S T U D I E S

MEDIEVAL SOCIETY AND POWER ELITES IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE
THE CASE OF THE KINGDOM OF HUNGARY UNTIL THE END OF THE 13TH CENTURY*

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Contemporary research on power elites and the formation of the nobility typically focuses on analyzing the specific social processes that lead to the structural transformation of ruling and warrior groups. Particular attention is often paid to origin, social status, economic foundations, wealth accumulation, and the participation of both court and regional elites in the exercise of power, with a special emphasis placed on the social mobility of lower social strata living on royal and ecclesiastical estates. The present study highlights the role of free warriors, who eventually developed into a legally defined and privileged landed nobility via processes closely tied to the broader social transformation of the High Middle Ages, occurring from the late 12th to the 13th century, which contributed to the emergence of the lower and middle nobility. A key factor in the social advancement of the so-called "new men" was their relationship with the king, which played a decisive role in shaping, modifying, and stabilizing political power structures. These transformation processes also influenced the configuration of power hierarchies, social stratification, and the social position of ruling and military groups.
Keywords: Kingdom of Hungary. East-Central Europe. Árpáds. Power elites. Aristocracy. Magnates. Landed nobility. Social mobility. Social transformation. Continuity and change. Historiography.
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In recent decades, the study of social structures and power elites in the Middle Ages has shifted significantly, away from the traditional focus on political history and moving toward the analysis of long-term social processes. Increasing attention has been given to the mechanisms behind the emergence and formation of the aristocracy, as well as the ways in which landed nobility developed within the framework of royal authority and regional relationships. Social mobility and sweeping societal changes also contributed to a transformation of the relationship between the monarch and local elites. The present study focuses on the methodological foundations, offering a concise overview of the existing scholarly literature, and outlining potential avenues for further research into these phenomena, particularly within the Kingdom of Hungary up to the end of the 13th century, while also taking into account the broader East-Central European context.

Research Subject and Methodological Trends

In the 1950s and 1960s, Western historiography—especially in the French and German academic spheres—witnessed a wave of stimulating debates on power elites[1] closely tied to the issue of noble formation[2] within the broader framework of medieval social transformations.[3] Much of this discussion centered around

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1 In defining power elites in the early Middle Ages, this study draws on current theoretical concepts that reflect the complex nature of social relations, see: WICKHAM. The changing composition of early élites. In BOUGARD; GOETZ and LE JAN, eds. *Théorie et pratiques des élites au Haut Moyen Âge: Conception, perception et réalisation sociale/Theorie und Praxis frühmittelalterlicher Eliten. Konzepte, Wahrnehmung und soziale Umsetzung*. Turnhout 2011, pp. 5-17; BÜHLER-THIERRY. Connaître les élites du haut Moyen Âge. In BOUGARD; GOETZ and LE JAN, eds. *Théorie et pratiques*, pp. 373-383; BOUGARD; BÜHLER-THIERRY and LE JAN. Elites in the Early Middle Ages. Identities, Strategies, Mobility. In *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 2013, vol. 68, no. 4, pp. 735-768. See also WERNER. Adel – „Mehrzweck-Elite" vor der Moderne? In WERNER. *Einheit der Geschichte Studien zur Historiographie*. Sigmaringen 1999, pp. 120-135.

2 REUTER. The Medieval Nobility in Twentieth-Century Historiography 1. In BENTLEY, ed. *Companion to Historiography*. London 1997, pp. 166-184. In general, see: REUTER. Introduction. In REUTER, ed. *The Medieval nobility: Studies on the ruling classes of France and Germany from the sixth to the twelfth century*. Amsterdam; New York; Oxford 1979, pp. 1-16. Fundamental works that significantly influenced later discourse were also published during this period by French medievalist Georges Duby. A selection of his most important studies on the formation of the medieval nobility was published in the collected volume: DUBY. *The Chivalrous Society*. Berkeley 1977.

3 For this, see, for example: POLY and BOURNAZEL. *The Feudal Transformation: 900–1200*. Translated by HIGGITT. New York; London 1991; WEST. *Reframing the Feudal Revolution: Political and Social Transformation between Marne and Moselle, c. 800–c. 1100*. Cambridge 2013; FIORE. *The Seigneurial Transformation: Power Structures and Political Communication in the Countryside of Central and Northern Italy, 1080–1130*. Translated by KNIPE. Oxford 2020. For historiography on the origins and development of nobility, knighthood, and

the problem of continuity versus discontinuity among power elites, specifically whether the original prominent families that had held the most power survived the turbulent transitions of the 10th and 11th centuries, or whether entirely new elites not associated with earlier ruling groups emerged during that time.[4] Paul Fouracre distinguishes between the older lineage-based nobility rooted in hereditary status and a nobility defined by individual merit—particularly through military prowess, loyal service to the monarch, and administrative competence. He also emphasizes the interrelation of military obligations, property rights, and kinship ties in shaping a class of elites capable of exercising regional power and representing royal interests. In his view, the legitimation of elite status relied on a blend of continuity in familial traditions and the establishment of new power relations with the crown. The rise of the aristocracy during this period is thus interpreted as the interplay between older genealogical structures and the ascent of charismatic individuals who secured distinguished positions through personal merit and strategic influence, whether by asserting royal authority or by developing personal regional lordships and networks of power.[5]

In this context, early medieval elites or aristocratic groups – often referred to in sources by Latin terms such as *optimates*, *proceres*, *primates*, *principes*, *illustres*, *maiores natu*, and *nobiles*—have been studied primarily from political and legal perspectives. One of the central research questions concerns the internal structure, familial ties, identity and origins,[6] wealth and corresponding

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ministeriality within the context of transformative processes, using the example of medieval the Low Countries, see: VAN STEENSEL. Origins and Transformations. Recent Historiography on the Nobility in the Medieval Low Countries 1. In *History Compass*, 2014, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 263-272.

4   LEYSER. The German Aristocracy from the Ninth to the Early Twelfth Century. A Historical and Cultural Sketch. In *Past & Present*, 1968, vol. 41, pp. 25-53; GENICOT. Recent research on the medieval nobility. In REUTER, ed. *The Medieval nobility*, pp. 17-29; SCHMID. The structure of the nobility in the earlier middle ages. In REUTER, ed. *The Medieval nobility*, pp. 37-40; MARTINDALE. The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal. In *Past & Present*, 1977, vol. 75, no. 1, pp. 5-45. For a summary overview, see: REUTER. Introduction, pp. 1-16.

5   FOURACRE. The Origins of the Nobility in Francia. In DUGGAN, ed. *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*. Woodbridge 2000, pp. 17-24. Also see: NELSON. Nobility in the Ninth Century. In DUGGAN, ed. *Nobles and Nobility*, pp. 43-51. Social developments in the 10th century were marked by a shift in the exercise of power toward holders of specific territories who possessed military strength, leading to the gradual transformation of the Carolingian court "nobility" into an aristocracy firmly tied to particular regions. See: LE JAN. Continuity and Change in the Tenth-Century Nobility. In DUGGAN, ed. *Nobles and Nobility*, 2000, pp. 53-68.

6   BOSL. Die "familia" als Grundstruktur der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft. In *Zeitschrift für Bayerische Landesgeschichte*, 1975, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 403-424; MARTINDALE. The French Aristocracy, pp. 10-19. Also see the important collected volume on noble families and kin-

access to power, as well as their relationship with the monarch—based on proven merits, personal success, or any role in a courtly or regional office, for instance.[7] From the 6th to the 12th century, aristocratic, (and later noble) ideals also included the development of behavioral models and value systems related to social culture, displays of power, and royal authority. In different stages of historical development, values such as loyalty, military honor, ideals of virtue, sacred legitimation, and status symbols played a key role in shaping the identity of power elites and expressing their social standing.[8]

The structures of early medieval power did not consist solely of prominent legacy families who owed their position to the military achievements of their ancestors and substantial landholdings, but also included an emerging knightly class, high-ranking ecclesiastics, clergy, court officials, influential administrators, and future urban elites. These aristocratic groups were typically distinguished not only by land ownership, military prowess, wealth, or legal privileges, but also by an ostentatious and representative lifestyle. This included feasts, gift-giving, distinctive dress, courtly etiquette, donations to ecclesiastical institutions, lavish residences, and often access to education, all of which served as means of expressing authority and securing social recognition. It follows that elites cannot be defined solely by their lineage or traditional family ties, cultural factors such as norms of behavior, political gestures, visible expressions of Christian identity, methods of exercising power, symbolic dominance, and the ability to represent oneself publicly also played a crucial role. Those who held such exceptional status combined practical control over social spaces with strong displays of prestige and the performance of social rituals, through which they reinforced their authority and publicly legitimized their power.[9]

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ship relations, with particular emphasis on individual European regions and their comparative analysis: DUBY, Georges and LE GOFF, Jacques, eds. *Famille et parenté dans l'Occident médiéval. Actes du colloque de Paris (6–8 juin 1974)*. Rome 1977. A major influence on the further development of research in this area was the publication: FICHTENAU. *Lebensordnung des 10. Jahrhunderts: Studien über Denkart und Existenz im einstigen Karolingerreich*. Stuttgart 1984. On the issue of the German nobility and the perception of its status, which in some respects differed from the Western European tradition, see: FREED. Reflections on the Medieval German Nobility. In *The American Historical Review*, 1986, vol. 91, no. 3, pp. 553-575.

7   It remains difficult to determine whether social status, wealth, and access to power were primarily the result of proven merits and royal favor, or whether kinship ties within extended families and their "noble" origin played a more decisive role. REUTER. Introduction, pp. 7-12; SCHMID. The structure, pp. 45-48, 51-56; MARTINDALE. The French Aristocracy, pp. 26-31. Most recently, see for example: BRÉGAINT. Kings and aristocratic elites: communicating power and status in medieval Norway. In *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2021, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 1-20.

8   For the example of the German nobility, see: BOSL. *Leitbilder und Wertvorstellungen des Adels von der Merowingerzeit bis zur Höhe der feudalen Gesellschaft*. München 1974.

9   REUTER. Nobles and Others: The Social and Cultural Expression of Power Relations in the

The preservation of privileged status and the very process by which the high medieval landed nobility emerged was equally important.[10] Such issues have been addressed by numerous historians,[11] and although their findings led to the identification of several common features that characterize the position and transformation of power elites and the formation of nobility, current research as well as interpretations of individual scholars continues to reassess, refine, or revise earlier historiographical concepts. There have even been attempts to deconstruct the very notion and concept of medieval nobility,[12] along with efforts to analyze the relationship between the social image conveyed by contemporary sources and the actual social structures, particularly in relation to elites, the division of estates, and the privileged warrior class from which the nobility gradually developed.[13]

As Susan Reynolds demonstrated in her original and somewhat controversial book, medieval sources do not support the widely accepted thesis that relationships between kings and nobles (*nobiles*) in the later Middle Ages directly evolved from the bonds between early medieval military chieftains and the members of their retinues. The transformation of personal warrior vassalage into ties based on territorial landholding—mediated through the granting of fiefs—does not reflect the social reality of the early and high Middle Ages, but rather represents a construct shaped by late medieval and early modern legal thinking.[14]

Among the established and well-worn approaches to the study of elites are detailed case studies that focus either on smaller areas or broader regions, depending on the availability and condition of preserved written sources. Over a longer time span, such research makes it possible to more effectively trace

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Middle Ages. In DUGGAN, ed. *Nobles and Nobility*, pp. 85-98.

