

Hungary's Conversion to Christianity: The Establishment of Hungarian Statehood and its Consequences to the Thirteenth Century

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The Carpathian Basin occupies a peculiar place in history. It was the ground where Roman-Germanic world met that of the Slavs and mounted nomad peoples, where no group had achieved sustained unity before the state of Hungary was founded.¹ Its function was more as a kind of channel through which nomadic peoples, like the Ostrogoths, Gepids and Longobards, launched successful drives into the heart of Europe, or failed in the attempt, as in the case of the Huns (420–455), and subsequently broke up. The Huns opened up the road to Europe for the Germanic tribes, and the Avars opened up the Balkans to the Slavs, until the Hungarians finally closed the channel off. The dominion of the Romans and the Huns was confined to certain areas of the basin. The Avars (568–803) took control of the whole of it, while Charlemagne's Frankish empire extended only to Transdanubia, the region's most developed area.

It was here, on the remains of the Roman, Avar, Frankish and Frankish-Slav cultures, that the Hungarians settled in the tenth century. After Árpád and his successors secured the area, they set up the first bishoprics and organized the first counties. This basin can be regarded as a missing piece of an enormous jigsaw, filled in by the establishment of Hungarian power, aided to some extent by accidental events. After the Huns and Avars, the setting up of Hungarian rule was accompanied by consolidation and modernization of the basin, and was assisted by hitherto unknown stability in East Central Europe. The Slav peoples occupying the borders of the German empire were split into two parts that would never reunite. The Northern and Southern Slavs, after being separated, set out on their way to the founding of their states and the discovery of their national identities. The pattern for development was the same everywhere:

multi-centred, i.e. tribe-centred, development had to be replaced by a process of creating a unitary state. This is what took place among the Hungarians, the Czechs and the Poles in the tenth century.² The furthest progress down this road was achieved by the Czechs in Prague, where a secular centre coincided with an ecclesiastical one, whereas in Hungary and Poland at first several ecclesiastical and temporal centres developed in parallel: Esztergom, Székesfehérvár / Gniezno, Poznan, Wrocław, Cracow. The formation of communities with national identities was not a necessary concomitant, however, and did not occur among the Slavs of the Elbe, for example.

The claim concerning parallelism among Czech, Polish and Hungarian development is not made purely from the considerations of present-day politics. The events in the second half of the tenth century are indeed very close to each other: for example, the Polish king Mieszko I sought relations with Christendom in 963. The establishment of first the bishopric in Prague took place about a decade later. References in the chronicles about Hungarians starting to convert to Christianity appear at the same time. For the ruling elite of these emerging states, taking up the Christian religion presented an excuse for attacking and eliminating their pagan rivals. However, the assumption of Christianity was more than a political tool: the Christian faith was truly the basis of legitimacy for these new state entities. It was the medium through which they could access and become a part of the socially and culturally dynamic world of the Christian peoples, represented by the two "Roman" emperors: the German and the Byzantine, and stretching from the Kievan principality in the East to the land of the Franks in the West, and from Scandinavia in the North to the Mediterranean in the South.³

The enterprise of founding the state of Hungary was undertaken by the Árpád dynasty, under the leadership of the first king's father, Duke Géza, who still bore a pagan name. Specific knowledge of the radical, bloody nature of the process only comes to us from the time of Stephen's rule, apart from the terse reference to the "bloody-handed" Géza in the legend of St. Stephen. Spreading from the top down, conversion was clearly forcible. It was directed not only against pagans but also against every centre of power that defied central — ducal and later royal — power in the name of non-Latin Christianity. Árpád's princely successors on certain occasions brought their might down on both pagans and Christians oriented toward Byzantium (Koppány, Gyula, Ajtony), in the process spreading their dominion to the East (i.e. Transylvania) and the south.⁴

Under Stephen's rule Hungary would be converted to Christianity and the Christian Church would be organized in the country. With the help of the legends of the times, by the end of the eleventh century the memory of Stephen (by then canonized and referred to as Saint Stephen) as the man who had forced Hungary's conversion, had faded.⁵ Part of this process was the relegation of the achievements of Géza, Stephen's father, into the background and the emphasis on Stephen as an apostolic king. One legend claimed that a celestial apparition had prohibited Géza from laying the foundations of Christian Hungary and of the Church, since his hands had been smeared with human blood.⁶ According to this tradition, if there had been bloody measures taken to force Hungary's conversion, they took place during the time of Géza, and King Stephen had no conflict with his people over faith — he only confronted a few rival noblemen whose defeat automatically ensured the victory of the new faith in the country.

Heavenly apparitions, however, were not only characteristic of the legend as a genre, but could also be used to obscure the external circumstances of conversion, its international implications, and above of all, the role of Henry II, German King and (later) Holy Roman Emperor. Who initiated the conversion is an important factor because this act earned him, i.e. Henry, certain right of suzerainty over the converted area and legitimized his influence there.⁷ Not surprisingly, the polemicists in the service of the Holy Roman emperors kept referring to Henry's deeds for centuries. Countering the tendencies emerging from such claims, in the Hungary of the latter half of the 11th century there emerged an emphasis on Stephen as the state- and church-founder and the apostolic king. It has to be kept in mind that at the time the kingdom was in the cross-fire of papal and German political ambitions. It was the legends of the late 11th and early 12th centuries that made the pope and contemporary Europe recognize the apostolic right of the Hungarian king.⁸

