Sarajevo: Synopsis - Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 2006), pp. 23-265. In contrast to that, although it was a very important period in the historical development of Croatian historical lands, the reign of King Sigismund of Luxemburg was not the subject to which a large number of Croatian authors devoted their work. Nevertheless, writings of the following authors deserve to be pointed out: Franjo Rački, "Pokret na slavenskom jugu koncem XIV i početkom XV stoljeća" ["The Movement on the Slavic South in the End of 14th and the Beginning of 15th century"], *Rad Jugoslaven-ske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti*, 3 (1868), pp. 65-165; Vjekoslav Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata [The History of Croats]*, vol. 2 (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1981), pp. 271-400; Vjekoslav Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata [The History of Croats]*, vol. 3 (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1981), pp. 51-174; Ferdo Šišić, *Vojvoda Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić i njegovo doba (1350.-1416.) [The Duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić and His Period (1350-1416)]* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1902). It is also important to notice that after the submission of this paper, Suzana Miljan had defended her PhD thesis, which could be very useful for this paper (Suzana Miljan, *Plemićko društvo Zagrebačke županije za vladavine Žigmunda Luksemburškog (1387.-1437.) [Noble Society of the County of Zagreb during the Reign of Sigismund of Luxemburg (1387-1437)]*, unpublished doctoral thesis, (Zagreb: Hrvatski studiji Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2015)). Nevertheless, because it was defended after this paper was finished and submitted, it was not consulted in this work.

2. On opposite sides

As was said, in the middle of the summer of 1395 King Sigismund of Luxemburg deprived the Counts of Blagaj of their castle Ostrožac as well as castle Krupa in order to give them to Count Vuk Vukčić Hrvatinić.⁶ This was done as part of royal preparations for the upcoming military campaign against the Bosnian magnates, the campaign whose positive outcome very much depended on the support of Vuk Vukčić Hrvatinić. In spite of the fact that in 1394 King Sigismund had defeated the Horvati brothers near Dobor in the County of Usora as well as the fact that in the same year King had defeated Vuk Vukčić Hrvatinić near Knin, and the fact that King Dabiša of Bosnia had acknowledged King Sigismund as his sovereign. Nevertheless, in the spring of 1395 the Bosnian nobility turned away from King Sigismund. Therefore, on July 6th 1395, King Sigismund proclaimed the start of a military campaign against the Bosnian king Dabiša and “other heretics of his kingdom”. The King success in upcoming campaign heavily depended on the support of Vuk Vukčić Hrvatinić. Count Vuk was not only former ban of Croatia and former supporter of Anjou dynasty from Naples, against whom King Sigismund was struggling to keep the crown of Saint Stephen, but he was also a brother of Count Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić, king’s main adversary in Croatia and Bosnia. Therefore, by having Vuk Vukčić Hrvatinić on his side King Sigismund would weaken Anjou side a lot. At the end, because Sigismund had more urgent affairs to be attended to in Transylvania, this campaign did not materialize in the summer of 1395.⁷

At the beginning of the summer of 1395 King Sigismund had conducted military and strategic preparations for campaign in Bosnia. Hence, one should regard the King’s confiscation of the castles Krupa and Ostrožac as part of these preparations. It was a reasonable strategic move, because these two castles were not only border strongholds towards the Kingdom of Bosnia and the estates of Count Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić, King’s main adversary. In addition, castles Krupa and Ostrožac were situated in the valley of the river Una, one

⁶ Although it is not directly stated there, the information about King Sigismund taking the castle of Ostrožac from the counts Nicholas III and Stephen VII of Blagaj in the middle of the summer 1395 can be found in a charter issued by the King in his military camp near Šebeš in today’s Eastern Slovakia (CD 18, pp. 54-55). According to that charter, Sigismund had promised to return the castle Ostrožac to the Blagaj brothers as soon as peace with rebellious Bosnian nobility would be reached. Therefore, it is very likely that his confiscating that castle was part of the strategic preparations for the upcoming war. Furthermore, information that King Sigismund had also deprived the Counts of Blagaj of the castle Krupa can be found in another charter, composed by the Chapter of Zagreb on August 18th 1396 (CD 18, pp. 144-145). That particular charter was composed on the demand of Count Stephen VII of Blagaj, who was at that moment a canon of the Chapter of Zagreb, and in it Count Stephen VII requested that the King fulfill his promise from the year before that, according to which he would return the confiscated castles Ostrožac and Krupa. The context of the issuing these two charters will be discussed further on.

⁷ Rački, “Pokret na slavenskom jugu”, pp. 153-156; Šišić, *Vojvoda Hrvoje Vukčić*, pp. 98-100; Lovrenović, *Na klizištu povijesti*, pp. 73-75, 77-78.

of the most important traffic routes of that time. Hence, for King Sigismund it was very important that those two strongholds should be held by nobles on whose support the King was at the moment counting, such as Count Vuk Vukčić Hrvatinić at the moment. The King would have never allowed nobles of whose support he was uncertain to control these two castles. In addition, there are some accounts that indicate that even before the King's decision to confiscate the castles Krupa and Ostrožac. Namely, the Counts of Blagaj had, on several occasions, associated themselves with the rebellious Bosnian nobility, and even used military contingents of Bosnian nobles in their struggle against the Counts of Zrin who were their neighbours, but also faithful partisans of King Sigismund. The evidences of this can be found in the verdict of Count Nicholas of Gorjani, ban of Slavonia, issued on September 20th 1397.⁸ In this verdict, Ban Nicholas condemns all misdeeds done by the *familiares* and other retainers of Count Stephen VII of Blagaj on the estates of Count Paul I of Zrin in the period between 1384 and 1397. In this document, it is recorded that a certain John Rufus, retainer of Count Stephen VII of Blagaj and castellan (*castellanus*) of Blagaj's castle of Otoka, had joined the armies of the Bosnian great duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić in their raids on the estates of the Counts of Zrin. This had happened in the period between September 1386 and March 1387. Moreover, in September 1387 some other unnamed retainer (most likely John Rufus again) of Count Stephen VII of Blagaj had once again joined the army of the Bosnian duke Hrvoje and participated in the sacking of the Struga estate, owned by Count Paul I of Zrin.⁹

The piece of information how some of the retainers of the Counts of Blagaj joining the armies of the Bosnian duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić on their raids on the valley of Una,¹⁰ especially on the estates of Count Paul I of Zrin, could mean that these events were not random incidents, but indeed the results of a premeditated political strategy of the Counts of Blagaj. One can argue that

⁸ CD 18, pp. 273-275.

⁹ CD 18, pp. 273-275. It has to be noted that in this charter, the usual chronological reference point in the form of an upcoming, recent or current Christian feast was omitted by mistake. This was noticed by Miljan and Karbić, who have, after a detailed analysis of the medieval Latin text and of the historical context of the account found in the charter, rightly concluded that Duke Hrvoje's military campaign in the valley of Una was conducted sometime between September 1386 and March 1387 (Damir Karbić – Suzana Miljan, "Političko djelovanje kneza Pavla I. Zrinskog (1362.-1414.)" ["Political Agency of Count Paul I of Zrin (1362-1414)"], *Zbornik Odsjeka za povijesne znanosti Zavoda za povijesne i društvene znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti*, 30 (2012), p. 92). For more details on the verdict of the ban Nicholas of Gorjani, see: Kekez, *Plemički rod Babonića*, pp. 158-161.

¹⁰ These raids, conducted by the armies of the Bosnian great duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić in lower and middle Pounje, were most likely part of the continuous struggle between King Sigismund on the one side, and the brothers Horvat and Paližna on the other, at the end of the ninth decade of 14th century (Rački, "Pokret na slavenskom jugu", pp. 77-78; Šišić, *Vojvoda Hrvoje Vukčić*, pp. 55-79; Lovrenović, *Na klizištu povijesti*, pp. 39-53).

the Counts of Blagaj relied on the support of the Bosnian great duke Hrvoje in their struggle for political and economic domination in the middle and lower Pounje with the Counts of Zrin.¹¹ It is important to underline that in the last decade of 14th century the Counts of Blagaj still owned large estates in the valley of the Vrbas river, that is, in the areas bordering with Donji Kraji, a possession of the Bosnian great duke Hrvoje himself.¹² Even more, it is highly likely that in the middle of the last decade of the 14th century, Count Nicholas IV of Blagaj had chosen the Countess Dorothy, granddaughter of the Bosnian great duke Hrvoje, as wife for his youngest son, Count John V of Blagaj.¹³

It is very likely that Count Nicholas IV decided to make this political maneuver because King Sigismund refused to return the castles Ostrožac and Krupa to the Blagaj family. Instead of that, he made them a royal donation of two new estates – Omersel and Brisovica - at the end of August 1395.¹⁴ Eventually, King Sigismund did not go to war in Bosnia in the summer of 1395, but instead undertook extensive preparations for the upcoming military campaign against the Ottomans in the east of the Balkan Peninsula.¹⁵ Although

¹¹ The best evidence of the struggle between the Counts of Blagaj and the Counts of Zrin in the last two decades of the 14th century is the aforementioned verdict of the ban Nicholas of Gorjani, issued in 1397 (CD 18, pp. 273-275).

¹² For more details about the estates of the Counts of Blagaj and their ancestors, the Babonići family, situated in the valley of the Vrbas River, see: Kekez *Plemićki rod Babonića*, pp. 349-362.

¹³ In the preserved written documents, the countess Dorothy is mentioned as spouse of Count John V of Blagaj only once, and even then as his widow. This account can be found in the charter issued by the Bosnian king Stephen Tomas on May 25th 1446, in which he guarantees safety to her and her son, Count Nicholas V of Blagaj (CDCB, pp. 342-345). Later on, Countess Dorothy married Count Martin V Frankapan, and is mentioned as his wife in a charter from 1448 (Arhiv Prvostolnog Kaptola zagrebačkog, Locus credibilis, Lit. B. Nr. 408., fasc. 21). According to that charter, Countess Dorothy gave her new husband the castle of Kozara, situated in the County of Vrbas. This was once again confirmed in 1459 (Arhiv Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, zbirka Diplomata latina (hereafter: AHAZU, D-), fasc. XIII, no. 35). The fact that the countess Dorothy was a granddaughter of the Bosnian great duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić, that is, a daughter of his son, Count Balša Hercegović, is attested by a charter issued in 1423. In that charter, two daughters of Balša Hercegović – our Countess Dorothy and a certain Catherine – are mentioned (Medo Pucić (ed.), *Spomenici srbski od 1395. do 1423.: to est pisma pisana od Republike Dubrovačke kraljevima, despotima, voivodama i knezovima srbskiem, bosanskiem i primorskiem* (Beograd: Knjigopječtanja Knjaževstva Srbskog, 1858), pp. 171-172). In any case, the arguments made by Klaić and Šišić remain uncontested (Vjekoslav Klaić, *Krčki knezovi Frankapani: od najstarijih vremena do gubitka otoka Krka (od god. 1118. do god. 1480.)* [Counts Frankapani of Krk: from the Oldest Times to the Loss of Island of Krk (from the year 1118 to the year 1480)] (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1901), p. 233).

¹⁴ CD 18, pp. 54-55.

¹⁵ For more details about the King's preparations, made in 1395, for the military campaign against the Ottomans, which was conducted in the form of a crusade and met its end at the Battle of Nicopolis in the following year, see: Dražen Nemet, "Križarski pohod i bitka kod Nikopola 1396. godine" ["Crusade and the Battle of Nicopolis in the Year 1396"], *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest*, 41 (2009), no. 1, pp. 55-113.

it was expected, the King did not return the castles Ostrožac and Krupa, but continued to keep his forces in it.¹⁶

When the news of the disaster at Nicopolis reached the Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia, the opposition to King Sigismund, led by Stephen Lacković and Nicholas of Horvat, hastened to invite Ladislav of Naples, son of the murdered Charles of Durazzo, one of the pretendent to royal throne from Anjou dynasty, to come and take the crown. The opposition was bigger among the Slavonian nobility than Croatian one, because the casualty rate of Slavonian nobility at the battle of Nicopolis was bigger than among Croatian nobility.¹⁷ This seemed as a real possibility at the time, because nothing was known about the fate of King Sigismund immediately after the Battle of Nicopolis.¹⁸ In these political circumstances, Count Nicholas IV of Blagaj estimated that it is the wright time to try to regain the castles Ostrožac and Krupa. In order to achieve this, he had to ally himself with the Bosnian grar duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić, who was one of the major supporters of King Ladislav of Naples, and the closest neighbour of the Counts of Blagaj. Therefore, it is very likely that exactly in 1396 Count Nicholas IV decided that his son, John V of Blagaj, was to marry the countess Dorothy, granddaughter of Duke Hrvoje. The anti-Sigismund coalition obviously welcomed a new important member, such as Count Nicholas IV of Blagaj.

