

www.forumhistoriae.sk



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)



© 2024 The Author(s)
© 2024 Institute of History,
Slovak Academy of Sciences

Milites in the Kingdom of Hungary Society from 11th and 12th Century Sources

Andrej Ondrejka

Keywords

milites, the legal codes of the Kingdom of Hungary, 11th–12th century society, the medieval society, knights

DOI

10.31577/forhist.2024.18.1.2

Author

Andrej Ondrejka
Department of General History
Faculty of Arts, Comenius University
Gondova 2
811 02 Bratislava 1
Slovakia
Email: ondrejka31@uniba.sk

Cite

ONDREJKA, Andrej. *Milites* in the Kingdom of Hungary Society from 11th and 12th Century Sources. In *Forum Historiae*, 2024, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 27–36, doi: 10.31577/forhist.2024.18.1.2

Abstract

ONDREJKA, Andrej. *Milites* in the Kingdom of Hungary Society from 11th and 12th Century Sources.

Milites remain a frequently discussed component of Middle Age Hungarian society, though their standing among the general population can be examined mainly through surviving references from the legal codes of Hungarian kings Stephen I, Ladislaus I and Coloman. In the Kingdom of Hungary times, *milites* can be found among both the free and unfree population. From contemporary sources, it is possible to identify *milites* within Hungarian society and to observe a unifying element in the apparent dichotomy. The common characteristic that connected *milites* of different social status, from members of the lowest social classes to nobles, princes or counts, was the execution of a specific armed service to their lords. By way of this performance, the *milites* formed a relatively closed group of men comprising an elite part of the larger army, whose fellowship was strengthened not only on the battlefield, but also during feasts in the lords' mansions. Gradually, the *milites* became a more exclusive group of men from the upper social classes who, from the 12th century onwards, could call themselves knights.

*Milites*¹ are an often discussed component of medieval Hungarian society by historians and scholars alike.² A group of elite forces, *milites* can be identified within groups belonging to the free population as well as among groups classified as “unfree.” The aim of the present study is to focus on references to *milites* in

- 1 An armed man serving in the army, warrior, soldier; a member of an armed escort, a free person living a military life, see: *A magyarországi középkori latinság szótára* 6. Edited by Miklós Maróth. Budapest : Argumentum Kiadó, 2017, pp. 343–345. The Latin term *milites* ceased to refer to warriors in general during the 11th century and became a name for elite mounted warriors, or knights. Due to their specific way of fighting and the adoption of a system of moral, ethical and religious values, from the second half of the 11th century onwards, they began to shape themselves into an elitist group made up primarily of men of wealth and nobility, eventually resulting in a merger with the nobility. For more on this, see: e.g. FLORI, Jean. *Chevaliers et chevalerie au Moyen Age*. Paris : Hachette Littératures, 1998, pp. 47–88; FLORI, Jean. Knightly Society. In LUSCOMBE, David – RILEY-SMITH, Jonathan (eds.) *The New Cambridge Medieval History 4*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 176–184. In the 11th and early 12th centuries, it is not yet possible to attribute the characteristics of classical chivalry, typical of chivalry from the middle of the 12th century onwards, to *milites* or knights, even in the Western European area at the earliest. In the 11th century, *milites* can be seen as elite, well-armed and armoured, mounted warriors who formed the most valuable component of an army and were part of the retinue (entourage) of the richest and most powerful men.
- 2 On the social groups in the first decades after the establishment of the Kingdom of Hungary, see: e.g. ENGEL, Pál. *The Realm of St. Stephen. A History of Medieval Hungary 895–1526*. London : I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001, pp. 66–82; RADY, Martin. *Nobility, Land and Service in Medieval Hungary*. New York : Palgrave, 2000, pp. 11–27; SOLYMOSI, László. Die Gesellschaft um die erste Jahrtausendwende in Ungarn. In PAPP, Klára – BARTA, János (eds.) *The first Millenium of Hungary in*

Hungarian sources from the 11th and early 12th centuries and to define the position and role of *milites* in Hungarian society from the foundation of the Kingdom of Hungary to the early 12th century.