10 E.g. HUNT. The Emergence of the Knight in France and England 1000–1200. In *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 1981, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 93-114; BOUCHARD. The Origins of the French Nobility: A Reassessment. In *The American Historical Review*, 1981, vol. 86, no. 3, pp. 501-532; DUGGAN. Introduction: Concepts, Origins, Transformations. In DUGGAN, ed. *Nobles and Nobility*, pp. 1-14; CROUCH. *The English Aristocracy, 1070–1272: A Social Transformation*. New Haven; London 2011; CROUCH. *The Birth of Nobility. Constructing Aristocracy in England and France 900–1300*. London; New York 2014.

11 Marc Bloch, Karl Bosl, Georges Duby, Timothy Reuter, Gerd Tellenbach, Karl Ferdinand Werner, Karl Schmid, Leopold Genicot, Karl Leyser, Bernard Stanley Bachrach, Constance B. Bouchard, Anne J. Duggan, David Crouch, Hans-Werner Goetz, Laurent Feller, Gerd Althoff and many others.

12 MORSEL. Inventing a Social Category. The Sociogenesis of the Nobility at the End of the Middle Ages. In JUSSEN, ed. *Ordering Medieval Society: Perspectives on Intellectual and Practical Modes of Shaping Social Relations*. Philadelphia 2001, pp. 200-240.

13 OEXLE. Perceiving Social Reality in the Early and High Middle Ages. A Contribution to a History of Social Knowledge. In JUSSEN, ed. *Ordering Medieval Society*, pp. 92-126.

14 REYNOLDS. *Fiefs and Vassals. The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted*. Oxford 1994, especially pp. 475-482.

the origins, rise to power, and social status of individual aristocratic families.[15] Further investigation of research questions related to power elites and the formation of landed nobility has largely drawn on methodological approaches developed within the field of social history, particularly with regard to the early and high Middle Ages. This includes the study of collective identities (e.g., *in-group* and *out-group theory*), wealth (land ownership), luxury and the display of generosity (*gift-giving theory*), strategies for maintaining power, and the transformation of social hierarchies—understood broadly as processes of social mobility.[16] Social mobility is understood in this context as changes in the composition of ruling elites, whereby different aristocratic families and their kin could rise to prominence thanks to royal favor or dynastic succession. The replacement of elites and the emergence of new noble families were often driven by political crises, the rise of new dynasties, or related military conflicts, which sometimes led to the extinction of formerly influential lineages.[17] While newly crowned rulers often relied on segments of the old elite, they also tended to build their own circles of loyal supporters. This opened opportunities for previously less prominent families to gain access to power, property, and public office. At the same time, these shifts were accompanied by deliberate efforts on the part of the older elites to maintain established positions, often by attempting to limit the access of new families to the royal court or to influential positions within the political structure.[18]

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15   BARTON. *The Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century León and Castile*. Cambridge 1997. BARBE-RO. *L'Aristocrazia nella società francese del medioevo: analisi delle fonti letterarie, secoli X–XIII*. Bologna 1987.

16   BOSL. On Social Mobility in Medieval Society: Service, Freedom, and Freedom of Move-ment as Means of Social Ascent. In THRUPP, ed. *Early Medieval Society*. New York 1967, pp. 87-102; HARLIHY. Three Patterns of Social Mobility in Medieval History. In *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 1973, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 623-647; CAROCCI. Social mobility and the Middle Ages. In *Continuity and Change*, 2011, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 375-387; WARE-HAM. *Lords and Communities in Early Medieval East Anglia*. Woodbridge 2005, pp. 125-154; REYNOLDS. *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300*. 2nd edition. Oxford 1997.

17   On the issue of social mobility triggered by the dynamic societal changes following the Nor-man invasion of England in the second half of the 11th century—which led not only to an elite replacement but also to significant alterations in the social hierarchy—see: RUNCIMAN. Accelerating Social Mobility: The Case of Anglo-Saxon England. In *Past & Present*, 1984, vol. 104, no. 1, pp. 3-30. On the social rise of the new warrior class, the so-called *ministeria-les*, see: FREED. The Origins of the European Nobility: The Problem of the Ministerials. In *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 1976, vol. 7, pp. 211-241.

18   LEYSER. The German, pp. 25-30, 37-40, 42-46, 48-53; GENICOT. Recent research, pp. 20-22; SCHMID. The structure, pp. 51-56; BOUCHARD. The Origins, pp. 520-528. See also: BOSL. Die "familia", pp. 418-420.

Most scholars emphasize that social status was largely determined by birth, which was the decisive factor in defining "nobility." Some early medieval authors who used the term *nobilis* in their works clearly indicated that "family"[19]— typically understood as extended kinship traced through the male, and sometimes also the female line, often claiming descent from a common illustrious ancestor —played a fundamental role in determining social position.[20] A crucial factor was also one's relationship to the monarch (*Königsnähe*),[21] as well as access to court offices and positions.[22] In their research on elites, historians also pay close attention to the creation of client networks and power alliances, which are directly related to the distinction between public and private power, as well as to the exercise of social, economic, and political dominance within structures of authority.[23] Research further focuses on personal charisma arising from military skill, such as the role of horsemen in the formation of knighthood and the semantic development of the term *miles*,[24] along with related military achievements, the accumulation of wealth, or the attainment of high ecclesiastical office.[25]

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19 BACHRACH. Some Observations on The Medieval Nobility: A Review Essay. In *Medieval Prosopography*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1980, pp. 20-22. For research on extended kinship and family ties based on personal names recorded in liturgical memorial books, see: SCHMID and WOLLASCH. *Societas et Fraternitas. Begründung eines kommentierten Quellenwerkes zur Erforschung der Personen und Personengruppen des Mittelalters*. Berlin; New York 1975. Alternatively also BEECH; BOURIN and CHAREILLE, eds. *Personal Names Studies of Medieval Europe: Social Identity and Familial Structures*. Kalamazoo, Mich. 2002.

20 LEYSER, The German, pp. 25-53; BULLOUGH. Early Medieval Social Groupings: The Terminology of Kinship. In *Past & Present*, 1969, vol. 45, pp. 3-18; LEYSER. Maternal Kin in Early Medieval Germany. A Reply. In *Past & Present*, 1970, vol. 49, pp. 126-134; BISSON. Nobility and Family in Medieval France: A Review Essay. In *French Historical Studies*, 1990, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 599-602.

21 For personal and political ties with an emphasis on the private and public spheres in the exercise of power, ceremonies, and symbolic actions in relation to the ruler and power elites within court structures in the early Middle Ages, see, for example: NELSON. *Politics and ritual in early medieval Europe*. London; Ronceverte 1986; ALTHOFF. *Amicitiae und pacta: Bündnis, Einung, Politik und Gebetsgedenken im beginnenden 10. Jahrhundert*. Hannover 1992.

22 For public offices and court positions that influenced the social status of the king's closest associates, see: ZOTZ. In Amt und Würden: Zur Eigenart "offizieller" Positionen im früheren Mittelalter. In *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte*, 1993, vol. 22, pp. 1-23.

23 For the definition and categorization of power from sociological perspectives as a political instrument in the exercise of rule and its symbolic representation, using the example of medieval queens see: REINLE. Was bedeutet Macht im Mittelalter? In ZEY, ed. *Mächtige Frauen? Königinnen und Fürstinnen im europäischen Mittelalter (11.–14. Jahrhundert)*. Ostfildern 2015, pp. 35-72.

24 HUNT. The Emergence, pp. 93-96; BISSON. Nobility, pp. 597-602, 608-613.

25 Unlike property, the granting of offices was temporary and revealed more about the social

Symbolic acts—rituals, gestures, ceremonies—also held considerable weight, used by elites and the nobility not only to demonstrate their elevated status, but also in relation to the king as part of the broader political order and balance of power. Thus, symbolism and ritual were not merely a means of expressing social norms and values, they also served as important instruments of legitimizing power, expressing the connection between Christian virtues and aristocratic ideals.[26] An additional decisive factor supporting the social recognition and self-representation of elites were special donations (*donationes pro anima*) made to ecclesiastical institutions, which were linked to the concept of preserving *memoria* after death.[27]

An important part of these broadly conceived topics also included questions concerning the emergence of estates and the economic transformation of older settlement areas, including the colonization of previously forested peripheral zones. These changes manifested themselves in new legitimizing "ideologies," the strengthening of lineage-based identity within various branches of noble families, the reorganization of extended kinship structures, and the formation of more "closed" noble lineages.[28] Intimately related to these themes in the study of power elites are questions surrounding the disappearance or exclusion of certain families and their extended kin from power and office, which could result from a loss of royal favor or from property and financial difficulties that led to a decline in status and overall socio-economic downfall. In some cases, the disappearance of a family was simply a matter of gradual decline, such as through the deaths of its male members in warfare.

The loss of influence of certain groups can sometimes be explained by the fact that although some prominent families no longer appear in written sources, they continued to exist in collateral lineages under different names, which

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status of individuals. Since high ecclesiastical and secular offices were not yet hereditary in the early Middle Ages, kin groups were formed primarily based on the achievements of charismatic individuals, whose prestige also benefited the wider family network. SCHMID. The structure, pp. 47-48.

26 ALTHOFF. Christian Values and Noble Ideas of Rank and Their Consequences on Symbolic Acts. In *e-Spania*, 2007, vol. 4, https://doi.org/10.4000/e-spania.4053

27 LEYSER. The German, pp. 35-36. For this, see: OEXLE. Memoria und Memorialüberliefe-rung im früheren Mittelalter. In *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 1976, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 70-95.

