

version in Serbian



Serb Land of Bosnia

"We are apt to speak of the Serbs of Serbia as 'the' Serbians, and to forget that modern Serbia is a recent state mapped out arbitrarily by the Powers."

by **Mary E. Durham**



Acknowledgments

Indeed, the Serbs in Bosnia feel themselves equally an essential part of the Serbdom. Even as the leaders of the struggle for the unification of all Serbs. This idea is recalled today in the way the Serbs in Bosnia refer to their land. Besides the name Bosnia, you will also hear them call it **Serbska**, meaning 'the Serb land'.

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Do you consider
the arguments to
be satisfactory?

YES

NO

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Serbs, Bosnia and national identity

Because of the great level of interest on the topic of the identity of medieval Bosnia, I've decided to renew this page and enrich it as well. Most of the material found here is here thanks to the "old cafe patrons" in the "history" section of Serbian Cafe (www.serbiancafe.com). Comments or questions can be referred to [the guest book](#) or [e-mail](#).

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Ban Matej Ninoslav



The text which speaks that Bosnia, according to the following Bosnian ruler, is inhabited only by Serbs and Vlachs

This is an without a doubt proof that within midieval Bosnia Serbs were the main inhabitants even while Bosnia stretched from Sarajevo to Zeniva only (the valley of the river "Bosna"). In the international accord on the lack on Bosnian-Dubrovnik relations, the Ban (vicero) Ninoslav explicitly calls his subjects "Serbs" (Srbliji) and the Dubrovnikers "Vlachs" (Vlasi).

For deciet by a Vlah of a Serb, a Bosnian court was to be conveyed. But for deciet of a Serb over a Vlach, a court was to be convened in Dubrovnik. Calling Dubrovnikers "Vlachs" as well as the Latin origin of their prince's name, tells us that, at the time, the Dubrovnikers were still ROMANS and not Slavicized, whereas the Bosnians where "Serbs" who felt the difference enough to use two different names to describe themselves.

This was all writen when Bosnia eas was only 100 km from the Dubrovnik border, and the agreement does not does not apply to Serb tribes within Dubrovnik. Serbia, at the time was under the rule of the Nemanjic Kings and at the time, they also bordered Dubrovnik.

From:Lj. Stojanovic - "Old Serbian Documents", I., 8, 9-10.

БАН МАТЕЈ НИНОСЛАВ

1232-1235.

У име Оца и Сина и Светаго Духа, амин!

Аз раб Божји Матеј, а одмјелом Нинослав, бан бос'нски велики, кле се кнезу Дубровчкому Жан Дандолу и всеј опћине Дубров'чкој.

Таком с'м се клетв'ју клел, каком се је бан Кулин клел:

Да ходе Власи свободно, их добит'к, тако како су у бана Кулина ходили, без все хабе и зледи.

А ја кудје облада, тудје си ходите пространо и здраво, а ја пријати како-ре сам себје, и наук дати од все зледи.

А се писах, именем Десоје, граматиг бана Нинослава, велијега бос'нскога, тако вјерно како-ре у првих.

А се јеште: ако вјерује Србљин Влаха, да се при пред кнезем; ако вјерује Влах Србљина, да се при пред баном, а иному Влаху да не буде изма.

Боже-ре ти дај здравије.

(Повеља Дубровчанима)

Ban Matej Ninoslav (from old Slavic to Serbian)

1232-1235

In the name of the father, son and the holy ghost!

I, God's slave, Matej, branch of Ninoslav, great viceror of Bosnia, swear unto the prince of Dubrovnik

Dubrovnik's Zan Dandole (Gianni Dandolli) and all the regions of Dubrovnik.

I swear just as Ban Kulin swore before me:

For the Vlachs to walk freely as they did in the time of Ban Kulin, freely without deciet and evil...thus if a Serb decieves a Vlach, may he be held in the Ban's court.

(Letter to the Dubrovnikers)



Bosnian rulers called themselves Serbs, as they called Serbs their own subjects.

Tvrtko Kotromanic was crowned as 'the King of SERBS, Bosnia, the Seacoast and Western Parts' on the grave of St. Sava in the Mileseva. In order to emphasise the relationship of the Nemanjic (Serb in Rascia, the first Serbian state within the borders of modern Serbia) and Kotromanic (Bosnian Serb) dynasties , Tvrtko puts before his own name, the title **Stefan**, which indicates that he is crowned. In this letter the name Stefan is mentioned often (see for example the last word in the first sentence), just as it is also emphasised in the letter the concept of "Serbian land" or "Serbs" (Srbijem) as one ethnic categorization. For example, in the fifth line, Tvrtko clearly indicates the roots of his 'parents of **Serb** nobility'. Also, at the end of the letter, on the right side in big letters there is emphasised the title "King of the **Serbs**."

For a source, see the letters of the medieval rulers which are microfilmed in their original and are kept in the Dubrovnik archives. Also see the letters of the Bosnian ban (viceroy) Ninoslav.