The concept of *milites* in the European context

In areas of present-day France in the 11th century, the term *milites* referred to men from different social classes, including counts, princes or kings. According to French historian Jean Flori, these were not only men from the highest social classes,³ as seen in examples from contemporary sources of Western European provenance.⁴ Over the course of the 11th century, the term *milites* grew in importance so much that in addition to being used as a general term for soldiers and warriors, it was also used to refer to mounted warriors (*equites*), gradually transforming into the designation of an elite armoured mounted warrior, who can be described more simply as a knight. It is important to remember that in the period in question, knights were the most valuable and expensive unit of the army and were not ascribed the lofty values and ideals that would be conveyed by chivalry until later times. *Milites* came from all different social groups (free or unfree) with a range of property bases. The common element that united *milites* of different social status, from members of the lowest classes to nobles, princes or counts, was the performance of a specific armed service to their lords. Through the execution of this service, the *milites* in Western Europe formed a relatively closed group of men encompassing an elite part of the army, whose fellowship was strengthened not only on the battlefield, but also during feasts in the lords' mansions where the *milites* dined alongside their lords.

Europe. Debrecen : Multiplex Media–Debrecen University Press, 2002, pp. 39–49; SOLYMOSI, László. Gesellschaftsstruktur zur Zeit des Königs Istvan der Heiligen. In ZSUZSA, Fodor (ed.) *Gizella és kora. Felolvasóülések az Árpád-korból*. Veszprém : Laczkó Dezső Múzeum, 1993, pp. 59–69; ZSOLDOS, Attila. *The Árpáds and Their People: An Introduction to the History of Hungary from cca. 900 to 1301*. Budapest : Research Centre for the Humanities, 2020, pp. 125–230; ZSOLDOS, Attila. Vznik šľachty v stredovekom Uhorskom kráľovstve. In *Forum Historiae*, 2010, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 3–13. On the military groups in the Kingdom of Hungary, see e.g. BOROSY, András. XI–XII századi harcosrétegünk néhány kérdéséről. In *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, 1974, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 3–25; KRISTÓ, Gyula. *Háborúk és hadviselés az Árpádok korában*. Szeged : Szukits Könyvkiadó, 2003, pp. 52–76; VESZPRÉMY, László. Hadszervezet Szent István korában. In KRISTÓ, Gyula (ed.) *Államalapítás, társadalom, művelődés*. Budapest : MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2001, pp. 31–41; ZSOLDOS, Attila. The First Centuries of Hungarian Military Organization. In VESZPRÉMY, László – KIRÁLY, K. Béla (eds.) *A Millennium of Hungarian Military History*. New York : Social Science Monographs, 2002, pp. 3–25; ZSOLDOS, Attila. *Vitézek, ispánok, oligarchák. Tanulmányok a társadalom- és a hadtörténetírás határvidékéről*. Budapest : HM Hadtörténelmi Intézet és Múzeum, 2016, pp. 11–24, 37–46.

3 FLORI 1998, pp. 69–70; BUMKE, Joachim. *The Concept of Knighthood in the Middle Ages*. New York : AMS Press, 1982, pp. 26–27. For the situation in the areas of the former Holy Roman Empire, see also: ARNOLD, Benjamin. *German Knighthood 1050–1300*. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1985, pp. 25–27.

4 DE FLEURY, André. *Miracula Sancti Benedicti: Les miracles de Saint Benoit*. Edited by Eugene de Certain. Paris : Chez M^{me} V^e Jules Renouard, 1858, pp. 218–220; DE JUMIÉGES, Guillaume. *Gesta Normannorum ducum*. Edited by Jean Marx. Rouen; Paris : A. Lestringant; A. Picard, 1914, p. 108; *Landulfi Historia Mediolanensis usque ad a. 1355*. Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores (in Folio) 8. Edited by Ludwig Conrad Bethmann and Wilhelm Wattenbach. Hannoverae : Impensis Bibliopolii Avlici Hahniani, 1848, p. 99, III. 32 (IV. 2).

Milites in 11th century Hungarian sources

The most important type of source which mentions the *milites* in the early period of Hungarian history are the legal codes (*decreta*) of Hungarian kings Stephen I, Ladislaus I and Coloman.⁵ It would be incorrect to see the *milites* mentioned in these legal codes as members of a single social class.

In the first book of the laws of St. Stephen the King (*Decreta S. Stephani regis*), there are two ordinances concerning what appears to be the same issue at first sight—the departure of a *miles* from his lord. On closer examination, however, it is possible to see just the different social status of the *milites*. In regulation chapter 23, it reads: “We wish that each lord has his own *milites* and no one shall try to persuade a *miles* to leave his long-time lord and come to him, since this is the origin of quarrels.”⁶ The key words here are *suadere* and *deserere*. The legislation does not sanction the departure of the *miles* from the lord, but at the same time it does not mention any restrictions in case the *miles* should do so. Since the regulation in question was necessary, it is clear that such situations did occur. Something similar is written in regulation chapter 25:

If a *miles* or a *servus*⁷ flees to another and he whose *miles* or man has run away sends his agent to bring him back, and that agent is beaten and whipped by anyone, we decree in agreement with our magnates that he who gave the beating shall pay ten steers.⁸

The term *fugere* here indicates that such a change of lord was an unlawful act.

