

**CISTERCIANS AND NOBILITY IN MEDIEVAL CROATIA:
THE BABONIĆI FAMILY AND THE MONASTERIES
OF TOPUSKO (TOPLICA) AND KOSTANJEVICA (LANDSTRASS)
IN THE THIRTEENTH AND EARLY FOURTEENTH CENTURIES***

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In early spring of the year 1269 two members of the noble Babonići family, the brothers Jacob and Christian, were summoned into the presence of Duke Bela, son of the Hungarian king Bela IV, to defend themselves against accusations that they held certain lands in the Una river valley illegally. Accused by a group of lesser nobles from Dubica County, the brothers tried to defend themselves by claiming that these lands were their property by hereditary right, given to them in legacy by their grandfather, Lord Stephen I of Gorička; the Babonići brothers further asserted that they held several grants issued by successive Hungarian kings. When Duke Bela asked them to produce these charters, they stated that they did not have them in hand because they were kept at the Cistercian abbey in Kostanjevica. Duke Bela

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In this paper modern versions of the names for both monasteries have been used because it is these versions which are commonly used in modern Slovenian and Croatian historiography. Nevertheless, author is fully aware of possible confusion which can arise because names Toplica and Landstrass are more familiar to the western European scholars. See notes 2 and 3 for explanations.

Abbreviations

ANČIĆ, “Cistercitska opatija” Mladen ANČIĆ, “Cistercitska opatija u Topuskom do pretvaranja u komendu [*The Cistercian abbey in Topusko until its conversion into commendē*]”, *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest* 27, Zagreb 1994, p. 29-42.

CD *Diplomatički zbornik Kraljevine Hrvatske, Dalmacije i Slavonije. Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae* vol. 2 (1904), 3 (1905), 4 (1906), 5 (1907), 6 (1908), 7 (1909), 8 (1910), 9 (1911), 10 (1912), 11 (1913), 12 (1914), ed. Tadija SMIČIKLAS, Zagreb; vol. 13 (1915), ed. Marko KOSTRENIĆ, Emilij LASZOWSKI; vol. 14 (1916), 15 (1934), 16 (1976), ed. Marko KOSTRENIĆ; vol. 17 (1981) ed. Stjepan GUNJAČA; vol. 18 (1990), ed. Duje RENDIĆ-MIOČEVIĆ

KEKEZ Hrvoje KEKEZ, “Između dva kralja: plemićki rod Babonića u vrijeme promjena na ugarsko-hrvatskom prijestolju, od 1290. do 1309. godine [Between two Kings: The Babonić Family in the Period of Dynastic Succession to the Croatian and Hungarian Throne, 1290–1310]”, *Povijesni prilozi*, vol. 35, Zagreb 2008, p. 61-89.

then ordered them to produce the charters in his presence and appointed a date for the new assembly.¹

This extract from the life of two members of the Babonići family demonstrates one significant connection between the medieval Croatian nobility and the Cistercian Order. This article will examine the role of the Cistercians in medieval Croatian society in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, through a case study of the relationship between the Babonići family and two Cistercian monasteries: Blessed Virgin Mary in Topusko² in modern Croatia and Saint Mary in Kostanjevica³ in Slovenia. The monastery in Kostanjevica was established near the border of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, at the edge of the Babonići family's political sphere of influence. In contrast, the monastery in Topusko was situated near Sjenčnjak castle, which was their main stronghold.

I. CONTEXT

1. History

Before discussing the relationship between the Babonići family and these two monasteries, a brief context for medieval Croatia will help to set the stage. Historically, Croatia is located at the crossroads of three major European regions: Central Europe, the Balkans and the Mediterranean. At the beginning of the twelfth century Croatia entered into a union with the powerful medieval Kingdom of Hungary, which meant that Croats shared common kings with Hungary. Nevertheless, during the period of this union, Croatian lands continued to possess a certain level of autonomy.⁴ (Fig. 1)

From the earliest Croat settlements in the regions where they live today—and especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—their land had been divided

¹ This event is described in a charter issued by Lord Bela, Duke of Slavonia, Dalmatia and Croatia in the first half of 1269, and will be discussed in context below. (CD 5, p. 514-516).

² The present-day city of Topusko is called *Toplica* or a variation (*Toplicza*, *Töplica*) in all surviving medieval documents. The name came from the Slavic (Croatian) word for a spring (*toplice*); there are many natural springs in that area which were used as bathing resorts even in the Roman period. Despite the legend that the name Topusko came from the Slavic word for cannon (*top*), which can be connected with the cannons that were used by Ottomans in the 16th century, there is more scientific explanation. Michael VON KUNNITS wrote that the original Slavic name (*Toplicza* or *Toplika*) was changed via the influence of the Hungarian language, most likely in the late Middle Ages, to become the current Topusko (*Toplica* → *Tapolca* → *Topolca* → *Topuzka* → *Topusko*). Michael VON KUNNITS, *Povijesno topografski opis mineralnog kupališta Topusko* [*Historical and topographical description of the mineral baths in Topusko*], Topusko, 1827 (reprint: 1997) p. 21-22.

³ In contrast to Topusko, the medieval German version of the contemporary city of Kostanjevica on Krka (*Landstrass*) was changed during 17th and 18th centuries to the Slavic (Slovenian) name. It is likely that the common people in the area used the Slavic version even in the earlier period, but since most of present-day Slovenia was for many centuries under Habsburg rule where there was a strong German influence, the Slavic version of the name was suppressed. The name Kostanjevica comes from Slavic word for chestnut (*kestenje*). Even today there are many chestnut woods in the area.

⁴ *Povijest Hrvata* [*The History of the Croats*], vol. 1, ed. Franjo ŠANJEK, Zagreb 2003, p. 259-290.



Fig. 1. Southeastern Europe in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. (map: author)

into three independent, but interconnected, kingdoms: Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia. During the reigns of the late Árpáds and Anjou kings in Hungary there had been an administrator in each of these Croatian kingdoms. These so-called bans (Latin *bani*) were high judges and had the power to assemble the army. They were usually members of local noble families appointed by the Hungarian king.⁵

By the end of the eleventh century the medieval Kingdom of Slavonia was incorporated into the powerful Kingdom of Hungary. Although not many documents have been preserved, archaeological evidence has shown that these areas were inhabited by a Slavic population, most likely Croats.⁶ Territorially the Kingdom of Slavonia was divided into several royal counties. Each of these counties was governed by the king's deputies, called *župani* (Croatian) or *comites* (Latin). Similar territorial organization can be found throughout the medieval Kingdom of

⁵ Pál ENGEL, *The Realm of St Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895-1526*, London/New York 2001, p. 36, 91, 151-153.

⁶ ŠANJEK, *Povijest Hrvata*, p. 47-140.

Hungary. It was common for the office of the *župan* to be headed by a member of the local aristocracy.⁷ One of the most powerful medieval noble families in the Kingdom of Slavonia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was the Babonići family, later lords of Blagaj.⁸

2. Historiography

a. Topusko

In the early sixteenth century—especially after the battle of Mohach in 1526⁹—the territories of central Croatia were under Ottoman attack. Because of constant raids on the area, the Cistercians appear to have abandoned Topusko by 1533,¹⁰ and even after their attempt to return in the mid-sixteenth century, the Ottomans plundered and ravaged the remains of the abbey several more times throughout the remainder of the century.¹¹ It is likely that most of the abbey's archives were destroyed during this period. A small number of documents survived in the archives of the surrounding ecclesiastical centres (e.g., the cathedral archive of the chapter of Zagreb), in the royal archive in Buda,¹² and in the archives of the neighbouring noble families; references have also been found in the Vatican archives. These charters were published in several collections of medieval documents edited from the late nineteenth century onwards.¹³ Further references to the abbey in Topusko

⁷ ENGEL, *The Realm of St Stephen*, p. 39-42.

⁸ Nada KLAIĆ, *Povijest Hrvata u razvijenoj srednjem vijeku [History of the Croats in the Late Middle Ages]*, Zagreb 1976, p. 340-450.

⁹ After the defeat of the Hungarian troops and the death of King Louis II Jagiellon in the battle of Mohach in August 1526, most of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary was opened to constant raids by the Ottoman cavalry. Details concerning the battle and its meaning for the historical development of East Central Europe may be found in Géza PERJÉŠ, "The fall of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary: Mohács 1526—Buda 1541", *War and Society in East Central Europe*, vol. XXVI, Boulder 1989, p. 171-272.

