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History of the Royal Arms of the Kingdom of Serbia (1882-1918)

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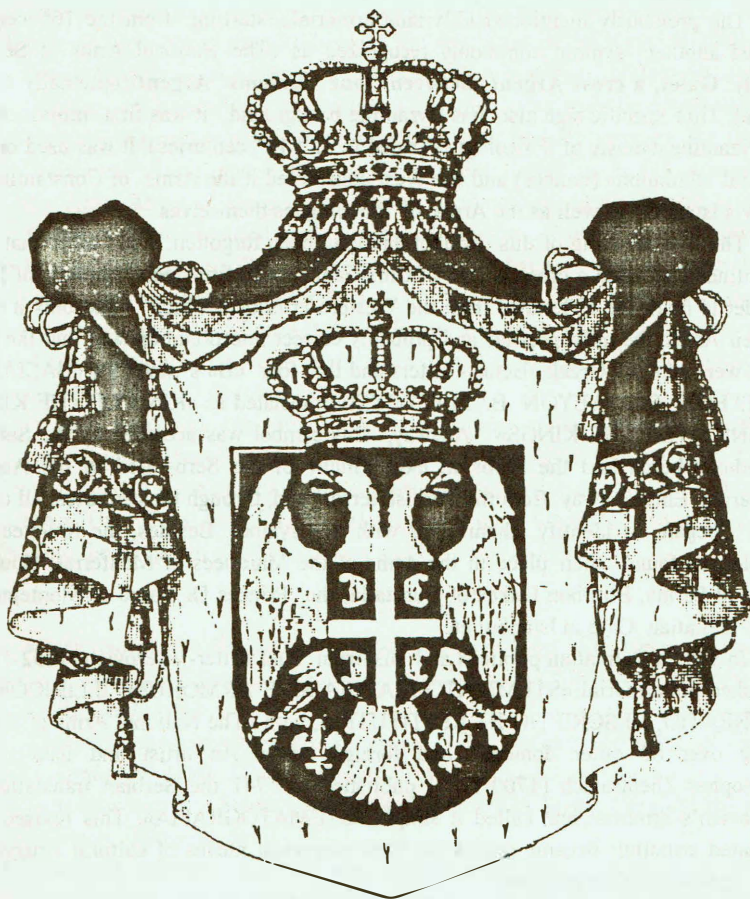
Medieval Serbia, considering her geographical position, was under the influence of the Ancient Byzantine Empire as well as Western Europe. Even though the influence of East was naturally more strong and appreciated, none of those had the strength to overrule each other. Various influences took place in many aspects of politics and economy, military and trading and, last but not least, in heraldry.

Origins of heraldry in Serbia can be traced back to the 12th century. That was a time the medieval Serbian aristocracy started to organize the western way, which resulted in need of heraldry. More serious interest for heraldry took place in the mid-14th century under the influence of German, Austrian-Hungarian and Italian armorial achievements.

Serbian ruler Stephen Urosh IV Dushan «The Powerful» (1308-1355, King 1331-1345, Emperor 1345-1355) considered himself and his State to continue the power and the glory of Byzantium. Therefore, he adopted a double-headed eagle, Byzantine ornament and sign of Imperial significance introduced by Komnins dynasty, as his insignia, but with a slight change - instead of the Byzantine double-headed eagle Or on Gules, Emperor Dushan used it Argent on Gules. This symbol later received more proper heraldic form and became known as the Arms of Serbia and her rulers. It might be interesting to point out that the double-headed eagle (Gules on Or) represented Serbian town, later capital, of Skopje (today the capital of the Republic of Macedonia) on a «portolan» (map) of Catalonian sailor and cartographer Angelino Dulser in 1338.

Later on the Serbian rulers also used these armorial achievements as the «armorum insignia» of themselves and the land they ruled. The Ulrich Richental's armorial «CONCILIUM DE CONSTANZ 1414-1418» shows the Arms of Serbian Prince «Despot» Stephen Lazarevich «The Tall» (1377-1427, Prince 1389-1402, «Despot» 1402-1427): **Gules, a double-headed eagle Or** (mistake by Richental!), **between two bull's horns Or** (bull's horns were used as Crest in some earlier Arms of this family). Some armorials, especially «Illyrian» ones, repeated the double-headed eagle Argent on Gules as «The Arms of the Royal and Imperial house of Nemanych» (Serbian rulers 1166-1371).