These two different interpretations of a termination of service, or different ways of changing one’s lord, imply a different legal status of the said *milites*. In the first case, the *milites* can be classified as free men who were in the service of another lord, but their service did not affect their status as free men. Thus, they were free to leave their lord and enter the service of another. The second case puts the *milites* in the same position as the *servientes*. On this basis, it can be assumed that these *milites* were from the unfree classes of the population and

5 The latest edition of the Hungarian legal codes was used *Online Decreta Regni Medievalis Hungariae, The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary* (ODRMH). *All Complete Monographs*. Edited by János M. Bak. Logan : Utah State University, 2019, https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=lib_mono (last accessed 23 Mai 2024). Here, see also basic information on the *decreta* of the Hungarian kings, their dating and extant copies, as well as other literature on the *decreta*. See also: *A Szent István, Szent László és Kálmán korabeli törvények és zsinati határozatok forrásai*. Edited by Levente Závodszy. Budapest : Szent István Társulat, 1904; JÁNOSI, Monika. *Törvényalkotás a korai Árpád-korban*. Szeged : Szegedi Középkorász Műhely, 1996.

6 “Volumus, ut unusquisque senior suum habeat militem, nec aliquis alter illum suadeat antiquum deserere seniore et ad se venire, inde enim litigium habet initium.” *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 25, I. 23.

7 Because the exact status of male and female servile persons in 11th century in the Kingdom of Hungary has been the object of scholarly debates for a long time and yet there is not a final word on the matter, this study uses the Latin term *servus* and the decision of meaning is left to the reader. For this see: SOLYMOSI, László. Liberty and Servitude in the Age of Saint Stephen. In ZSOLDOS, Attila (ed.) *Saint Stephen and His Country: A Newborn Kingdom in Central Europe: Hungary*. Budapest : Lucidus, 2001, pp. 69–80; SUTT, Cameron. *Slavery in Árpád-era Hungary in a Comparative Context*. Leiden : Brill, 2015, pp. 52–90. Here, see also further literature on the topic. For older opinions on the meaning of the Latin term *servus* in Hungarian sources, see: SUTT 2015, pp. 64–71.

8 “Si cuius miles aut servus ad alium fugerit, et his cuius miles vel servus fuga lapsus est suum miserit legatum ad reducendos eos et is legatus ibidem a quoquam percussus et flagellatus extiterit, decernimus nostrorum primatum conventu, ut ille percussor X solvat iuencos.” *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 25, I. 25.

thus not allowed to arbitrarily leave the service or to change lords.

The first mentioned regulation (*Decreta S. Stephani regis*, I. 23) is complemented by regulation chapter 24 of the same code:

If someone receives a guest with benevolence and decently provides him with support, the guest shall not leave his protector as long as he receives support according to their agreement, nor should he transfer his service to any other.⁹

If we accept the idea that in the period in question, the guests (*hospites*) were primarily clerics and knights (*milites*),¹⁰ this would be a class of free *milites* in the same position as the *milites* in the regulation chapter 23. A bilateral relationship based on a personal agreement of maintenance is evident here. This arrangement is strikingly reminiscent of the well-known personal lord–vassal relationship of Western Europe, in which the lord agreed to nurture and protect his vassal and in return, the latter pledged obedience, loyalty and service.¹¹ Regulation chapter 23 states why it is undesirable to arbitrarily leave one's lord's service: “for from this, the law has its beginning” (*inde enim legitimum habet initium*), and regulation chapter 24 on guests, which included *milites*, suggests that it was possible if the lord did not properly observe the conditions. The Code regulates the conditions of service similarly for *milites* and *hospites*, and hence it may be assumed that the status of *milites* and *hospites* was the same. Further, since the *hospites* were among the freemen, the *milites* were also among the freemen and were subject to similar conditions of service as the *hospites*.¹²

According to regulation chapter 15, the *milites* in may be included among the free classes:

If a *comes*¹³ with a hardened heart and a disregard for his soul—may such remain far from the hearts of the faithful—defiles himself by killing his wife, he shall make his peace with fifty steers to the kindred of the woman, according to the decree of the royal council, and fast according to the commands of the canons. And if a *miles* or a man of wealth commits the same crime he shall pay according to that same council 10 steers and fast, as has been said. And if a commoner has committed the same crime, he shall make his peace with five steers to the kindred and fast.¹⁴

9 “Si quis hospitem cum benivolentia accipit et nutrimentum sibi honeste inpendit, quamdiu secundum propositum nutritur, non deserat suum nutritorem, nec ad aliquem alium suam deferat hospitalitatem.” *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 25, I. 24.