¹⁰ Due to the strategic position of the abbey—and the fact that it was most likely fortified—the Hungarian king, Ferdinand I von Habsburg, apparently did not want it to remain abandoned. In 1533 he offered Lord Peter Keglević of Bužim some sort of patronage of the abbey (including income from abbey lands) if Peter would bring Cistercian monks back to Topusko. They did apparently return, but likely left again by 1548 when Topusko was heavily plundered by the Ottomans (see n. 11). The abbey was certainly abandoned by 1558 when King Ferdinand offered it, along with its estates, to the bishop of Zagreb on the condition that he fortify the abbey further for greater protection (Ivan OSTOJIĆ, *Benediktinci u Hrvatskoj i ostalim našim krajevima [The Benedictines in Croatia and the rest of our lands]*, vol. III, Split 1965, p. 215).

¹¹ As recorded in the documents, the Ottomans had ravaged the abbey in 1548, and several more times in 1565 and 1593. Nevertheless, the worst period was between 1577 and 1580, with the most damage done to Topusko in early summer of 1579 when the Ottomans burned the monastic complex to the ground. (Radoslav LOPAŠIĆ, *Bihać i bihaćka krajina [The City of Bihać and the County of Bihać]*, Zagreb 1890, p. 22, 165).

¹² Most of the surviving medieval charters of the royal Hungarian dynasty today are kept in the Hungarian National Archive (Magyar Országos Levéltár) in Buda.

¹³ The most important are: *CD*, vol. 2-18; *A Blagay-család oklevéltára. Codex diplomaticus comitum de Blagay*, ed. Lajos THALLÓCZY, Samu BARABÁS, Budapest 1897; *Monumenta Croatica Vaticana, Camera Apostolica, Obligationes et solutiones camerale*, vol 1-2, ed. Josip BARBARIĆ, Josip KOLANOVIĆ, Zagreb/Rome 1996-2001.

can be found in the *Statuta*, but they are sporadic and of a general nature.¹⁴ The total number of surviving references to Topusko for the period of approximately 350 years is less than 200. Considering this—and the lack of archaeological excavation of the abbey—modern historiography contains only a narrow range of material concerning the political and social role of the Cistercians in Topusko. Any further information on the economic, cultural, or daily life of the Topusko monks will remain limited until by site can be excavated.

Nevertheless, Topusko Abbey and its history became the object of historical research as soon as modern Croatian historiography was developed in the first half of the nineteenth century. After visiting Topusko in the 1830s, Radovan Filjak published a short history of the abbey in 1840.¹⁵ Twenty years later, Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski provided the first detailed history of the abbey,¹⁶ and his work benefited from the first archaeological excavations conducted by Šime Ljubić and his team.¹⁷ The best overview of the abbey's history, based on the surviving written sources, was written by Ivan Krstitelj Tkalčić in 1897.¹⁸ At the beginning of the twentieth century several new medieval charters concerning the abbey were discovered, analyzed and published by Emilij Laszowski¹⁹ and Vjekoslav Klaić.²⁰ In the second half of twentieth century the abbey once again came under the scrutiny of Croatian historians who began investigating special issues such as life and politics in the medieval kingdom of Slavonia. Josip Adamček studied economic life and the peasant uprising on the abbey's estates in middle of the sixteenth century,²¹ while Mladen Ančić examined the ways in which the huge Cistercian estates had been governed from the foundation of the abbey in 1205 up to their absorption into the commendatory system in the early fifteenth century.²² Most recently, in 2008

¹⁴ Joseph-Maria CANIVEZ, *Statuta capitulorum generalium ordinis cisterciensis ab anno 1116 ad annum 1786*, Louvain 1933-1935, vol. 1: 1214, p. 421, n° 17; 1215, p. 437, n° 14; 1219, p. 514-515, n° 57; vol. 3: 1265, p. 35, n° 20; 1272, p. 112, n° 41; 1282, p. 223, n° 25; 1294, p. 271, n° 22.

¹⁵ Radovan FILJAK, "Kloster dann Abtei und Schloss Toplica (Topocz) nun Thopusko," *Croatia Zeitschrift* 47 (1840), p. 1-9.

¹⁶ Ivan KUKULJEVIĆ SAKCINSKI, "Opatija b. d. M. u Topuskom [*Abbey b. v. M. in Topusko*]", *Književnik: časopis za jezik i povijest hrvatsku i srbsku, i prirodne znanosti*, vol. 1, Zagreb 1864, p. 78-89.

¹⁷ Šime LJUBIĆ, "Topusko (*Ad fines*)", *Viestnik hrvatskoga arheologičkoga društva*, vol. 1, n° 2, Zagreb 1880, p. 1-11.

¹⁸ Ivan Krstitelj TKALČIĆ, "Cistercijski samostan u Topuskom [*The Cistercian monastery in Topusko*]", *Viestnik hrvatskoga arheološkoga društva*, vol. 2, n° 1, Zagreb 1896-1897, p. 110-129.

¹⁹ Emilij LASZOWSKI, "K povijesti opatije Topuske [*On the history of the abbey in Topusko*]", *Vjestnik Hrvatsko-Slavonsko-Dalmatinskog Zemaljskog arkiva*, vol. 1, Zagreb 1899, p. 199-200; Emilij LASZOWSKI, "Prilog za povijest opatije topuske [*A Contribution toward the history of the abbey in Topusko*]", *Straine Jazu*, vol. 32, Zagreb 1907, p. 92-130.

²⁰ Vjekoslav KLAJČIĆ, "Dva priloga za povijest cistercičanskoga samostana u Topuskom [*Two contributions for the history of the Cistercian monastery in Topusko*]", *Vjestnik Hrvatsko-Slavonsko-Dalmatinskog Zemaljskog arkiva*, vol. 3, Zagreb 1901, p. 263-264.

²¹ Josip ADAMČEK, "Nemiri na posjedima Topuske opatije sredinom XVI. stoljeća [*The uprisings on the estates of the abbey in Topusko in the middle of the 16th century*]", *Historijski zbornik*, vol. 21/22, Zagreb 1968-1969, p. 283-308.

²² ANČIĆ, "Cistercijska opatija", p. 29-42.

Ana Novak defended her M. Phil. thesis on Topusko in which she details the historiography and describes the history before and after the arrival of the Cistercians. In addition, she examines the cultural, political, and economic influence of the Cistercians on the surrounding areas, but also emphasizes their role in medieval Slavonia and explains the abbey's defensive position during the Ottoman raids of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²³ In addition, Topusko Abbey has often been mentioned in books or articles containing overviews of the history and role of the Cistercians in medieval Croatian lands.²⁴

None of these authors has, however, attempted to explain more than the most superficial relationship between the abbey and the neighboring nobility: aristocratic patronage, connections of these nobles to other Cistercian abbeys, and how such relationships may have affected the political life of the local nobility.

b. Kostanjevica

Despite the fact that the Cistercian abbey in Kostanjevica was raided several times by the Ottomans in the mid-sixteenth century, and that the monastic buildings survived two major fires (one in the mid-sixteenth century, the other in 1760), most of its archive and library survived until the end of eighteenth century.²⁵ On 27 March 1706, the state had made an effort to prevent further ruin of the most important collections of medieval monastic and church archives by ordering that records be made of all documents kept in church and monastic archives. Seven months later, on 23 October 1706, special notice was sent to the abbey in Kostanjevica because the abbot had failed to list the records kept in the abbey's archive,²⁶ but the warning unfortunately never moved him to action and no list was made. The emperor Joseph II von Habsburg (1780-1790) abolished all monasteries in the Habsburg Empire—including Kostanjevica—which were not hospitals.²⁷ But before closing the monasteries, in 1782 the emperor ordered that all monastic libraries and archives had to be inventoried and protected. Kostanjevica, however, was closed and abandoned on 5 January 1785, before Count John Nepomuk Ursini of Blagay came with orders to transport all important documents and books to

²³ Ana NOVAK, *Topusko u razdoblju od dolaska cistercita do kraja srednjega vijeka* [Topusko from the arrival of the Cistercians to the end of the Middle Ages], M.Phil. thesis, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, Zagreb 2008.

²⁴ The most important are: Milan TURKOVIĆ, *Povijest opatija reda cistercita u Hrvatskoj-Slavoniji i Dalmaciji* [History of the Cistercian abbeys in Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia], Sušak 1936; Josip BUTURAC, "Poviestni priegled redovništva u Hrvatskoj [Historical overview of the clergy in Croatia]", *Croatia Sacra*, vol. 20/21, Zagreb 1943, p. 11-12; Mladen ANČIĆ, "Cistercians in Thirteenth-Century Croatia", *Mediaevistik*, vol. 10, Salzburg 1997, p. 205-218.