28 WAREHAM. *Lords and Communities*, pp. 61-124; FREED. Reflections, pp. 553-575. It sho-uld also be noted that the term *familia*, despite its legal meaning, also referred to the so-called "paternal" extended family (i.e., kinship derived from a male ancestor) and encompassed a broader socio-economic and cultural-religious kinship community. BOSL. Die "familia", pp. 411-412; BOUCHARD. The Origins, pp. 501-504. Likewise, the awareness of belonging to a wider kin group reinforced identification and the "collective memory" of ancestors, which served as a source of familial self-consciousness, manifested primarily in lineage genealogy. BISSON. Nobility, pp. 602-605.

significantly complicates identification in historical research. These families may have been absorbed into the "lower" nobility or as a result of social decline and the loss of rank, may have become burghers or even in rare cases, free peasants.[29] It is important to note in this context that not all members of extended magnate families had equal access to power and office. Unlike their more successful relatives, some of them held relatively limited political, social, or economic significance throughout the entire period.[30]

Several of the aforementioned research approaches were influenced by political sociology (notably Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca) and later by cultural and social anthropology. Such schools of thought emphasize that human communities naturally generate a ruling minority that concentrates wealth, power, and prestige in its hands.[31] This results in the emergence of a group—the elite—closely associated with the exercise of public authority.[32] The status of power elites could be inherited, acquired through marriage—which offered lower social groups a chance for upward mobility, obtained through property ownership—since land was a key economic asset for both established and newly emerging ruling classes, earned via education, held through office, or granted by royal favor.[33] Many related research questions fall within the domain of legal history, such as those concerning inheritance rules, forms of property ownership, economic background,[34] the structure of extended kinship networks, legal status, the definition of privileged and non-privileged groups, their legal classification, or the degree of personal freedom. The study of medieval elites is also closely connected to the sociological theory of "contacts and networks" (*actor–network*

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29 LEYSER. The German, pp. 25-35; GENICOT. Recent research, pp. 18-19.

30 BACHRACH. Some Observation, pp. 20-22.

31 MARTINDALE. The French Aristocracy, pp. 10-13. For this, see: FELLER. Crises et renouvellements des élites au haut Moyen Âge : mutations ou ajustements des structures? In BOUGARD; FELLER and LE JAN, eds. *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge: Crises et renouvellements*. Turnhout 2006, pp. 13-17; WICKHAM. The changing, pp. 8-13.

32 For example, when defining medieval elites, several authors from the 9th–10th centuries likely employed methods of social evaluation by distinguishing between status acquired through the exercise of power or granted office, and a person's position within a hierarchically structured society (free or unfree and of "noble" or "common" origin). At the same time, they expressed the belief that men of high social status should be favored over those of lower rank. MARTINDALE. The French Aristocracy, pp. 5-9.

33 LEYSER. The German, pp. 33-35; SCHMID. The structure, pp. 40-45, 48-50; BOUCHARD. The Origins, pp. 512-524; MARTINDALE. The French Aristocracy, pp. 26-31.

34 On the relationship to land and the associated property strategies and kinship identities of early medieval power elites, see: GEARY. Land, Language and Memory in Europe 700–1100. In *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 1999, vol. 9, pp. 169-184; WHITE. *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints: The Laudatio Parentum in Western France 1050–1150*. Chapel Hill; London 1988, pp. 1-17, 22-41, 134-139, 150-153; LEYSER. The German, pp. 36-40.

theory), as groups within centers of power and regional structures who often gained, maintained, or enhanced their status and influence through internal organization and interconnection within multiple "networks" or "zones of contact." In doing so, they exercised control over social spaces.[35]

The use of traditional historical approaches, such as genealogy and prosopography continues to be an integral part of modern research on power elites and the formation of landed nobility. Despite certain risks in interpreting source references (e.g., concerning family names),[36] these methods remain valuable and effective tools for identifying individuals within extended kinship networks and for examining their roles within the power structures of the royal court or within regional administrations.[37] An analysis of the terms *nobilitas* and *nobilis*, expressions which have multiple meanings and were used to refer to higher social strata, to emphasize noble lineage, or to identify individuals of significant status,[38] often linked to claims of social rank and land ownership, is equally important. These terms also referred to a variety of warrior groups and it is therefore necessary to interpret them in light of the semantic changes they underwent throughout different historical periods. Closely connected to social status is the question of medieval interpretations of freedom (*libertas*), which could take on a range of meanings and forms. All of these aspects can be explored through a research approach known as *Begriffsgeschichte*, which focuses on the historical transformation of key terms within their specific temporal and cultural contexts. [39]

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35 For power and family ties, social networks, and political behavior, see, for example: FREED. Reflections, pp. 553-575; LE JAN. Continuity, pp. 53-68; ALTHOFF. *Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter: Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde*. Darmstadt 1997.

36 SCHMID. The structure, pp. 45-48.

37 On prosopography and its use in the study of medieval lineages and families, see, for example: BACHRACH. Some Observation, pp. 15-33; ROGOZINSKI. Ennoblement by the Crown and Social Stratification in France 1285–1322: A Prosopographical Survey. In JORDAN; McNAB and RUIZ, eds. *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Joseph R. Strayer*. Princeton 1976, pp. 273-291; BISSON. Nobility, pp. 597-598.

38 See: NELSON. Nobility, pp. 43-51. Although these terms held considerable social significance for medieval authors, they did not always precisely convey or clearly define their meaning. GENICOT. Recent research, pp. 25-26; SCHMID. The structure, pp. 48-49; MARTINDALE. The French Aristocracy, pp. 10-19; BACHRACH. Some Observation, pp. 18-19. For a detailed discussion of the term *nobilis*, see: GOETZ. „Nobilis". Der Adel im Selbstverständnis der Karolingerzeit. In *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1983, vol. 70, pp. 153-191. For Anglo-Saxon terms denoting nobility and for a linguistic analysis of how concepts such as status, recognition, honor, and loyalty were reflected in language, see: ROBERTS. The Old English Vocabulary of Nobility. In DUGGAN, ed. *Nobles and Nobility*, pp. 69-84.

39 SCHULZE. Mediävistik und Begriffsgeschichte. In JÄSCHKE and WENSKUS, eds. *Festschrift für Helmut Beumann*. Sigmaringen 1977, pp. 388-405. For the semantic shifts of the

Several of these methodological perspectives—especially those drawing on sociological and anthropological analytical methods—were applied in the international research project *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge* (2003–2009), which produced eight collective monographs that explored early medieval elites from a variety of angles: historiography; periods of crisis and renewal; the role of elites on the frontiers in the spread of Christianity and their associated mobility and hierarchy; their spheres of power tied to movement, influence, and dominance; hierarchy and social stratification; questions of literacy and attitudes toward culture as a form of elite self-representation; their relationship to wealth and luxury as expressions of power and status; and concepts, perceptions, and social realizations of early medieval elites.[40] The project team established key criteria and new research directions for the study of power elites and their transformations, as well as highlighting further possibilities, scholarly challenges, and—last but not least—certain limitations inherent in researching these topics. Although the project focused on the early Middle Ages (6th–11th centuries) and was geographically centered on the regions of southern and western Europe, its findings and methodological approaches are stimulating and applicable to the study of Hungarian and East-Central European power elites in the 11th–13th centuries. Several researchers described different forms of the emergence and transformation of power elites, with an emphasis on social mobility, stratification, and internal hierarchies within ruling groups. These insights are broadly relevant to many early medieval European societies and offer a deeper understanding of

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concept of nobility, see for example: OEXLE. Aspekte der Geschichte des Adels im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit. In WEHLER, ed. *Europäischer Adel 1750–1950*. Göttingen 1990, pp. 1-56; HECHBERGER. *Adel, Ministerialität und Rittertum im Mittelalter* (2. Auflage). München 2010.

40 LE JAN and BÜHLER-THIERRY, eds. *L'historiographie des élites du haut Moyen Âge: Actes du colloque tenu à l'Université de Marne-la-Vallée et Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 28–29 novembre 2003*. Paris 2004, https://archive-2007-2013.lamop.fr/elites/index.html; BOUGARD; FELLER and LE JAN, eds. *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge: Crises et renouvellements*. Turnhout 2006; BÜHLER-THIERRY and LIENHARD, eds. *Les élites aux frontières. Mobilité et hiérarchie dans le cadre de la mission: Actes de la rencontre organisée à Marne-la-Vallée par l'Université de Marne-la-Vallée et Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 20 mai 2006)*. Paris 2006, https://archive-2007-2013.lamop.fr/elites/frontiere.html; DEPREUX; BOUGARD and LE JAN, eds. *Les élites et leurs espaces. Mobilité, Rayonnement, Domination (du VIe au XIe siècle)*. Turnhout 2007; BOUGARD; IOGNA-PRAT and LE JAN, eds. *Hiérarchie et stratification sociale dans l'Occident médiéval (400–1100)*. Turnhout 2007; BOUGARD; LE JAN and McKITTERICK, eds. *La culture du haut Moyen Âge, une question d'élites?* Turnhout 2009; DEVROEY; FELLER and LE JAN, eds. *Les élites et la richesse au Haut Moyen Âge*. Turnhout 2010; BOUGARD; GOETZ and LE JAN, eds. *Théorie et pratiques des élites au Haut Moyen Âge: Conception, perception et réalisation sociale/Theorie und Praxis frühmittelalterlicher Eliten. Konzepte, Wahrnehmung und soziale Umsetzung*. Turnhout 2011.

the mechanisms by which East-Central European elites asserted dominance and secured social recognition.

Power Elites in East-Central Europe and the Kingdom of Hungary: State of Research

Some of the processes outlined above changed only minimally over several centuries (though the theory of *longue durée* requires us to account for gradual developments and social shifts), and for this reason, can be observed even in later periods. This is particularly true of the "younger" Christian monarchies that emerged on the periphery of Latin Christendom in the 11th century, including the Kingdom of Hungary under the Árpád dynasty. The establishment of these dominions is considered a significant event in the medieval history of Europe, as these regions had previously not been part of the Roman Empire and originally lay on the margins of Latin Christianity.