10 FÜGEDI, Erik – BAK, M. János. Foreign Knights and Clerks in Early Medieval Hungary. In BEREND, Nora (ed.) *The Expansion of Central Europe in the Middle Ages*. New York : Routledge, 2016, pp. 319–321.

11 For Western Europe, see: e.g. BLOCH, Marc. *Feudal Society 1: The Growth of Ties of Dependence*. Translated by L. A. Manyon. New York : Routledge, 1965, pp. 145–163. The Western European feudal system did not fully take hold in the Kingdom of Hungary. Numerous literature has been devoted to the subject, more recently, with references to many studies, see: e.g. KOMÁROMI, László. Nyugati hűbériség vagy bizánci feudalizmus? Középkori magyar fejlődés két társadalmi modell határán. In HORVÁTH, Attila et al. (eds.) *Sapientia iniuria non potest fieri: ünnepi tanulmányok Zlinszky János tiszteletére*. Budapest : Gondolat, 2009, pp. 201–215; ENGEL 2001, pp. 76–82; RADY 2000, pp. 110–112; THOROCZKAY, Gábor. The Appearance of “Feudalism” and “Feudal” Forms of Property in Medieval Hungary. In *Historical Studies Central Europe*, 2021, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 31–34. See also further literature there.

12 See also: ZSOLDOS 2016, pp. 41–42.

13 For a definition of *comes* in the Hungarian context, see: *Korai magyar történeti lexikon (9.–14. század)*. Edited by Ferenc Makk, Gyula Kristó and Pál Engel. Budapest : Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994, p. 290.

14 “Si quis comitum obduratus corde neglectusque anima, quod procul sit a cordibus fidelitatem observantium, uxoris homicidio polluetur, secundum decretum regalis senatus cum quinquaginta iuvenis parentibus mulieris concilietur et ieiunet secundum mandata canonum. Si autem miles vel alicuius vir ubertatis eandem culpam inciderit, iuxta eundem senatum solvat parentibus X

In the abovementioned decree, three groups of free inhabitants of the Kingdom of Hungary during the reign of Stephen I are mentioned, *comites*, *milites* and *vulgares* (commoners). The fact that these were groups of free inhabitants is proven by the fact that at that time, the unfree could not legitimately marry, and even a freeman became unfree if he took an unfree woman or slave (*ancilla*) as his wife.¹⁵ Regulation chapter 27 similarly states:

If anyone, who has humbled himself by lewdness, kidnaps a girl for his wife without the consent of her parents, we order that the girl be returned to her parents, even if he has done anything to her by force, and the kidnapper shall pay 10 steers for the kidnapping, even though he has afterwards reconciled with the girl's parents. If a poor man, who is an ordinary man, should attempt it, he will compensate for the kidnapping with five steers.¹⁶

The reconciliation with the girl's parents (*reconcilietur parentibus puelle*) mentioned evidently implies marriage with the girl in question, and hence it is a *milites* from the free classes, since as mentioned above, unfree men were not allowed to marry legitimately.¹⁷ The *milites* may also be seen included among the freemen in regulation chapter 35:

We wish that peace and concord may prevail [...] For if any sojourner be found so presumptuous as, after the order of this common council, to seek another at home to destroy him and his goods, and if the lord of the house be there and fight with him and be slain, the sojourner shall be punished according to the law of the drawing of the sword. If, however, the *comes* shall fall, he shall lie without compensation. If he did not go in person, but sent his *milites*, he shall pay compensation for the incursion with a 100 steers. If, in addition, a *miles* invades the court and house of another *miles*, he shall pay compensation for the invasion with 10 steers. If a commoner invades the huts of people of similar status, he shall pay for the invasion with five steers.¹⁸

Milites are again mentioned here along with *comites* and *vulgares* (commoners), that is, with other persons of the category of freemen. The same is true in the text of regulation chapter 22:

Because it is worthy of God and best for men that everyone should live his life in virtuous liberty, it is ordained by royal decree that henceforth no *comes* or *miles* shall dare to reduce a freeman to serfdom.¹⁹

iuencos ieiunetque, ut dictum est. Si vero vulgaris in eodem crimine inuenietur, cum quinque iuencis cogitas reconcilietur et subdatur predictis ieiuniis." *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, pp. 23–24, I. 15.

15 *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 26, I. 29; ZSOLDOS 2016, p. 42.

