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The Archaeology and Material Culture of Queenship in Medieval Hungary, 1000–1395

Christopher Mielke

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The Archaeology and Material Culture of Queenship in Medieval Hungary, 1000–1395. By Christopher Mielke. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. ISBN: 978-3030665104. xvi + 371 pp. €103.99.

In the year 1000, King Stephen I, better known as St. Stephen, ascended to the Hungarian throne as the new kingdom's first Christian monarch. Before 1000 the Magyars, who had settled in the territory that became the Kingdom of Hungary, governed themselves according to a federation that afforded each of their tribes semi-autonomy. By the end of the tenth century, the Hungarian tribes had converted to Christianity and emerged as a kingdom with its royal seat at Esztergom. This context sets the scene for Christopher Mielke's important work, *The Archaeology and Material Culture of Queenship in Medieval Hungary, 1000–1395,* and his analysis of the royal women—queens consort, queens regent, and queens regnant—of the Hungarian monarchy in its first four centuries.

In centering his study on the material culture of early Hungarian queenship, Mielke "aims to document how medieval queens in the Hungarian Kingdom used material culture and structured space as expressions of their own power" (1). Accordingly, the sources in this volume include crowns, seals, coinage, chronicles, manuscripts, and gravestones to cover the lives of over thirty royal women. This focus on material sources speaks to an emerging trend in medieval and queenship scholarship as works by Kathleen Nolan, Marguerite Keane, and Jitske Jasperse have similarly drawn attention to the ways in which objects and spaces define the authority, both political and religious, of medieval and early modern royal women.

Mielke divides his book into eight chapters that bring the reader from the beginning of the monarchy to the start of the Habsburg period. Each chapter serves as a short biography of several royal figures and examines how their lives were shaped by surviving material evidence, visual sources, and spaces (e.g., the monasteries that each queen patronized or was buried in). Mielke argues that the "image of the queen carried enough symbolic weight" in ways that exemplified what "'power' meant for a medieval queen" (6 and 3). To appreciate the full imagery of the "power" that these sources embody, Mielke leans on a biographical approach that gives the reader the full scope of each queen's life, her specific context, and how the development of Hungary shaped her.

Each section pushes beyond the lives of Hungary's queen consorts to chart the role of royal women in the monarchy in the aftermath of events such as the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century and the first wave of the Black Death (1347–1351). For instance, the discussion of the seals of Elizabeth of Bosnia (r. 1353-1382) highlights the ways that Elizabeth's great seal, which depicts her enthroned with the orb and scepter in both hands, visualizes her role as regent for her daughter, Mary (r. 1382-1385), and as consort of both Hungary and Poland. This imagery, Mielke suggests, served to "strengthen her own image during her regency" in ways that reinforce her position as a female regent to another queen in her minority (229). This imagery mirrors that of her daughter during her brief reign, as her symbol similarly depicts Mary enthroned with an orb and scepter in hand, an image that Mielke suggests allowed her to "push their boundaries in a more kingly direction" (260).

In addition to discussions of seals for political purposes, Mielke highlights the ways in which early Hungarian queens engaged with devotional texts and monasteries and how their emphasis on their ancestry, via the cult of saints such as St. Stephen, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and St. Ladislaus, fit into the monarchy's ancestral line and right to rule. As Joan A. Holladay has similarly argued in relation to the Capetian dynasty and St. Louis, the Hungarian monarchy stressed

its sanctity to both legitimize itself and to foreground its connection to religious networks. In his discussion of Agnes of Habsburg, in particular, Mielke emphasizes the connections between the Hungarian royal house and the life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary. The stained-glass windows of the church at Königsfelden that Agnes had made in the 1320s depict St. Elizabeth alongside the Hungarian double-barred cross. The visual relationship between Agnes of Habsburg and St. Elizabeth and the seals of Elizabeth of Bosnia and Queen Mary represents the ways in which visual sources and materiality allow royal women to emphasize their authority and their right to their positions, particularly in terms of their familial connection to saints. During moments of uncertainty, these material representations remind the viewer of the queen's right to rule, her right to sit as regent, and/or her place within her new family by marriage.

Each of the thirty-five women surveyed left behind many objects to fill the pages of this monograph, and the remaining chapters focus on similar themes of authority and gender through funerary monuments, manuscripts, and prayer books. Mielke's attention to both biography and materiality demonstrate the significance of material sources and how they can complement existing documentary records on these women. In sum, Mielke's work demonstrates that material sources, from coins to funerary monuments, can inform scholars about the ways in which royal women displayed their political and religious authority that transcend the written record.

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