²⁵ Jože MLINARIČ, "Usoda arhiva cistercijanske opatije Kostanjevice [The history of the archive of the Cistercian abbey in Kostanjevica]", *Kronika: časopis za slovensko krajevno zgodovino*, vol. 20, n° 3, Ljubljana 1972, p. 146.

²⁶ MLINARIČ, "Usoda arhiva", p. 146.

²⁷ *Povijest Hrvata* [The History of the Croats], vol. 2, ed. Mirko VALENTIĆ, Lovorka ČORALIĆ, Zagreb 2005, p. 269-273.

Ljubljana, the capital of the province of Carniola.²⁸ In the period after the closing the abbey, but before the count's arrival, the library and archive were heavily plundered. The remaining documents were sent to Ljubljana to be kept in the provincial government building.²⁹ It was in 1889 that the surviving archival material was transferred to the National Museum in Ljubljana to be preserved under proper conditions.³⁰ What is left of the abbey archive—ninety-four codices (from 1282 to 1843) and 170 charters (from 1249 to 1761)—is today kept in the Slovenian State Archive in Ljubljana.³¹ Most of the medieval charters have been published in various collections of medieval documents edited from the late nineteenth century onwards.³²

Because of geographical and historical connections to the Cistercian abbey of Stična, the history of Kostanjevica Abbey has often been mentioned in works concerning the history and the social, economic and cultural role of Stična. Many references to Kostanjevica can therefore be found in publications by Josip Srebrenič,³³ Saria Baludin,³⁴ Metod Mikuž,³⁵ Marijan Zadnikar³⁶ and Ema Umek.³⁷ It was Jože Mlinarič who, in the middle of the twentieth century, became interested in the history of Kostanjevica Abbey. He first published several articles concerning the economic, social and cultural relationship of Kostanjevica to the surrounding area,³⁸ and in 1987—culminating more than 30 years of research on the subject—produced a monograph in which he described the history of the abbey from the foundation to its closing in 1786, including a list of the abbots as well as Latin

²⁸ MLINARIČ, "Usoda arhiva", p. 147.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147-148.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³² *Archiv für Heimatkunde*, vol. 1-2, ed. Franc SCHUMI, Ljubljana 1882-1887; *Monumenta historica ducatus Carinthiae*, vol. 1-4, ed. August von JAKSICH, Klagenfurt 1896-1915; *Gradivo za zgodovino Ljubljane v srednjem veku [Documents for the history of Ljubljana in the Middle Ages]*, vol 1-12, ed. Franc KOS, Milko KOS, Ljubljana 1906-1968.

³³ JOSIP SREBRENIČ, *Stična: Črtice o cistercijanskem samostanu v Stični [Stična: Sketches on the Cistercian monastery in Stična]*, Ljubljana 1919.

³⁴ SARIA BALDUIN, "Srednjeveški zagovor iz Stične in njegove paralele [Medieval vows from Stična and its parallels]", *Etnolog*, vol. 11/12, Ljubljana 1937-1939, p. 245-253.

³⁵ METOD MIKUŽ, *Vrsta stiških opatov: donsei k zgodovini stiške opatije [List of the abbots of the Stična: contribution to the history of Stična Abbey]*, PhD thesis, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana 1941.

³⁶ MARIJAN ZADNIKAR, *Stiški samostan [The monastery of Stična]*, Ljubljana 1971.

³⁷ EMA UMEK, *Samostani Kostanjevica, Pleterje in Stična [Monasteries Kostanjevica, Pleterje and Stična]*, Ljubljana 1974.

³⁸ JOŽE MLINARIČ, *Kostanjeviško gospostvo: po urbarju iz leta 1625 [The estates of Kostanjevica: according to the Urbarium from the year 1625]*, Kostanjevica na Krki 1970; JOŽE MLINARIČ, *Topografija posesti kostanjeviške opatije: 1234-1786 [Topography of the estates of Kostanjevica Abbey: 1234-1786]*, Maribor-Kostanjevica na Krki 1972; MLINARIČ, "Usoda arhiva", *passim*; JOŽE MLINARIČ, "Napad Uskokov na kostanjeviško cisterco leta 1736 [The attack of the Uskoks on the Cistercians of Kostanjevica in the year 1736]", *Kronika: časopis za slovensko krajevno zgodovino*, vol. 27, n° 2, Ljubljana 1979, p. 100-106; JOŽE MLINARIČ, "Cistercijska opatija Kostanjevica 1234-1786 [The Cistercian abbey in Kostanjevica 1234-1786]", *Redovništvo na slovenskem*, Ljubljana 1984, p. 217-237.

transcriptions of the most important documents about, or produced in, Kostanjevica Abbey.³⁹ Despite this prodigious survey, Mlinarič did not attempt to explain more than superficially the connections between the abbey and the Babonići family and how these relationships affected the political life of the latter.

One of the goals of this article is to provide a more detailed description of the relations between Cistercians of Kostanjevica and the Babonići family in the late thirteenth and early of fourteenth centuries, especially concerning aristocratic patronage and the vital connections with the abbey in Topusko.

II. FIRST CONTACTS AND THE ROLE OF THE CISTERCIANS OF TOPUSKO IN THE POLITICAL ASCENT OF THE BABONIĆI FAMILY

The origins of the Babonići family may be found in the medieval county of Gora in present-day central Croatia.⁴⁰ The first recorded member is Stephen I, to whom the Hungarian king Emeric, around the year 1200, gave land in Vodica and all income from it.⁴¹ Despite some problems with the charter,⁴² most historians agree that Stephen I of Gorička was the founder of the Babonići lineage.

The Babonići slowly rose from their origins as lesser nobility in the Gora County at the dawn of the thirteenth century to become the leading noble family in the medieval kingdom of Slavonia.⁴³ Their power reached its apex in the early fourteenth century when they had become the most influential magnates in the kingdom. Their estates stretched from the river Vrbas in the east to the river Kupa and the border with the German Empire in the west; the southern borders were the slopes of the Kapela Mountain.⁴⁴ (Fig. 2)

The Cistercian monastery in Topusko had been a royal foundation founded by King Andrew II in 1205,⁴⁵ but very soon after the Cistercians arrived in Croatia the Babonići came into contact with them. It is possible that they were one of the six

³⁹ Jože MLINARIČ, *Kostanjeviška opatija 1234-1786 [The abbey of Kostanjevica 1234-1786]*, Kostanjevica na Krki 1987.

⁴⁰ Ljudevit THALLÓCZY, "Historička istraživanja o plemenu goričkih i vodičkih knezova [Historical research on the Gora and Vodica families]", *Glasnik zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini*, vol. 9, Sarajevo 1897, p. 334; KLAIČ, *Povijest Hrvata*, p. 346; Mladen ANČIĆ, "Vlastelinstvo hrvatskoga hercega u Gorskoj županiji [The estates of the Croatian duke in Gora county]", *Povijesni prilozi*, vol. 15, Zagreb 1996, p. 219-220.

⁴¹ *CD 2*, p. 359-361.

⁴² The document is preserved as *transumptum* from 1582; the Latin text is from the late 16th century. Most of the information is historically correct except the detail stating that Stephen I was the son of Nicola Ursini, a legend introduced into the family history in the mid-15th century. (N. KLAIČ, *Povijest Hrvata*, p. 343.) 11

⁴³ ANČIĆ, "Vlastelinstvo hrvatskoga", p. 219-220.

⁴⁴ KEKEZ, p. 61-89.

⁴⁵ The Cistercians were invited to Croatia by the Hungarian king, Andrew II (1205-1235), in 1205 (*CD 2*, p. 54-55). The first monks came to Topusko from Clairvaux Abbey (OSTOJČ, *Benediktinici u Hrvatskoj*, p. 209).