After many problems and a long journey, at the beginning of 1397 King Sigismund had returned to the Realm of Saint Stephen and immediately made several political moves, which all culminated at the assembly of the Slavonian nobility at Križevci, where several of his most eminent adversaries were murdered, including the leading Slavonian magnate and former Ban of Croatia – Count Stephen Lacković.¹⁹ It is very likely that it was then when the Counts of Blagaj realized that it would be impossible to regain the castles of Ostrožac and Krupa by supporting King Sigismund's opponents, but by allying themselves with him. And indeed, there are many accounts from the following years that show how the Counts of Blagaj tried to do the latter.

¹⁶ This is known from the formal complaint, made on August 18th 1396 by Count Stephen VII of Blagaj on his own behalf, as well as on behalf of his brother, Count Nicholas IV, and his sons, Counts Ladislav II, Anthony and John V (CD 18, pp. 144-145).

¹⁷ Ivan Botica, *Knezovi Krbavski u srednjem vijeku [The Counts of Krbava in the Middle Ages]*, unpublished doctoral thesis, (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2011), p. 168.

¹⁸ Milan Kruhek, "Povijesni put kralja Sigismunda od Nikopolja do Križevaca" ["Historical route of King Sigismund from Nicopolis to Križevci"], *Kaj – časopis za književnost, umjetnost i kulturu*, 30 (1997), no. 2, pp. 25-39; Nemet, "Križarski pohod i bitka kod Nikopolja", p. 106.

¹⁹ For more detailed accounts of King Sigismund's return journey, as well as the assembly at Križevci, see: Šišić, *Vojvoda Hrvoje*, pp. 120-121; Milan Kruhek, "Povijesni put kralja Sigismunda od Nikopolja do Križevaca: rujan 1396.-veljača 1397." ["Historical Journey of King Sigismund from Nicopolis to Križevci: September 1396 – February 1397"], *Kaj – časopis za književnost, umjetnost i kulturu*, 30 (1997), no. 2, pp. 25-39.

3. Rapprochement

The major change in the policy of the Counts of Blagaj towards King Sigismund was enabled by two significant changes. The first of these can be seen in King Sigismund's political moves at the beginning of the 15th century, especially after 1403, that helped him to finally strengthen his position as the king of the Realm of Saint Stephen.²⁰ The second one can be seen in the fact that after the death of Count Nicholas IV of Blagaj in 1399,²¹ his sons, Counts Ladislav II, Anthony and John V, who were more willing to cooperate with King Sigismund than their father was, became the leaders of the Blagaj family.

These tendencies are apparent even in Ladislav II's and Anthony's choice of spouses. Their marriages were arranged and accomplished most likely during the first years of the 15th century.²² The first wife of Count Anthony of Blagaj was Magdalene, niece of Eberhard, bishop of Zagreb (1397-1406 and 1410-1419), and sister of the later bishop of Zagreb, Count John of Alben (1421-1433).²³

²⁰ On the conflicts between King Sigismund and the supporters of King Ladislav of Naples in the first decade of the 15th century, see: V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, vol. 2, pp. 338-400; Šišić, *Vojvoda Hrvoje*, pp. 102-209; Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, pp. 206-211, Lovrenović, *Na klizištu povijesti*, pp. 95-168.

²¹ The last mention of Count Nicholas IV of Blagaj as living is in the charter issued on June 18th 1399 (...*magistro Nicolao comite de eadem Blagay...*, CD 18, p. 460) and it is very likely that he died very soon after that.

²² Although this cannot be attested in any preserved written sources, it can be presumed, if one has in mind the time when Counts Ladislav II and Anthony of Blagaj were politically active. The Count Ladislav II is for the first time mentioned as deceased in the charter issued by the Chapter of Szekszárd on March 1st 1434, in which the members of this Chapter confirm that the late Count Ladislav II of Blagaj had decreed that the sons of his wife, that is her sons from her first marriage, were to inherit some of his silverware (Magyar Országos Levéltár (in further text: MOL), Budapest, collection: Diplomatikai levéltár (in further text: DL), no. 12585). Furthermore, the count Anthony of Blagaj is for the first time mentioned as deceased in the charter issued on September 2nd 1438. Hence, it is logical to assume that they died sometime before these charters were issued. Finally, if one has in mind that according to the article 111 of the first book of Werbőczy's *Tripartitum* – list of provisions of the medieval Hungarian customary law composed in the early 16th century – the boys became adult (*perfecta aetas*) at the age of 24 (...*Perfectae aetatis sunt masculi viginti quatuor annorum...*, Stephen Werbőczy, *The Laws of Hungary: The Customary Law of the Renewed Kingdom of Hungary in Three Parts (1517.)*, ed. and trans. János M. Bak – Péter Banyó – Martyn Rady, ser. I, vol. 5 (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), Prima pars, Tit CXI, p. 192), and the fact that Ladislav II and Anthony had started their political life in the last decade of the 14th century, when they are mentioned for the first time in the preserved written sources (1396 - CD 18, pp. 54-55), one can argue that during the first decade of the 15th century Counts Ladislav II and Anthony of Blagaj were in their twenties, that is, that they were of appropriate age for marriage.

²³ Although the countess Magdalene of Alben is for the first time mentioned as spouse of Count Anthony of Blagaj in the last will of John of Alben, bishop of Zagreb, written no sooner than 1432 (...*Antonii Comitis de Blagai ex Magdalena sorore sua...*, Georgii Fejér (ed.), *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis* (hereafter: CD Fejér), tom. 10, vol. 7 (Buda: Typis Typogr. Reiae Universitatis Ungaricae, 1843), p. 437), it is very likely that this marriage

Bishop Eberhard and his nephew, John of Alben who was royal chancellor since 1406 and later bishop of Pécs (from 1410 to 1420), were among those foreigners who owned their political and social position to King Sigimund, so they were very loyal to him.²⁴ The marriage between Count Anthony of Blagaj and Countess Magdalene of Alben was a product of the close cooperation between the Count of Blagaj and John of Alben while the latter was commendator of the Cistercian abbey in Topusko (1398/1399-1404), as well as of the contacts between Count Stephen VII of Blagaj, who was a canon in the Chapter of Zagreb, and the bishop Eberhard during Eberhard's first mandate on the bishop's see of Zagreb (1397-1406).²⁵ This marriage was arranged in order to improve the standing of the Counts of Blagaj at the royal court of King Sigismund of Luxemburg.

Similar can be said of the marriage between Count Ladislas II of Blagaj and Claire Bánffy (Banić), widow of the late Count Stephen Bánffy, who was a son of the former ban of Slavonia, Count John Bánffy of Donja Lendava. The late John Bánffy and his brother Stephen Bánffy, who jointly served as bans of Slavonia in the period between 1381 and 1385, were among the most reliable supporters of the queen dowager Mary of Hungary, and queen consort Elisabeth of Hungary, and therefore also of King Sigismund of Luxemburg during the early years of his struggle for the throne of Realm of Saint Stephen.²⁶ Although

was arranged and concluded in the last year of the 14th century or, even more likely, in the first years of the 15th century, that is during Eberhard's first mandate on the bishop's see of Zagreb. For more about the bishops Eberhard and John of Alben, as well as about the Alben family, see: Franko Mirošević (ed.), *Zagrebački biskupi i nadbiskupi [The Bishops and Archbishops of Zagreb]* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1995), pp. 163-175, 181-186; Szilárd Süttő – Pál Engel, "Beiträge zur Herkunft zur Tätigkeit der Familie von Alben in Ungarn", *Südost-Forschungen*, 54 (1995), pp. 23-48; Marija Karbić, "Velikaška obitelj Alben i njezina uloga u hrvatskoj povijesti" ["The Noble Alben Family and their Role in the Croatian History"], *Godišnjak Njemačke zajednice / DG Jahrbuch*, 19 (2012), pp. 11-29.

²⁴ Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, pp. 211-212.

²⁵ Ivan Krstitelj Tkalčić, "Cistercitski samostan u Topuskom" ["Cistercian Abbey in Topusko"], *Vjestnik hrvatskoga arheološkoga društva. Nova seria*, 2 (1897), p. 129; Ivan Ostojčić, *Benediktinci u Hrvatskoj i ostalim našim krajevima [Benedictions in Croatia and the Rest of Our Regions]*, vol. 3 (Split: Benediktinski priorat, 1965), p. 327; Ana Novak, *Topusko u razdoblju od dolaska cistercita do kraja srednjega vijeka [Topusko in the Time from Arrival of the Cistercians until the End of the Middle Ages]*, unpublished MA thesis (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2008), p. 101.

²⁶ While serving as bans of Slavonia (1381-1385), the brothers Stephen and John Bánffy were among the most reliable supporters of the queens Mary and Elisabeth, and were therefore supporters of King Sigismund of Luxemburg. This did not change even after the brothers were dismissed from their service as bans of Slavonia in 1385. Hence, John Bánffy was elevated among the most influential magnates (*barones*) of the Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia by King Sigismund in 1388 (Pál Engel, *Középkori magyar genealógia/Magyarország világi archontológiája 1301-1457* (in further text: KMG), CD-rom (Budapest: Arcanum, 2001), while his son, Stephen Bánffy, at that moment already married to Clare Bánffy, was mentioned as a royal knight at the queen's court in 1390 (KGM, s.v. 1390). For a more detailed account of the relations between the Bánffy

the first account of the marriage between Ladislav II of Blagaj and Clare Bánffy originates from 1407,²⁷ it is very likely that this marriage was made several years before that. At the same time Claire Bánffy had been recently widowed and was left alone with three underage children, so she was looking for protection.²⁸ Her late husband, Count Stephen Bánffy, was among the partisans of King Sigismund, and he was also among his supporters during the crucial military campaign led by King Sigismund in Bosnia in 1403 against the partisans of Ladislav of Naples.²⁹ Because there are no more accounts on Count Stephen Bánffy after these events,³⁰ it is very likely soon after these events Count Stephen Bánffy had died. It is very likely that immediately after his death Clare Bánffy was looking for protection for herself and her sons. In the same time, the Counts of Blagaj were looking for another way of strengthening their connections with King Sigismund. Therefore, it is not surprising that the marriage between Clare Bánffy and Count Ladislav II of Blagaj was made. Due to this marriage, the Counts of Blagaj not only improved their relations with King Sigismund, but also expanded their political and social influence to the areas north of the river Mura, towards the lake Balaton, that is, to the areas where the Bánffy family owned large estates.³¹

family and King Sigismund of Luxemburg, see; Marija Karbić, "Banići Lendavski od plemićkog roda Hahot i njihova uloga u hrvatskoj povijesti" ["The Bánffy of Lendava from the Noble Kindred of Hahot and their Role in Croatian History"], *Godišnjak Njemačke zajednice / DG Jahrbuch*, 18 (2011), pp. 22-23.

²⁷ ...domina alias relicta Stephani filii bani de Alsolzdwa, nunc vero consortis comitis Ladislai de Blaga..., Imre-Véghely Nagy - Gyula Dezső-Nagy, (eds.), *Zala vármegye története. Oklevéltár: 1364-1498*, vol. 2 (Budapest: Zala Vármegye Közönsége, 1890), pp. 331-332.

²⁸ According to the preserved written sources, Stephen and Clare Bánffy had three sons – Ladislav, Stephen and Paul. They were first mentioned as early as 1421, as sons of the countess Clare Bánffy, who was the spouse of Count Ladislav II of Blagaj (...in personis Ladislai de Blagaj ac nobilis domine Clara vocate, relicte condam Stephani filii bani de Alsolzdwa, consortis eiusdem, nec non Ladislai, Stephani et Pauli filiorum eiusdem condam Stephani filii bani..., CDCB, p. 258).

²⁹ This can be argued from the king Sigismund's charter issued on August 1st 1406 to the counts Nicholas and John of Gorjani, in which the king rewards them for serving him in the period between 1386 and 1406 (Ferdo Šišić, "Nekoliko isprava sa početka XV. st." ["Several Charters from the Beginning of 15th Century"], *Starine JAZU*, 39 (1938), p. 286).

³⁰ M. Karbić, "Banići Lendavski", p. 23.

