



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-Slavonian Kingdom
 - ca. 96% of the nobility had their landed estates in Croatia / Croatian counties
 - ca. 84% of the nobility possessed 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.

Patterns of promotion

- 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”.

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!