However, this does not mean that the political and social developments in East-Central Europe unfolded independently of those in Western Europe. On the contrary, there were intensive contacts between the two regions and socio-political changes occurring in the West significantly influenced the situation in these peripheral areas.[41] One of the defining features of power elites—characterized by their exceptional status, wealth, and prestige—was their ability to shape the cultural environment and transmit normative ideas, behavioral models, forms of representing power, and ideological frameworks into neighboring regions. The relationships between medieval communities thus manifested not only through conflict and warfare, but also through the adoption of cultural elements, which were often adapted to local contexts (e.g. weapons, clothing, fighting styles, literacy, Christianity, etc.). These long-term processes contributed to structural

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41   POHL and WIESER. Introduction: The Historiography of New Peoples and Polities in Northern and Eastern Europe. In POHL; WIESER and BORRI, eds. *The Emergence of New Peoples and Polities in Europa, 1000–1300*. Turnhout 2022, pp. 1-41. Specifically regarding medieval Hungary, see: ANGENENDT. *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe. Kaiser, Könige und Päpste als geistliche Patrone in der abendländischen Missionsgeschichte*. Berlin; New York 1984, pp. 305-315; BÜHLER-THIERRY. Adopter une autre culture pour s'agréger à l'élite: acculturation et mobilité sociale aux marges du monde franc. In BOUGARD; LE JAN and McKITTERICK, eds. *La culture*, pp. 257-259, 263-264, 267-269. On the formation of medieval East-Central Europe with regard to power-political contacts and Western influences, see the most recent: WIHODA. *The Making of Medieval Central Europe: Power and Political Prerequisites for the First Westernization, 791–1122*. Lanham; Boulder; New York; London 2024. The social transformation of the 13th century in the Czech lands, which occurred as a result of innovations and influences from Western Europe and was accompanied by cultural changes, transformations of the rural environment, and the founding of towns, also pays particular attention to the formation of the landed nobility, see: KLÁPŠTĚ. *The Czech Lands in Medieval Transformation*. Leiden; Boston 2011.

transformations within the ruling and warrior classes in frontier regions. Cultural elements that were implemented became visible markers of elite identity, helping to reinforce their prominent role within the social hierarchy.[42]

   Such aforementioned contacts and cultural influences had a significant impact on the native Hungarian elites, which became evident in subsequent periods of crisis and other important social transformations.[43] This was partly related to the arrival of magnates, warriors, and clerics from abroad at the Árpád court and their eventual integration into local power structures, who brought changes that contributed to increased social mobility, shifts in landholding practices, lifestyle, and the mechanisms by which local magnates and warriors consolidated and maintained their positions of power. The durability of social status, as well as opportunities for individual advancement, were rooted in the interconnection of political, economic, and cultural spheres—essentially a network of social relations, demonstrated loyalty, and direct ties to royal authority.[44] This system was characterized by the overlap of "power networks" with royal authority and by the influence of established regional elites on the structure of these relationships.[45]

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42 For a detailed examination of the ways in which elites on the periphery actively sought to legitimize their position through the "language of power," using the examples of Poland and Norway, see: JEZIERSKI; ORNING and PAC. Introduction: Languages of Power and Elite Legitimisation on the Periphery, Poland, and Norway, 1000–1300. In *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 2024, vol. 129, pp. 5-30. On medieval elites east of the Elbe and on cultural transfer from the West that influenced the peripheral regions of Central Europe, see: KLAMMT and ROSSIGNOL. Mittelalterliche Eliten und Kulturtransfer östlich der Elbe. Eine Einleitung. In KLAMMT and ROSSIGNOL, eds. *Mittelalterliche Eliten und Kulturtransfer östlich der Elbe: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zu Archäologie und Geschichte im mittelalterlichen Ostmitteleuropa*. Göttingen 2009, pp. 5-9. For this, see for example: GALUŠKA. Rex, principes, optimates – elity Velké Moravy. In KOUŘIL, ed. *Velká Morava a počátky křesťanství*. Brno 2014, pp. 51-61; PROFANTOVÁ. Mocenské elity v Čechách 9. – 10. století. In KOUŘIL, ed. *Velká Morava*, pp. 62-69; KALHOUS. Some observations on the social structure of Great Moravia. In KOUŘIL, ed. *The Cyril and Methodius Mission and Europe: 1150 Years Since the Arrival of the Thessaloniki Brothers in Great Moravia*. Brno 2015, pp. 40-46.

43 HUDÁČEK. Medieval Society in East-Central Europe in the 11th to 13th Centuries: An Introduction from the Example of the Kingdom of Hungary. In *Forum Historiae*, 2024, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 1-26.

44 HERUCOVÁ and HUDÁČEK. Verní a neverní kráľovi. In *Forum Historiae*, 2019, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 1-17; RAZIM. Věrnost v Kosmově kronice. In *Forum Historiae*, 2019, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 18-39; MACHALSKI. Bonds of Loyalty in the Gesta principum Polonorum. In CSEPREGI, ed. *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, Vol. 27. Budapest; Vienna 2021, pp. 37-51; MACHALSKI. (Un)faithful Subjects of (Un)faithful Rulers. Loyalty in the Earliest Central European Chronicles. In *Historical Studies Central Europe*, 2021, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 44-67.

45 Earlier scholars assumed that the so-called "tribal" nobility in Poland, Bohemia, and the Kingdom of Hungary was forcibly removed during the 10th–11th centuries and replaced by the so-called service nobility, which only gradually took shape and freed itself from royal control. REUTER. Introduction, pp. 11-12. For current research on medieval elites in a comprehen-

It was precisely after the adoption of Christianity that conditions for the rise of new power elites in the Kingdom of Hungary, Poland, and Bohemia emerged, developments often accompanied by social shifts, occasional crises, and "pagan" reactions.[46] These social processes, which stemmed from "military reforms" aimed at recruiting new warriors and increasing upward mobility among the lower classes, culminated over the course of the 13th century with the formation of the landed nobility.[47]

In this context, it is important to acknowledge a point made some time ago by János M. Bak, namely that comparative research on medieval elites in East-Central Europe faces certain limitations. From a methodological perspective, it is also essential to exercise caution when adopting findings and source interpretations from Western historiography uncritically and applying them directly to local written materials. In Western scholarship, elites are often associated with the "feudal" nobility, knighthood, or urban patriciates. However, East-Central European elites and nobility—though they also had access to power—may have differed in origin, legal status, or experienced a delay in the development of privileged social groups compared to their Western counterparts. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a clearly defined and consistently applied conceptual framework. When comparing similarities or differences between

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sive form with an emphasis on the East-Central European context, see: POPA-GORJANU. The Rise of the Early Medieval Aristocracy. In CURTA, ed. *The Routledge Handbook of East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1300*. London; New York 2022, pp. 155-165; POPA-GORJANU. Changing Elites in Medieval Central Europe. In ZEČEVIĆ and ZIEMANN, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Central Europe*. Oxford 2022, pp. 175-186.

46 LÜBKE. Das „junge Europa" in der Krise: Gentilreligiöse Herausforderungen um 1000. In *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 2001, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 475-496; MÚCSKA. Boj uhorského štátu proti pohanstvu v 11. storočí. In KOŽIAK and NEMEŠ, eds. *Pohanstvo a kresťanstvo. Zborník z konferencie 5. – 6. II. 2003 v Banskej Bystrici*. Bratislava 2004, pp. 201-210; PLESZCZYŃSKI. Kryzys i upadek wczesnych państw słowiańskich oraz ich odbudowa (IX–XI wiek). Zarys problemu. In *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 2018, vol. 125, no. 2, pp. 263-302.

47 RADY. *Nobility, Land and Service in Medieval Hungary*. New York 2000, pp. 28-44, 79-95; HUDÁČEK. From Royal Populi to Filii Iobagionum (The Change in the Social Position of "Royal Servants" to "Conditional Nobles" in the Region of Liptov in the Thirteenth century). In ZUPKA, ed. *Continuity and Change in Medieval East Central Europe. Social, Ruling and Religious Transformations*. London 2025, pp. 57-76. For the transformation of the social status of the *Knezes* in the 14th–15th centuries—who initially became part of the Hungarian nobility as *nobiles Valachi* and later merged with the nobles of the kingdom (*veri nobiles regni*)—see: POPA-GORJANU. From Kenezii to Nobiles Valachi: The Evolution of the Romanian Elite of the Banat in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries. In SEBŐK and SZENDE, ed. *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, Vol. 6. Budapest 2000, pp. 109-128; POPA-GORJANU. Continuity and Change in the History of Elites in Medieval Hungary. The Nobility and the Knezes. In ZUPKA, ed. *Continuity and Change*, pp. 133-147.

different types of medieval sources, it is necessary to take into account the specific historical context. In the case of the Kingdom of Hungary, Poland, and Bohemia, this means especially the distinct socio-political settings, the balance between written and oral culture, specific terminology and its usage, as well as the structure of families and extended kinship networks.[48]

Recent publications focused on medieval East-Central Europe offer valuable approaches to studying the relationship between elites and the monarch or his circle of loyal supporters. The authors of these works examine such topics through the lenses of historical anthropology, as well as new political and cultural history, with research centred particularly on the representation of elites and rulers,[49] political and symbolic communication through various forms of ritual and symbols of power,[50] as well as themes of sacralization and legitimation of authority or military activity carried out by privileged and elite social groups.[51] An additional noteworthy contribution has been the renewed interest in the role of noblewomen, including their significance and position in the political and social history of medieval East-Central Europe.[52] Recently, using the example of comes Piotr Włostowic from the second half of the 12th century, Eduard Mühle has shown that although elite status was traditionally defined by noble origin, social rank, land ownership, and wealth, other key factors included holding court offices, participation in the administration of the realm, military command, extended kinship ties, and client networks. A higher social position and continued hold on power largely depended on close cooperation with the current ruler and his immediate entourage.[53] Similar conclusions were reached by Zbigniew Dalewski,

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48   BAK. Probleme einer vergleichenden Betrachtung mittelalterlicher Eliten in Ostmitteleuropa. In BORGOLTE, ed. *Das europäische Mittelalter im Spannungsbogen des Vergleichs. Zwanzig internationale Beiträge zu Praxis, Problemen und Perspektiven der historischen Komparatistik*. Berlin 2001, pp. 49-64.

49   NODL and PLESZCZYŃSKI, eds. *Moc a její symbolika ve středověku*. Praha 2011; ANTONÍN. *The Ideal Ruler in Medieval Bohemia*. Leiden; Boston 2017.

50   DALEWSKI. *Ritual and Politics*. Leiden; Boston 2008; ZUPKA. *Ritual and Symbolic Communication in Medieval Hungary under the Árpád Dynasty, 1000–1301*. Leiden; Boston 2016; ŠMAHEL; NODL and ŽŮREK, eds. *Festivities, Ceremonies and Rituals in the Lands of the Bohemian Crown in the Late Middle Ages*. Leiden; Boston 2022.

51   VERCAMER and ZUPKA, eds. *Rulership in Medieval East Central Europe. Power, Rituals and Legitimacy in Bohemia, Hungary and Poland*. Leiden; Boston 2022.

52   PAC. *Women in the Piast Dynasty: A Comparative Study of Piast Wives and Daughters (c. 965–c.1144)*. Leiden; Boston, 2022; ZSOLDOS. *The Árpáds and Their Wives: Queenship in Early Medieval Hungary, 1000–1301*. Roma 2019.

53   MÜHLE. Czym były elity społeczne wczesnego średniowiecza? Próba zdefiniowania świeckiego możnowładztwa polskiego pierwszej połowy XII w. In *Historia Slavorum Occidentis*, 2021, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 65-83; MÜHLE. Genese und frühe Entwicklung des Adels in polnischer Sicht. In MÜHLE, ed. *Studien zum Adel im mittelalterlichen Polen*. Wiesbaden 2012,

who also investigated the foundations of elite social status in early medieval Poland, emphasizing that it was a dynamic and complex set of characteristics, which also included representation in the princely council, personal service to the ruler, participation in military campaigns (as a demonstration of courage and loyalty), support for the Church as a form of self-presentation (such as founding churches and monasteries), and dynastic memory.[54]

Unlike in Hungarian, Czech, and Polish historiography, Slovak medieval studies have not yet undergone deeper scholarly debates concerning power elites—secular or ecclesiastical—and their transformations. Most historians have focused primarily on survey works or summaries,[55] relying predominantly on Hungarian research.[56] There are also several older, detailed studies of individual lower- and middle-ranking noble families who resided in what is today northern Slovakia, with attention given to their genealogy and property acquisitions.[57] In

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pp. 1-12.