³¹ In the Hungarian State Archive (MOL) there is a rather substantial number of medieval documents from the second and third decades of the 15th century that provides interesting information about various ownership disputes instigated by Clare Bánffy. These documents were issued by various institutions or individuals, and some of them were published by Lajos Thallóczy and Samu Barabás. Nevertheless, these documents have so far not been analyzed in detail by Croatian historians. See unpublished documents: MOL, DL 10502, 10690, 10899, 10990, 10997, 10966, 11162, 11251, 11322, 11352, 11486, 11733, 11680, 11802, 11938, 12207, 33872 and 34020; as well as published documents: CDCB, pp. 234-235, 236. 240.-241, 242, 243-244, 244-246, 246-248, 249-250, 251, 251-252, 253-255, 255-256, 256, 257, 258-259., 271-272 and 273-276. Due to the fact that these documents are not of great importance to the topic of this paper, they will not be analyzed in detail here either. Nevertheless, this task should be undertaken in the future.

In spite of the fact that the first indirect information on improved relations between King Sigismund and the Counts of Blagaj can be found in the charter issued by the Chapter of Zagreb on March 13th 1401,³² the first direct information that the Counts of Blagaj had allied themselves with King Sigismund, and even waged the war on his behalf, can be found in two charters issued by the king himself on April 22nd 1406.³³ Both charters were composed by the royal chancellor Eberhard, bishop of Zagreb,³⁴ the uncle of countess Magdalene of Alben who was at that moment already married with Count Anthony of Blagaj. Both charters were issued to confirm earlier royal donations of the Vodičevo.³⁵

Moreover, both charters include the same account of how the Counts of Blagaj had waged war against the supporters of King Ladislav of Naples, namely against the Bosnian great duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić and “his Bosnians”. It is also stated that the supporters of the Duke Hrvoje besieged several castles owned by the Counts of Blagaj, as well as raided their estates, and that those estates were left unpopulated because of these raids.³⁶ Even more, it is clearly stated that Count John V of Blagaj was captured by Hrvoje and was eventually ransomed at the price of a substantial amount of money.³⁷ On the John’s captivity, more will be said in following chapters.

Although it is not directly stated in those two charters, it is very likely that this happened during the military campaign led by King Sigismund in 1405 against the partisans of King Ladislav of Naples, among whom the most prominent was the Bosnian great duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić. Namely, it

³² This particular charter was issued by the Chapter of Zagreb on the demand of Count Stephen VII of Blagaj, who requested a confirmation of ownership of the Poljana estate in the District of Dubica. The request was resolved favourably to him, and the canons of Zagreb stated that the king Sigismund approved his request (...*de medio nostri exurgendo exhibuit nobis literas serenissimi principis domini Sigismundi inclity regis Hungarie, Dalmatie, Crovatie etc., nec non marchionis Brandenburgensis etc. domini nostri naturalis maiori sigillio suo consignatas...*, CDCB, p. 210).

³³ CDCB, pp. 218-223 and 224-227.

³⁴ ...*Datum per manus reverendi in Christo patris et domini domini Eberhardi premissa dei apostolice sedis gratia episcopi Zagrabiensis, aule nostre sumpni cancellarii...*, CDCB, p. 222; same in: CDCB, p. 225.

³⁵ In both of the king Sigismund’s charters, we find transumpt of the earlier charters issued by the king Louis the Great. For more about the issuing of the king Louis’ charters, as well as about the Vodičevo estate, see: Kekez, *Plemički rod Babonića*, pp. 15-16, 38, 43, 52-53, 139, 148-149, 281-282 and 297-300.

³⁶ ...*idem comites invasionem, combustionem, depopulationem et desolationem possessionum, ipsorumque castrorum obsidionem ac hominum cedom et abductionem, rerum et bonorum asortationem aliarumque innumerabilium enormitatum in ipsorum bonis, possessionibus et bominio per huismofi nostros infideles ceterosque nonnullos rebelles et inimicos nostros videlicet Horwoyam Wlkchith ac Bosnenses...*, CDCB, p. 220.

³⁷ ...*etiam propriarum etiam dispandia et captivatem prefati Iohannis fratris sui per ipsum Horwoyam factam ac redemptionem in non modica quantitate pecuniarum propriarum dicti Horwoye de vinculis...*, CDCB, p. 220.

was on June 10th 1405 that King Sigismund proclaimed his upcoming military campaign in Bosnia, in order to strengthen the borders of the Realm of Saint Stephen.³⁸ Several days later, the king issued an order to Paul Bessenyő and Paul of Pécs, the bans of Slavonia, as well as to the other counts and vice-counts of the Counties of Zagreb and Križevci, to raise an army and to stay in Slavonia, because he would arrive there very soon.³⁹ And indeed, the preparations for the military campaign were finished very soon and the king's army had routed through the valley of Una river towards the major city of Bihać where was gathered the army of the partisans of King Ladislas of Naples under the command of Duke Hrvoje. The siege of Bihać lasted until the end of September of 1405. This can be argued due to the known fact that King Sigismund had issued one charter in Bihać on September 30th 1405, and the other one in the same city once again on October 4th 1405. Nevertheless, this was not a permanent success for the King Sigismund. Namely, he had left the Bihać with his army by the end of the fall of 1405, and the city was very soon retaken by Duke Hrvoje.⁴⁰ It is possible that it was after Duke Hrvoje's recapturing of Bihać, that is after his counterattack through the valleys of the Una and Sana rivers the Blagaj family's estates situated in those areas were raided by the Duke Hrvoje's army. It seems that this counterattack was some kind of punishment for the Counts of Blagaj because they had joined King Sigismund's army during the summer campaign, and it is very likely that it was then when Count John V of Blagaj had fallen in the Duke Hrvoje's captivity.

It is very interesting to notice that among the three Blagaji brothers, it was John V who was captured. If the assumption that his wife Dorothy was the granddaughter of the Duke Hrvoje is correct, then one can argue that he was captured because the duke was especially angry on the husband of his granddaughter who joined his opponent. This can be further argued on the basis of the extremely large sum of money for which he was ransomed, which was noted in the aforementioned charter. However, it is also possible that the marriage between Count John and Duke Hrvoje's granddaughter was arranged and made during the former's captivity, in order to assure that the Counts of Blagaj would not join Duke Hrvoje's opponents in the future. Nevertheless, it is much more likely that this marriage was arranged sometime during the last decade of the 14th century, in circumstances already described in this paper.

The close relations that the Counts of Blagaj had with the bishops of Zagreb, firstly Eberhard and then John of Alben, helped them very much in their

³⁸ Georgius Fejér (ed.), *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis* (hereafter: CD Fejer), tom. 10, vol. 4 (Buda: Typogr. Regiae Vniversitatis Vngaricae, 1841), pp. 377-378

³⁹ Imre Nagy (ed.), *A Zichy és Vásonkeői gróf Zichy-család idős ágának okmánytára. Codex diplomaticus domus senioris comitum Zichy de Zich et Vásonkeő*, vol. 5 (Budapest: Magyar Tört. Társulat, 1888), pp. 405-406.

⁴⁰ See in more details: Šišić, *Vojvoda Hrvoje*, pp. 194-195., Lovrenović, *Na klizištu povijesti*, pp. 124-129.

attempts to ally themselves with King Sigismund. Nevertheless, there was another way for the Counts of Blagaj to garner the king's favor. One has to have in mind the family connections between the Counts of Blagaj and the noble family of Kurjakovići, the Counts of Krbava, which lasted during the last two decades of 14th century. Although the following is not mentioned in sources older than 1431, it is clear that Count Baboneg IV of Blagaj, paternal uncle of the Counts Ladislav II, Anthony and John V of Blagaj, was married to Ana of Krbava,⁴¹ daughter of Nicholas Kurjaković, and that this marriage was made during the eighth or ninth decade of the 14th century, that is, in the period when Count Baboneg IV was on the eve of his political activities.⁴² The Kurjakovići were very loyal partisans of the Queen Mary, wife of King Sigismund, and after her death, they continued to serve the latter.⁴³ Therefore, it is not surprising that after the disastrous battle of Nicopolis, during his long journey home, King Sigismund had stayed at the castle of Komić, the most important stronghold of the Kurjakovići family.⁴⁴ Moreover, it was then when Count John II Kurjaković, son of Count Nicholas Kurjaković and Ana of Blagaj, had entered in King Sigismund's service, and was to become one of the most important persons of the king's court during the first two decades of the 15th century.⁴⁵ Therefore, it is very likely that the Counts of Blagaj also used their family connections with the Counts of Krbava to ingratiate themselves with King Sigismund.

The relations between the Counts of Blagaj and the Counts of Krbava were further strengthened when Count Stephen VII of Blagaj was appointed bishop of Krbava by Pope Innocent VII in 1406.⁴⁶ Several weeks after his appointment, on February 23rd 1406, Count Stephen VII of Blagaj, already acting as bishop of Krbava, paid 33 golden florins to the Roman Curia to cover the fee for his appointment.⁴⁷ He was a bishop of Krbava until October 15th 1408, when he was appointed to a new duty – that of bishop of Karpathos, an island in the Aegean.⁴⁸

⁴¹ In the charter issued by the Count Frederick of Cili on April 28th 1431, the Countess Ana of Krbava is mentioned as widow of the Count Baboneg IV of Blagaj (...*Anne relicte condam Baonogh de Blagaj et Magdalena vocatis consortis Marci de Kladussa, filiiabz videlicet condam comitis Nicolai de Corbavia...*, CDCB, pp. 300-301).

⁴² For information about the accounts of the Count Count Baboneg IV of Blagaj in the preserved written documents, see: Kekez, *Plemički rod Babonića*, p. 199.

⁴³ Botica, *Knezovi Krbavski*, pp. 160-161.

⁴⁴ Botica, *Knezovi Krbavski*, p. 168.

⁴⁵ Botica, *Knezovi Krbavski*, pp. 169-170.

⁴⁶ Andrija Lukinović (ed.), *Monumenta historica episcopatus zagradiensis. Povijesni spomenici Zagrebačke biskupije*, vol. 5 (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost - Arhiv Hrvatske, 1992), pp. 265-266.

⁴⁷ Josip Barbarić - Josip Kolanović - Andrija Lukinović - Jasna Marković (eds.), *Camera apostolica*, vol. 1 (Zagreb-Rim: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti - Hrvatski državni arhiv - Kršćanska sadašnjost - Papinski hrvatski zavod sv. Jeronima, 1996), p. 307.

⁴⁸ Conradus Eubel (ed.), *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi sive summorum pontificum*, S. R. E.

By the middle of the first decade of the 15th century, the Counts of Blagaj had fully crossed to King Sigismund's side, and exactly in the context of these new circumstances one should consider the king's aforementioned confirmations of the earlier royal donations of the Vodičevo estate to the Counts of Blagaj. In those years, King Sigismund issued similar confirmations to several noblemen who supported him in his struggle with the Bosnian great duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, King Sigismund did not return strategically important the castles Ostrožac and Krupa to the Counts of Blagaj.

4. Count Ladislav II of Blagaj – *miles aulae regiae*

During the first decade of the 15th century, the Counts of Blagaj gradually became partisans of King Sigismund of Luxembourg. This process continued even after King Sigismund had strengthened his position as the king of Hungary-Croatia in 1408, especially after the victory near Dobor in 1403, that is, after King Ladislav of Naples had sold his royal claims to Dalmatia to the Republic of Venice in 1409 for 100 000 golden ducats.⁵⁰ Among the Blagaj brothers, the foremost supporter of King Sigismund was Count Ladislav II, so it is not surprising that he was mentioned in 1411 among the troops sent by King Sigismund to Friuli and Istria to fight against the Venetians.⁵¹ This was the king's response to the fact that by that time, the Venetians had put under their control most of the cities on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, including the very important city of Šibenik.⁵² Therefore, in September 1411 the king sent the vanguard of his troops to Friuli and Venetian Istria, but the bulk of the royal army, led by Pipo of Ozora, marched there in November 1411. Among the most eminent noblemen in that army was Count Ladislav II of Blagaj.⁵³

cardinalum ecclesiarum antistitum series ab anno 1198 usque ad annum 1431 perducta e documentis tabularii praesertim Vaticani collecta, digesta, edita, vol. 1 (Regensburg: Typis librariae Regensbergianae, 1813), p. 439.

⁴⁹ For example, on June 9th 1406 the king confirmed several estates to Dionysius Lopatački, because he supported the king in the military campaign against Duke Hrvoje (Šišić, "Nekoliko isprava", pp. 273-275). Similarly, on August 1st 1406 the king rewarded the Counts Nicholas and John of Gorjani for all military services rendered to him in the period between 1386 and 1403 (Šišić, "Nekoliko isprava", pp. 276-287).