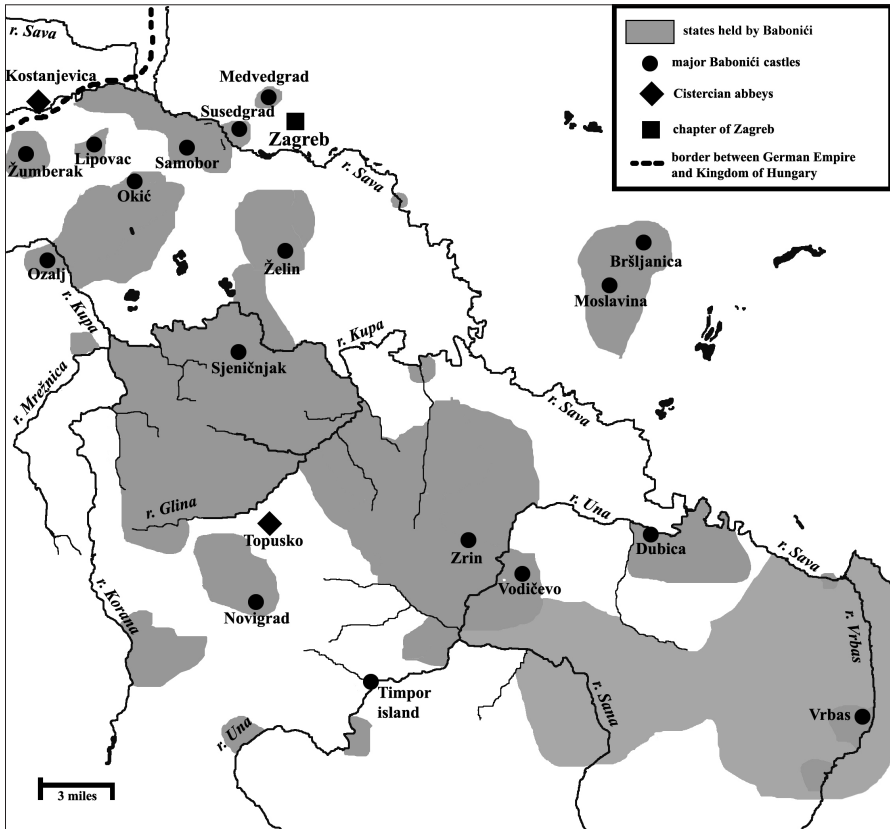


Fig. 2. Estates held by the Babonići family in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. (map: author)

noble families of Gora County (*sex generationes de Gora*) who became neighbours of the Topusko Cistercians via a grant from the Hungarian king at the beginning of the thirteenth century. According to the formal foundation charter issued by King Andrew II in 1211, Topusko was given the county of Gora, including estates, towns and markets, with the exception of the estates of the six noble families—as well as those owned by the Templars—which were excluded from this grant.⁴⁶

Since Topusko had been founded by King Andrew II in 1205 as a royal monastery, it was under the direct protection of the Hungarian king. During his firm

⁴⁶ *Dedimus autem eidem monasterio ... in dotem, totum videlicet comitatum de Gorra cum omnibus pertinentiis suis, preter pertinentias Templariorum in eodem comitatu contentas et preter sex generationes cum tenementis earum* (CD 3, p. 104). See also ANČIĆ, "Cistercijska opatija", p. 33.

reign—as well as that of his successor, Bela IV—there was no need for the Cistercians to become greatly involved with the neighbouring nobility.⁴⁷ Until the last three decades of the thirteenth century, royal power was unquestionable;⁴⁸ the monastery in Topusko thus enjoyed undisturbed development without the interference of the neighbouring nobility or ecclesiastical institutions such as the cathedral chapter of Zagreb.

Firmer relations between the Cistercians in Topusko and their neighbours, the Babonići, were nevertheless established before the middle of the thirteenth century. A conflict had started because of the common practice of plunder and blood revenge called *vražda*.⁴⁹ Witnesses at a peacemaking assembly in 1243—between the citizens of the coastal city of Senj and the Babonići—were monks from Topusko,⁵⁰ present on behalf of the Babonići.

Connections between the Babonići and the Cistercians continued in the 1260s. The most influential person in Slavonia at that time was Lord Roland of the noble family of Rathold (*dominus Rolandus banus tocius Sclavonie*), who, acting as the king's viceroy, was ban of Slavonia from 1261 to 1267.⁵¹ In order to achieve his main goal of consolidating the king's power in the medieval kingdoms of Slavonia and Croatia,⁵² he had initiated the exchange of certain royal estates for lands in Vodica near the Una River which belonged to the Babonići.⁵³ Ban Roland wanted these lands because the Una River was the main medieval route from Dalmatia and Croatia to Slavonia and Hungary,⁵⁴ and he wished to control it; to this end he tried to acquire properties and castles in the valley. To compensate the Babonići, Ban Roland had offered his estates at Grđen (*Gergyen*) and Bojna (*Boyna*).

The agreement was made on 6 July 1266 and the charter issued by the bishop of Knin in Grabovica. Once again, one of the witnesses for the Babonići was Abbot Mathew of Topusko.⁵⁵ By acquiring this land in Bojna, the Babonići became immediate neighbours of the Cistercians there.

⁴⁷ ANČIĆ, "Cistercitska opatija", p. 32.

⁴⁸ The reign of the Hungarian kings Andrew II (1205-1235) and Bela IV (1235-1270) was a period of firm royal rule. The two kings made great strides in reconstructing the organization of royal territories and reforming the military, especially King Bela IV after the great Mongol invasion of 1242/43. The situation changed greatly after the sudden death of the next king, Stephen V, in 1272, after only two years of rule. Several pretenders to the throne appeared, and this led to a civil war after which royal power diminished all over the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. For more details see ENGEL, *The Realm of St Stephen*, p. 101-111; Zoltan J. KOSZTOLNYIK, *Hungary in the Thirteenth Century*, New York 1996.

⁴⁹ ...*inimicitia, quae dicitur vulgarice Wrasda* (CD 4, p. 181-182).

⁵⁰ ...*capitulum fratrum de Toplica* (CD 4, p. 181-182).

⁵¹ Vjekoslav KLAČIĆ, *Povijest Hrvata [The History of Croats]*, Zagreb 1899, p. 242.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 238-242.

⁵³ CD 5, p. 386-388.

⁵⁴ Concerning the main routes from the east Adriatic coast through Croatian lands to Hungary in late Middle Ages, see Lovorka ČORALIĆ, *Put, putnici, putovanja [Routes, Passengers and Journeys]*, Zagreb 1997.

⁵⁵ *Nos Ladislaus divina miseracione episcopus Tyniniensis, frater M. Dictus abbas de Toplica et commendator de Gara videlicet frater Jakminus* (CD 5, p. 386-388).

Several years later, obviously unhappy with the loss of important possessions in Vodica, the Babonići tried to get them back. But at the same time they wished to retain their newly acquired possessions of Grđen and Bojna, and they used the changed political situation to do so. In these efforts they were helped by the Cistercians of the monastery Saint Mary in Kostanjevica, which had been founded in 1234 by Lord Bernard of Spanheim, Duke of Carinthia, and was situated on the slopes of Mount Žumberak near the border of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary.⁵⁶

This brings us back to the story with which this article began. In the first half of the year 1269 the Babonići brothers, Lords Jacob I and Christian, were accused of illegally holding land in Vodica against the claims of lesser nobility of the area.⁵⁷ The brothers asserted their rights in the presence of Duke Bela, defending themselves by claiming that this property was theirs by hereditary right, having been bequeathed to them by their grandfather, Lord Stephen of Gorička. According to the brothers, the land was given to their grandfather by King Bela III and confirmed by later kings, Emeric I and Bela IV. The Babonići further claimed that they possessed a bull from King Emeric I with a golden seal, and two others from King Bela IV, also with golden seals.⁵⁸

Duke Bela was apparently not satisfied with their word, as he ordered them to produce the charters in question and appointed a date for a new assembly. When the day came, the Babonići arrived with only one charter, and it carried only a wax seal. In place of the other charters, the brothers showed transcripts with the seal of the abbot of the Cistercian abbey in Kostanjevica, claiming that the originals were kept safe in the archive of that Cistercian abbey.⁵⁹ After he read these transcripts, Duke Bela decided in favour of the Babonići, and placed the lands in Vodica in their hands. In this manner, the Babonići succeeded in keeping the lands in Vodica without losing the possessions of Grđen and Bojna.

One should not be surprised by the cooperative attitude of the unnamed abbot of Kostanjevica Abbey, nor by the fact that the Babonići kept their important documents in a Cistercian archive. In later years the Babonići granted several further donations to Kostanjevica.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ ...*apud Landestrof forum nostrum in valle que Topliz vulgariter dicitur*, MLINARIČ, "Cistercijska opatija", p. 217.

⁵⁷ A total of twenty persons filed a claim against the Babonići brothers for illegally holding land in Vodica. The plaintiffs were members of the lesser nobility of Dubica County and also servants of Vodica castle (*ipsi fuissent iobagiones castrum in terra Vodichan*). Their leader was Bora, son of Hlapuna, who filed a claim in his name and that of his family (*proximus suis*). See CD 5, p. 514-516.