54 DALEWSKI. Wyznaczniki statusu elit władztwa piastowskiego we wcześniejszym śred-niowieczu. In *Historia Slavorum Occidentis*, 2025, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 137-149. For the use of feasts as ritualized instruments of political and symbolic dominance to legitimize power and elite status, see: JEZIERSKI and ŻMUDZKI. Feasting and Elite Legitimisation in Poland and Norway: Propaganda, Political Economy, and Recognition in a Comparative Perspective, 1000–1300. In *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 2024, vol. 129, pp. 103-141. A classic treatment of this issue was offered by: ALTHOFF. *Family, Friends and Followers. Political and Social Bonds in Early Medieval Europe*. Cambridge 2004, especially pp. 152-159.

55 LUKAČKA. Formation of the Aristocracy in Slovakia. In *Human Affairs*, 2000, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 68-75.

56 MARSINA. Štruktúra šľachty na Slovensku (v Uhorsku) do začiatku 16. storočia. In ČIER-NY; HEJL and VERBÍK, eds. *Struktura feudální společnosti na území Československa a Pol-ska*. Praha 1984, pp. 134-153; MARSINA. Štruktúra šľachty na Slovensku v 9. až 13. storočí. In ŠTULRAJTEROVÁ, ed. *Najstaršie rody na Slovensku*. Martin 1999, pp. 35-43; ULIČNÝ. *Dejiny Slovenska v 11. až 13. storočí*. Bratislava 2013, pp. 392-452. This observation, how-ever, does not apply to the 14th–15th centuries, where research on the nobility and the courtly milieu is significantly more developed. For a selective overview, see, for example: DVOŘÁ-KOVÁ. Šľachtici z Ludaníc a kráľ Žigmund Luxemburský. In *Historický časopis*, 2000, vol. 48, no. 1, pp. 35-43; DVOŘÁKOVÁ. Rytierska kultúra v živote uhorskej šľachty na prelome 14. a 15. storočia. In *Historický časopis*, 2002, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 569-586; DVOŘÁKOVÁ. Mikuláš zo Sečian a Salgó – výnimočný muž na dvore Žigmunda Luxemburského (príspe-vok k dvorskej kultúre a fungovaniu uhorského kráľovského dvora na začiatku 15. storočia). In *Historický časopis*, 2011, vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 387-401. Within the Central European con-text, with an emphasis on the ritualized forms of communication among political elites, see: ZUPKA. Forms of Communication of the Political Elites in Medieval Central Europe (Hun-gary, Austria and the Czech Lands, 1250–1350). In *Historický časopis*, 2019, vol. 67, no. 5, pp. 785-808.

57 JERŠOVÁ. *Rod Ivanka z Jordánu a Dražkoviec. Príspevok k dejinám Turca*. Turčiansky Sv. Martin 1937; HÚŠČAVA. Zemianska rodina z Okoličného (Historicko-genealogická štúdia do konca XV. storočia). In *Historický sborník*, 1943, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 65-89.

some cases, emphasis is placed on their ancient "Slovak" origin, often based on analyses of personal names which is aimed at understanding their identity and family structures.[58] However, such theses do not always take into account the broader context of social change, the later chronicle tradition, or the specific conditions of the Kingdom of Hungary at the beginning of the 11th century, including the arrival of foreigners at the royal court. It is also important to recognize the risks and limitations of attempting to determine origin solely through the analysis of family names, which may not reliably reflect actual kinship ties or familial connections. Given the insufficient preservation of written sources, such an approach can distort the identification of individuals and lead to inaccurate generalizations.[59]

In recent years, new studies have emerged that focus on the nobility at the level of broader territorial units or regional noble families. These include detailed investigations into the settlement of peripheral areas, the rise of individual careers, and the economic foundations of prominent noble families and their cadet branches,[60] as well as in-depth case studies of Hungarian noble families active in the region of Šariš during the 13th and early 14th centuries. These works explore genealogical ties, family strategies, military activities, property and legal disputes, as well as personal responses to the political pressures of oligarchic rule and the formation of relationships with the monarch in efforts to preserve their social status.[61] A separate group of studies examines the nobility

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58 LUKAČKA. Beginnings of the Formation of Aristocracy on the Territory of Slovakia: As seen on the Hunt-Poznans in the Nitra region. In KUČERA and KOSTELNÍKOVÁ, eds. *Slovaks in the Central Danubian Region in the 6th to 11th century*. Bratislava 2000, pp. 167-173; LUKAČKA. K otázke etnického pôvodu veľmožského rodu Hont-Poznanovcov. In *Forum Historiae*, 2010, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 1-13.

59 See, for example, the specific chapters related to these risks in: BEECH; BOURIN and CHA-REILLE, eds. *Personal Names Studies*, or the work: SCHMID and WOLLASCH. Societas et Fraternitas.

60 E.g. RÁBIK. Vznik, počiatky a pôvod najstaršej liptovskej šľachty. In *Genealogicko-heraldický hlas*, 1999, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 3-19; LUKAČKA. *Formovanie vyššej šľachty na západnom Slovensku*. Bratislava 2002; ĎURKOVÁ. Vznik a vývoj najstaršej zvolenskej šľachty. In *Historický časopis*, 2008, vol. 56, no. 1, pp. 3-28; TIHÁNYIOVÁ. *Bubekovci z Plešivca. Úspechy a pády jedného rodu v politike a umení*. Turany 2017; TIHÁNYIOVÁ. *Páni zo Štítnika Putovanie kultúrnymi a hospodárskymi dejinami horného Gemera*. Turany 2019; LABANC. Páni z Lomnice – počiatky rodu. In DOBROTKOVÁ, et al. eds. *Studia Historica Tyrnaviensia VIII*. Trnava 2009, pp. 14-30; LABANC. *Vývoj šľachty na Spiši do začiatku 14. storočia*. Trnava; Kraków 2013. For a comprehensive overview of noble families by county in the territory of present-day Slovakia, see: ŠTULRAJTEROVÁ, ed. *Najstaršie rody na Slovensku*. Martin 1999, pp. 65-128.

61 SMOROŇ. *De genere Thekule: Uhorská šľachta v období stredoveku I*. Prešov 2015; SMOROŇ. *Rod Merše: Uhorská šľachta v období stredoveku II*. Prešov 2016.

on ecclesiastical estates, the interrelations between the Hungarian nobility and the Church, and the social ascent of prominent ecclesiastical dignitaries and their careers in various administrative roles throughout the kingdom.[62] Attention is given to the political and economic rise of powerful magnates (representatives of the oligarchy) at the royal court, with a focus on their political and military activities in the 13th century as they sought to expand influence and build personal clienteles.[63] Other topics include the arrival and settlement of foreign families in medieval Hungary and their engagement in political affairs.[64]

Despite these important contributions, Slovak historiography still lacks systematic research into the genesis, status, and transformations of Hungarian power elites between the 11th and 13th centuries, as well as analytically focused studies emphasizing specific examples of the formation of the lower and middle landed nobility. Exceptions are older studies by Daniel Rapant on the origin, status, and obligations of conditional nobles, as well as his work on the distinctions between different warrior groups, with a strong emphasis on terminological issues.[65] However, there is still an absence of connections to

62 E.g. OSLANSKÝ. Z počiatkov a rozšírenia cirkevnej šľachty na území Ostrihomskej ar-cidiecézy. In ŠIMONČIČ, ed. *Studia Historica Tyrnaviensia III*. Trnava 2003, pp. 97-104; OSLANSKÝ. Šľachta ostrihomského arcibiskupa na prelome 13. – 14. storočia. In ULIČNÝ and MAGDOŠKO, eds. *Bitka pri Rozhanovciach v kontexte slovenských a uhorských dejín*. Košice 2012, pp. 311-330; LUKAČKA. Cirkev a šľachta v Uhorsku na prelome 13. – 14. storočia. In KRAFL, ed. *Sacri canones servandi sunt. Ius canonicum et status ecclesiae sae-culis XIII – XV*. Praha 2008, pp. 168-172; LABANC and GLEJTEK. Kariéra spišského pre-pošta Mutimíra. K personálnemu a kultúrnemu transferu v Uhorskom kráľovstve v polovici 13. storočia. In *Historický časopis*, 2020, vol. 68, no. 3, pp. 385-407; LABANC. Spiš – Vise-grád – Dăbâca – Zagreb – Kalocsa – Napoli: Career paths of a family of the lower Hungarian nobility in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. In *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series His-torica*, 2016, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 61-71.

63 BLANÁR. Finta z rodu Aba–vojvoda a palatín. In *Zborník Filozofickej fakulty Univerzity Komenského, Historica 50*, 2019, pp. 120-134; PALKO. Matúš II. a Peter I. Čákovci a ich politické aktivity v 60. a 70. rokoch 13. storočia. In MALO; MICHALÍK and PINĎÁK, eds. *Matúš Čák Trenčiansky 1321 – 2021*. Trenčín 2023, pp. 11-19; VLASKO. Zápolenie uhorskej oligarchie počas feudálnej anarchie na príklade pánov z Kőszegu a rodu Čákovcov. In MALO; MICHALÍK and PINĎÁK, eds. *Matúš Čák*, pp. 21-31; BLANÁR. Omodejovci a Matúš Čák Trenčiansky, vzájomný vzťah dvoch mocenských „hornouhorských" dobových predstaviteľov oligarchie: podobnosti, špecifiká a rozdiely pôsobenia významnej vetvy Abov-cov, Omodejovcov a Matúša Čáka Trenčinskeho. In MALO; MICHALÍK and PINĎÁK, eds. *Matúš Čák*, pp. 33-39; PALKO. *Štefan I. Gutkeled (†1259). Banus et dux totius Sclavoniae et capitaneus Styriae*. Bratislava 2024.

64 VLASKO. Okolnosti príchodu a etablovania sa Frangepánovcov v Uhorskom kráľovstve do roku 1263. In *Historický časopis*, 2022, vol. 70, no. 1, pp. 3-31; VLASKO. Páni z Veglie a poslední Arpádovci. In *Historický časopis*, 2025, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 23-50.