⁵⁰ V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, vol. 2, pp. 395-396, Šišić, *Vojvoda Hrvoje*, pp. 203-209.

⁵¹ Wakounig, *Dalmatien und Friaul*, pp. 99-100.

⁵² V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, vol. 3, pp. 62-67.

⁵³ Most of the existing accounts of the war in Friuli and Venetian Istria (1411-1412) can be found in "Chronicon Tarvisinum" and "Vitae Ducum Venetorum" ("Chronicon Tarvisinum Ab anno MCCCCLXVIII. usque ad Annum MCCCCXXVIII. auctore Andrea de Redusiis de Quero", in: Ludovico Antonio Muratori (ed.), *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, vol. 19 (Milano: Typographia Societatis Palatinae in Regia Curia, 1731), pp. 826-844; "Vitae ducum Venetorum Italicè scriptae ab origine Urbis sive ab anno CCCCXXI usque ad annum MCCCCXCIII auctore Marino Sanuto" in: Ludovico Antonio Muratori (ed.), *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*,

At the end of 1411 Another account of Count Ladislas' participation in the campaign in Friuli at the end of 1411 can be found in a charter issued by King Sigismund on January 25th 1424, in which he granted Ladislas the castle Kostanjica, situated in the Una valley.⁵⁴ According to this account, Count Ladislas II of Blagaj had crossed the mountains of Carinthia and joined the siege of Udine, led by Carolus de Peles, by the order of the king Sigismund. Moreover, it is stressed there that after the siege of Udine, it was Ladislas II who successfully continued to wage war against Sigismund's adversaries.⁵⁵

During the following year, Count Ladislas II of Blagaj continued to wage war in Friuli in the army led by Pipo of Ozora, the high commander of the royal army.⁵⁶ At the beginning of 1412, King Sigismund sent additional forces to Friuli under the command of Nicholas Marczali, Duke of Transylvania, in order to strengthen the defence of several castles in Friuli, which were conquered during the previous year. Count Ladislas II joined Marczali's army because there was a significant threat of those castles falling to Carlo Malatesta, the high commander of the Venetian army.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, very soon after that

vol. 22 (Milano: Typographia Societatis Palatinae in Regia Curia, 1733), pp. 855-938. However, in these chronicles there is no mention of the count Ladislas II of Blagaj, nor of his participation in this campaign. Nevertheless, he is mentioned in one of King Sigismund's royal charters, as a supporter of Count Frederick of Ortenburg, who waged war in Friuli in 1411 in a behalf of King Sigismund (...als wir hewr zitliche vor dem herbst die vorgnante sache wider Venediger anhuben, da waren uns und dem edeln Fridrichen graven zu Ortemburg, den wir unsern und des richts gemeinen vicarien in den vorgnanten landen zu Frijaul von erst mathen, dieselben Venediger und die iren nit allien wider under auch die stat zu der Weyden und daz ganze land zu Frijaul, ussgenomen dez catelle daz genant ist Civitas Austrie, de santen wir demselben Fridriche zu hilf den **edeln Ladislaum von Blaga mit etwie fil volkes** (highlighted by HK), die iczgnanten von det Weyden, die in Frijaul die mechtigsten sint..., CD Fejer 10/5, p. 234).

⁵⁴ CDCB, pp. 261-266. An almost identical text can be found in another royal charter, issued on July 7th 1427. In that charter, King Sigismund listed all the services rendered to him by count Ladislas II, and among them is the account of Ladislas' participation in the war in Friuli in 1411 and 1412 (CDCB, pp. 281-283). Details of the circumstances that preceded the issuing these two charters will be discussed further in this paper.

⁵⁵ ...ipse Ladislaus, in quem tuc vota nostra dixeramus, primum se obtulit cum banderio suo iuxta mandatum celsitudinis nostre ipsos venetos viriliter impugnaturum, quem nos cum eodem suo banderio in copiosa multitudine pugnatorum ad patriam Fori Iulii, quam iidem nostri emuli tunc occupative detinebant duximus transmittendum, ipse itaque Ladislaus, recepto hilari vultu huiusmodi nostro mandato, illico transcensis alpibus Carinthie cum gentibu suis in sue strenuitatis indicium versus Vtinum, ubi ipsorum nostrorum emulorum aciem presciverat ordinatam, se contulit, cui quidem Carolus de Peles tunc ipsius aciei capitanes exadverso similiter cum suis gentibus obaviam dedit..., CDCB, pp. 261-262.

⁵⁶ So far, the most detailed description of Count Ladislas' participation in the war in Friuli and Venetian Istria so far, based on aforementioned royal charters, was written by Vjekoslav Klaić (V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, vol. 3, pp. 69-75).

⁵⁷ ...Porro nos ad offensam ipsorum nostrorum emulorum aciem nostre menits ampulis dirigen-tes, prefatum Ladislaum, strenuitate fidelitateque probatum, una cum fideli nostro laudande memorie condam Nicolao de Marczaly alias vayvoda nostro Transsilvano ad easdem partes Fori Iulii consimiliter cum banderio suo vice altera duximus destinandum, qui vires suas et mentis intuitum semper circa fidelitates et servitia maiestatis nostre figendo..., CDCB, p. 262.

Ladislav II left the main Hungarian army and went to Istria, to defend the castle of Buje that was threatened by the Venetians, and was expected to fall to them very soon.⁵⁸ He managed to defend Buje, and later he also besieged and conquered the city of Buzet.⁵⁹

After these successes, Ladislav II returned to Friuli and joined the main Hungarian army led by Nicholas Marczali, who appointed him supreme commander of the defense of the city of Motta, situated on the river Livenzo.⁶⁰ However, city of Motta was very soon besieged by the Venetian army led by Carlo Malateste, and Marczali rushed to break the siege, but was unsuccessful. In light of these events, Count Ladislav II barricaded himself in the citadel of Motta and continued to defend it.⁶¹ Marczali's attempt of breaking the siege of Motta was unsuccessful because the contingent of Cumans under his command abandoned the fight in favor of pillaging the Venetian camp when the battle was still undecided.⁶² At the beginning of August 1412, Duke Marczali tried to break the siege of Motta once again, but he was again unsuccessful, because at the crucial moment of the battle the Venetian Navy arrived and reinforced Malatesta's army.⁶³ The battle of Motta was a crucial battle between Sigismund's and Venetian armies for the Venetian *terra ferma*. After this Venetian success, King Sigismund gave up the attempts to conquer the Venetian *terra ferma* and the main theater of war became Dalmatian coast.

During his last attempt break the siege of Motta, Marczali was seriously wounded, and died shortly after. In spite of that, Count Ladislav II of Blagaj continued to defend the citadel of Motta for several more weeks. Eventually, because aid did not arrive, Ladislav II gave up further defense and surrendered the citadel to the Venetians. He himself was captured by the Venetians, and was held in their prison for the following ten months.⁶⁴ It was not before

⁵⁸ ...se cum suis gentibus in Istriam contulit et accepto, quod gentes ipsorum nostrorum emulorum in obsidione oppidi nostri Bula vocati, nostre ditioni suppositi consisterent, ipsos fortiter animoseque invasit et viriliter amovit ab eodem..., CDCB, p. 262.

⁵⁹ ...et insuper tanquam fortis tione zelo fidelitatis fortius accensus oppidum Bulsam alias Piguentem vocatum in sua belligera virtute et strenuitatis audacia nostro subiecit dominio..., CDCB, p. 262.

⁶⁰ ...Post plura itaque per ipsum inibi peracta sue militie spectacula oras Fori Iulii repetit, seque memorato condam Nicolao de Marczali cum suis associans ... ipse Ladislaus in eodem suo itinere pro gubernatione castris nostri Motha vocata predictae terre Fori Iulii per maiestatem nostram specialiter fuisset deputatus..., CDCB, pp. 262-263

⁶¹ ...ipso Nicolao de Marczali cum gentibus suis in campo residente, quidam Carolus de Malatestis, generalis capitaneus gentium ipsorum nostrorum emulorum cum valida armorum potentia idem castrum nostrum obsidere et circumvallare attemptavit, machinasque et bombardas et alias instrumenta bellica fixit sub eodem..., CDCB, p. 263.

⁶² ...Intera gens cumanorum nostrorum et quidam alii rapine potius inhiantes quam victoriae tentiorum, thesaurorum relictorum prede se exponunt atque ab inimicorum desinunt persequutione..., CDCB, p. 263.

⁶³ V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, vol. 3, p. 74.; Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund in Ungarn*, p. 115.

⁶⁴ ...sed post multa per ipsum inibi peracta certamina bellantium multitudine circumseptus captus ab eis et fere decem mensium spatio tertis carceribus detinetur..., CDCB, p. 264.

a peace agreement was signed between Venice and King Sigismund in April 1413⁶⁵ that Count Ladislav II managed to ransom himself for the sum of 6000 golden ducats.⁶⁶

While Ladislav II was serving in King Sigismund's army in Friuli and Venetian Istria, his brothers, Counts Anthony and John V, were in king's proximity. It is attested in written sources that two Counts of Blagaj were present among the most distinguished persons at the tournament organized by King Sigismund in Buda in May 1412.⁶⁷

It is very likely that Ladislav's brave defense of the citadel of Motta, as well as the growing influence of the Blagaji brothers at King Sigismund's court, had motivated King Sigismund to entrust them with the administration of the District of Sana, that is, of the former County of Sana, at the beginning of June 1413. King Sigismund even issued a charter to inform the local nobility and the inhabitants of the Sana District that he had taken this district from under the control of Duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić and given it to the Blagaji brothers, and that they have to serve their new masters without hesitation. If they would not, the Slavonian ban Paul Čupor would force them to do so.⁶⁸

This king's decision has to be seen in the context of King Sigismund's new policy towards Bosnia, that is his political and military preparations for the final struggle with Duke Hrvoje. Since 1412 started to give bordering areas of Realm of Saint Stephen towards Bosnia into the hands of his faithful partisans while he himself was more interested in conquering Bohemia and becoming the Roman emperor. Good example of this was the case of Usora County that was let to be administrated by Vukmir Zlatonosić.⁶⁹ Final struggle with Bosnian great duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić took place soon after.⁷⁰ Therefore, it is very likely that King Sigismund decided to give the administration of the Sana

⁶⁵ V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, vol. 3, p. 78.

⁶⁶ ...*ipse Ladislaus anhelans se nostro conspectui presentare, de ipsa captivitate se seks milium ducatorum redemptione liberavit...*, CDCB, p. 264.

⁶⁷ ...*Czwen grafen von Vrsyn...*, Elemér Mályusz (ed.), *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár III. (1411-1412)* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1993), p. 527. For a detailed analysis of this document and its facsimile, see: Emir O. Filipović, "Viteške svečanosti u Budimu 1412. godine i učešće bosanskih predstavnika" ["The knightly ceremonies in Buda in 1412 and the participation of Bosnian representatives"], *Spomenica Marka Šunjića (1927-1998)* (Sarajevo: Filozofski fakultet u Sarajevu, 2010) p. 285-306. Having in mind that in May 1412 the Count Ladislav II of Blagaj was defending the citadel of Motta, it is very likely that this reference referred to his brothers, Counts Anthony and John V of Blagaj.

⁶⁸ ... *pro fidelibus servitiis Anthonii, Ladisali et Iohannis de Blagay predictum districtum de Zana hactenus apud manus Herwoye habitum rationabili de causa ab eodem Herwoza auferendo eisdem Anthonio, Ladislao et Iohanni usque nostre maiestatis beneplacitum pro honore dederimus et contulerimus...*, CDCB, pp. 232-233.

⁶⁹ Botica, *Knezovi Krbavski*, p. 216.

⁷⁰ On the "fall" of Bosnian great duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić, see in more details in: V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, vol. 3, pp. 79-93; Šišić, *Vojvoda Hrvoje*, pp. 210-237.