16 "Si quis militum inpudicia fedatus, puellam aliquam sine concessione parentum sibi in uxorem rapuerit, decrevimus puellam reddi, etiamsi ab illo aliqua vis sibi illata sit, et raptor X solvat iuencos pro raptu, licet postea reconcilietur parentibus puelle. Si vero pauper quis hoc vulgaris agere agreditur, componat raptum V iuencis." *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 25, I. 27.

17 See also: ZSOLDOS 2016, pp. 42–43.

18 "Volumus, ut firma pax et unanimitas sit [...] nec aliquis alium invadere audeat. Nam si quis comitum post diffinitionem huius communis concilii tam contumax extiterit, ut alium domi querat ad perdendum eum atque sua dissipare, si dominus domi est et secum pugnaverit vel interfecerit, luat secundum legem de evaginatione gladii confectam. Si autem comes ibidem occubuerit, sine compositone iaceat. Si vero ille non supervenerit, sed suos milites miserit, centum iuencis componat invasionem. Si vero miles quis curtim vel domum alterius militis invaserit, X iuencis componat invasionem. Si vulgaris quidem alterius sui similis mansiunculas invaserit, V iuencis solvat incursionem." *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 27, I. 35.

19 "Quoniam igitur dignum deo est et hominibus optimum, unumquemque sue industria libertatis vite cursum ducere, secundum regale decretum statutum est, ut nemo comitum vel militum posthac liberam personam servituti subdere audeat." *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, pp. 24–25, I. 27.

It should be added that the *vulgares*—a general name for a broad stratum of the lower free social classes, commoners—are missing from this decree, since they were the ones who might have been deprived of their liberty.²⁰ *Milites* were put in the opposite position in regulation chapter seven:

It is our will that just as we have given others the opportunity to lord their own possessions, so equally the goods, *milites*, *servi*, and whatever else belongs to our royal dignity should remain permanent, and no one should plunder or remove them, nor should anyone dare to obtain any advantage from them.²¹

Here, *milites* represent a kind of property, of the king in this case.²² Other men had similar rights, since the regulation explicitly says: “just as we have given others the ability to control their own affairs” (*sicuti ceteris facultatem dedimus dominandi suorum rerum*). From the above, it can be concluded that the *milites* mentioned belonged to the class of the unfree population, since they are included between the *res* (things) and *servientes* (unfree). This law is apparently followed by regulation chapter 25, where it speaks about the flight of *milites* and *servientes* from the lord, language equally indicative of their unfree status.²³

The *miles* mentioned in regulation chapter 18 may be included among the unmarried in office in the Second Book of the Laws of St. Stephen the King, in which there is an appendix that reads: “Similarly, if a *servus* kills his lord, or a *miles* his *comes*.”²⁴ *Miles* is again mentioned with *servus*, like in regulation chapter seven and chapter 25 of the First Book of the Laws of St. Stephen the King.

On the contrary, the *milites* in chapters nine, 10 and 11 of the Second Book of the Laws of St. Stephen the King can be assigned to the free population. In the former, it states that: “If a *miles*, scorning the just judgment of his *comes* appeals to the king, seeking to prove the injustice of the *comes*, he will owe 10 *pensae*²⁵ of gold to the *comes*.”²⁶ If the *miles* mentioned in the decree was not free, he could not accuse the *suo comite* (his *comes*) of injustice, as the unfree were forbidden to make accusations against their lords (and mistresses).²⁷ Relationships between

20 ZSOLDOS 2016, p. 43; LADÁNYI 2005, pp. 214–215.

21 “Volumus quidem, ut sicuti ceteris facultatem dedimus dominandi suorum rerum, ita etiam res, milites, servos et quicquid ad nostram regalem dignitatem pertinet, permanere immobile et a nemine quid inde rapiatur, aut subtrahatur, nec quisquem in his predictis sibi favorem acquirere audeat.” *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 22, I. 7.

22 The opposite view is held by Hungarian historian Erzsébet Ladányi, who considers all *milites* during the reign of Stephen I to be free, regardless of the context in which they are mentioned. See: LADÁNYI, Erzsébet. A *miles* Magyarországon és Európában Szent István korában. In ALMÁSI, Tibor – DRASKÓCZY, István – JANCSÓ, Eva (eds.) *Tanulmányok Erzsébet Géza hatvanadik születésnapjára*. Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005, pp. 213–214. It is hard to agree with Erzsébet Ladányi’s opinion because she argues on the basis of selectively chosen sources supporting her claims and completely ignores any sources that contain references to *milites* which do not fit into her concept.