65 RAPANT. Filii jobagionium (Deti bojarské). In *Slovenská archivistika*, 1974, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 61-74; RAPANT. Milites, cives, civiles. In *Slovenská archivistika*, 1976, vol. 11, no. 1,

foreign research and methodological approaches that could be applied to broader inquiries into the origins and transformations of power elites in the Kingdom of Hungary. Some historians have reflected only partially on these innovative approaches and rarely employ current research methods in the study of warrior classes and the formation of the lower and middle nobility.[66]

Yet these methods include the investigation of social mobility within the warrior strata, changes in social hierarchy, elite self-representation, their economic background, wealth and prestige necessary for maintaining power, inheritance practices within extended kinship networks, various forms of familial ties, and issues of social identity and family structure. Such approaches allow for a more precise understanding of the rise and decline of power elites and free warriors, as well as the processes associated with the social transformation of high medieval society in the 13th century, which ultimately led to the formation of the middle and lower nobility.

The situation is significantly better in Hungarian historiography, where a longer tradition of researching medieval aristocracy, the oligarchy,[67] warrior classes, Hungarian nobility,[68] "chivalric" culture, and medieval warfare exists.[69] Numerous historians have addressed the subject of power elites in monographs and analytical studies, including the terminological issues related to their

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pp. 89-107.

66 A comparison of two medieval noble communities in the north and south of the Kingdom of Hungary is worth noting; on this topic, see: GÁBRIŠ and BAČOVÁ. Parallels of Medieval Autonomous Communities in Slovakia and in Croatia. In HOMZA; LUKAČKA and BU-DAK, eds. *Slovakia and Croatia: Historical Parallels and Connections (until 1780)*. Bratislava; Zagreb 2013, pp. 208-221. For interesting studies on the lesser nobility, see: FÜGE-DI, Erik. O stredovekej uhorskej šľachte slovenského pôvodu. In *Historický časopis*, 1982, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 395-402 and SULITKOVÁ. Nižší šlechta v českém státě a Uhrách na přelomu 13. století ve světle písemných pramenů. In *Archaeologia historica*, 1977, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 9-22.

67 For the theoretical foundations of research on the Hungarian aristocracy, using examples from the late Middle Ages that can be methodologically applied to earlier periods as well, see: FÜGEDI. The Aristocracy in Medieval Hungary. Theses. In BAK, ed. *Kings, Bishops, Nobles and Burghers in Medieval Hungary*. London 1986, pp. 1-14 (IV).

68 To this day, for example, the three-volume work on Hungarian noble families remains a valuable and widely used source: KARÁCSONYI. *A magyar nemzetségek a XIV. század közepéig I–III*. Budapest 1900–1904, or a more recent treatment: ENGEL, Pál. *Középkori magyar genealógia. Magyar középkori adattár*, 1998 dostupné na https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Engel_MoKozepkoriAdattara_Genealogia/?pg=0&layout=s

69 BOROSY. XI–XII. századi harcosrétegünk néhány kérdéséről. In *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, 1974, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 3-27; VESZPRÉMY. A magyarországi lovagságra vonatkozó néhány adat értelmezéséről. Filológia és hadtörténet. In *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, 1987, vol. 100, no. 4, pp. 746-752; KURCZ. *Lovagi kultúra Magyarországon a 13.–14. században*. Budapest 1988;

designation,[70] like the meaning of the Latin term *nobilis* in King Ladislaus's legal code, which at the end of the 11th century may not have referred exclusively to prominent magnates, but also to large landowners.[71] Research has also explored the development and transformations within the structure of the ruling class,[72] the formation of the lower and middle nobility,[73] social hierarchies, economic background, social dynamics, and their interactions with the high nobility, as well as the overall integration of these groups into Hungarian societal structures, with consideration of the broader East-Central European context.[74] Considerable attention has been paid to the status of the royal *servientes* as free landowners directly subordinated to the king, and their transformation into hereditary landed nobility in the 13th century,[75] as well as to groups of castle or royal warriors.[76] Other important topics include the structure of the Hungarian noble family, particularly regarding inheritance practices, property strategies, forms of extended kinship, and relationships among family members,[77] including the specific term *avus*, which could refer not only to a distant ancestor but also to a legendary "founder" of the lineage used to support claims to property.[78] Research has further

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70 HUNYADI. Maiores, optimates, nobiles: Semantic Questions in the Early History of the Hungarian Nobility. In SEBŐK, ed. *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU 1996–1997*. Budapest 1998, pp. 204-211.

71 GERICS. A nobilis fogalmának értelmezéséhez Szent László II. törvényében. In HORVÁTH and RÉVÉSZ, eds. *Összehasonlító jogtörténet. Bolgár Elek emlékkönyv*. Budapest 1983, pp. 63-65.

72 SZÉKELY. Evolution de la structure et de la culture de la classe dominante laïque dans la Hongrie des Árpád. In *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 15, no. 3/4, 1969, pp. 223-252.

73 FEKETE-NAGY. Az országos és particularis nemesség tagozódása a középkorban. In BAKÁCS, ed. *Emlékkönyv Domanovzky Sándor születése hatvanadik fordulójának ünnepére 1937 május 27*. Budapest 1937, pp. 159-184; MÁLYUSZ. A magyar köznemesség kialakulása. In *Századok*, 1942, vol. 76, no. 1/3, pp. 275-305, 407-434; BÓNIS. *Hűbériség és rendiség a középkori magyar jogban*. Budapest 2003 (reprint c. 1944).

74 MAKSAY. Le pays de la noblesse nombreuse. In *Studia historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 1980, vol. 139, pp. 5-27.

75 SZEKFŰ. *Serviensek és familiarisok*. Budapest 1912; VÁCZY. A királyi serviensek és a patrimoniális királyság. In *Századok*, 1927, vol. 61, no. 9/10, pp. 351-414.

76 ZSOLDOS. *A szent király szabadjai. Fejezetek a várjobbágyság történetéből*. Budapest 1999.

77 FÜGEDI. Some Characteristics of the Medieval Hungarian Noble Family. In *Journal of Family History*, 1982, vol. 7, no.1, pp. 27-39. For more detailed studies on property relations, kinship networks, and the social and legal status of the nobility using a microhistorical approach through the investigation of a single family, see: FÜGEDI. *The Elefánthy. The Hungarian Nobleman and His Kindred*. Budapest 1998; POPA-GORJANU. *Medieval Nobility in Central Europe: The Himfi Family*. Cluj-Napoca 2019.

78 FÜGEDI. The avus in the Mediaeval Conceptual Framework of Kinship in Hungary. In BAK, ed. *Kings, Bishops*, pp. 137-142 (V).

addressed the formation of political and dynastic allegiance, especially loyalty to the Árpád dynasty and Christian identity, both of which formed the foundation of later noble estate consciousness.[79] A distinct area of study has been the historical conceptions and theoretical ideas of the medieval Hungarian chronicler Simon of Kéza, who in his work *Gesta Hungarorum*, outlined the basic principles of social and political organization, also discussing the origin of social hierarchy and the emergence of the nobility as a distinct estate. The central element of his political thought was the concept of *communitas* and the associated principle of delegated power, a model that later evolved into the idea of *communitas nobilium*, which began to present itself as the bearer of historical memory and collective identity. At the same time, it served as an ideological tool for asserting the political demands of the Hungarian nobility in the second half of the 13th century. This concept also included the construction of a historical continuity reaching back to the time of the Huns, intended to strengthen the legitimacy of the Hungarian nobility's privileges and social standing.[80]

Traditionally, considerable study was devoted to the genealogies of medieval Hungarian families, especially regarding their origin, kinship ties, property claims, and the reconstruction of related power networks. Genealogical research served not only to trace lineage continuity and the social status of individual families, but also to identify strategic marriage alliances, methods of acquiring and maintaining land, and the building of relationships with royal authority and other prominent aristocratic groups.[81]

These earlier studies were further developed by more recent research, which, alongside traditional topics such as warfare during the Árpád era,[82] the development and legal status of royal servientes and their gradual merger with

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79 DEÉR. Közösségérzés és nemzettudat a XI–XIII. századi Magyarországon. In KÁROLYI and ANGYAL, eds. *A Gróf Klebelsberg Kuno Magyar Történetkutató Intézet évkönyve IV*. Budapest 1934, pp. 93-111.

80 SZŰCZ. Társadalomelmélet, politikai teória és történetszemlélet Kézai Simon Gesta Hungarorumában I.–II. In *Századok*, 1973, vol. 107, no. 3/4, pp. 569-643, 823-878. Abbreviated English version: SZŰCZ. Theoretical Elements in Master Simon of Kéza's Gesta Hungarorum (1282–1285). In SZŰCZ. *The Historical Construction of National Consciousness: Selected Writings*. Edited by KLANICZAY; TRENCSÉNYI and GYÁNI. Budapest; Vienna; New York 2022, pp. 109-152.

81 A wealth of information on Hungarian noble families can be found in genealogical and heraldic studies published in the specialized journal *Turul: a Magyar Heraldikai és Genealogiai Társaság Közlönye* (1883–2024).

82 ZSOLDOS. The First Centuries of Hungarian Military Organization. In VESZPRÉMY and KIRÁLY, eds. *A Millennium of Hungarian Military History*. New York 2002, pp. 3-25; VESZPRÉMY. *Lovagvilág Magyarországon. Lovagok, keresztesek, hadmérnökök a középkori Magyarországon. Válogatott tanulmányok*. Budapest 2008; ZSOLDOS. *Vitézek, ispánok, oligarchák. Tanulmányok a társadalom- és a hadtörténetírás határvidékéről*. Budapest 2016.

the nobles of the kingdom (*nobiles regni*),[83] as well as the transformation and social rise of *iobagiones castri* in Slavonia into fully recognized Hungarian nobles,[84] also focused on compiling an archontological register of Hungarian officeholders, useful today for identifying prominent individuals and determining the offices and functions they held.[85] Legal regulations were also analyzed, the statutes of King Andrew III for example, with a special focus on the property and usage rights of the lower and middle nobility.[86] Scholars also examined the development and mutual influence of royal and noble law concerning the ownership and administration of landed estates.[87]

Research into noble residences, conducted within the framework of social archaeology, focused on analyzing the location and internal layout of noble seats to determine the social status of their owners, power hierarchy, representational function, and relationships with their surroundings.[88] Case studies of specific magnate families, emphasizing their origins, careers, public roles, estates, and connections to royal power are equally important.[89]

On the other hand, attention has also been paid to processes of increasing military, economic, and judicial "independence" among regional oligarchs in the second half of the 13th and early 14th centuries, which significantly threatened and curtailed the exercise of royal authority.[90] Valuable insights have also been provided by studies on the social conditions and dynamics of social change,

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83 VARGA. A királyi serviens. In *Levéltári közlemények*, 2006, vol. 77, pp. 1-96 or a good review study on the formation of the nobility ZSOLDOS. Vznik šľachty v stredovekom Uhorskom kráľovstve. In *Forum Historiae*, 2010, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 1-11.