The letters of the Bosnian nobles of the Kotromanic dynasty in which we clearly see how they felt their ethnicity to be Serbian

[Stefan Tvrtko Kotromanic](#)

[Stefan Dabisa Kotromanic](#)

[Stefan Ostoja Kotromanic](#)

[Stefan Ostojic Kotromanic](#)

[Stefan Tvrtko II Kotromanic](#)

[Stefan Tomas Kotromanic](#)

All the above mentioned letters were written in the cyrillic script. There is a piece of the Zografic bible for those who think cyrillic and glagolitic are interchangeable (11th century).

[Zografsko jevandjelje](#)

Bosnian Rullers called their Language Serbian

Bosnian ban (viceroy) Stjepan Kotromanic (1322-1353) declares in 1333. a letter to Dubrovnik in which he states: "thus I evoke to the noble ban Stefan my golden seal, so that all may know and see the truth. This is why the seals are equal, two in Latin and two in Serbian and all are sealed in gold". At the time, it was a tradition to give out four letters of the same text in Serbian and Latin. This letter may be found in

Franc Miklosic, Monumenta Serbica, Vienna 1858. str. 105-109

Lj. Stojanovic - "Stare Srpske povelje i pisma" (old Serbian letters), I, 46.

Western sources and literature

The Governing of An Empire (De administrando imperio) , 10-th century

Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus aka: CONSTANTINE VII FLAVIUS PORPHYROGENITUS (r. Septembar 905, Constantinople [now Istanbul, Turkey]. Nov. 9, 959), the Byzantine emperor from 913 to 959.

His writings are an emense source regarding the empire and neighbouring lands. His work "De administrando imperio" is kept in its original manuscript in the Vatikan library. It deals primarily with the Slavic peoples of the Balkans and its a huge account of geographical and cultural as well as political situation of the Balkans at the time. Porfirogenitus does not only discuss the events of his lifetime, but of earlier periods such as that of Heraclius (610-641) and earlier.

Heading 32 od De Administrando Imperio of Konstantin Porfirogenitus, is called "On the Serbs and the lands in which they live". It speaks of the territories inhabited by Serbs in which he mentions Bosnia, specifically two inhabited cities, Kotor and Desnik, both of which are in an unidentified geographic position.

The annals of the Frankish chronologist Einhard, 9-th century

A source older than that of the the is that of the frankish chronicler Einhard . In his anals, so precious to Serb history, he describes the uprising of the Pannonian prince Ljudevit (818-823). In his work, he claims that Ljudevit ran from Sisak and went "among the Serbs". Accordingly, Serbs must have lived somewhere around Una, maybe even to the west, likely where the modern Serbian Krajina (region of Lika) lies.

"Liudevitus Siscia civitate relicta, ad Sorabos, quae natio magnam Dalmatie partem obtinere dicitur, fugiendo se contulit"

, that is: [Ljudevit (prince of Lower Panonia 822. - prim. CafeHome) having left the city of Sisak, ran toward the Serbs, for whom the people say inhabit the greater part of Dalmatia).

Franjo Racki, the Croatian historian, says, that as the Roaman province of Dalmatia stretched from the Adriatic to Panonia, under those Serbs, who are mentioned by Einhard, we must look ate all those lands between, and the people inhabiting them, ie: Bosnia to be considered Serbian lands, inhabited by Serbs.

The letter to Dubrovnik

The Pope sent in 1188 to the bishop of Dubrovnik a letter and in it he acknowledges all the old rights of the dubrovnik church. In the letter, he mentions Serbian Bosnia: "regnum Servilie, quod est Bosna" (Serbian kingdom of Bosnia). That was in the time of Ban Kulin.

("regnum" must have loosely meant kingdom in that time for, Bosnia was then a "banovina")

From: I. Kukuljevic, Codex diplom, II, 148, str 21.)

The Writings of father Diocletian (Dukljanin) also known by its Serbian acronym LPD, 12-th century

The LPD, also known as the Bar document is one of the oldest known written sources and kept in its Latin translation from the XVI century. It is a the work of a priest from Bar fro. 1196.

The LPD divided Serbia into two parts as follows: "Surbiam autem quae et Transmontana dicitur, in duas divisit provinciam: unam a magna flumine Drina contra occidentalem palagam usque and montem Pini, quam et Bosnam vocavit, alteram vero ab eodem flumine Drina contra orientalem plagam usque ad Lapiam et [ad paludem Labeatidem], quam Rassam vocavit". The LPD called Bosnia and Raska (the name of the first Serbian state within the borders of modern Serbia) by the common name "Serbia", which clearly indicates the united Serbian national identity.

Encyclopedia Britanicca

1. The first recorded mention of Bosnia was written during this period by the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, who described "Bosona" as a district in "baptized Serbia."
2. TVRTKO KOTROMANIC (b. c. 1338--d. 1391), probably the greatest ruler of Bosnia, ruling as Bosnian ban (provincial lord, subservient to the king of Hungary) from 1353 and king of the Serbs and Bosnia from 1377.
3. The Ottoman Turks invaded Bosnia in 1386, and after many battles it became a Turkish province in 1463. Hum held out longer under rulers who styled themselves herceg ("duke") of St. Sava--a name recalled today in Herzegovina.