⁵⁸ ...*tria haberent privilegia, unum videlicet regis Himerici sub bulla aurea, et aliud illustris Bele regis, karissimi patris nostri similiter sub bulla aurea, et tertium privilegium eiusdem domini Bele regis, karissimi patris nostri bulla cerea consignatum* (CD 5, p. 515).

⁵⁹ ...*transcriptum eorundem duorum privilegiorum sub sigillo abbatis de Lonscruht, ubi ipsa privilegia dicebant fuisse deposita* (CD 5, p. 515).

⁶⁰ Among the most important patrons of Kostanjevica in the 13th and 14th centuries—such as counts of Spanheim and King Henry of Bohemia—historian Jože Mlinarič, the Slovenian expert in the history of Kostanjevica, includes also the kindred of Babonići (MLINARIČ, "Cistercijska opatija", p. 220).

III. THE DECLINE OF ROYAL POWER AND THE RISE OF BABONIĆI PATRONAGE AT TOPUSKO ABBEY

The Cistercian abbey of Saint Mary in Topusko had benefited from the protection of the Hungarian kings from its foundation in 1205 until the death of King Bela IV in 1270.⁶¹ The dynastic crises—especially during the 1290s when the Hungarian throne was taken by King Andrew III of Venice—meant diminished royal control throughout the medieval Kingdom of Hungary,⁶² and this naturally had an effect on Topusko Abbey. The Cistercians lost their powerful defenders, a situation which forced the abbots to search for other sources of protection. They attached themselves to the neighbouring nobility, mostly the Babonići, relying on their ascending influence.

Problems within the abbey mainly concerned a crisis in 1282 regarding the legitimacy of one Abbot Matthew. The General Chapter declared that he was an impostor and ordered him to abandon his position as abbot of Topusko so that a legitimate abbot could be elected.⁶³

The second indication of internal problems at Topusko was the lack of a sufficient number of lay brothers. The only possible solution was to buy serfs (*servi*) from neighbouring estates. Such economic changes were closely connected to the transformation of the granges to *predii*, an arrangement whereby goods from the *predium* were divided in a set ratio between the holder of the *predium* and the abbey itself.⁶⁴

⁶¹ ANČIĆ, “Cistercitska opatija”, p. 32.

⁶² The Hungarian king, Ladislaus IV (1272-1290), was assassinated by a group of Cumans near Cheresig in Bihar county on 10 July 1290, leaving no children. There was, however, a living Árpádián prince, Andrew III, grandson of Andrew II. Although the legitimacy of his lineage had earlier been questioned, the majority of the lords were willing to accept his claim to the throne and he was crowned king of Hungary on 23 July 1290. A new pretender to the Hungarian throne nevertheless soon appeared: Charles Martel of Anjou, son of Charles II of Anjou, King of Sicily, and Queen Mary of Naples, daughter of the late Hungarian king, Stephen V (1270-1272). The pretenders to the Hungarian throne from the Anjou dynasty (first Charles Martel, then after his death in 1295 his son Charles, called Caroberto) from Southern Italy had political support from the papacy as well as one of the most important Croatian noble families, the Šubići of Bribir, who were quasi-independent rulers in Croatia and Dalmatia (eastern Adriatic coast). The struggle between Andrew III of Hungary and the pretenders from the Anjou dynasty lasted the whole final decade of the 13th century, ending only with the death of Andrew III on 14 January 1301. Slightly before, at the invitation of the Šubići and other Croatian lords, Charles Robert had disembarked in Dalmatia in August 1300, though it took him almost whole first decade of the 14th century to crush the opposition of the Hungarian lords and the several pretenders to the throne. Caroberto was finally crowned as the Hungarian king Charles I (1309-1342) in 1309 in the church of Our Lady at Buda. (ENGEL, *The Realm of St Stephen*, p. 109-111, 128-130; Damir KARBIĆ, *The Šubići of Bribir: A Case Study of a Croatian Medieval Kindred*, PhD thesis, Central European University, Budapest 2000, p. 58-65.)

⁶³ *Quoniam iuxta beati Augustini sententiam, sicut poenitentibus misericordes esse iubemur, sic impenitentibus et obstinatis in malo misericordiam impendere prohibemur, statuit et ordinat Capitulum generale quod frater M. qui se gerit pro abbate de Thoppior, licet non sit, auctoritate Capituli generalis pro non abbate de cetero habeatur, et super aliis multis excessibus eius in quibus, ut dicitur, impunitus hucusque perseverat, per patrem abbatem puniatur, de restitutione autem alterius abbatis, qui metu mortis cessisse dicitur, patri abbati committitur, et quid inde, etc.* (CANIVEZ, *Statuta capitulorum generalium*, vol. 3, p. 223, n^o 25.)

⁶⁴ ANČIĆ, “Cistercitska opatija”, p. 35.

In the last three decades of the thirteenth century these circumstances forced the Topusko community to look for the confirmation of their rights to certain estates—not only from the king, but often from the neighbouring nobility, in this case the Babonići, the most powerful family in that part of the Kingdom of Slavonia. Their leader at the time was Lord Stephen IV, whose main stronghold was the castle at Sjeniĉnjak, and it is probable that an even closer affiliation between the Topusko Cistercians and the Babonići family therefore began in the 1270s.

Lord Stephen IV was an ambitious man. He wanted to raise his family to the position of being the leading magnates in the whole of the medieval kingdom of Slavonia, and also to become the Ban of the kingdom. This set him in opposition to two other powerful Slavonian families, the Gut-Keled and the Güssing. Very quickly this competition escalated into armed conflict, with battles mostly waged around Sjeniĉnjak castle. In 1277 during one of these skirmishes, the Ban Joachim of Gut-Keled was killed while fighting Babonići troops of Lord Stephen IV.⁶⁵

Several peace assemblies were held in 1278 and 1279,⁶⁶ the final one on 30 October 1280.⁶⁷ Of interest to this study is the assembly which took place on 6 November 1278 in the presence of Bishop Timothy of Zagreb and Abbot Matthew of Topusko.⁶⁸ As one of the conditions of this peace, it was agreed that all three sides would place their sons in the custody of Abbot Matthew to guarantee their good faith.⁶⁹ It is clear from this agreement that the abbot and community of Topusko enjoyed the trust and respect of the medieval Slavonian nobility.

The Babonići soon repaid the favours. In 1285 Lord Radoslav I, count of Glaž, Vrbas and Sana—brother of Lord Stephen IV—decided to return an island in the Una River to the Cistercians.⁷⁰ Lord Radoslav must have realized the advantages of good relations with Topusko Abbey. Perhaps he was expecting their help in a new conflict with Güssing family, or their support in his efforts to become the new leader of his family. On the other hand, the Topusko Cistercians were not secure in their ownership of certain lands; they apparently feared they would again lose possession of this island, so they asked Lord Radoslav I to repeat his donation, which he did once more on 7 May 1288.⁷¹

Meanwhile Radoslav's brother, Lord Stephen IV, was busy establishing a connection with the Cistercians at Kostanjevica, following the example of his relatives in the 1260s. On 9 February 1290 he granted several estates to the abbey.⁷² Several

⁶⁵ More about ban Joachim of Gut-Keled see: Marija KARBIĆ, "Joakim Pektar, slavonski ban iz plemićkog roda Gut Keled [Joakim Pektar of the Gut-Keled Kindred, a Ban of Slavonia]", *Godišnjak Njemačke narodnosne zajednice*, Osijek 2000, p. 19-24.

⁶⁶ More about the failed peace assemblies in the years 1278 and 1279, see KEKEZ, p. 64-68.

⁶⁷ CD 6, p. 362-363.

⁶⁸ CD 6, p. 261-266.

⁶⁹ *Stephanus banus debet restituere duos filios Nicolai bani et unum filium Alexandri bani in manus dicti venerabilis patris domini Timothei episcopi Zagrabienensis, fratris Mathei abbatis Toplicenensis et fratris Gerardi magistri domus militie templi per Ungariam et Sclavoniam conservandos et tenedos* (CD 6, p. 265).

⁷⁰ *insula Tympor sita iuxta fluvium Wen* (CD 6, p. 544).

⁷¹ CD 6, p. 608-609.