84 HALÁSZ. Iobagio castri–nobilis castri–nobilis regni. Castle warriors–castle nobles–noblemen. The development of a social stratum in county of Križevci. In *Banatica*, 2016, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 119-134. For a comparison of the emergence and function of two noble (military) communities in medieval Hungary during the 13th–14th centuries, see: SZEBERÉNYI. Noble Communities in Spiš and Turopolje in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries. In HOMZA; LUKAČKA and BUDAK, eds. *Slovakia and Croatia*, pp. 222-226.

85 ZSOLDOS, ed. *Magyarország világi archontológiája 1000–1301*. Budapest 2011.

86 GERICS. A nemesi jogállás és birtoklás törvénybe foglalása III. András idején. In *Strigonium Antiquum*, 1993, vol. 2, pp. 105-107.

87 GERICS and LADÁNYI. Nemesi jog – királyi jog. A középkori magyarországi birtoklásban. In *Agrártörténeti szemle*, 1988, vol. 30, no. 1/2, pp. 1-19.

88 VIRÁGOS. *The Social Archaeology of Residential Sites: Hungarian noble residences and their social context from the thirteenth through to the sixteenth century: an outline for methodology*. Oxford 2006.

89 ZSOLDOS. Péter és Gurka (Gurcu) ispán nemzetsége. In *Történelmi szemle*, 1995, vol. 37, pp. 345-351.

90 ZSOLDOS. Kings and Oligarchs in Hungary at the Turn of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries. In *Hungarian Historical Review*, 2013, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 211-242.

especially regarding the emergence, legal status, and collective identity of the middle nobility in particular regions.[91]

In the 1990s, a promising international collective project developed at Central European University under the leadership of János M. Bak focusing primarily on the lower and middle nobility in East-Central Europe from the year 1200 onward, extending into the early modern period. The research team aimed to examine the nobility using a comparative approach, employing methods from social history and incorporating sociological and anthropological frameworks such as social models and client networks. The project encompassed several key thematic areas, from definitions of nobility, status, wealth, inheritance, family and kinship, marriage strategies, economic and social stratification, to social mobility.[92] One of the project's outcomes was the collective volume *Nobilities in Central and Eastern Europe: Kinship, Property and Privilege*, which included studies primarily by Hungarian medievalists alongside contributions from Czech, Polish, and Bulgarian historians.[93] The most recent findings in this field, along with a comprehensive overview of existing research, have been provided by Attila Zsoldos and Gábor Thoroczkay.[94]

In addition to a brief overview of Hungarian historiography concerning the study of power elites and the formation of the nobility, it is also appropriate to introduce some works by Polish and Czech medievalists, limited here to selected notable works that deserve particular attention. Valuable contributions include collective volumes by Polish medievalists *The Polish Nobility in the Middle Ages* and *Studien zum Adel im mittelalterlichen Polen*. These offer a detailed overview of research on the genesis and early development of the nobility, the structure of the ruling class as described by the chronicler *Gallus Anonymus*, knighthood,

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91 ZSOLDOS. „Eléggé nemes férfiak...“ A kehidai oklevél társadalomtörténeti vonatkozásairól. In *Zalai történeti tanulmányok, Zalai gyűjtemény*, 1997, vol. 42, pp. 7-19. For forms of regional identity using the example of the Transylvanian nobility in the 14th century, see: PO-PA-GORJANU. The Nobility as Bearers of Regional Identity in Fourteenth Century Transylvania. In *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica*, 2012, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 41-58.

92 BAK. La noblesse dans l'Europe centrale au Moyen Âge et au début de l'époque moderne. Présentation du programme de recherche de l'Université d'Europe centrale de Budapest (Central Europe University). IN COULET and MATZ, eds. *La noblesse dans les territoires angevins à la fin du Moyen Âge: Actes du colloque international organise par l'Université d'Angers, Angers-Saumur. 3-6 juin 1998*. Rome 2000, pp. 149-158.

93 BAK, ed. *Nobilities in Central and Eastern Europe: Kinship, Property and Privilege: History and Society in Central Europe 2, Medium Aevum Quotidianum 29*. Budapest; Krems 1994. For that, see: BAK. Probleme, pp. 58-62.

94 ZSOLDOS. *Árpáds and Their People*. Budapest 2020, pp. 125-201; THOROCZKAY. *The Historical Research on the Árpád Era – From the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867) to the Present Day*. Budapest 2024.

the emergence and internal hierarchy of the noble estate,[95] knightly law, and the role of magnates in relation to the Piast monarchy. Space is also given to court and administrative elites, the formation of the lower regional nobility, noble and knightly families and their genealogy, shifts in ruling elites caused by social change, and other related topics.[96] Particularly interesting is a comprehensive overview of ecclesiastical foundations involving royal and noble establishments of monasteries and churches, as well as the donation of property to ecclesiastical institutions, with an emphasis on *imitatio regni* in the case of noble foundations.[97] Adrian Jusupović provides a good example of prosopographical research into 13th-century power elites by examining their social standing, family ties, marriage politics, career advancement, power networks and alliances, as well as their roles within the political structures of the Principalities of Galicia and Volhynia based on a detailed analysis of prominent and previously lesser-known representatives of the regional aristocracy.[98]

A similarly favorable situation exists in Czech historiography, where several historians have focused on the status of local magnates and the development of the landed nobility in Bohemia and Moravia. Their research has addressed questions such as how the princely (service) nobility evolved into a hereditary nobility with its own landholdings, and what mechanisms and social processes enabled the group to gradually acquire extensive estates (through donations, colonization of land, etc.). Scholars have also examined the formation of political thought, identity, and self-awareness of the nobility in relation to the monarch over the long term.[99] There are high-quality survey studies on the

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95 For the development of noble lineages and families in medieval Poland, see: GIEYSZTOR. Le lignage et la famille nobiliaire en Pologne aux XIe, XIIe et XIIIe siècles. In DUBY and LE GOFF, eds. *Famille et parenté dans l'Occident médiéval. Actes du colloque de Paris (6–8 juin 1974)*. Rome 1977, pp. 299-308.

96 GĄSIOROWSKI, ed. *The Polish Nobility in the Middle Ages: Anthologies*. Wrocław; Warszawa; Kraków; Gdańsk; Łódź 1984; MÜHLE, ed. *Studien zum Adel im mittelalterlichen Polen*. Wiesbaden 2012. The formation of ideas about knighthood in the 12th to 14th centuries—crucial for shaping the identity of the Polish nobility and expressing their social status—was significantly influenced by clan structures, legal frameworks, privileges, special rights, authority, and property ownership. These factors also played a key role in the evolving understanding of the nobility as a distinct power-holding social class. GÓRECKI. Words, Concepts, and Phenomena: Knighthood, Lordship, and the Early Polish Nobility, c. 1100–c. 1350. In DUGGAN, ed. *Nobles and Nobility*, pp. 115-155.

97 MÜHLE, ed. *Monarchische und adlige Sakralstiftungen im mittelalterlichen Polen*. Berlin 2013.

98 JUSUPOVIĆ. *Elity ziemi halickiej i wołyńskiej w czasach Romanowiczów (1205–1269). Studium prozopograficzne*. Kraków 2016.

99 GRAUS. Origines de l'État et de la noblesse en Moravie et en Bohême. In *Revue des études slaves*, 1961, vol. 39, no. 1/4, pp. 43-58; GRAUS. A propos de l'évolution de la noblesse en

origins and development of the Czech and Moravian nobility from the early to the high Middle Ages, which focus in particular on the beginnings.[100] Specific social processes manifesting as structural changes in power elites have been explored not only in terms of authority, property, and the socio-political status of magnates, but also in connection with their legitimization and cooperation with the Přemyslid dynasty in stabilizing royal power. Research into the regional aristocracy has also been important, as princes relied on these groups, with their cooperation based on mutual agreements and military assistance within the dynamic processes of consolidating dynastic power.[101]

In addition to traditional themes, scholars have studied the economic foundations of noble families, namely the composition of their estates and how hereditary land ownership emerged in early medieval Bohemia, with an emphasis on regional differences. Research has also focused on different forms of land ownership (hereditary, granted by the ruler, etc.) and the disparities between the wealth of major magnates and that of the service nobility closely tied to princely power.[102] Of note in this context is the collective volume by Czech and Polish medievalists titled *Šlechta, moc a reprezentace ve středověku*, which explores the origins of the nobility, the acquisition, retention, and legitimation of power, symbolic and ritual forms of representation, and loyalty to the ruler.[103] A good example of a synthesis of long-term research on early and high medieval

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Bohême du IXe au XIIIe siècle. In MANTEUFFEL, ed. *L'Europe aux IXe – XIe siècles. Aux origines des Etats nationaux*. Varsovie 1968, pp. 205-210; VANÍČEK. Šlechta a český stát za vlády přemyslovců (K formování ideologie české šlechty od 11. do počátku 14. století). In *Folia Historica Bohemica*, 1988, vol. 12, pp. 65-101; ŽEMLIČKA. Ke zrodu vrcholně feudální „pozemkové" šlechty ve státě Přemyslovců. In *Časopis Matice moravské*, 1990, vol. 109, no. 1, pp. 17-38; ŽEMLIČKA. Origins of Noble Landed Property in Přemyslide Bohemia. In BAK, János M, ed. *Nobilities in Central and Eastern Europe: Kinship, Property and Privilege: History and Society in Central Europe 2, Medium Aevum Quotidianum 29*. Budapest; Krems 1994, pp. 7-24.

100 JAN. Nástin vzniku a vývoje české a moravské šlechty (s důrazem na její počátky). In *Časopis Matice moravské*, 2019, vol. 138, no. 2, pp. 241-260; JANIŠ. The Cultural Position and Stratification of the Bohemo-Moravian Nobility from 12th and 13th Century Provincial Law Sources. In *Forum Historiae*, 2024, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 37-53.

101 KALHOUS. *Anatomy of a Duchy. The Political and Ecclesiastical Structures of Early Přemyslid Bohemia*. Leiden; Boston 2012, pp. 104-143; KALHOUS. *Bohemi. Prozesse der Identitätsbildung in frühpřemyslidischen Ländern (bis 1200)*. Wien 2018, pp. 18-54.

102 ŽEMLIČKA. K pozemkové výbavě české nobility ve starším středověku. In *Český časopis historický*, 2012, vol. 110, no. 2, pp. 189-231; VELÍMSKY. K problematice pozemkové držby českých velmožů a družiníků v období 11.–12. století. In *Studia Mediaevalia Bohemica*, 2009, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 177-186.

103 NODL and WIHODA, eds. *Šlechta, moc a reprezentace ve středověku: Colloquia mediaevalia Pragensia 9*. Praha: Filosofia, 2007.