23 See also: ZSOLDOS 2016, pp. 41–42; LADÁNYI 2005, p. 215.

24 “Item si servus seniore, si miles suum comitem interfecerit.” *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 44, II. 18.

25 GEDAI, István. The Economic and Political Background of St. Stephen’s Coinage. In PAPP – BARTA 2002, pp. 52–53.

26 “Si quis militum iudicium a suo comite recte iudicatum spernens, regem appellaverit, cupiens comitem suum reddere iniustum, sit debitor decem pensarum auri suo comiti.” *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 44, II. 9.

27 “Ut gens huius monarchie ab omni incurso et accusatione servorum et ancillarum remota et quiete maneat, secundum decretum regalis concilii penitus interdictum est, ut nullius causa culpe aliqua servilis persona contra dominos vel dominas in accusationem vel in testimonium recipiatur.” *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 24, I. 20.

milites and *comites* are also regulated in chapter 10: “If, on any pretext, a *comes* takes something unjustly from a *miles*, he shall make restitution and also pay the same amount out of his own resources,”²⁸ and chapter 11: “If a *miles* says that his freely given gift was taken from him by force and in so doing tells a lie, he shall be deprived of it and in addition, pay the same amount.”²⁹ The foregoing statutes are obviously related. The person who should have been charged with forcible taking of the thing by *miles* is *comes*. The ordinances also show that *comes* needed a legitimate reason to take something from the *milites*, which is another argument in favour of the claim that the *milites* in the three regulations in question came from the free population.

Milites hardly appear in the legal codes of Hungarian King Ladislaus I or King Coloman. They are mentioned in regulation chapter 11 from the Second Book of the Laws of Ladislaus I, which reads:

If a noble³⁰ or *miles* invades the house of another noble and causes a fight there and beats the other man's wife, two-thirds of his property, if he has enough, shall be given for the commission of the crime, one-third shall remain for his wife and sons. If, however, he lacks property, he shall be led with his head shaven around the market-place bound and whipped, and sold in this state. Others who were with him, if freemen, shall redeem their crime with 55 bezants;³¹ if bondmen, shall be punished by the same penalty as their lord.³²

The free status of *milites* in the regulation is evidenced by the fact that he can redeem himself from guilt like other freemen who would have participated in the assault, and he can only be sold if he has nothing to pay. The unfree *servientes* mentioned below are to be punished in the same way as their lord. They are further discussed in regulation chapter 15 of the Third Book of the Laws of King Ladislaus I:

Anyone at all who violates the decrees of the king and the magnates shall be judged according to the king's will if he is a bishop; shall be deposed from his office if an *comes*, shall be deprived of his commission and pay and additional 50 *pensae* if a centurion; and shall likewise pay 50 *pensae* if a *miles*.³³

Servientes are mentioned as well in regulation chapter 65 from the legal code of King Coloman: “No *comes* or *miles* shall presume to claim any authority in the church except the bishop himself.”³⁴ In both regulations, *milites* are

28 “Si quis comitum inventa aliqua occasione quid iniuste militi abstulerit, reddat, et insuper ex proprio tantum.” *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 44, II. 10.

29 “Si quis autem militum, suum spontaneum donum dicens sibi vi ablatum, mendax extiterit, ex hoc careat et insuper tantumdem solvat.” *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 44, II. 11.

30 ZSOLDOS 2010, pp. 3–4; RADY 2000, pp. 28–34.

31 *Bizancii* was Byzantine gold *solidus* (gold coin).

32 “Si quis nobilium vel militum alterius nobilis domum invaserit et ibi pugnam fecerit, et uxorem illius flagellaverit, si tantam substantiam habuerit, due partes eiusdem substantie pro reatu commisso dentur, tertia vero uxori filiisque suis remaneat. Si autem substantia defuerit, raso capite ligatus et flagellatus circa forum ducatur, et sic vendatur; alii vero, qui cum illo erant, liberi reatum suum LV bizanciis redimant, servi vero eadem pena dampnentur, ut dominus eorum.” *Decreta S. Ladislai regis*. ODRMH, p. 75, II. 11.

33 “Quicumque ergo regis et principum decreta fregerit, si episcopus est, secundum voluntatem regis diiudicetur; si comes, a comitatu degradetur; si centurio, honore privetur et insuper LV pensas solvat; si miles, similiter LV pensas solvat.” *Decreta S. Ladislai regis*. ODRMH, p. 90, III. 15.

34 “Nullus comitum vel militum in ecclesia persumpmat sibi vindicare potestatem preter solum episcopum.” *Decretum Colomani regis*. ODRMH, p. 113, c. 65.

discussed in the context of men who rank among the free classes of the population, and thus it can be assumed that the *milites* named there also belonged to this class.

