

THE DOUBLE HEADED EAGLE THE SYMBOL OF
SERBIAN STATE FROM 12TH TO 21ST CENTURY



ZELJKO KNEZEVIC

The double-headed eagle originated in the ancient Near East as a Hittite symbol. In ancient Greece Zeus (Jupiter) was said to let two eagles fly from the east and west and eventually meet at Delphi, proving it as the centre of the world.

The Roman state had a single headed eagle as a symbol.

Same single headed eagle was later the symbol of Byzantium.

In the tenth century, the double-headed eagle made a reappearance. Because of its popularity it was adopted by emperor Isaac Komnenos (1057 - 1059).

During the Palaiologos Dynasty, the double-headed eagle represented the desire of the Palaiologoi to look at both West and East and to reconquer lost imperial territories in both directions. The double-headed eagle thus came to symbolize not just the rulership but the ambition to expand the empire.

The oldest depiction of the Serbian double-headed eagle is found on the founding fresco of Prince Miroslav of Hum, brother of Stefan Nemanja, from the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Belo Polje, today's Montenegro, 12th century. (Picture 1)



(Picture 1) Double-headed eagle detail of a fresco from the church of St. Peter and Paul in Belo Polje, today's Montenegro, around 1190, 12th century.

The double-headed eagles in Belo Polje as well as at the entrance to the Žiča monastery next to the charter of King Stefan the First Crowned (Pictures 2 and 3) and on the wall under the fresco of Stefan Nemanja and his 3 sons, the first Serbian archbishop Saint Sava, King Stefan the First Crowned and Vukan in the Church of Our Lady of Ljeviška in Prizren, are red colour on a white background. (Pictures 6 and 7)



(Picture 2) Double-headed eagle detail from the entrance to the Žiča monastery next to the charter of King Stefan the First Crowned, Serbia, 13th century.



(Picture 3) Double-headed eagles from the entrance to the Žiča monastery next to the charter of King Stefan the First Crowned, Serbia, 13th century.