The fall of the Ancient Byzantine Empire and Serbian State under the Ottoman-Turkish occupation in 1459 marked the end of heraldry in Serbia, since the feudal system of the Ottomans was based on Islam ideology and did not have the need for



The Arms of Kingdom of Serbia, 1882-1918

use Arms. However, the double-headed eagle continued it's «heraldic life» in the Arms of Montenegrin-Zetian family of Charnoyevich

The previously mentioned «Illyrian» armorials, starting from the 16th century showed another symbol commonly recognized as «The National Arms of Serbs», namely: **Gules, a cross Argent between four furisons Argent** (optionally **Or** or **Azure**). This specific sign also has Byzantine background; it was first introduced by the Byzantine dynasty of Paleologues (ruled in 12th-14th centuries). It was used on the Imperial «flamulon» (banner) and the West considered it the Arms of Constantinople (today's Istanbul) as well as the Arms of Paleologues themselves.

The true meaning of this symbol has long been forgotten; some think that the Byzantines combined a cross, a sign of Christianity, with fire-steels, symbols of light, in order to mark the difference from the Western crusaders which had only a cross on their Arms; the most popular and probably correct interpretation was that the fire-steels were actually Greek «Beta» - letters and that four «B» s stood for «ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΟΥΣΙ» translated as «KING OF THE KINGS REIGNS OVER THE KINGS». Anyway, this symbol was accepted by the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbs in exile (many of the Serbs fled to the Austro-Hungarian Empire away from the Turkish terror) and, through the centuries, all of the Serbs began to identify themselves with this symbol. Besides, the fire-steels of Paleologues found their place in the Arms of the Marquess of Monferrat, Bourbon Dukes of Parma, Bourbon Dukes of Guastalla, the Princes Di Tocco of Montemillet, on the Gallatian Gate in Istanbul etc.

In 1701 a Dalmatian publicist and historian Paul Ritter-Vitezovich (1652-1713) published his armorial «STEMMATOGRAPHIA SIVE ARMORUM ILLIRICORUM DELINEATIO, DESCRIPTIO ET RESTITUTIO», with «The National Arms of Serbs» among over 60 other domestic and foreign Arms. An artist and icon-painter Christopher Zhefarovich (1700-1753) published in 1741 the Serbian translation of Vitezovich's armorial and called it simply «STEMATOGRAFIA». This revised and translated armorial became one of the most important means of cultural struggle of Serbs against the foreign power.

In 1804 the Serbs, led by Karageorge Petrovich (1768-1817), upraised against Turks, wearing a cross with fire-steels on their banners. During the 2nd uprising in 1815, led by Milosh Obrenovich (1780-1860), Serbs used the same symbols.

The newly proclaimed Principality of Serbia adopted its Arms in 1825 as follows: **Gules a cross Argent between four furisons of the same, encircled with a wreath composed of Dexter oak leaves Vert, and Sinister olive leaves of the same, and placed on a Robe of Estate Purple, doubled Ermine, surmounted by a coronet of Prince**. This was the official Arms in 1834-1882.

On February 1882 (Julian calendar) the Kingdom of Serbia was proclaimed, and Prince Milan M. Obrenovich IV (1855-1901) was also proclaimed His Majesty King Milan I. New form of state required new Arms. The intention was to keep the «old» Arms, but to add something completely new. The new Arms of the Kingdom of Serbia were blazoned by Stoyan Novakovich (1842-1915), an historian, philologist, herald and the Secretary of Education who combined the «old» arms with the double-headed eagle of Nemanichs, which was to symbolize the power and the glory of the former Serbian medieval State, and a fleur-de-lis (popular flower in Serbia, commonly known as «Virgin Mary's Flower»). The Blazon of the Royal Arms (Figure 3) is as follows: **Gules, a double-headed eagle displayed Argent, armed Or, accompanied in base by two fleurs-de-lis Or, and charged on his breast with an escutcheon Gules, a cross Argent, between four furisons of the same. The shield is ensigned by a Royal Crown and placed on a Robe of Estate Purple, doubled Ermine, with a Royal Crown proper.** The Royal Arms were designed by Hugo Gerard von Strohl and adopted officially on 7 October 1882.

This Arms remained the same after the overthrow of the Obrenovich dynasty and the coronation of Prince Peter Karageorgevich as His Majesty King Peter I, but with a minor change - the proper Royal Crown was applied instead of a heraldic Royal Crown. The official use of the Royal Arms was up to the merge of the Kingdom of Serbia into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918

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