⁷² CD 6, p. 685-686.

years later, on 13 January 1295, Lord Stephen IV, by then very old,⁷³ composed a new charter donating several more estates to Kostanjevica.⁷⁴ This property was situated in the province of *Carniola* (present-day Slovenia), which was ruled by Lord Mainhard IV, count of Görz and Tyrol, who he agreed to this donation.⁷⁵

Perhaps we can find in this statement some of the reasons behind Lord Stephen's gift. It is important to remember that this is the period of greatest intensity in the relationship between the Cistercians and the Babonići.⁷⁶ It may be assumed that in taking advantage of the relationship with the Cistercians at Topusko and Kostanjevica, the Babonići—especially Lord Stephen IV—were attempting to establish relations with their powerful western neighbours, the counts of Görz and Tyrol. They were the families of the dominant magnates, whose members even tried to attain the imperial crown, and the Babonići could have benefited handsomely if they became affiliated with these counts. This is especially true when considering the relentless struggle for the Hungarian crown between King Andrew III, last descendant of the Árpád dynasty, and members of the Anjou dynasty from Southern Italy and Sicily.⁷⁷

In the later period these connections became even stronger. During the first two decades of the fourteenth century, Lord John Babonić was the active exponent of his family's policy towards its western neighbours. He is mentioned on several occasions in various services—mostly of a military nature—on behalf of Lord Henry II, count of Görz and Tyrol, and was married to Clare Eufemia, Lord Henry's sister.⁷⁸ John helped Henry in his military campaign in Furlany (modern-day northern Italy), when on 15 May 1309 John attacked and devastated the village of Mortegliano.⁷⁹

Furthermore, using his affiliation with the counts of Görz and Tyrol, John Babonić tried to attach himself to the powerful Habsburg dynasty, the dukes of Austria. Obviously he succeeded in doing so, as there are references to his military support of the Habsburgs in 1308 and 1309.⁸⁰

⁷³ It is likely that Ban Stephen of Sjeničnjak died sometime between 1295 and 1299. For more details about his death date, see KEKEZ, p. 75, n. 102.

⁷⁴ CD 7, p. 198-199.

⁷⁵ *...possessiones sitas in ducatu incliti viri domini Mainhardi ducis Karinthie, ipsius fauore et beniuolencia mediante* (CD 7, p. 198).

⁷⁶ NOVAK, *Topusko u razdoblju*, p. 68.

⁷⁷ ENGEL, *The Realm of St Stephen*, p. 109-111, 128-130; KARBIĆ, *The Šubići of Bribir*, p. 58-65.

⁷⁸ THALLÓCZY, BARABÁS, *A Blagay-család*, p. LXIX; MILKO KOS, "Odnosaji medju goričkim grofovima i hrvatskim plemstvom u srednjem vijeku [The relations between the Counts of Görz and the Croatian nobility in the Middle Ages]", *Vjesnik Zemaljskog arhiva*, vol. 19, Zagreb 1917, p. 285; PETER ŠTIH, *Goriški Grofje ter njihovi ministeriali in militi v Istri in na Kranjskem* [The Counts of Görz and their servants and solders in Istria and Kranjska], Ljubljana 1994, p. 239; KEKEZ, p. 82.)

⁷⁹ "Juliani canonici Civitatensis chronica (anno 1252-1364)", *Rerum italicarum scriptores. XXIV*: vol. 24, ed. Giovanni TAMBARA, Città di Castello 1906, p. 47.

⁸⁰ In March 1308 the Babonići brothers, Lords John and Radoslav, met Lord Fredrick of Habsburg, duke of Austria, in Maribor in present-day Slovenia ("Ottokars Österreichische Reimchronik", vol. 2, in: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores. VIII: Deutsche Chroniken, 5.2.*, ed. Joseph SEEMÜLLER, Hannover 1893, p. 1213-1214, lines 93474-93480). The Babonići brothers had lent Duke

In the 1320s, the prestige, wealth and political influence of the Babonići were considerably reduced as a result of the actions of the new Hungarian king Charles Robert,⁸¹ whose main political goal was to crush the rising aristocratic oligarchy.⁸² Having fallen from the king's favour, the Babonići looked for a new powerful political ally.

Using their friendly relations with the Cistercians of Kostanjevica—whose patrons, among other magnates, included members of the Habsburg family⁸³—the brothers John, Jacob II, Dionysius and Paul attempted to connect themselves with the Habsburg dynasty in order to improve their political position, thus following in their uncle's footsteps taken a decade earlier. The brothers wanted to improve relations with the Cistercians of Kostanjevica, so they made several donations to the abbey. The first, on 22 September 1321, was the church of Saint Jacob, located below Žumberak castle.⁸⁴ And in early December of that year they promised to continue to act as patrons of the abbey and would not ask anything in return.⁸⁵

Both sides were satisfied with this arrangement. The Cistercians of Kostanjevica acquired new donations, protection and patronage of their still-powerful neighbours, the Babonići, whose main stronghold at the time was the nearby castle of Ozalj. Affiliation with Kostanjevica Abbey was also profitable for the Babonići. On 7 January 1336 the brothers Jacob II, Dyonizius and Paul decided to enter into the service of Dukes Albert and Otto von Habsburg, rather than to continue in the service of the Hungarian king, Charles Robert, who had taken several of their important castles and estates and diminished their political power.⁸⁶ They were

Fredrick sum of 300 sliver ducats (*CD* 8, p. 153) which he needed for his military campaigns. Even more, the Babonići brothers had assisted him in his renewed military campaigns for the Bohemian crown ("Iohannis abbatiss Victoriensis liber certarum historiarum", vol. 2, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores. VII: Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum scholarum* 36.2., ed. Fedor SCHNEIDE, Hannover 1910, p. 11-12, lines 32-33). The Babonići brothers had therefore laid siege to the strategically important city of Slovenj-Gradec in present-day Slovenia and finally conquered it in June 1308 ("Ottokars Österreichische Reimchronik", vol. 2, p. 1239, lines 95535-95538). All of these actions the Babonići conducted in behalf of the Duke Fredrick. For more details see: THALLÓCZY, "Historička istraživanja", p. 371; Lajos THALLÓCZY, *Die Geschichte der Grafen von Blagay*, Wien 1898, p. 77-78; KOS, "Ođnošaji medju", p. 285-286; KEKEZ, p. 83.

⁸¹ After the death of his brother in 1316, Lord John Babonić replaced him as Ban of Slavonia (vice-roy). John held this function until 1322 when he was replaced by the Hungarian king, Charles Robert, in spite of the fact that one year before John had led an army of Slavonian knights against one of the powerful Croatian noble families, the counts of Bribir, the most dangerous opponents of royal rule in hinterland of the Dalmatian coast. (V. KLAJČ, *Povijest Hrvata*, p. 351-357.)

⁸² After he became Hungarian king in 1309, Charles I insisted on the restoration of all estates and revenues usurped from the royal demesne and the Church, and that the barons should abandon the practice of forcing the nobility of their provinces to enter into their service. This led him to a long and desperate war during which new foundations of royal authority were laid down. The conflict ended in 1323 with the victory of Charles I and the suppression of the aristocratic oligarchy all over the medieval Kingdom of Hungary (ENGEL, *The Realm of St Stephen*, p. 130-134).

⁸³ MLINARIĆ, "Cistercijska opatija", p. 220.

⁸⁴ ...ecclesiam sancti Georgi apud Siherberg (*CD* 9, p. 30-31).

⁸⁵ *CD* 9, p. 38-39.

⁸⁶ *CD* 10, p. 249-250.

convinced that the Habsburgs would help them win back their estates and political influence. This did not happen, but is an issue beyond the scope of this article.⁸⁷

IV. THE SPIRITUAL ROLE OF TOPUSKO ABBEY FOR THE BABONIĆI

Little is known about the physical structure of the monastery. As mentioned earlier regarding the archives,⁸⁸ Topusko was attacked in the sixteenth century by the Ottomans and very little remains. The site is now a municipal park and has not been excavated; the only part of the abbey still standing is the ruined portal of the monastic church which is currently undergoing conservation (Fig. 3, 4). For this reason it is necessary to rely on written sources to try to establish the conditions under which the chapel of Saint Nicola and the altar of the Holy Cross were built.

Toward the end of his life—in the last decade of the thirteenth century—Lord Stephen IV had not forgotten the Cistercians of Topusko. According to a charter issued in 1302, he built an altar dedicated to the Holy Cross in the abbey church,⁸⁹ in the chapel of Saint Nicolas.⁹⁰ In a charter of 1301, Lord Stephen IV was referred to as *Stephanus quondam banus filius Stephani*, which means that he was already dead when the document was written. However the verb *construere* appears in the pluperfect (*construxisset*⁹¹) which suggests that construction of the Holy Cross altar was undertaken before the charter was composed. On the other hand, the great gothic church was probably not built immediately after the Cistercians came to Topusko.⁹² On arriving, they most likely built a small church and planned a bigger one when time, financial, and political circumstances would permit. The building of the chapel of Saint Nicola with the altar of the Holy Cross within can therefore be placed in the second half of the thirteenth century during the life of Lord Stephen IV.