District to the Counts of Blagaj because they had already proved their loyalty to him, but also because the Blagaji brothers owned numerous estates in that area, including the castle of Blagaj, their family residence. In any case, their taking over the administration of the Sana District represents the first major political, but also economic advantage that the Counts of Blagaj had from their rapprochement with King Sigismund. This is even more important if one has in mind that their ancestors, the Babonići family, have controlled these areas for decades in the period between the middle of the ninth decade of the 13th century and their political and economic downfall at the end of the third decade of the 14th century.⁷¹

On the downside, it was for the second time in a rather short period that siding with King Sigismund came for the Counts of Blagaj at the price of devastations of their estates in the Una valley. Although they happened several years after the death of Duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić, the Ottoman raids on the Blagaj estates in the Una valley in the second half of 1418 could be related to the fact that Duke Hrvoje allied with the Ottomans in the final years of his life, when he waged open war against King Sigismund.⁷² During that conflict, the gravest defeat of the army of the king's partisans took place in the battle near Dobož on June 16th 1415. In that battle the Ottomans supported Hrvoje's army.⁷³ Although they were present in Bosnia and its neighboring western regions since 1402,⁷⁴ this was the first time that the Ottomans played major political and military, especially if one has in mind that in that occasion the Ottomans raided large territories and came as far as the coastal city of Senj.⁷⁵ It seems that the Ottomans, which were invited in Bosnia by Duke Hrvoje, continued their raids on the estates of the late Hrvoje's adversaries, such as the Counts of Blagaj. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Ottomans raided the Blagaj estates Vojska, Brezovica, Otoka and Visoko in the second half of 1418.⁷⁶ The Counts of Blagaj informed King Sigismund about these events, but also that the Ottomans had raided the royal castles Krupa and Ostrožac as well.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Kekez, *Plemićki rod Babonića*, pp. 329-332.

⁷² Šišić, *Vojvoda Hrvoje*, pp. 233-235.

⁷³ Šišić, *Vojvoda Hrvoje*, p. 234.

⁷⁴ Andrija Lukinović (ed.), *Monumenta historica episcopatus Zagrabienensis. Povijesni spomenici zagrebačke biskupije* (hereafter MHEZ), vol. 5 (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1992), pp. 173-174.

⁷⁵ V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, vol. 3, p. 92.

⁷⁶ ...*fidelis noster egregius Ladislaus de Blagay sua ac An[thonii et] Iohannis fratrum suorum carnalium in personis ... et castris eorum Atak videlicet Brezouicha, Woyzka, Wizoko et alias...*, CDCB, p. 239.

⁷⁷ In the charter is mentioned that the captains of the royal strongholds at that moment were Nikola de Erwncze and Ladislas, son of Tiboldov (...*Nicolaus de Erwncze et Ladislaus filius Tiboldi castellani nostri Cr[u]ppa circ[a] festum sancti Michaelis aechangeli proxime preteritum ad temutas et pertentias castris Ostrozech...*, CDCB, p. 239).

These latest events, together with his loyal service in Friuli and Venetian Istria, very likely helped Count Ladislav II of Blagaj to embark on a successful career at the royal court, so it is not surprising that in one royal charter, issued on May 1st 1418, he is mentioned as a *miles aulae regiae*.⁷⁸ This charter was issued by King Sigismund during his stay at the Council of Constance, in order to confirm that Count Ladislav II of Blagaj is the legal custodian of his wife Clare, widow of Stephen Bánffy, and her sons from her first marriage.⁷⁹ Moreover, from the aforementioned charter it could be concluded that Ladislav II was present at the Council of Constance as a member of King Sigismund's entourage.⁸⁰ In any case, it is obvious that Ladislav II enjoyed the trust of King Sigismund and, due to that, considerable prestige among the participants of the Council. Therefore, one can argue that all of this helped that by the virtue of the papal confirmation, the local church in Blagaj became the pilgrimage destination. And indeed, during Count Ladislav's stay in Constance, the new pope Martin V, elected with the approval of King Sigismund, granted a formal privilege of a pilgrimage site to the local church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Blagaj.⁸¹

In any case, the presence of Ladislav II at the Council of Constance as a member of King Sigismund's entourage shows that he was among the king's most reliable supporters. Even more, Ladislav II continued to serve king in his military campaigns. For example, he took part in the king's campaign in Moravia against the Czech Hussites in 1420.⁸² Among many other noblemen that were present in King Sigismund's army that invaded Bohemia in 1420, Count Ladislav II and his *banderia* was inlisted.⁸³ Once again, more detail accounts of these events can be found in the aforementioned royal charter, the one issued on January 25th 1424.⁸⁴ In that charter it is stressed that Count Ladislav

⁷⁸ ...*Fideli nostro egregio, Ladislao de Blagaj, Aulae nostrae militi...*, CDCB, p. 237. Having a position of knight of royal domus (*miles aulae regiae*) the Count Ladislav II of Blagaj was among the small circle of the loyal royal servants. It has to be said that the royal aula was, at first, understood to be synonymous with the royal court (*curia*) and household (*domus*). By the early years of the thirteenth century, the aula began, however, to acquire an exclusive quality. That is, *miles aulae regiae* were within the more prestigious circle of the royal aula, by which should probably be understood the innermost sanctum of the king's household (Martyn Rady, *Nobility, Land and Service in Medieval Hungary* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 127).

⁷⁹ ...*quod iidem uterque Ladislaus videlicet antecessores et tutores annotatarum nobilium dominarum et orphanorum apud nostram maiestatem certis nostris regalibus servitiis occupati sunt...*, CDCB, p. 238.

⁸⁰ ...*in presentiam fideles nostri grate et sincere dilecti egregii Ladislaus de Blagaj...*, CDCB, p. 237.

⁸¹ MHEZ 5, p. 540.

⁸² On Jan Hus and the Hussite Revolution see: Howard Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967); Jaroslav Pánek – Oldřich Tůma (eds.), *A History of the Czech Lands* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2009), pp. 142-168.

⁸³ Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund in Ungarn*, p. 123.

⁸⁴ CDCB, pp. 264-265. Once again, a similar text can be found in another royal charter, issued on June 7th 1427 (CDCB, pp. 286-287).

II of Blagaj had distinguished role in the military campaign in Bohemia,⁸⁵ and because of that he was appointed as the commander of the defense of the castle Hradiště in Moravia (today's Uherské Hradiště).⁸⁶ These events were part of a larger political agenda of King Sigismund, who tried to gain the crown of Bohemia after the death of his brother, the Bohemian King Wenceslas, who died on August 16th 1419.⁸⁷ With the support of the Catholic fraction of the Estates of Moravia, which was – unlike in Bohemia – rather strong, King Sigismund entered Brno in the second half of 1419, where most of the members of the Moravian Estates, as well as some of the members of the Bohemian Estates – including some Hussites – pledged their loyalty to him.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, very soon after that came the swift reaction of the Hussites, led by Count Procopius of Ústí, who had, at the end of February 1420, retaken the already abandoned castle of Hradiště.⁸⁹ At that time, the main body of King Sigismund's army was already in Wrocław, Silesia, where the king published Pope Martin V's bull proclaiming a crusade against the Hussites on March 17th 1420.⁹⁰ Because at that moment most of Bohemia was enclosed by Sigismund's supporters and allies, it seemed that the end of the Hussite Revolution was very near, so King Sigismund, at the head of his army, entered Bohemia and marched on Prague.⁹¹

This is the military and political context of the accounts that can be found in the royal charter issued to the Counts of Blagaj in 1424. In that charter, it is also stated that Count Ladislav II of Blagaj and his troops took part in the battle in front of Castle Ostrov,⁹² where the count himself fought a duel with the commander of the Hussites.⁹³ Ladislav's troops won this battle and took many prisoners.⁹⁴ Among the following events, King Sigismund entered Prague in the

⁸⁵ *...Hiis denique proxime elapsis temporibus, dum in regno nostro Bohemie hereticorum innumerabilis pullulasset multitudo, nos pro eorum estirpatione congregato valido exercitu ad ipsum regnum nostrum Bohemie potenter progressi fuissimus...*, CDCB, p. 264.

⁸⁶ *...in ipso reditus nostri precinctu ispum Ladislaum, quem nobis eximie strenuitatis audaciam dudum commendaverit, in directorum, moderatorem et generalem capitaneum gentium nostrarum et opidi nostri Hradischye terre nostre Moravie, in qua ipsas gentes pro conservatione et tuitione ipsorum nostrorum confiniorum locaveramus...*, CDCB, p. 264.

⁸⁷ Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, p. 230.

⁸⁸ Pánek – Tůma, *A History of the Czech Lands*, p. 156.

⁸⁹ Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution*, pp. 333-334.

⁹⁰ Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, p. 230; Pánek – Tůma, *A History of the Czech Lands*, p. 156.

⁹¹ Pánek – Tůma, *A History of the Czech Lands*, p. 156.

⁹² Most likely modern city of Ostrov situated in western part of present-day Czech Republic in district of Karlovy Vary.

⁹³ *...procedit siquidem ipse Ladislaus eis obviam et in campo quodam nate castrum nostrum Ostro occurit cum gentibus suis ... esd et ipse capitaneus exadverso lanceam contra ipsum Ladislaum vibravit vehementer...*, CDCB, p. 264-265. It seems that Ladislav refused to participate in duel because he had been injured in previous conflicts.

⁹⁴ *...quare idem Ladislaus capta illorum preda et copiosa numerositate captivorum abducta, cum trimpho ad propria victor remeavit...*, CDCB, p. 265.

middle of July 1420, and was even crowned King of Bohemia on July 28th in the Cathedral of St. Vitus, but had to abandon the city soon after that. Moreover, his troops have been severely defeated at Vyšehrad, in the vicinity of Prague, on November 1st 1420. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that he did not crush the Hussite Revolution, King Sigismund's campaign was not a complete loss, because in the course of it he was formally crowned as a King of Bohemia and managed to impose his rule on Moravia and Silesia.⁹⁵

After the return from Moravia and Bohemia Count Ladislav II of Blagaj continued to stay in King Sigismund's proximity, and therefore he was present at the diet of the Imperial Estates in Nuremberg in 1422.⁹⁶ Ladislav remained part of the king's entourage also in the following year. Namely, he escorted King Sigismund to the German city of Regensburg. Information about this is preserved in the letter sent by the citizens of Dubrovnik to King Sigismund on March 4th 1423. This letter was sent in answer to another letter, sent by the king to the citizens, which is unfortunately lost to us. It was sent on February 23rd 1423 and was brought from Regensburg to Dubrovnik by a certain Farkaš, servant of Count Ladislav II of Blagaj.⁹⁷ On the basis of this, one can argue that Ladislav II was a member of King Sigismund's escort in Regensburg, and that his servant Farkaš was very likely chosen to bring the king's letter to Dubrovnik because he was a servant of Ladislav II of Blagaj, a loyal supporter of the king, and because Farkaš was most likely very familiar with the routes from Regensburg to Dubrovnik.

In the following years, Count Ladislav II of Blagaj continued to serve in King Sigismund's army, for example in the conflicts in Walachia, one of the

⁹⁵ Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution*, pp. 361-383; Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, pp. 230-231; Pánek – Tůma, *A History of the Czech Lands*, pp. 156-158.

⁹⁶ Among the Hungarian Estates from Croatia and Slavonia, enlisted were: ...*So sint dis die Ungerschen herren ... grof Karle von Karbauwe herre zü Loffelitz, grof Johans und grof Laßlauwe von Zenge, grof Laßlav und grof Stephen von Kartua...*, Wilh Altman (ed.), *Eberhard Windeckes Denkwürdigkeiten zur geschichte des zeitalters Kaiser Sigmunds* (Berlin: R. Gaertners Verlagsbuchandlung, 1893), p. 157. Without any doubt, it can be said that among enlisted was the count Charles II of Krbava (Pál Engel, "Krbavski knezovi u Ugarskoj" ["The Counts of Krbava in Hungary"], *Povezivanje srednjoeuropskih zemalja sa Jadranom (Mediterranom)* (Zagreb: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1998), p. 78; Borislav Grgin – Ivan Botica "The Counts Kurjaković of Krbava in the Medieval History of Modern-day Slovakia", *Slovakia and Croatia: Historical Parallels and Connections (until 1780)* (Bratislava-Zagreb: Department of Slovak History at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University - PostScriptum, s. r. o., 2013), p. 168), while for the other is rather complicated to conclude who were they. The first Ladislav is obviously the certain captain of coastal city of Senj, while the second one is most likely the Count Ladislav II of Blagaj.