Milites are also mentioned in the charters, but any classification as part of the free or unfree population is problematic.³⁵ Thanks to their explicit name, the *liberis scilicet ducentis militibus* (two hundred free warriors) made available for the protection of the Pécsvárad monastery³⁶ can be considered freemen who were obliged to provide military service to the monastery if necessary.³⁷

Undoubtedly, the *milites* mentioned in *De institutione morum*³⁸ belonged among the free and at the same time, among the highest social classes. In the fourth chapter, entitled *De honore principum et militum*, it states:

The fourth ornament of rulership is the fidelity, strength, diligence, comity and trust of the *principes*,³⁹ *comites*,⁴⁰ and *milites*. For they are the bulwark of the realm, defenders of the weak, conquerors of the enemy, and expanders of the kingdom. They will be, my son, your fathers and brothers; you should never reduce any of them to servitude nor designate any as a bondman.⁴¹ They will fight for you, not basely serve you [...] If you are peace-loving, you will be called a king and a king's son and loved by all the *milites*. If you are stiff-necked in anger, pride, hatred, and strife concerning the *comites* and *principes*, the power of the *milites* will doubtlessly overshadow the royal dignity and your kingdom will be given over to others.⁴²

35 For example, in one charter from 1091 it is mentioned that King Ladislaus sends “Sorinum, nostrum militem” to protect his messengers sent to the Pope, see: *Diplomata Hungariae antiquissima: Accedunt epistolae et acta ad historiam Hungariae pertinentia, Volumen 1* (DHA). Edited by György Györffy. Budapest: Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, 1992, p. 272, no. 91.

36 The generic term “warrior” is deliberately used, because it is unlikely that the king would put two hundred *milites*, i.e. elite mounted warriors, at the disposal of a single monastery. More importantly, the document is a forgery and was very probably written sometime before 1228. However, its author used information from the authentic founding charter, probably from the beginning of the 11th century, and its royal copy by Géza II from 1158. DHA 1, pp. 64–72, no. 12. For details, see: KARÁCSONYI, János. *Szent-István király oklevelei és a Szilveszter-bulla. Diplomatikai tanulmány*. Budapest: Magyar Tud. Akadémia, 1891, pp. 78–102. A different opinion is held by Gyula Kristó, who considers this figure to be older, from the 11th century, which can be disputed precisely because of the number of *milites* mentioned. See: KRISTÓ, Gyula. *Szent István pécsváradai okleveléről*. In PITI, Ferenc – SZABADOS, György (eds.) „Magyaroknak eleiről”: *Ünnepi tanulmányok a hatvan esztendő Makk Ferenc tiszteletére*. Szeged: Szegedi Középkorász Műhely, 2000, p. 317.

37 Another example is provided by a reference in the 11th century charter, or copy of the original foundation charter, of the monastery of Somogyvár, according to which the monastery was given “100 militum domus.” DHA 1, p. 268, no. 88.

38 *Libellus de institutione morum*. *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum 2*. Edited by Iosephus Balogh. Budapestini: Academia Litter. Hungarica atque Societate Histor. Hungarica, 1938, pp. 611–627. See the translation of this source: SZÚCS, Jenő. King Stephens Exhortations—and his State. In *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, 1988, vol. 29, no. 112, pp. 89–97.

39 The Latin term *principes* meant the magnates. See: HUNYADI, Zsolt. *Maiores, optimates, nobiles: Semantic Questions in the Early History of the Hungarian Nobility*. In SEBŐK, Marcell (ed.) *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU 1996–1997*. Budapest: CEU, 1998, pp. 204–211.

40 Some historians consider the *comites* to be members of the highest social classes—the nobility; for more, see: e.g. BOROSY 1974, p. 3; FÜGEDI, Erik. *The Aristocracy in Medieval Hungary*. Thesis. In BAK, M. János (ed.) *Kings, Bishops, Nobles and Burghers in Medieval Hungary*. London: Variorum Reprints, 1986, pp. 3–4; ZSOLDOS 2016, p. 40.

41 It follows logically from this appeal that they must have been freemen.

42 “Quartus decor regiminis est fidelitas, fortitudo, agilitas, comitas, confidentia principum, comitum, militum. Illi enim sunt regni propugnaculum, defensores inbecillium, expugnatores adversariorum augmentatores marciarum. Illi enim sint fili mi tibi patres et fratres, ex his vero nominem in servitutem redigas vel servum nomines. Illi tibi militent, non serviant, [...] Si eris pacificus, tunc duxeris rex et regis filius atque amaberis a cunctis militibus; si iracundus, superbus, invidus, incapificatus super comites et principes cervicem erexeris, sine dubio fortitudo militum habitudo erit regalium dignitatum et aliens tuum tradetur regnum.” *Libellus de institutione morum*, pp. 623–624, c. 4; SZÚCS 1988, p. 102.