⁸⁷ For further reading, see THALLÓCZY, *Die Geschichte der Grafen von Blagay*, p. 85-86.

⁸⁸ See note 11.

⁸⁹ *dedimus seu contulimus et assignauimus cum omnibus utilitatibus et pertinenciis suis, siluis ac pratis ecclesie beate virginis Marie de Toplica et specialiter ad vtilitatem altaris sancte crucis, quod in ipsa ecclesia construi fecimus* (CD 8, p. 26).

The date when the original charter was composed is not known; it is dated 30 May 1302 (*in vigilia ascensionis domini, anno domini MCCC secundo, CD 8, p. 27*) which is after the death of Stephen IV (see n. 73). The original charter has not, however, survived and is only known in a 14th-century transcript made by Cistercians as evidence in a suit held before King Caroberto in 1323 (*CD 9, p. 166-167*). The transcription of a charter of 1315 from the Chapter of Zagreb for Topusko may be found in a royal charter where a transcription of Lord Stephen's donation charter is also preserved (*CD 8, p. 405*). Other important statements (the donation of the Svinjica estate, building the altar of the Holy Cross...) can be confirmed in other documents.

⁹⁰ *...super sacrosanctum altare in capella sancti Nicolai in monasterio de Toplica Cisterciensis ordinis* (charter dated 8 June 1313, *CD 8, p. 335*).

⁹¹ *CD 8, p. 11* (see n. 93 below).

⁹² Šime LJUBIĆ, "Topusko (*Ad fines*) i ostaci njegove crkve [Topusko (*Ad fines*) and the remains of its church]", *Vjesnik Hrvatskog arheološkog društva*, vol. I-II, Zagreb 1880., p. 36.; Ljubo KARAMAN, "O umjetnosti srednjeg vijeka u Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji [About the art of Middle Ages in Croatia and Slavonia]", *Historijski zbornik*, vol. I, Zagreb 1948, p. 120.

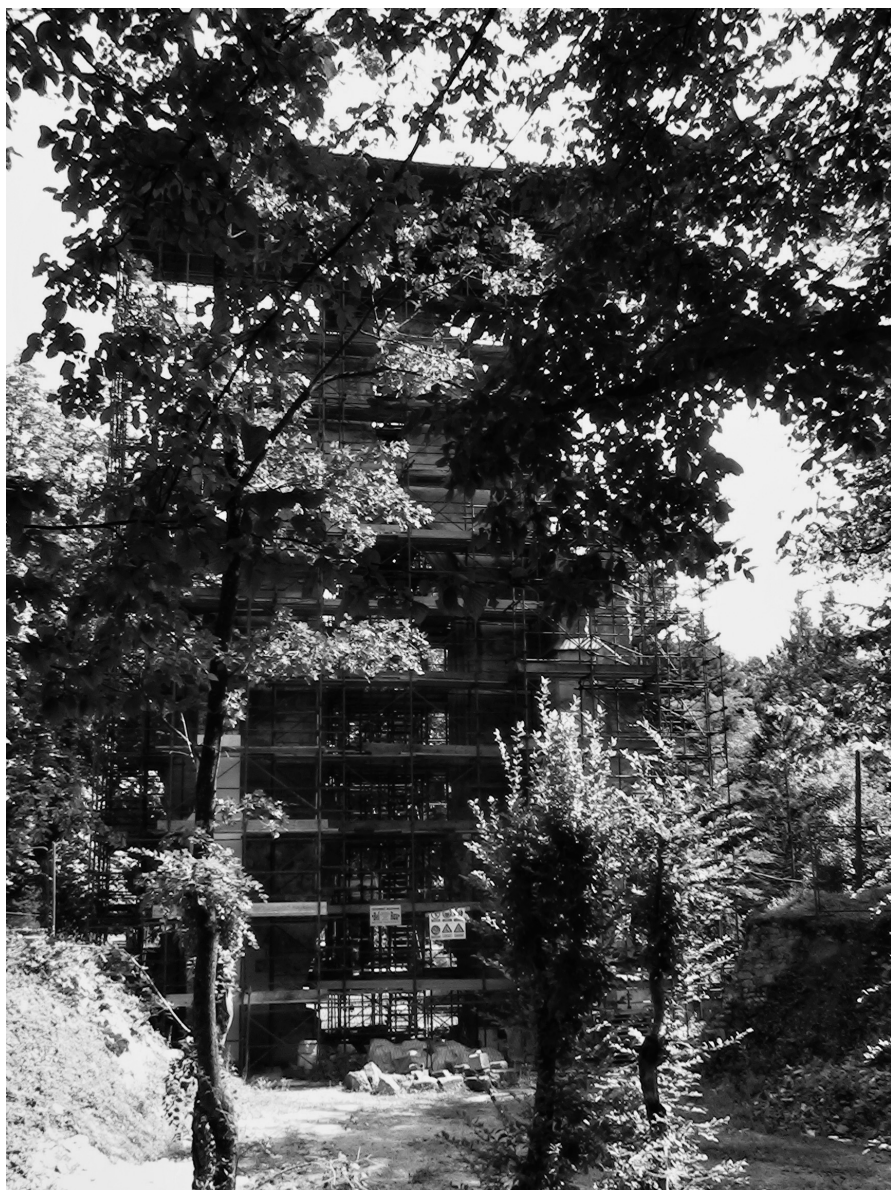


Fig. 3. Topusko, site of the former monastery (now a municipal park) showing the ruins of the main portal to the church, currently under conservation. (author, 2010)



Fig. 4. Topusko, detail of the church portal. (author, 2010)

Lord Stephen's construction of the Holy Cross altar was a pious act undertaken for the salvation of his soul, and in order to provide for its continued maintenance, he in addition gave Topusko lands in Svinica which were earmarked to furnish it.⁹³ In subsequent years this altar came to have special meaning for the Babonići family,⁹⁴ as several family assemblies were held there in the fourteenth century.

⁹³ *Stephanus quondam banus filius Stephani, anime sue salubriter uolens providere operibusque pieatatis diem extreme preuenire messonis, in monasterio Toplicensi ad honorem sancte crucis construxisset, cupiens ipsum altare dotari per eundem quandam [terram] seu possessionem suam Zuynicha uocatam ... ob reuerenciam sancte crucis, nec non pro anime sue remedio supradicto monasterio donasset et eciam contulisset perpetualiter et irreuocabiliter possidendam, sicut in litteris eiusdem nobis transmissis plene udimus contineri, a nobis per easdem litteras suas diligenter postulauit, ut super huiusmodi donacione et collacione sua litteras nostras priuilegiales abbati supradicti monasterii concederemus* (CD 8, p. 11-12).

⁹⁴ It is interesting to note that two ancestors of the Babonići clan, Lords Baboneg III and Stephen III, went to the Crusade organised by the Hungarian king Andrew II in 1217 (CD 3, p. 167-170, Krešimir KUŽIĆ, *Hrvati i križari [The Croats and Crusaders]*, Zagreb 2003, p. 47-50). It is possible that Lords Baboneg III and Stephen III introduced devotion to the Holy Cross to the Babonići clan. Further, Viktor ŽIVIĆ suggested that these Babonići brothers built a small votive chapel in the present-day village of Dobrljin located near Vodičevo, the most important Babonići castle at that time (Viktor ŽIVIĆ, *Na pragu hrvatskog Orijenta [In the footsteps of the Croatian Orient]*, Zagreb 1937, p. 27). Near the

According to a charter dated 8 June 1313, the nephews of the late Lord Stephen IV—John, Radoslav II and Stephen V—gathered within the chapel of Saint Nicolas, in front of the altar of the Holy Cross, in order to decide how to divide their estates and tributes among themselves.⁹⁵ This meeting took place in the presence of Agustin Kažotić, bishop of Zagreb, who had come to Topusko for the occasion. The brothers were not satisfied with the division decided at that time, and a new meeting was required. On 12 May 1314 they gathered again in the chapel of Saint Nicolas, and once again a division was made in the presence of Bishop Agustin Kažotić.⁹⁶ This time all parties were satisfied with the result.

The Babonići soon rewarded the Topusko Cistercians for their hospitality. On 15 July 1315, the cellarer, Brother Henry, asked them to confirm a previous donation of lands in Svinjica,⁹⁷ and the following year he requested confirmation of a second donation made by the late Lord Stephen IV.⁹⁸ Both were granted.