⁹⁷ ...*Recepimus serenitatis vestre patentes literas per Farcassium servitorum viri magnifici, domini Ladizlai comitis Blagay die XXIII. mensis Februarii prope exacti ea solita nostra humilitate. qua decuit, sub datas in Ratisbona...*, József Gelcich - Lajos Thallóczy (ed.), *Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae Ragusanae cum Regno Hungariae. Ragusa és Magyarország összeköttetéseinek oklevéltára* (Budapest: M. Tud. Akadémia Toört. Bizottsága, 1887), pp. 288-289.

buffer states between the Realm of Saint Stephen and the Ottoman Empire. During the King Sigismund's winter campaign of 1426/1427 against the Wallachian duke Radu "Praznaglava", undertaken in order to assist Duke Dan II in his agenda of retaking the throne of Wallachia,⁹⁸ Count Ladislav II of Blagaj was the standard-bearer of the royal army.⁹⁹ Most of the accounts of Ladislav's role in that winter campaign can be found in a charter issued on June 7th 1427 by King Sigismund to Count Ladislav II of Blagaj, in which the king granted him the Závod estate, situated in the county of Tolna. This was a reward for Ladislav's participation in the winter campaign of 1426/1427.¹⁰⁰ The campaign was the final strike against Duke Radu and it ended in the spring of 1427 with a great victory for Duke Dan I, after which there was a period of five years of peace.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ After the grave defeat in the battle of Ankara in 1402, the Ottoman Empire needed more than a decade to overcome the political crisis that resulted from it, and it did not manage to do so until the new sultan, Mehmed I (1413-1421), seized the power. Very soon, Mehmed continued the Ottoman conquests on the Balkan Peninsula. After two years of Ottoman raids on his territory, the Wallachian Duke Mircea was forced to accept Ottoman supremacy and to pay annual tribute to the Ottoman Porte in order to be allowed to keep some autonomy in his principality. Unsatisfied with this arrangement, Duke Mircea took refuge with King Sigismund, prompting a new Ottoman raid on Wallachia in 1417, which ended in Ottoman conquest of the important fortress of Turnu Severin and several other smaller fortresses on the banks of the river Danube. Moreover, the Ottomans captured the sons of Duke Mircea, and therefore it became very complicated to secure the transfer of his throne to his eldest son Michael because they were kept in Istanbul. Although Duke Michael had taken the throne of Wallachia after the death of his father, Duke Mircea, in 1418, he did not keep it for very long. He sided with King Sigismund and even managed to, with his help, retake the castle of Turnu Severin in 1419, but in the following year he died in one of the battles against the Ottomans. After the death of Duke Michael the Ottomans put on the Wallachian throne his younger brother, Duke Radu, called "Praznaglava" (the Emptyheaded), who actually resided not in Wallachia, but in Ankara. On his part, King Sigismund appointed to the Wallachian throne Duke Dan II, son of Mircea's younger brother Dan I. These two princes, Duke Radu "Praznaglava" and Dan II, wrestled the Wallachian throne from each other in turns during the third decade of the 15th century, and led several military campaigns against each other. The bloodiest were the campaigns between 1423 and 1426, when Duke Dan I attacked Wallachia from his strongholds in Transylvania in order to retake the principality from the Duke Radu "Praznaglava" and his supporters – the Ottomans. Compare and see in more details: Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, p. 236; Borislav Grgin, *Rumunjske zemlje u srednjem i ranom novom vijeku* [Romanian Lands in the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern Age] (Zagreb: FF press, 2006), pp. 36-37.

⁹⁹ ...*Demum vero, dum nos (h)ieme proxime preterita constra quendam Radul alias Praznaglawa vocatum, nostrum infidelem et emulum notorium, qui aggregata sibi turcorum ingenti potentia fidelem nostrum spectabilem et magnificum Daan, vayvoda nostrum Transalpimum ... validissimum harum partium nostrarum Transsilvanarum exercitum, ipsum Ladislaum ceteris nostris fidelibus preeligendo in eiusdem nostri ex[er]citus vexilliferum proficiendo...*, CDCB, p. 287.

¹⁰⁰ CDCB, pp. 283-289.

¹⁰¹ Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, pp. 236-237. It is interesting to note that one of the higher commanders of the Hungarian army was Peter, the son of the Portuguese king Alphonso (Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, p. 236). He is also mentioned in the aforementioned charter (... *cum illustri principe domino Petro, serenissimi principis domini Alfonsi regis Portugalie secundo genito...*, CDCB, p. 287). Hence, one can easily argue that the Count Ladislav II of Blagaj participated in the winter campaign of 1426/1427, even though the mentioned charter does not clarify in which of several campaigns (from 1423 to 1426/1427) Ladislav II had participated.

Furthermore, it is very likely that Count Ladislav II of Blagaj participated in the campaigns against Duke Radu “Praznaglava” even before the final winter campaign of 1426/1427. According to the charter issued on August 16th 1425, Ladislav II had bought the Závod estate from a certain *Jeronimus Kolos de Neme*, and this transaction was confirmed by King Sigismund in his military camp near the city of Orşova, one of the strongholds on the river Danube in present-day Donji Banat.¹⁰² Considering the location where the charter was issued, it seems that it was issued there because at that moment Ladislav II was serving in the royal army.

In any case, later on it was necessary for King Sigismund to confirm the possession of the Závod estate to Ladislav II once again. This was done on July 7th 1427, and after this confirmation the Chapter of Szekszárd introduced Count Ladislav II of Blagaj not only into the possession of the Závod estate, but also into the possession of several other estates - *Thewel, Kekenyes, Balyatha, Naghweyke, Kysapar, Teryek i Gerenye* - all situated in the Tolna county.¹⁰³ In spite of this, it seems that Ladislav II had some problems ruling his newly gained possessions, so he once again asked King Sigismund for a new confirmation of his rights. This was done on April 28th 1430.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, a certain part of the Závod estate continued to be owned by the knights of the Order of St. John.¹⁰⁵

There were two direct benefits for the Counts of Blagaj of Ladislav's military service in the royal campaigns in Wallachia. Firstly, Ladislav II was rewarded with a royal confirmation of his estates in the Tolna County. These, as well as the estates in the Zala County inherited by his wife Clare, were the first estates owned by the Counts of Blagaj north of the Drava river, that is, in the Kingdom of Hungary proper. In acquiring estates north of the Drava river the Counts of Blagaj have followed the example of their relatives, the Counts of Krbava, who had gained several estates in Northern Hungary even earlier.¹⁰⁶ As in the case of the Counts of Krbava, the owning of the estates north of the Drava river forced the Counts of Blagaj in furthering their rapprochement with King Sigismund, whose approval was needed in order to keep those newly gained possessions with substantial income.

Moreover, by gaining the estates north of the river Drava, the Counts of Blagaj involved themselves even more actively in the political life of the Kingdom of Hungary and its nobility. They established liaisons even with members

¹⁰² ...*Datum in descensu nostro campestri prope Orsuam...*, Imre Nagy – Iván Páur – Károly Ráth – Dezső Véghely (eds.), *Hazai okmánytár. Codex diplomaticus patrius*, vol. I (Győr: Sauerwein, 1865), pp. 319-320.

¹⁰³ CDCB, pp. 290-292.

¹⁰⁴ CDCB, pp. 295-297.

¹⁰⁵ CDCB, pp. 299-300.

¹⁰⁶ Grgin – Botica “The Counts Kurjaković of Krbava”, pp. 164-174.

of the highest noble families in Hungary. Therefore, it is not surprising that Count Anthony of Blagaj arranged the marriage of his daughter Margaret to Count Lawrence Héderváry, who later became Palatine of Hungary.¹⁰⁷

The close cooperation of the Counts of Blagaj, especially of Count Ladislav II, with King Sigismund, was very productive and beneficial to them. Not only were many possessions granted to them by the sovereign, but they even benefited from royal protection in various legal disputes they had with their neighbors during the second and third decade of the 15th century. Hence, it is interesting to notice that Countess Clare Bánffy, wife of Count Ladislav II of Blagaj, had several legal disputes with relatives and tenants of her late husband, and that these disputes usually ended with royal verdicts in her favor.¹⁰⁸

It is also interesting to note that the Counts of Blagaj enjoyed royal favor and protection even in disputes with the most powerful magnates of the Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia, such were the Counts of Cili. This can be easily seen in the dispute between the Counts of Blagaj and the Counts of Cili over the ownership of the city of Kostajnica and its environs. Namely, on January 25th 1424, due to his numerous services, King Sigismund had granted several estates and the vassalage of several noble kindreds in Kostajnica, Čaglić, Stabanda, Baštra, Banjani and Donja Jamnica to Count Ladislav II of Blagaj.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, it was Count Frederick of Cili, who was ban of Slavonia at that time, who filed an objection to this decision, because he was claiming that these possessions were part of his estate of Krupa.¹¹⁰ The official protest was made at the beginning of August 1424 by a certain Stephen, son of Nicholas of Brezovica, retainer of Count Fridrick of Cili. As it seems, men of the Counts of Cili tried to stop the Counts of Blagaj in entering the possession of the aforementioned estates, even by force of arms.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, in spite of all of this, King Sigismund ordered the cannons of the Chapter of Zagreb to introduce the Counts of Blagaj into the possession of the aforementioned estates, which was finally accomplished on August 16th 1424.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Margaret of Blagaj is mentioned as wife of Palatine Laurence Héderváry in 1439 and in 1442 (Béla Radvánszky – Levente Závodszy (eds.), *A Héderváry-család Oklevéltára*, vol. 1 (Budapest: M. Tud. Akadémia, 1909), pp. 193-196 and 206-207).

¹⁰⁸ For the document mentioned here, see footnote 31.

¹⁰⁹ *...quasdam possessiones nostras regales utputa villas et generationes Coztanicza, Chaglycz, Stebancha, Baschya, Banjane et inferior Jamnyca vocatas in comitatu Zagrabieni...*, CDCB, pp. 261-266.

¹¹⁰ Nada Klaić, *Zadnji knezi Celjski v deželah Sv. krone [The Last Counts of Cili in the State of the Holy Crown]* (Ljubljana-Celje: Svetovni slovenski kongres, 1991), pp. 45-46.

¹¹¹ In the same charter it is stated: *...contradicione spectabilis et magnifici domini Frederici Cilie, Zagorieque etc. comitis tandem certis diebus elapsis hic in sacristia nostre ecclesie in persona eiusdem per certos suos homines facta et demum ex iussu et mandato dicti domini nostri regis ex certis causis repobata non obstante eisdem in hac parte, predictis regio et nostro hominibus legitimis diebus iuxta regni consuetudinem ibidem moram facientibus personalem...*, CDCB, p. 269.

¹¹² CDCB, pp. 267-269.

A similar situation occurred two years later, in the dispute between Count Anthony of Blagaj and Count Herman II of Cili, the father of Count Frederick, once again over the ownership of certain estates – this time, the Petrinja estate and two castles - Gradac and Dubica. It started on August 13th 1426, when Count Stephen Čupor of Moslavina and several of his relatives mortgaged a quarter of the Petrinja estate and the castles Gradac and Dubica to Count Anthony of Blagaj for 400 golden florins.¹¹³ In the following month, Count Herman filed an official objection to this transaction, arguing that these estate and castles were his own property. He even brought several witnesses, among them Peter Trpnić and a certain priest by the name of Adam, but the canons of the Chapter of Zagreb overruled his objection and granted the Petrinja estate and the castles Gradac and Dubica to Count Anthony of Blagaj.¹¹⁴

Finally, there is a third example of the failure of the Counts of Cili in their legal disputes with the Counts of Blagaj that can be attested in preserved written materials. At the beginning of March 1427, Count Herman II of Cili once again complained to the Chapter of Zagreb that the brothers Ladislav II, John V and Anthony of Blagaj took over the estates in Vrhovine, Lokočevo and Podmartinje in spite of the fact that these estates were Herman's property, as he was claiming.¹¹⁵ Once again, as in the two aforementioned examples, the canons of the Chapter of Zagreb dismissed Herman's claims and granted these estates to the Blagaji brothers.¹¹⁶ From these three examples, one can easily argue that the Counts of Blagaj successfully used their good relations with King Sigismund, as well as with John of Alben, bishop of Zagreb at that time (1421-1433), to benefit from their protection even in legal disputes with the most powerful magnates of the Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia, such as the Counts of Cili.

5. King Sigismund of Luxemburg and the Counts of Blagaj after the death of count Ladislav II

Having this in mind, as well as knowing that among the Blagaji brothers it was Count Ladislav II of Blagaj who had the most prominent position in King Sigismund's court, it is very interesting to analyze the relations between the Counts of Blagaj and the king after the death of Count Ladislav II, who died

¹¹³ *...quartam partem possessionibus Petrinje vocate ac duo castella Gradech et Dobouch appellata ... pro quadringentis florenis auri....*, CDCB, pp. 278-279.

¹¹⁴ CDCB, pp. 279-281.

