CHAPTER 4

The Reconstruction of Domestic Communities in the Branković Region of Serbia in 1455

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1 Introduction

After the death of Prince Dušan The Great (1308–1355),1 who had conquered great territories and thus created a most powerful medieval Serbian state

* The present contribution is based on research carried out for the author's MA thesis, “Teorijsko–konceptualni i metodološki problemi u istraživanju porodice i domaćinstva na osnovu turskog popisa Oblasti Brankovića iz 1455. Godine” [Theoretical-Conceptual and Methodological Problems in the Study of Family and Household on the Basis of the Turkish Census of the Branković Region from Year 1455], Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Belgrade, 1995. Several studies have appeared since then, which it has not been possible to take into account here. The author and editors are most grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing their attention to the following, which are included as indications of recent work: Ema Miljković, Смедеревски санџак 1476–1560: земља – насеља – становништво [The Sanjak of Smederevo 1476–1560: Land – Settlements – Population] (Belgrade, 2004); eadem, "Породица у пљевљском крају у првом веку османске владавине" [Family in the Region of Pljevlja in the First Century of Ottoman Rule], Гласник Завичајног музеја (Пљевља), 2 (2001), 103–117; eadem, "Османске пописне књиге као извор за историју српског народа под османском влашћу (О постојећим критичким издањима и планираним пројектима)" [Ottoman Census Books as a Source for the History of Serbian People under Ottoman Rule: on Present Critical Editions and Planned Projects], Бањалучки новембарски сусрети "Наука и образовање", Филозофски факултет у Бањалуци, Научни скупови, 6: 1 (2006), 269–281; eadem, "Studies of Ottoman History in Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia (Modern Serbian, Montenegrin and Croatian Historiography on the Ottoman Empire)", Türkiye Araştırma Dergisi, Cilt 8, Sayı 15, XX, (2010), 1–18; eadem and Siniša Mišić, “Structure of the Serbian family in the late Middle Ages”, Romanian Journal of Population Studies, 6: 2 (2012), 5–18; Aleksandra Vuletić, Porodica u Srbiji sredinom XIX veka [Family in Serbia during the 19th Century] (Belgrade, 2002); eadem, Брак у Кнежевини Србији [Marriage in the Principality of Serbia] (Belgrade, 2008); eadem, "Породичне везе јавних личности Србије током друге половине 19. века у мемоарским делима" [Family Relations in Serbia During the Second Half of the 19th Century in Memoir Literature], in Перо и повест: зборник радова [Belgrade, 1999], 163–172; eadem, "Из породичног живота Илије Гарашина" From the Family Life of Ilija Garašanin, in Писмо: зборник радова [Belgrade, 2001], 129–139; eadem, “Структура сеоске породице у Клућу средином 19. Века”
in political and military terms, there came a period of huge decline and disintegration. His son and inheritor, Prince Uroš V, was too weak to resist the selfish interests of local nobles who jeopardized central administration and were therefore threatening to bring about the disintegration of the country. There were several families who were struggling to overtake the power, the most dominant being the Mrnjavčević. Although some of them approved the sovereignty of Prince Uroš V, such as Lazar Hrebeljanović in southern parts of Serbia (see Figure 4.1) and Vuk Branković in Kosovo, generally speaking they nevertheless ruled their territories independently. These were the circumstances when Serbs came across Ottomans, the newly emerging military force arriving in the Balkans. The ultimate debacle of Serbs in the battle of the Marica (a river in today's Bulgaria) in 1371 and the resulting death of Prince Uroš V spelt the total demise of Serbian medieval empire. The most outstanding among the prince's successors was Lazar Hrebeljanović, who enlarged his territories to include great parts of lands with the towns of Niš, Užice as well as his later capital town of Kruševac (see Figure 4.1). He also came into possession of the renowned medieval mines of Novo Brdo and Rudnik. Apart from him, the other two great nobles were his two sons-in-law: Vuk Branković, lord of the region of Kosovo and Skoplje, and Đurađ Balšić of the County of Zeta. Lazar’s ambition to unite Serbian lands and impose restrictions on the power of local nobles was blocked by the Turks’ penetration of the territory which began in 1381. The resulting historic and military clash took place, famously, in Kosovo valley in 1389 and ended up with a huge Serbian defeat when the country lost the majority of its nobles. Both armies were headed by their


1 His empire had spread from the Danube in the North to the Gulf of Corinth in the south (today’s Greece), and from the Adriatic Coast and Dubrovnik (today’s Croatia) in the west to the town of Cavalla and the Aegean Sea (Greece) to the east.

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