Since the altar of the Holy Cross was an endowment of the Babonić clan, and considering as well their strong connection to the Cistercians of Topusko, it is possible that over time the monks became personal confessors to the Babonići family. Without documentary evidence this can only be conjecture, but the close proximity (about ten kilometres) of Sjeničnjak castle—the main stronghold where most of the family members lived—may also have been a factor.

Finally, some authors argue for the possibility that during the construction of the abbey church in the second half of the thirteenth century, some relics were brought to the chapel of Saint Nicolas. This may in turn suggest the possibility of a pilgrimage to Topusko, at least for the annual feast of Saint Nicolas on 6 December.⁹⁹

V. CONCLUSION

The Cistercian monasteries in Topusko and Kostanjevica played a significant role in the historical development of the Babonići. The role of each of these abbeys depended upon its geographical location. Saint Mary in Topusko was situated only a few miles from the main stronghold of the Babonići, Sjeničnjak castle, while Saint Mary in Kostanjevica was located on several borders. Geographically speaking, it

ruins of Vodičevo castle, Živić found a crusader's sword at the bottom of the Una River. It is also worth mentioning that the present church in Dobrljin—built in 1933 on the site of the previous building—is also dedicated to the Holy Cross, as was the earlier church (Emanuel HOŠKO, Marija MIRKOVIĆ, Vitomir BELAJ, *Franjevci Hrvatske provincije sv. Ćirila i Metoda [The Franciscans of the Croatian province of Saint Cyril and Methodius]*, Zagreb 1992, p. 173). One can therefore argue for continuity in devotion to the Holy Cross which may well have originated in the High Middle Ages.

⁹⁵ *proprio se iuramento positus super sacrosanctum altare in capella sancti Nicolai in monasterio de Toplica Cisterciensis ordinis* (CD 8, p. 335-337).

⁹⁶ CD 8, p. 359-361.

⁹⁷ CD 8, p. 405.

⁹⁸ CD 8, p. 424.

⁹⁹ Novak summarized the arguments concerning pilgrimages to Topusko (NOVAK, *Topusko u razdoblju*, p. 93-94).

was within the boundaries of the German Empire, yet near the frontier of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, while also located on the borders of the estates and zone of influence of the Babonići.

These facts made the abbey in Kostanjevica a kind of meeting point, a bridge at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century between the Babonići and their powerful neighbours, the counts of Görz and Tyrol. Even more, using their affiliation with the counts of Görz and Tyrol (most likely established at Kostanjevica), the Babonići came in contact with an even more powerful western neighbour and ally, the Habsburg family, dukes of Austria. These connections became very important for the future political ascent of the Babonići.

This was not the only role that Kostanjevica played for the Babonići. There are several indications that the family kept its important documents in the archives there. On the other side, the Cistercians benefited greatly from their good relations with the Babonići, who donated land in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and even more, acted as the abbey's patrons during much of this time.

The relations between Saint Mary in Topusko and the Babonići were even more intense, including many aspects of the social, political, economic and spiritual life of this noble family. One probable reason was the proximity of Sjeničnjak castle. In the mid-thirteenth century phase of this partnership, the Babonići used the reputation of the Topusko Cistercians in their ascent up the political ladder. At the end of that century and beginning of the following, when times were more restless, the Babonići repaid their debts to Topusko by donating land and providing them with slave labour (*serves*) from their nearby possessions.

Furthermore, the abbey in Topusko was important for the Babonići as a place of authenticity (*locus credibile*). Considering that many of the Babonići charters were issued from the abbey, it would seem that they had used the monks' scriptorium and stored their important documents in the abbey's archive.

The economic benefits of the good relations between the Cistercians of Topusko and the Babonići need also to be underlined. With a pilgrimage so too come growth in trade. There are several references to a marketplace (*forum*) near the abbey, and during the thirteenth century, the Cistercians collected all the taxes from it. This situation changed at the beginning of the following century when, according to a charter of 1314, at least a half of this tribute was collected by members of the Babonići family.¹⁰⁰

It is clear that the Cistercians played an important role in the society of medieval Croatia. As this case study of the relations between the Babonići family and the Cistercian monasteries of Topusko and Kostanjevica shows, the Cistercians were influential in many aspects of the social, political, economic, cultural and spiritual life of noble families. The strong affiliations between feudal magnates and Cistercians in medieval Croatia continued more or less undisturbed up to the

¹⁰⁰ ... *quam ipsius fori Stephano bano preter portionem...forro tributa Toplica* (CD 8, p. 359-360).

end of fifteenth century and the coming of the Ottomans. From that time on, constant threat of war transformed the political and daily life in medieval Croatia. Topusko Abbey was abandoned by the Cistercians sometime before 1533, and the monastic complex was finally devastated by the Ottomans in 1579.

On the other hand, after the political and military confrontation with the Hungarian king, Charles Robert, in the third decade of the fourteenth century, the Babonići had lost not only their political power, but also large number of their estates and castles. Deprived of all of their possessions in the regions near the border of the German Empire—*i.e.*, the estates near Kostanjevica—the connections between the Babonići clan and the Cistercians there ceased.

The intention of this study was to extract from the extant documentary evidence a sense of the complex relationship that existed between one family of magnates and the Cistercians in medieval Croatian lands in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. No doubt still more connections are there for the looking if further medieval Croatian noble families (including those of the lesser nobility) are examined and the study is taken through the sixteenth century, which constituted the end of the Middle Ages in Croatian and Slovenian lands.

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Les cisterciens et la noblesse dans la Croatie médiévale: la famille Babonići et les monastères de Topusko (Toplica) et Kostanjevica (Landstrass), au XIII^e et au début du XIV^e siècle.

À la fin du XIII^e et au début du XIV^e siècle, la famille des Babonići devint l'une des principales familles de la noblesse du royaume médiéval de Slavonie. Les Babonići entretenirent des relations étroites avec deux abbayes cisterciennes, Topusko (Toplica) et Konstanjevica sur Krka (Landstrass). Celle de Kostanjevica se trouvait en terre d'Empire, à proximité de la frontière avec le royaume de Hongrie, de l'aire d'influence et des terres de la famille Babonići. Topusko se situait pour sa part près de Sjeničnjak, le principal château des Babonići à cette époque. Du fait de la situation frontalière de la première et de la position centrale de la seconde, les membres de la famille eurent des attitudes différentes. Les moines des deux monastères bénéficièrent toutefois de l'appui des membres de la famille. L'auteur étudie les enjeux de plusieurs donations de terres, ainsi que le rôle social, économique, culturel et politique de chacun de ces deux monastères dans la vie des Babonići.

Cistercians and Nobility in Medieval Croatia: The Babonići Family and Monasteries of Topusko (Toplica) and Kostanjevica (Landstrass) in the 13th and early 14th centuries

At the end of the 13th and early 14th centuries the Babonići became one of the leading noble families of the medieval kingdom of Slavonia. They had intense relations with two Cistercian abbeys: Topusko (Toplica) and Kostanjevica on Krka (Landstrass). Kostanjevica was inside the German Empire, but very close to the borders of the Hungarian kingdom as well as the domains of interest to the Babonića family. The abbey in Topusko was, however, near Sjeničnjak, the family's main castle. This border position of the one, and central position of the other, elicited different attitudes from family members, yet the monks of both monasteries enjoyed support from the Babonići. The author examines the circumstances of several land donations, but also the social, economical, cultural and political role of the each of these two monasteries in the lives of the Babonići family.

Zisterzienser und Adel im mittelalterlichen Kroatien: The Familie Babonići und die Klöster von Topusko (Toplica) und Kostanjevica (Landstrass) im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert

Am Ende des 13. und im frühen 14. Jahrhundert wurde die Familie Babonići eine der führenden adeligen Familien des mittelalterlichen Königreichs von Slowenien. Sie hatten besaßen enge Beziehungen zu zwei Zisterzienserklöstern: Topusko (Toplica) und Kostanjevica auf Krka (Landstrass). Kostanjevica lag auf dem Gebiet des Reichs, aber sehr nahe an den Grenzen des ungarischen Königreichs sowie der Gebiete, die für die Familie Babonići von Interesse waren. Das Kloster Topusko lag jedoch in der Nähe von Sjeničnjak, der Hauptburg der Familie. Die Grenzlage des einen und die zentrale Lage des anderen Klosters riefen verschiedene Haltungen der Familienangehörigen hervor, gleichwohl erfreuten sich die Mönche beider Monasterien der Unterstützung der Babonići. Der Autor untersucht die Umstände mehrerer Landschenkungen, aber auch die soziale, ökonomische, kulturelle und politische Rolle beider dieser Klöster im Leben der Familie der Babonići.