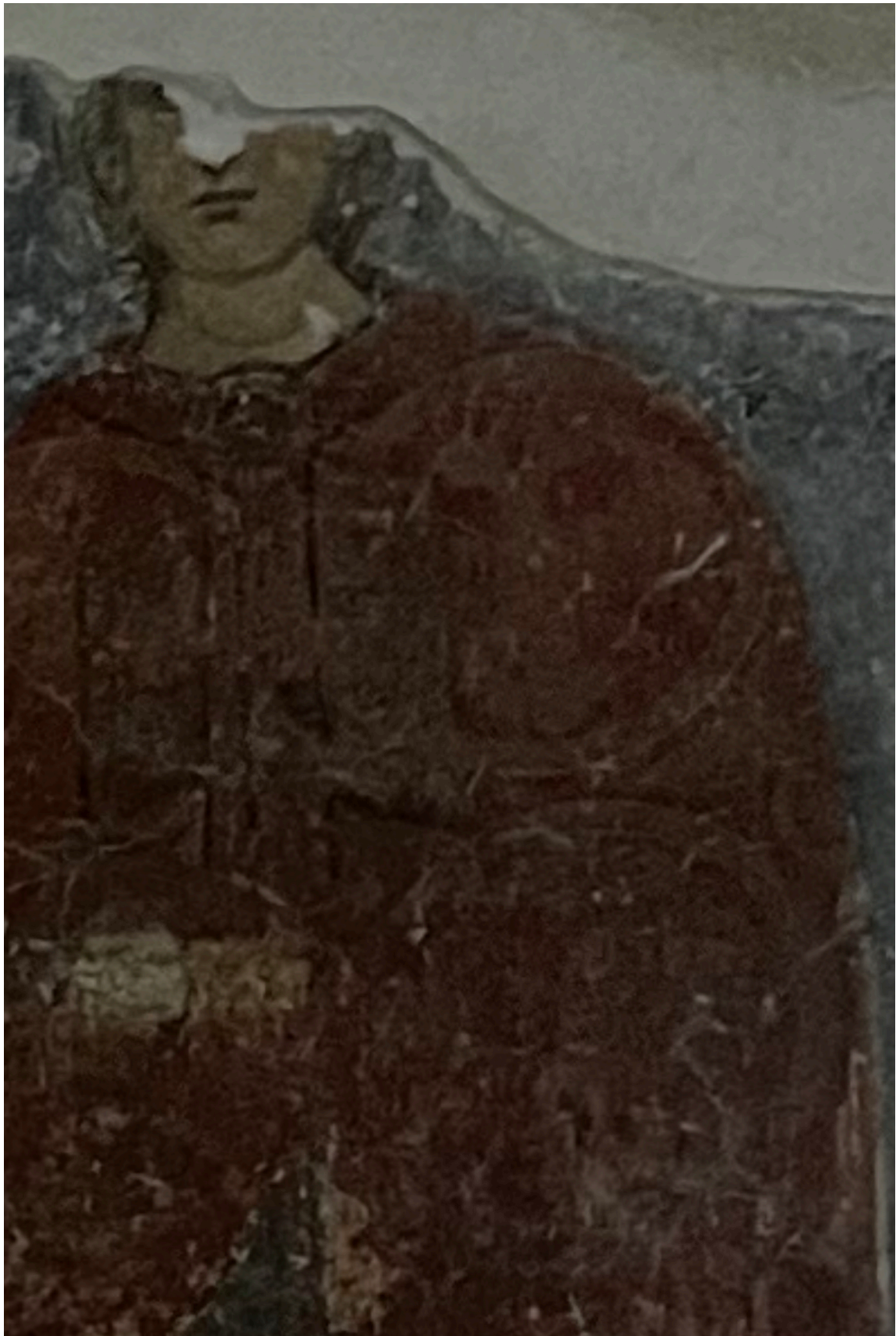


(Picture 6) Double-headed eagles under the fresco of Saint Sava, Stephen Nemanja, King Stephen the First-crowned and Vukan from the Church of Our Lady of Ljeviška, Prizren, Serbia, 13th century.



(Picture 7) Double-headed eagles under the fresco of Saint Sava, Stephen Nemanja, King Stephen the First-crowned and Vukan from the Church of Our Lady of Ljeviška, Prizren, Serbia, 13th century.

On the fresco of King Stefan Vladislav in the Studenica Monastery (Pictures 4 and 5) and in the Mileševa Monastery, as well as on the fresco of Prince Lazar in the Ravanica Monastery, the double-headed eagles are golden on a red background. (Pictures 12 and 13).



(Picture 4) Double-headed eagle detail of a fresco from the Studenica monastery from the clothing of King Stefan Vladislav, Serbia, 13th century.



(Picture 5) Double-headed eagle from a fresco from the Studenica monastery from the clothing of King Stefan Vladislav, King Radoslav is on the left side, Serbia, 13th century.



(Picture 12) Double-headed eagles on Prince Lazar's clothes, detail of a fresco from Ravanica monastery, Serbia, 14th century.



(Picture 13) Double-headed eagles on Prince Lazar's clothes, fresco from Ravanica monastery, Serbia, 14th century.

The double-headed eagle appears on Emperor Stefan Dušan's plate, one of 33 that Emperor Dušan ordered and used in the middle of the 15th century which was found in a cavity in the wall of the chancel of the church of St. Nicholas in Drenova in present-day North Macedonia. Around the double-headed eagle is the description: "+ STEPAN EMPEROR IN CHRIST THE PIOUS". Today, the plate is on display in the National Museum, Belgrade, Serbia. (Picture 9)

During Dušan's reign, the symbol of the double-headed eagle looking at two opposite directions, towards the east and the west, which represents the expansion and acquisition of the territory, came to the fore when the Serbian kingdom became an empire in 1346 and when Emperor Dušan became the emperor of the Serbs, Greeks and Bulgarians.



(Picture 9) Emperor Dušan's plate around a double-headed eagle is the description: "+ STEPAN THE EMPEROR IN CHRIST THE PIOUS", The National Museum, Belgrade, Serbia, 15th century.

On the fresco of the young Simeon Siniša Nemanjić from Visoki Dečani monastery, on his clothes, two-headed eagles are white on a black background. (Pictures 10 and 11)

Simeon Siniša Nemanjić was the son of King Stefan Uroš III Dečanski and the Byzantine princess Maria Palaiologus, the second wife of Stefan Uroš III, daughter of John Palaiologus and granddaughter of the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologus. Simeon was the half-brother of Emperor Dušan and after his death he ruled the southern regions of the former Serbian empire - Thessaly and Epirus.



(Picture 10) Double-headed eagles on the clothes of young Simeon Siniša, Visoki Dečani monastery, Serbia, 14th century.



(Picture 11) Double-headed eagles on the clothes of the young Simeon Siniša, the half-brother of Emperor Dušan, standing on the right, on the left is the young King Uroš future emperor Uroš and in the middle is Empress Jelena, Visoki Dečani monastery, Serbia, 14th century.