Czech elites is the work of Tomáš Velímský, who through individual studies uses a microhistorical approach to reconstruct the origins, development, power ambitions, property relations and related disputes, land ownership, settlement expansion, client networks, and the power dynamics of Czech magnates and the emerging nobility. His work also focuses on the history, genealogy, and prosopography of regional noble families or their prominent members in relation to the ruler.[104]

Research Perspectives

Although the approaches and concepts discussed above regarding the study of power elites in East-Central Europe—shaped by Western European medieval studies—are continually reassessed and refined, they can now also be effectively applied to the analysis of social transformations, power strategies of ruling groups, and the formation of the landed nobility in Árpádian Hungary. In conclusion, some directions future research into power elites and the nobility could take will be outlined briefly.

First, it is important to recognize that early and high medieval elites should be studied within the framework of the broader social transformations that resulted in a hierarchical structure of the ruling class, whether based on lineage, property ownership, or the holding of courtly and regional offices, as well as in the formation of the landed nobility. Researchers should build upon or take inspiration from methodologically tested and widely accepted approaches that have proven fruitful in both Western and East-Central European scholarship on these topics. In this context, it is necessary to reevaluate domestic historiographical interpretations concerning the nature of social status and the hierarchical organization of ruling groups, their transformations, and their strategies for acquiring and maintaining power, with particular attention on the horizontal social mobility of lower-ranking strata. With a focus on the structural changes within Hungarian society during the 11th to 13th centuries, it is possible to achieve more precise and detailed insights into the development and transformation of power elites in medieval Hungary. Given that these changes among the ruling and warrior classes took place over a prolonged period, it is appropriate to include the earlier period prior to the 11th century in the research—that is, before the establishment of the Kingdom of Hungary—while also recognizing that the persistence of these processes can be documented through the study of elite groups in the early 14th century.

Future research could specifically focus on the origins and transformations of Hungarian power elites in the early and high Middle Ages, particularly with

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104 VELÍMSKÝ. *Jimi země česká stála. Soubor studií k českým elitám raného a vrcholného středověku*. Praha 2023.

regard to the social mobility of lower-status free warriors, which culminated in the 13th century with the emergence of the nobles of the kingdom (*nobiles regni*) as a legally defined social class.[105]

For the period of the 11th and 12th centuries, it would be appropriate to investigate the continuity or discontinuity of warrior elites after the establishment of the Kingdom of Hungary, their socio-political background, the formation of new elites (e.g., contrasting pagan and Christian elements), and the influence of incoming foreign elites on the royal court and their role in consolidating the ruling dynasty's power.[106]

There is also a need to analyze and clarify the terminology used to describe power elites and its semantic development over time. An integral part of this research focus involves questions related to the internal hierarchy of warrior strata (*comites, milites*),[107] which are mentioned in the earliest legal codes from the Árpád dynasty, as well as the ways Hungarian magnates acquired landed wealth and property, principles of inheritance, and the structure of extended kinship groups (or "clans"). The practice of property donations made by Hungarian magnates to ecclesiastical institutions (*donationes pro anima*) is closely related, which, beyond religious motivation, also reflected the donors' status, wealth, and power, serving as a means of public representation and self-identification.[108]

Equally important are questions concerning the perception of freedom and semi-freedom among different social groups, including the social mobility of several warrior strata (e.g., *populi*, castle folk, castle warriors,[109] and *udvornici*), many of whom gradually became members of the emerging middle and lower nobility during the 13th century. It was precisely during this period that the Hungarian nobility (*nobiles regni*, *veri nobiles*) became legally defined and unified, sharing equal rights and social standing, with differences among them being mainly in terms of wealth and prestige. Although these topics have already been addressed by a few scholars, it would be highly beneficial to re-examine

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105 ZSOLDOS. Vznik šľachty, pp. 6-9; HUNYADI. *Maiores*, pp. 207-208.

106 See: BEREND. Immigrants and Locals in Medieval Hungary: 11th–13th centuries. In BEREND, ed. *The Expansion of Central Europe in the Middle Ages*. London; New York 2012, pp. 307-318; FÜGEDI and BAK. Foreign Knights and Clerks in Early Medieval Hungary. In BEREND, ed. *The Expansion*, pp. 319-331.

107 VESZPRÉMY. A magyarországi, pp. 746-752; ZSOLDOS. *Vitézek*, pp. 39-46. Most recently on the Hungarian milites in sources from the 11th–12th centuries, see: ONDREJKA. Milites in the Kingdom of Hungary Society from 11th and 12th Century Sources. In *Forum Historiae*, 2024, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 27-36.

108 HUDÁČEK. Zádušné donácie (pro anima) v Uhorsku v 11. storočí (Úvod do problematiky). In HLAVÁČKOVÁ and LYSÁ, eds. *Smrť v stredoveku*. Bratislava 2024, pp. 129-153.

109 ZSOLDOS. *A szent király*, pp. 9-28.

the legal statutes of 1222, 1231,[110] 1267,[111] 1290, and 1298 in detail, including their amendments and confirmations, which defined the legal and social position of the middle nobility. These legal documents should also be analyzed within a broader East-Central European context.

All of these social processes are closely related to the question of continuity and discontinuity—or rather, the overlap—between the old, "original" elites, rooted in extended kinship ties, shared landownership, and exclusive access to power, and the new, predominantly regional elites that emerged from broad layers of free or semi-free groups elevated by Hungarian kings. It will be important to analyze the implementation of the aforementioned legal provisions and to reconstruct the property base and ownership relations of the newly formed noble elites. It would also be worthwhile to compare changes in the status and military obligations of specific noble groups, as well as the legal regulations that applied to regional elites (e.g., in the northern parts of the Kingdom of Hungary, Transylvania, etc.).[112]

During this period, one can already observe the social status and hierarchy of the new elites—newly ennobled individuals or broader families—who began to exercise their own power strategies within smaller territorial units. Efforts to gain a greater share of power were reflected in career advancement at the royal court or in regional administration, as well as in the systematic expansion of their landed base, which was closely tied to political influence and power ambitions.

Future research could also place a greater emphasis on transformative processes, analyzed through the example of a single lordship (e.g. royal estate, castle county, Benedictine abbey, borderland of the kingdom, etc.) or specialize in the origins and transformations of royal *servientes*, as well as the social mobility of "new nobles" (such as the spearmen of Spiš, *filii jobagionum*, *praediales*, etc.).[113] Along those lines, case studies focused on the career advancement

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110 For this, see detailed studies: BESENYEI; ÉRSZEGI and PEDRAZZA GORLERO, eds. *De bulla aurea Andreae II regis Hungariae MCCXXII*. Verona 1999; ZSOLDOS. II. András Aranybullája. In *Történelmi szemle*, 2011, vol. 53, no. 1, pp. 1-38; RADY. Hungary and the Golden Bull of 1222. In *Banatica*, 2014, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 87-108; BALOGH. The Hungarian Golden Bull and its place among European legal sources. In BALOGH, ed. *Golden Bulls and Chartas: European Medieval Documents of Liberties*. Budapest; Miskolc 2023, pp. 43-84.

111 SZŰCZ. Az 1267. évi dekrétum és háttere. Szempontok a köznemesség kialakulásához. In BALÁZS; FÜGEDI and MAKSAY, eds. *Mályusz Elemér emlékkönyv. Társadalom- és művelődéstörténeti tanulmányok*. Budapest 1984, pp. 341-3940 ZSOLDOS. Az 1267. évi dekrétum és politikatörténeti háttere (IV. Béla és István ifjabb király viszályának utolsó fejezete). In *Századok*, 2007, vol. 141, no. 4, pp. 803-842.

112 MÁLYUSZ. Hungarian nobles of medieval Transylvania. In BAK, ed. *Nobilities in Central*, pp. 25-53; RÁBIK, Vznik, pp. 3-19; POPA-GORJANU. Continuity, pp. 133-147; HUDÁČEK. From Royal, pp. 57-76.

113 ZSOLDOS. A nemesség határán. In *Turul*, 1999, vol. 72, no. 3/4, pp. 118-122; GÁBRIŠ and

of individual members of a specific noble family, as well as its origin and development up to the end of the 13th century would be equally valuable and help contribute to a better understanding of the broader changes occurring within Hungarian society.[114]

Particular attention should also be devoted to the development of urban elites in the settlements outside the main royal centers (*civiles, cives*, *castrenses*, etc.), including their legal status, social function, foreign influences (*hospites*), economic base, and the related transformations in the social organization of urban environments.[115] Since bishops, abbots, and provosts represented a significant and influential stratum, playing a key role in medieval society and ranking among the most powerful individuals at the royal court, it is also essential to study the development of regional ecclesiastical institutions and the formation of ecclesiastical elites, with a focus on their social mobility and a specialized emphasis on medieval prosopography.[116]

Conclusion

It is important to recognize, however, that research structured in this way can only focus on selected aspects of power elites in the Early and High Middle Ages and will inevitably be limited regionally to certain parts of the Kingdom of Hungary. Therefore, the main objective should not be to provide a comprehensive treatment of the issue of medieval Hungarian elites, but rather by applying current medievalist and methodological approaches and conducting research probes in specific regions, the aim should be to offer a more comprehensive view of the general phenomena involved in the formation of the East-Central European nobility.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the study of power elites and the formation of the nobility in medieval Hungary and East-Central Europe represents a dynamically evolving field of historical research, requiring a combination of traditional historiographical approaches with innovative theoretical and analytical inspirations. The studies included in this thematic issue of the *Historický časopis* will enrich the current state of knowledge, whether through the construction of

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BAČOVÁ. Parallels, pp. 214-217.

114 For research designed in this way, the archives of individual noble families are highly valuable, some of which have already been published or are held in the collections of the *Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár – Országos Levéltára* in Budapest. Specifically, these are collections of sources related to individual noble families in the *Családi levéltárak* section.

115 Pozri LYSÁ. *Bratislava na ceste k privilégiu 1291: Štúdie k dejinám Bratislavy v 13. storočí*. Bratislava 2014, pp. 31-54.

116 LABANC. *Spišskí prepošti do roku 1405*. Kraków; Trnava 2011; LABANC and GLEJTEK. Kariéra, pp. 385-407; LABANC. Spiš - Visegrád, pp. 61-71.

the ruler as *miles Christi* in the context of ideological patterns at the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries, the dynamics of conflict and cooperation between royal power and the nobility in the 13th century, the issue of legitimizing royal authority in the early 14th century seen through the example of Charles I of Hungary, the problem of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in pre-Hussite Bohemia and Moravia, the transformation of relations between Matthias Corvinus and the Opole Piasts, and finally with the functioning of county self-governments in medieval Hungary during the Jagiellonian period, with an emphasis on their military, financial, and fiscal role. It is hoped that these contributions will not only expand our understanding of royal authority, as well as the structure and identity of medieval elites, but also stimulate a more intensive scholarly discussion on social transformations and political culture in medieval East-Central Europe.

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