Milites are mentioned as *quartus decor* along with *principes* and *comites*, who are considered members of the highest social classes.⁴³ Logically, it can be assumed that the *milites* mentioned along with them also had such a status. In the second part of the quoted chapter, it appears as if the term *milites* also includes the names for *principes* and *comites*. This is seen in the statement: “If you are stiff-necked in anger, pride, hatred, and strife concerning the counts and magnates, the power of the warriors will doubtlessly overshadow the royal dignity” (*si iracundus, superbus, invidus, inpacificatus super comites et principes cervicem erexeris, sine dubio fortitudo militum hebitudo erit regalium dignitatum*).⁴⁴ Exaltation above *principes* and *comites* reduces the courage of someone else, namely the *milites*. A question arises here: if the king belittled the princes and comes did the knights cease to be loyal to him? In that case, the *milites* in the text would represent knights dependent only on *principes* and *comites*. It then makes no sense why the author would mention them as *quartus decor, regni propugnaculum, defensores imbecillum* or *expugnatores adversariorum*. The terms *fidelitas, fortitudo, agilitas, comitas* and *confidentia* of *principes* and *comites* would suffice. More likely, it seems the writer held a dual perception of *milites*. In the first sentence it was *milites* (knights, armoured mounted warriors) in the sense of a social group. The remaining two times he used the term *milites* as a common designation for men who were to fight for the king: “They will fight for you, not basely serve you” (*Illi tibi militent, non serviant*). In other words, they could be described as members of a privileged class who gained their freedom and privileged status as a reward for their armed service to the king.

Conclusion

From the evidence available in the sources, it is safe to conclude that *milites* could be found among both the free population and the unfree population. Despite such an apparent dichotomy, a unifying element is clear in the nature of the service which was rendered to their lords. As the very content of the term *miles* suggests, it was service with a weapon in hand, which is specificity demonstrated by the explicit references to *milites* among both free and unfree populations. *Milites* formed an armed retinue by means of which the lord could assert his authority among the population, increase his influence and extend his power. Evidence of such is found in the aforementioned regulation chapter 35 of the First Book of the Laws of Stephen I, on the invasion of the house. In addition to the attack in which he participates, a *comes* personally is mentioned only in the case that he sent only his *milites*.⁴⁵ As participants in similar hostilities in the service of their lord, or on his behalf, the *milites* gradually assimilated to the holders of power, their lords, with whom they fought. Alongside the martial solidarity built during combat, social belonging based on membership of a specific group of warriors gradually developed, despite the different positions

43 See footnote 40.

44 *Libellus de institutione morum*, p. 624, c. 4; SZŰCS 1988, p. 102.

45 “Si vero ille non supervenerit, sed suos milites miserit.” *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, p. 27, l. 35.

within the social strata that separated the lords from their *milites*. The context in which *milites* are mentioned needs to be adapted to our current translation of the term. If it is clear that the *milites* in question are from the upper social classes, it is possible to opt for a translation of *knights* in the sense of elite armoured mounted warriors.⁴⁶ If the context shows a lower social status, by the end of the 11th century, a more general translation of *warriors on horseback* is more appropriate.⁴⁷ *Milites* in the Kingdom of Hungary can be found among both the free and unfree population, providing a specific armed service to their lords, which is the one unifying element defining their common name, *milites*, despite different social origins and status. Eventually, *milites* would become a relatively closed group of men of the upper social classes who would be known as knights from the 12th century onwards.⁴⁸

46 For example, this option of translation is for *milites* in *Decreta S. Stephani regis*. ODRMH, 2019, pp. 23–24, I. 15; p. 27, I. 35; pp. 24–25, I. 22; *Libellus de institutione morum*, pp. 623–624.

47 As warriors could be translated *milites* in ODRMH 2019, (*Decreta S. Stephani regis*), p. 22, I. 7; p. 25, I. 25; (*Decreta S. Stephani regis*), p. 44, II. 18.

48 FLORI 1998, pp. 64–88; BUMKE 1982, pp. 72–96; STACEY, Robert. Social change in the thirteenth century: Nobles and knights. In ABULAFIA, David (ed.) *The New Cambridge Medieval History 5*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 13–25.