On the fresco of the despot Stefan Lazarevic in the Manasija monastery, on his clothes, the double-headed eagles are golden on a black background. (Pictures 15 and 16).



(Picture 15) Double-headed eagles on the clothes of the despot Stefan Lazarevic, detail of a fresco from the Manasija monastery, Serbia, 15th century.



(Picture 16) Double-headed eagles on the clothes of the despot Stefan Lazarevic, fresco from the Manasija monastery, Serbia, 15th century.

Despot Uglješa Mrnjavčević was the first to mint money with the image of a double-headed eagle 1365-1371 (Picture 25)



(Picture 25) Despot Uglješa Mrnjavčević was the first to mint money with the image of a double-headed eagle 1365-1371

Stefan Lazarević also mint coins with the image of a double-headed eagle. First as a prince without description minted between 1393 and 1402 and then he minted two types as a despot, one with a cross on the reverse and the other with Jesus standing surrounded by pearls on the reverse between 1402 and 1427. The coins here are from my personal collection, references Knežević 348, 371 and 373. (Pictures 17 and 18).

There is also a type with a spread-winged angel with a small double-headed eagle on the side.



(Picture 17) Double-headed eagle on the coin of Prince Stefan Lazarević 1393-1402, minted in Serbia 14-15 century. Knežević 348.



(Picture 18) Double-headed eagle on the coin of Prince Stefan Lazarevic 1393-1402 and two types of despot Stefan Lazarevic 1402-1427, minted in Serbia 14-15 century. Knežević 348, 371 and 373.

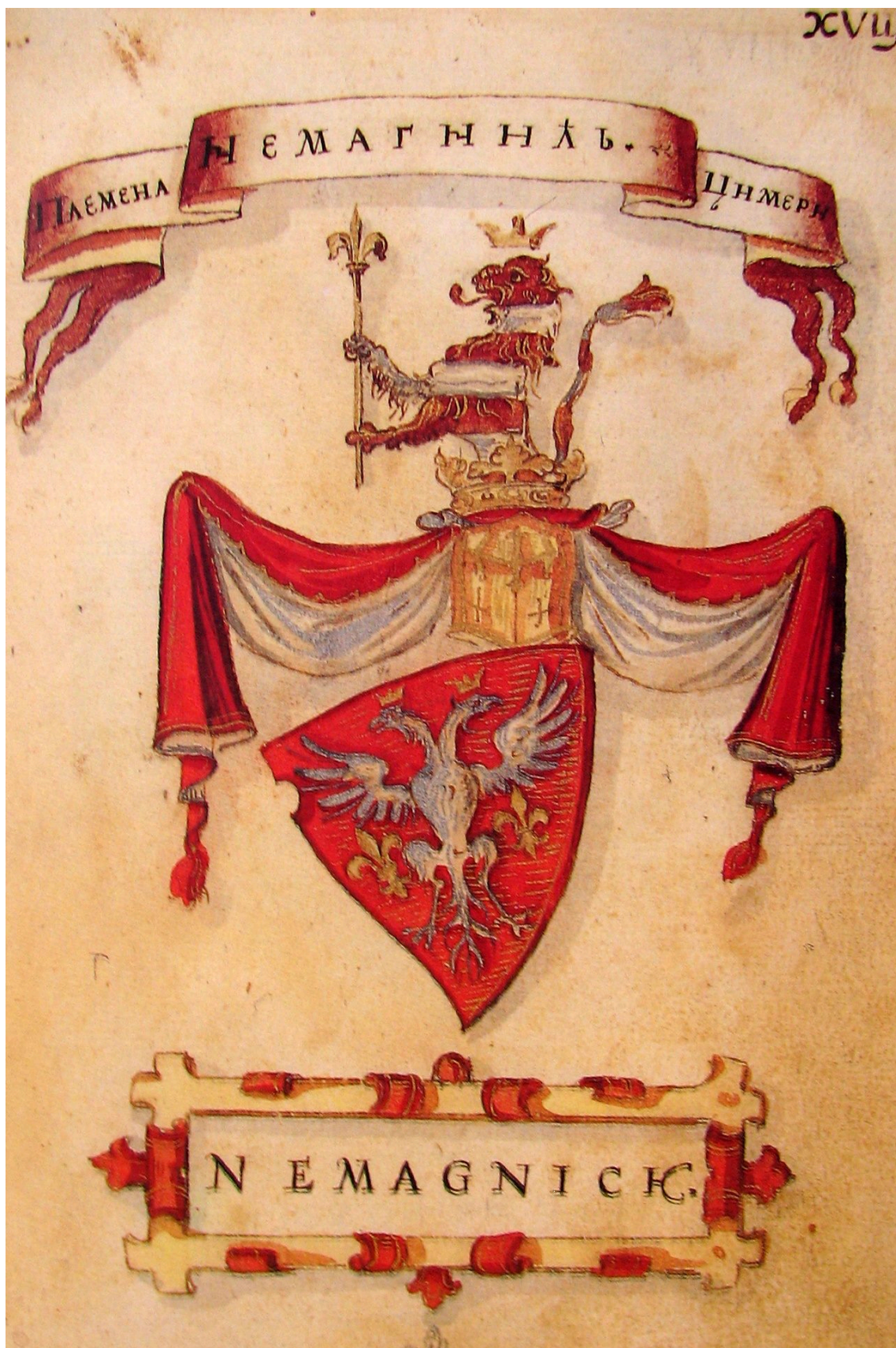
The Serbian nobleman Đurađ Kastriot Skenderbeg 1443-1468 was the founder of the Church of St. Anthony in Drač, formerly old Serbia, today Durrës in Albania, on the wall of which is a red double-headed eagle on a white background. (Picture 21)