¹¹⁵ *...possessionum ipsorum Werhovyna, Lokochevo et Podmartinya vo[cata]rum, in comitatu Zagrabienzi habitaram et existentium....*, CDCB, p. 281.

¹¹⁶ CDCB, pp. 281-283.

sometime at the beginning of 1434,¹¹⁷ that is, to analyze the dynamics of those relations and to see whether they changed or not.

There are several historical episodes, which can be used to answer these questions. As a case study of the social context and political relations between the Counts of Blagaj and King Sigismund during the last three years of his reign, we can consider the historical episode during which the Blagaji brothers tried to gain the strategically very important stronghold of Bušević, situated in the central valley of the river Una.¹¹⁸

According to the preserved written sources, King Sigismund had taken the estate and stronghold of Bušević from the sons of Martin of Cika sometime before 1421,¹¹⁹ and gave it to Helen (Jelena), widow of Count Nelipac, son of Constantine of Nečven.¹²⁰ Helen then sold it for 100 golden florins (*pro centum florenis auri*) to several noblemen of Goruša, a certain Count Peter Vereš and John, son of Paul, on September 17th 1421.¹²¹ Ten years later, on April 28th 1431, one of them, Peter Vereš (*Petrus dictus Veres de Gowsewa*), sold his portion of the estate and stronghold of Bušević again, this time to several female members of the Kurjaković family for 1000 golden florins, and this was confirmed by Count Frederick of Cili.¹²² It is very interesting to note that the buyers of the estate were only female members of the Kurjaković family, and that none of the male members of that family was included in that transaction. Hence, the estate was bought by several female members of the Kurjaković family - Anne, widow of Baboneg IV of Blagaj, her sister Magdalene, wife of Mark of Kladuša, their niece Mary, the wife of Simon (Šimun) of Kladuša and daughter of Anne's

¹¹⁷ Although the exact date of the Count Ladislav's death is not known, it must have been sometime shortly before March 1st 1434, because there is a charter issued by the Chapter of Szekszárd bearing that date, which contains the claims that the late Count Ladislav II had ordered that certain silver cutlery is to be inherited by the sons of his wife Clare born from her first marriage (MOL, DL 12585). This is the first known record in which the count Ladislav II of Blagaj is referred to as deceased.

¹¹⁸ On the year of its construction, as well as on the physical appearance of the stronghold of Bušević, see: Radoslav Lopašić, *Bihać i Bihaćka krajina: Miestopisne i poviesne crtice [Bihać and the Bihać County: Land and historical outlines]* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1890), pp. 131-138.

¹¹⁹ George and Martin, sons of Martin of Cika, were due to inherit the Bušević estate from Andrew, son of Strizivoj, after his death in 1411. The latter was a member of the lesser nobility from nearby Obrovac, on the river Una. As it seems, the brothers George and Martin were not able to prove their inheritance rights, and that is why the Bušević estate was put under royal custody (Lopašić, *Bihać i Bihaćka krajina*, pp. 133-134).

¹²⁰ Birin, Ante, "Posjedi Nelipčića na području srednjovjekovnog kotara Promine" ["The estates of Nelipčići in the medieval district of Promina"], *Miljevci u prošlosti (s pogledom u budućnost) Zbornik radova sa znanstvenog skupa Miljevci u prošlosti (s pogledom u budućnost)* (Visovac - Drinovci: Miljevački sabor, 2008), p. 127.

¹²¹ ...*quod nobilis domina Elena vocata, relicta condam Nelepech filii Kozthadini de Nechven ... totalem potrimonem suam possessionariam, quam in castello Busevzch vocato et suis pertinentis haberet ... nobilibus viris Petro Jankouzh et Iwano filio Pauli de Gorusa...*, CDCB, pp. 259-260.

¹²² CDCB, pp. 300-301.

and Magdalene's brother John.¹²³ This transaction was confirmed by the Chapter of Zagreb on June 9th 1431, on the request of Count Herman II of Cili with whom the members of the Kurjaković family were in excellent relations.¹²⁴

Three years later, on April 14th 1434, these persons sold the Bušević stronghold, as well as several nearby estates, to Count Anthony of Blagaj and his sons Ladislav III, Matthias and Gregory.¹²⁵ Considering that Anne Kurjaković, widow of Baboneg IV of Blagaj, was aunt of Count Anthony of Blagaj, one can argue that Count Anthony of Blagaj was behind the process of acquiring the Bušević castle from the beginning, and that it was he who actually persuaded the Kurjaković countesses to buy the estate and castle, just so they could pass them on to him when circumstances would allow it.¹²⁶ One has to have in mind that the amount of 1000 golden florins, paid by Anne Kurjaković and her female relatives to Peter of Goruša in 1431,¹²⁷ is exactly the same as the amount paid by Anthony to the Kurjaković countesses in 1434.¹²⁸ Moreover, according

¹²³ ...nobilibus Anne relicte condam Babonogh de Blagay et Magdalene vocatis consorti Marci de Kladussa, filiabus videlicet condam comitis Nicolai de Corbavia, item domine Marie filie condam Iohannis de eadem Corbavia, consorti scilicet Simonis filii dicti Marci de prefata Cladussa..., CDCB, p. 301.

¹²⁴ CDCB, pp. 302-303. For more details on this transaction, as well as on the relations of Kurjaković family with King Sigismund of Luxemburg, see: Botica, *Knezovi Krbavski*, pp. 215-216.

¹²⁵ ...egregius vir Anthonius filius Nicoali coms de Blagay ... ipse comes Anthonius ac Ladizlaus, Gregorius et Mathias filii eiusdem coitis Anthonii quasdam possessiones videlicet ultramque Bwsewych simul cum castello similiter Bwsewych vocato ... a nobilibus dominabus videlicet Anna relicta condam Babonok comitis de predicta Blagaz, sorore scilicet Iohannis dicti Grof comitis de Corbavia ac Magdalena consorte Marci filii Iwan de Cladussa, nec non Maria relicta condam Wolkmer vayvode de Wzura carnalium, item altera Maria consorte Simonis filii prefati Marci filii Iwan de Cladusa predicta et Katherina vocatis, filiabus prelibati Iohannis Groff, fratruelibus sororibus ipsius domine Anne..., CDCB, pp. 308-309. Cf. Botica, *Knezovi Krbavski*, pp. 216-217.

¹²⁶ Botica, *Knezovi Krbavski*, p. 216.

¹²⁷ ...pro mille florenis auri puri..., CDCB, p. 301.

¹²⁸ ...pro mille florenis auri puri..., CDCB, p. 308. In this charter it is stated that the Count Anthony of Blagaj gathered that amount from the money left to his son, count Ladislav III, by his mother's brother John of Alben, the bishop of Zagreb, in his last will (...per condam reverendum in Christo patrem dominum Iohannem episcopum Zagrabiensem etc. pie memorie, dominum et prelatum nostrum eidem Ladizlao in ultimo suo voto seu dispositione testamentaria legati set dimissis perpetuo et irrevocabliler emissent et comparassent..., CDCB, p. 308). Therefore, Ladislav's brothers, Counts Matthias and Gregory of Blagaj, had to promise that they would compensate their brother for that amount after the division of the family estate, which would take place after the death of their father, the Count Anthony of Blagaj (...divisionem fraternalem in prescriptis et comparatis inter se facere et celebrare vellent, ex tunc ipsi filii sui videlicet Gregorius et Mathias capitalem pecuniam utputa directas duas partes prescriptorum mille florenorum auri ipsius Ladizlai de partionibus ipsorum possessionariis, ipsi per formam ipsius divisionis in antelatis possessionibus ipsorum ut prefertur per eosdem emptis et comparatis proveniendis et provnire devendis, porione tamen ipsius Laduzlai similiter possessionaria in eisdem possessionibus ipsum tangente et sibi cedente illesa remanente, ipsi Ladizlao fratri ipsorum dare et plenare persolvere et assignare debeant et teneantur..., CDCB, p. 309; Lopašić, *Bihać i Bihačka krajina*, p. 135). It is also interesting to note that the last will of bishop John of Alben is preserved and published, and that it is

to both of the preserved charters, Count John Kurjaković was present when these transactions were made. He was at that moment more than twenty years was a prominent member of the court of King Sigismund,¹²⁹ and it was expected that his reputation would grant success to these transactions, because of the possibility of a negative response from the Counts of Cili, who were the owners of the nearby castles Krupa and Obrovac.

And indeed, in those days the Counts of Cili had entered into a confrontation with the Frankapani, another prominent noble family of medieval Croatia, over the control of Croatia. Both families took advantage of the fact that at that time King Sigismund was absent from the Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia, as well as of the fact that in 1433, two of the most important of King Sigismund's supporters, John of Alben, bishop of Zagreb, and Nicholas of Gorjani, palatine of Hungary, had died.¹³⁰ The political situation in Croatia was very tense and the nobility was divided in two confronted political camps. Even before these events there was a latent confrontation between the Counts of Cili and the Counts of Blagaj over the control of the middle Pounje area. Even more, the situation in the whole of medieval Croatia and Slavonia was very flammable, so it is very likely that Count Anthony of Blagaj expected some sort of a reaction from the Counts of Cili if he would try to buy the Bušević estate directly. Therefore, Count Anthony decided to use a more subtle approach in order to gain this strategically very important stronghold, and had decided that his aunt, Countess Anne Kurjaković, and her relatives should buy the Bušević estate instead. Proof of Count Herman II of Cili's displeasure with the fact that the Blagaji managed to acquire the Bušević stronghold can be found in the charter from 1435, in which is stated several times that he, Herman, is the owner of the neighboring castles Obrovac and Krupa.¹³¹ However, in the end it was he, Herman II of Cili, who officially granted the Bušević estate to count Anthony of Blagaj and his sons in June 1435.¹³²

Count Herman's final and formal acceptance of the fact that the Counts of Blagaj managed to acquire the Bušević estate and its stronghold was actually more a result of the change in political circumstances and of the steady increase of the Counts of Blagaj's prestige at the royal court, than it was Count Herman's free choice. Namely, as was already mentioned, King Sigismund had

stated in it that the late bishop had left all of his rings to the daughters of his sister Magdalene, wife of Anthony of Blagaj, while there is no mention of any money left to Magdalene's sons, counts Ladislav III, Matthias and Gregory of Blagaj (...*Annulos suos omnes filiabus Antonii Comitiss de Blagai ex Magdalena sorore sua prognatis...*, CD Fejer 10/7, p. 437).

¹²⁹ As it was already said, Count John Kurjaković was a member of the innermost circle of magnates in whom King Sigismund's placed his trust (Botica, *Knezovi Krbavski*, pp. 169-170).

¹³⁰ V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, vol. 3, pp. 149-155.

¹³¹ ...*et a possessionibus predictorum hominum nostrorum de Obrowchan ac aliorum quorumlibet ad predictum castrum nostrum Cruppa pertinetium distinctis et segregatis...*, CDCB, p. 316.

¹³² CDCB, pp. 315-320.

during his long reign developed a system of giving important administrative and political positions in his kingdom to his loyal supporters, whatever their origin or earlier political and social positions may have been.¹³³ This system helped him to strengthen his rule even further. Therefore, having in mind that the Counts of Blagaj have served him loyally for more than two decades, it is not surprising that King Sigismund decided on May 29th 1435 that his royal castles of Vrbas and Kozara are to be commanded by Count John V of Blagaj, a service which also included an annual salary of 1600 golden florins.¹³⁴ On that occasion, Count John V was referred to as a “loyal knight” (*fidelis noster egregius*),¹³⁵ same as his brother, Count Anthony, was a year earlier.¹³⁶ It is obvious that both of the remaining Blagaji brothers continued to be persons in whom King Sigismund placed his utmost trust. Therefore, it is not surprising that Count Herman II of Cili decided in June 1435 to accept the already done deal – that the Counts of Blagaj managed to acquire the Bušević estate – especially after the latter have managed also to expand their control to the territories of the former County of Vrbas, that is, to the areas which used to be the core of the political domain of their forefathers, the Counts Babonić, in the late 13th and the beginning of the 14th century.¹³⁷

In the following year – 1436 – the Counts of Blagaj managed to, thanks to their loyal service to King Sigismund of Luxemburg, achieve the highest success of that generation of their family – the return of the castle of Ostrožac under their control. On April 24th 1436 the king had returned the Ostrožac castle to them, and had once again confirmed the estates Omersel and Brisovica by a new letter of donation (*nova nostra donatio*),¹³⁸ which he had already

¹³³ Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen*, pp. 211-214. During his long reign, King Sigismund had practice to lean on capable individuals whatever their origin or earlier political and social positions may have been. They were often of foreign origin or even of lesser social status. In that way King could be rather certain that they would serve him faithfully, because their political and social status depended on his grace. See in more details: Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund in Ungarn*, pp. 69-93.