Linguistic variants

Stjepan, Stepan, Stipan, Scepan, Stefan, Stevan was one and the same name. Because the letter "J" did not exist before Vuk Karadzic's (Serbian reformer) reforms, but the letter "JAT" did exist, the reader could interpret the sound to be read in any way, depending on which dialect he spoke and how the dialect or regionalism

pronounces the sound "J".

The Serbian Epic of the emperor Stefan Dusan: "Zenidba Dusanova" (wedding of Dusan) :

When the Serbian Czar Stephan,
looked to marry a wife,
In the Latin city of Ledjin,
of the Latin king Michael,
a maiden by the name of Roksana

(Vuk KaradzicII/28)

Thus from king Tvsko all rulers carried the name STEPHAN.

<http://members.tripod.com/cafehome/serbdom-eng.htm#Povelje>

(see their letters.)

Surely, nobody would take that as proof that those were Serbs. The indicators of national feelings are those documents where Bosnian rulers write that they and their forefathers were Serbs and that those they rule are Serbs as well and that they speak the Serbian language.

The concept of a state in the middle ages

If we study the middle ages we must analyze the concept of the state. Modern states have the tendency to be national in character, ie: to occupy the area encompassing the members of a given nation. Because of that they are much larger today. As is known, in the middle ages, belonging in the administrative sense to a geographic area says nothing about one's ethnicity. It is known that ruling dynasties used relations, marriages, so that they could expand their influence which would not even constitute territorial continuity. For example: the Spanish kings ruled land which was thousands of kilometers away from the mainland, even Belgium at one point. That doesn't say that the population of Belgium at the time was ethnically Spanish. In the same way, an ethnic mass could encompass over ten or even more fiefdoms, provinces, kingdoms, as was the case with the Germans, Irish and French. That does not mean that two separate German states were two separate nationalities. The same goes for religious differences. The faith of the people was determined by the faith of the ruler, and that faith is known to have changed many times over. Even today it is not uncommon to see peoples with two or three faiths like the Germans or the Magyars.

As a relevant source for the study of national identity, the population of an area maps are not an excellent source. What could be better for the study of national feeling in the middle ages than the documents of the rulers who give clear signs of themselves, their subjects and the language they spoke?

To illustrate on top of the above arguments see the map of Europe in this period, say 1400 (while the Ottomans had not yet conquered Bosnia). Clearly we are bombarded by a pile of administrative bodies divided into many nationalities, eg: France and Germany, however there are also single bodies encompassing whole nations or more than one.



Titles

It is interesting to see what titles the rulers of the middle ages carried and what the "states" at the time were called.

The title of the Nemanjic rulers was as follows: "The King of the land of Rashka, Dioclea, Travunija, Dalmatia and Zahumia."

(in time, Dioclea was to be called Zeta)

Czar Dusan the Great as a Czar (emperor) takes the title "Emperor of Serbs and Greeks" (Romans) which he bestows to his son Uros, and the next emperor to have that title would be Tvrtko because he saw himself to be clearly "King of the Serbs", thus all kings from Bosnia would carry that title, without even mentioning another nationality, but only geographic areas which they ruled.

Only in Latin sources, however did they call Raska Serbia, though all Serbs called Raska 'Raska'.

The title of King Tvrtko was "King of Serbs, Bosnia and the Seacoast".

Until 1390, Tvrtko carried the title of "King of Serbs, Bosnia and the Seacoast and Western Areas". From this title we can see that he ruled only one people, the Serbs. When Tvrtko conquered parts of lands

inhabited by another nation, like fore example, the Croats, his title was changed in 1390 to "King of Rashka, Bosnia, Dalmatia, Croatia and the Sea Coast. When he conquered the lands of another nation (the Croats) he changed his title so that there would be no ethnic distinction "King of Serbs" because the Serbs were not the only people which he ruled, because lands inhabited by Croats were incorporated into the empire. From this, we clearly see to what extent Tvrtko was conscious that he was a Serb and that SERBS live in Bosnia, because while he ruled only Bosnia and parts of Raska and the Sea Coast, he was KING OF THE SERBS. When Bosnia lost parts of Croatia which it had conquered, after Tvrtko, the next Bosnian ruler took the title "King of the Serbs", because they no longer ruled Croatia but returned again to ruling Serbs only. This all speaks of how conscious the Bosnian nobles were that they were Serbs.

All Bosnian Kings call themselves "King of the Serbs" which is the only ethnic name used in the title. They were of course Kings of Bosnia but they only mention Bosnia as a territory just as they saw other lands as territories. They make no mention of any nation over which they rule except Serbs, and Tvrtko even mentions his forefathers in his letters. They called their subjects Serbs as well even before the incorporation of Serbia and Raska. In passing, Tvrtko called the state of the Nemanjic kings Raska because it was the only name of that land which we today call Serbia.

Links

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See the page on [the nobility](#).