The Croatian-Slavonian Nobility in the 18th Century
Political Activity, Vertical Mobility and Relationship with the Viennese Court

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Middle and lower Croatian-Slavonian nobility in the 18th century

- Population census 1785 – 1787 (the first census that took into account the noble population):
  - The nobility represented ca. 4,5 percent of the Kingdom’s population
  - Middle and lower nobility: the vast majority of the total of 3250 noble families in Croatian-Slavonan Kingdom
  - ca. 96% of the nobility had their landed estates in Croatia / Croatian counties
  - ca. 84% of the nobility posessed a small feudal estate (with only few tenants, or no tenant at all) or had no landed property
  - More active in local politics than the aristocracy
Bene possessionati

- Croatian-Slavonian nobility with middle-sized feudal estate
- Active participation in policy-making at the local level (Croatian-Slavonian diet; county assemblies)
- Some of the most prominent families:
  - **In Croatia**: Arbanas, Bedeković, Bornemisza (Stolneković), Bušić, Bužan, Cinderi, Jelačić, Juršić, Kanotaj, Kešer, Kušević, Lukavski, Magdić, Najšić, Pogledić, Raffay, Saić, Škrlec
  - **In Slavonia**: Bernaković, Cseh, Demković, Jancsó, Janković, Marković, Novosel, Bogathy
- Aspiration for aristocratic titles: Magdalenić (1762 barons), Pejačević (1760 barons, 1772 counts), Malenić (1762 barons), Rauch (1764 barons) etc.
One of the (rarely) preserved noble houses: Alapić house, Vukovina near Zagreb, second part of the 18th century
Lower Nobility

- *Nobiles unius sessionis*: small landlords without any serfs
- *Armalistae*: nobles without the estate who based their rights solely on the patent of nobility (at the beginning of the 19th century: 800-900 families, or ca. 26-37% of the noble families)
- Oriented towards military service under more substantial nobles, or (fewer) towards seigniorial or public service
- More known families: Balog, Fodrozzi, Fritz, Gaal, Grličić, Hudoden, Husinec, Končer, Loob, Lukinić, Mihalković, Odobašić, Seny, Švagel, Županić
Coats of Arms of the Croatian-Slavonian Nobility: examples
(source: Ivan Bojničić, Der Adel von Kroatien und Slawonien, 1899.)
Social importance and political activity

- From a legal point of view, there were no differences in the rights of the nobility: Croatian-Slavonian nobility (together with aristocracy) enjoyed considerable fiscal and administrative autonomy, tax exemption, and had exclusive right on public offices.
- Middle nobility politically more influential at the local level than aristocracy; shaped the collective identity of the Croatian-Slavonian nobility.
- A strong network of noble families existed in the Kingdom’s administration.
- Relations within the nobility itself relied on the system of patronage and various other forms of social and family ties that mostly originated in the period of continuous Ottoman wars: military and public service within the administration controlled by the Croatian-Slavonian estates.
The impact of the 18th-century state-building processes

- A number of administrative, fiscal, economic and social reforms had been carried out, esp. from 1750s to 1780s
- The administrative changes challenged the traditional structures of the Kingdom and marginalized the political influence of the Diet and the public offices held by the estates
- The fiscal autonomy and the tax exemption of the nobility was questioned
The relationship with the Court of Vienna

- Communication between the Court and the Estates permeated by their opposite understanding of the nature of governance: the Court advocated the “necessities of the time”, “public interests” or “general welfare”, the nobility safeguarded their privileges and invoked their “traditional rights” and their “grandfathers’ sacrifices for the dynasty”

- Cooperation with the local nobility was necessary for Vienna, both to implement reforms and to ensure legitimacy of the authorities at the local level.

- Aristocracy generally more loyal to the Court interests, but also socially, politically and culturally more tightly linked to the Court in Vienna than to the rest of the Croatian-Slavonian nobility: for creating a permanent base of loyal civil servants, it was for the Court more important to win the middle and lower nobility.
Egid Borié, the councillor of the *State Council*, 1761.: “it would be more useful for the state when the rich would pay taxes, and the poor serve the state”: a chance for the lower nobility for ascent, vertical mobility, and for a livelihood within the structure of a new, proto-modern administration.

Royal scholarships granted in order to attract the nobility to reformed higher schools

Easier access to careers in the structures of the proto-modern state for those who proved themselves to be receptive to reforms or loyal to the Habsburg court

Nobles were cautioned that, should they resist, “the path to rewards would forever be closed to them and their children”.

Patterns of promotion
The results

- Significant changes in the educational strategies of the Croatian-Slavonian nobility
- Most of the *bene possessionati* felt threatened by the reforms as a social group and tried to protect its interests within traditional bodies of political representation (Diet; county assemblies)
- Substantial nobles, with only several exceptions, failed to realize the importance of taking part in the continuous decision-making process; the poorer nobility was more willing to accept the opportunities offered by the Court of Vienna
- The 18th-century reforms rather formed the basis for the later rise of the middle class, while the nobility generally adopted a more conservative position, possibly leading to its political, economic and social decline.
Thank you for your attention!