¹³⁴ ...*quod nos fidelem nostrum egregium Iohannem filium Nicolai de Blagaj de rehibitione mille et sexingentorum florenum auri puri, qui eidem ratione sui stipendii pro conservatione castrorum nostrorum Orbaz et Kozara vocatorum, in regno nostro Sclavonie...*, CDCB, pp. 310-312.

¹³⁵ CDCB, p. 310.

¹³⁶ CDCB, p. 308.

¹³⁷ The Babonić family slowly gained the County of Vrbas during the ninth decade of the 13th century, after a successful struggle against the Güssing family (Hrvoje Kekez, “*Hinc transit fluvium Vrbas: kada i kako je slavonski plemićki rod Babonića došao u posjed župe Vrbas?*” [“*Hinc transit fluvium Vrbas: How and when the Babonići family had gained the Vrbas County?*”], *Hrvatska misao*, vol. 4 (2007), pp. 76-93). Members of the Babonić family continued to bear the title of Counts of Vrbas continuously until 1334, and during that period, they possessed large estates in that county and several castles, including the castle of Vrbas (For more details, see: Kekez, *Plemićki rod Babonića*, pp. 48-67, 362-366).

¹³⁸ CDCB, pp. 321-324.

given them in 1395.¹³⁹ In that royal charter from 1436, it is clearly stated that the Counts' ancestors, Counts Stephen VII and Nicholas IV, sons of Dujam of Blagaj, had ceded the Ostrožac castle to Sigismund during his conflicts with Duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić and the rest of the Bosnian nobility. The fact that Counts Ladislav II, Anthony and John V of Blagaj helped the king during that conflict was stressed as the main reason why King Sigismund decided to return the Ostrožac castle to the Counts of Blagaj.

Although this explanation seems rather logical, the question remains why King Sigismund decided to return the Ostrožac castle to the Counts of Blagaj precisely in 1436 and not before, when there were so many opportunities to do so. And indeed, there are some pieces of information in the royal charter of 1436 which could offer an explanation to this, particularly in the part which describes the complaint filed by Gregory and Simeon, sons of Francis Pulic (*Franciscus Pulcz*), former captain of Knin, against the royal decision to return the Ostrožac castle to the Counts of Blagaj.¹⁴⁰ The counts Gregory and Simeon presented their complaint to the Chapter of Zagreb, but the Chapter overruled it. It was even stated that the new ban of Slavonia, Matko Talovac, was assigned as the one who would enforce this legal verdict.¹⁴¹ It is very likely that Talovac's role was not only important in the implementation of the canons' verdict, but that he had also influenced the royal decision to return the Ostrožac castle to the Counts of Blagaj. Namely, it was exactly in the spring of 1436 when ban Talovac was preparing to go in Croatia at the head of the royal army, to fight the war brought on by the dispute over the inheritance of the great estates owned by the late Count Ivaniš Nelipić.¹⁴² It is very likely that there was plan in place, according to which ban Talovac would march towards Croatia through the valley of the Una, which was the most common route from Pannonia to Croatia. This valley was mostly controlled by the Counts of Blagaj. Therefore, the returning of the Ostrožac castle to the Counts of Blagaj resulted in two

¹³⁹ CD 18, p. 55

¹⁴⁰ CDCB, p. 323.

¹⁴¹ ...*commisimus et vigore premissorum firmissime committimus et mandamus fidei nostro magnifico Mathkoni de Thalowcz, regni nostri Sclavonie bano, ut ipse vos ad plenam huiusmodi mandatorum nostrorum executionem faciendam cum vestris gravaminibus et rerum periculis arctius compellat et astringat, auctoritate nostra imperiali presentibus sibi in hac parte plenarie attributa et iustitia mediante...*, CDCB, p. 323.

¹⁴² Feeling that the end of his life was very near, and because he did not have any male offsprings, the old count Ivaniš Nelipić wrote his last will in which he left his numerous estates and castles to his daughter Catherine and her husband John (Anž) Frankapan. In spite of that, after Ivaniš' death at the end of May 1434, King Sigismund overruled this last will and confiscated Ivaniš' estates using his royal prerogatives. This was challenged by Count Ivan Frankapan, which, at the end of January 1436, led the king to order that ban Talovac is to go to Croatia and enforce the king's will, by force of arms if necessary (V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, vol. 3, pp. 158-160; Ante Birin, *Knez Nelipac i hrvatski velikaški rod Nelipčića* [*The Count Nelipac and Croatian Magnate Kindred of Nelipčići*], unpublished doctoral thesis, (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2006), pp. 154-156).

direct benefits. Firstly, by doing so, ban Talovac secured their loyalty and, even more likely, their involvement on his side in the upcoming armed conflict. Secondly, he made sure that this strategically important stronghold, which the Ostrožac castle was at time, would stay in the hands of the king's loyal supporters, such as the Counts of Blagaj. Additionally, ban Talovac travelled to Croatia using the route through the Una valley, and was present in Bihać at the beginning of July 1436, from where he informed the captains of the Vlachs in Croatia that King Sigismund had reached a peace agreement with Venice.¹⁴³ These were the political circumstances under which the Counts of Blagaj had managed to, by receiving the royal donation of King Sigismund at the end of his long reign, gain back the Ostrožac castle, the stronghold that was taken from them by the very same ruler at the beginning of his reign.

6. Conclusion

The reign of King Sigismund of Luxemburg on the throne of Realm of Saint Stephen was for the Counts of Blagaj a period of fluctuating political relations with the king. That period is symbolically marked by the two events. First, King Sigismund's confiscation of the castles Ostrožac and Krupa, previously owned by the Counts of Blagaj, in 1395; and second, the return of the Ostrožac castle to the Counts of Blagaj by royal donation in 1436 in changed political situation.

It is possible to argue that at the beginning of the reign of King Sigismund, the Counts of Blagaj were among his opponents. There is significant evidence that the Counts of Blagaj had allied with the Bosnian duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić, one of the main opponents of King Sigismund, and even participated in the raids of the Bosnian nobility on the estates of King Sigismund's supporters during the last two decades of the 14th century. Therefore, it is not surprising that King Sigismund confiscated their castles Ostrožac and Krupa in 1395. Although this was done in the context of the preparations for the upcoming military campaign against the Bosnian nobility, and in spite of the fact that the King had promised to return the aforementioned castles after the end of planned campaign, King Sigismund refused to fulfill this promise, disregarding a formal request filed by Count Stephen VIII of Blagaj in 1396. It is very likely that King Sigismund refused to return those strategically important strongholds close to the border with medieval Bosnia because he did not trust the Counts of Blagaj.

The beginning of the 15th century brought a fresh start to the political relations of the Counts of Blagaj and King Sigismund of Luxemburg. There is

¹⁴³ In the following year, ban Talovac managed to retake Count Ivaniš' heritage, and it was very soon ceded to him by King Sigismund. Compare and see in more detail: V. Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata*, vol. 3, pp. 160-162;).

evidence in preserved written materials from the first years of the 15th century that clearly shows that the Counts of Blagaj tried to improve their relations with the King. There are several reasons as to what has influenced this change in the Counts of Blagaj policy towards the King. Among those reasons, the most important was the fact that a new generation of the Blagaj family emerged on the political scene. The most important of its members were the Counts Ladislav II, John V and Anthony of Blagaj, who were more willing to improve the relations with the King. Also important were the facts that the Counts of Blagaj became aware that the political strength of King Sigismund had improved greatly, and that the return of the confiscated castles Krupa and Ostrožac, as well as the restoration of the political and economic strength of the Counts of Blagaj, could be achieved only through an alliance with the increasingly powerful king.

The Counts of Blagaj used several socio-political mechanisms in their attempt to ingratiate themselves with King Sigismund. They mostly used their family connections with other influential individuals or noble families who were important supporters of King Sigismund in Slavonia and Croatia. There is evidence that the Counts of Blagaj used their good relations, especially those of Count Stephen VII of Blagaj, with the bishop Eberhard and his nephew John of Alben, who were among the most loyal supporters of King Sigismund in Slavonia. Moreover, the Counts of Blagaj also used their family connections with the Kurjaković family, the Counts of Krbava, established during the last decades of 14th century, to become closer to King. Finally, even in the marriage policy of Counts Ladislav II and Anthony of Blagaj it can be seen that they had taken wives from the noble families who supported King Sigismund.

This process was more or less successfully completed by the end of the first decade of the 15th century. The Counts of Blagaj, especially Ladislav II, entered the king's military service. There is abundant evidence, listed in this paper, that Count Ladislav II loyally served in the royal army, whether in the war against the Bosnian duke Hrvoje in 1405, or in the war against Venice in Friuli and Istria in 1411-1413, or against the Hussites in Bohemia and Moravia in 1420 or, finally, in Transylvania in 1423-1426. Moreover, Ladislav II was a member of King Sigismund's retinue at the Council of Constance in 1418 and during the diet of the Imperial Estates in Nuremberg in 1422, as well as during the king's visit to Regensburg in 1423. Therefore, it is not surprising that Count Ladislav II bore the prestigious title of *miles aulae regiae*.

There were several benefits for the Counts of Blagaj from their loyal service to King Sigismund that can be attested in preserved written records. King Sigismund did not only confirmed them the ownership of many castles and estates which the Counts of Blagaj had owned from earlier periods, but also he had also bestowed them with new estates. Some of those newly gained estates were situated north of the river Drava, that is, in medieval Hungary proper. This proved to be very important in later times, because ownership of estates

on the territory of medieval Hungary allowed the Counts of Blagaj to become active in its political life, and to establish important connections with the Hungarian nobility. Moreover, by supporting King Sigismund, the Counts of Blagaj enjoyed other benefits, such as the king's direct or indirect protection and support in their political and economic disputes with other noble families in Slavonia, even with very influential and powerful magnates, such as the Counts of Cili. Finally, without the support of King Sigismund it would have been almost impossible for the Counts of Blagaj to restore their political and economic influence in the areas of the middle and lower Pounje. And indeed, by the middle of the 15th century the Counts of Blagaj once again became the most powerful nobles in those areas. Both on practical and symbolical level, this can be seen in the royal act of returning the castle Ostrožac to them at the very end of King Sigismund's long reign, in 1436.

Im Dienste des mächtigen Königs: die politischen Beziehungen der Fürsten von Blagaj zum König Sigismund von Luxemburg

Zusammenfassung

Die Fürsten von Blagaj waren Nachkommen der Adelsfamilie Babonić, einer der einflussreichsten Magnatenfamilien des mittelalterlichen Slawoniens aber auch des ganzen Königreichs des Hl. Stephan, bzw. des Ungarisch-Kroatischen Königreichs. Politische und wirtschaftliche Blütezeit dieser Familie war Ende des 13. und Anfang des 14. Jahrhunderts. Während die zweite Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts eine Stagnation für diese Familie brachte, dasselbe galt nicht für das Ende des Jahrhunderts und für die ersten vier Jahrzehnten des 15. Jahrhunderts, also für die Zeit der Herrschaft des ungarisch-kroatischen Königs Sigismund von Luxemburg. Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist, eine Reihe von Fragen hinsichtlich des politischen Verhältnisses der Fürsten von Blagaj zum König Sigismund von Luxemburg während seiner langen Herrschaft zu analysieren. Zuerst wird die Position der Fürsten von Blagaj als Opponenten des Königs Sigismund von Luxemburg gegen Ende des 14. Jahrhunderts erforscht, bzw. während seines Kampfes um die Übernahme des ungarisch-kroatischen Throns und während der politischen Festigung seiner Herrschaft. Im Folgenden werden sozial-politische Mechanismen und Familienbeziehungen erforscht, die zur Veränderung der politischen Verhältnisse der Fürstenfamilie von Blagaj zum König Sigismund im ersten Jahrzehnt des 15. Jahrhunderts führten. Die Dynamik der politischen Beziehungen der Fürsten von Blagaj zum König Sigismund wirft vielmehr verschiedene Fragen auf: Hatte alle Mitglieder der Fürstenfamilie von Blagaj das gleiche Verhältnis zum König Sigismund oder nicht? Gab es unter ihnen ein bestimmter Mann, der die Familienpolitik dem König gegenüber definierte? Was bedeutete eigentlich

der treue Dienst beim König? Und schließlich, gab es gewisse politische und geopolitische Benefizien des treuen Dienstes, und wenn ja, welche?

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