His father's name was Jovan (John), who was buried in the Hilandar monastery. His mother's name was Vojislava Branković and she was the daughter of Grgur Branković, the grandson of nobleman Vuk Branković, a participant in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. His brothers were called Staniša, Kostadin and Repoš. All three were also buried in the Hilandar monastery. The place where his father and three brothers rest, as well as their names, are indisputable proof that they were Serbs of the Orthodox religion. In addition, they wrote charters and signed them in the Serbian medieval language and Cyrillic Serbian script.



(Picture 21) Double-headed eagle in the church of St. Anthony in Drač, old Serbia, today's Durrës in Albania, founder Serbian nobleman Đurađ Skenderbeg, 15th century.

In the 16th century, a white double-headed eagle with two lilies on the side on a red background appears on the coat of arms of the Nemanjić dynasty in the Korenić-Neorić coat of arms book, which was created from a copy of the lost original of Ohmučević's coat of arms book from 1595, commissioned by Petar Ohmučević, the Spanish admiral of Dubrovnik origin, between 1584 and 1594. (Picture 22)



(Picture 22) Coat of arms of the Nemanjić dynasty from the Korenić-Neorić coat of arms book from 1595, end of the 16th century.

At the end of the 19th century, with the proclamation of the kingdom, the coat of arms of the Serbian principality was changed to the Serbian Kingdom coat of arms (Picture 23) by the constitution according to Article 2 of December 21st, 1888, with the following proclamation:

"The coat of arms of the Kingdom of Serbia is a double-headed white eagle on a red shield with a royal crown. A royal crown stands on top of both heads of a double-headed white eagle; a lily flower under each claw. On his chest is the coat of arms of the Principality of Serbia: a white cross on a red shield with one fire in each corner of the cross."



(Picture 23) Coat of arms of the Kingdom of Serbia according to Article 2 of the Constitution, December 21st, 1888, 19th century.

From the 12th century, from the earliest appearance in 1190 to the 21st century, until today, for more than 830 years, the double-headed eagle is the symbol of the Serbian state!

FIVE KNOWN REPRESENTATIONS OF THE DOUBLE-HEADED EAGLE:

Red colour on white background 12th and 13th century
Golden colour on red background 13th and 14th century
White colour on black background, 14th century
Golden colour on black background 15th century
White colour on red background 16th century



(Picture 8) Double-headed eagle on the apsidal trifora, Visoki Dečani monastery, Serbia, 14th century.



(Picture 14) Double-headed eagle, detail on the porch of the church founded by Prince Lazar in the Serbian Orthodox monastery of Hilandar, Greece, 14th century.



(Picture 20) Double-headed eagle and dragons, detail from Kalenić Monastery, 1407, time of despot Stefan Lazarević, Serbia, the beginning of the 15th century.



(Picture 19) Coat of arms of the despot Stefan Lazarevic, Prussian edition of the Chronicle of the Council of Constance, mid-15th century.



(Picture 26) Serbian gold medieval ring with a double headed eagle motive, The Peoples Museum, Belgrade, Serbia, 14th century.



(Picture 28) Serbian silver medieval ring with a double headed eagle motive, The Peoples Museum, Belgrade, Serbia, 14th century.



(Picture 27) Cup from Zadar most likely of Serbian origin with double headed eagles, 18th century.



(Picture 24) 16 representations of the Serbian double-headed eagle from the 12th century to the 19th century.