The chroniclers of the Hungarian Kingdom's early history treat the subject of the conversion reticently, a fact which indicates that they did not want to depict conversion to Christianity as a radical transformation. They date the history of the Hungarian people from far before the Christian era because a sharp dividing line between the pagan and Christian ages would have questioned the justification of discussing Hungarian prehistory at length.⁹ Hungarian legends treat the subject similarly. This is not surprising in view of the fact that both they and the chronicles were part of, or were inspired by, the Kingdom's court litera-

ture. At the court, those who commissioned works expected the authors to apply the ideological and legal arguments prevalent at the time. The Greater Legend of St. Stephen stresses continuity just as the chronicles do. The former makes explicit mention of the fact that imperial Rome, just as the Kingdom of Hungary, became Christian after a period of paganism. In this manner it justified the ravaging of Christian Europe by the pagan Hungarians — upon divine inspiration — before their conversion.¹⁰ This argument suggested that the German emperors, who professed continuity with the Roman Empire, had no valid ground to reproach the Hungarians for their pagan past.

The best example of this position can be found in the *Gesta Hungarorum*. It was written by an anonymous chronicler around 1200 and is devoted exclusively to the prehistory of pagan Hungarians.¹¹ It depicts these pre-Christian Magyars — the *flagellum Dei* or God's tool for punishing sinners — as being governed by the Holy Spirit even in their raids against the Christians and in their seizure of the land where they settled. The author of this *gesta*, known as Anonymus to Hungarians, consciously searched for evidence of continuity in Hungarian history before and after the settlement. He found such evidence or historical link in the person of Attila, the king of the Huns, whom he inserted in the family tree of Hungary's Árpadian kings. With his *Gesta Hungarorum* Anonymus laid the foundation of a view prevalent in Hungary up to the nineteenth century. This view held that the occupation of the Carpathian Basin by the Magyar tribes in 896 had been preceded by the capture of the region by the Huns, a fact which legalized and justified the area's subsequent Hungarian settlement. Attila, another "scourge of God", could thus be more easily fitted into the early history of the pagan Hungarians.¹²

The ultimate version of the theory of continuity between the Hungarians' pagan and Christian history was created by the chronicler Simon of Kéza in the 1280s. To him the Huns and Magyars were not merely related peoples but they were identical; accordingly the settlement of the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin in 896 was none other than their second settlement in the region.¹³ Simon of Kéza also derived the origin of the community ("*communitas*") of Magyar noblemen and their claim to sovereignty over the land, from pagan, Hunnish traditions.¹⁴ What partly explains Simon of Kéza's views is the serious controversy into which the king of the period, Ladislas IV, got with the Pope. The author, who was the king's court priest, probably wanted to prove that Hungarian history was guided by divine will even before the conversion

and that the charge of heathendom against Hungarians and their ruler was senseless. As late as 1279 the papal legate to Hungary reminded the Hungarian king, Ladislas IV, that St. Stephen had subordinated his country to St. Peter, that is to the Apostolic See, repeating the papal court's well-known argument — which was consistently rejected by Hungarian elite. This argument had appeared for the first time in Gregory VII's letter to Salamon, the king of Hungary between 1063 and 1074, albeit some modern-day historians suggest that King Stephen himself had offered the country to the Virgin Mary in order to disarm any hegemonic claims to his kingdom by the papal court.¹⁵

The main motive of those who stressed continuity between pre-Christian and post-conversion Hungarian history was undoubtedly the desire to counter foreign accusations that were flung at the Hungarians already in the 11th century. Both the papal and the imperial propaganda questioned several times — not unreasonably in view of the large-scale pagan revolt of 1046 — the completeness or the sincerity of the Hungarians' conversion. A similar situation existed in regard to Poland. In the 11th century German-Polish historiographical polemics, the German writers equated the Poles' refusal to obey the German emperor with rebellion against the Christian church, citing the Poles' alleged or real superficial Christianity as proof.¹⁶ For revolting against the Germans, Thietmar of Merseburg in 1018 called Boleslav the Bold the "foe of all believers," just as 12th century writers Gerhoh of Reichersberg and Otto of Freising found correlation between the Hungarians' anti-German sentiments and their "infidelity" to Christendom.¹⁷ The latter even questioned the sainthood of King Stephen even though he was already widely revered as a saint at the time. These Germans emphasized a certain continuity in the Hungarian history as well: the Magyars' enduring "pagan" and "barbaric" traditions. The arguments of the Hungarian chroniclers and legend writers must be seen in the context of these anti-Hungarian polemics. There can be no doubt that this is why the spokesmen of the Hungarian nation stressed the continuity of Hungarian history, its divinely-ordered nature, as well as the rapid and complete success of Hungary's conversion to Christianity under St. Stephen.

The Hungarian raids that plagued tenth century Europe had been ended through a political reconciliation between Germans and Hungarians. The process started with the arrival of a Hungarian delegation at the German emperor's court in Quedlinburg in 973, and ended with the Hungarian ruler Géza's son marrying Gisela some time in the 990s, the

sister of the future German king and Holy Roman Emperor, the later canonized Henry II.¹⁸ It is clear from the historical evidence that the conversion must have been carried out with German assistance, probably with the substantial support of the Stephan's German wife and her retinue. As in Bohemia and Poland, German influences, chiefly Bavarian, left their mark also in Hungary in the areas of social life, culture and ecclesiastical organization — from the minting coins and making of laws to the producing liturgical books and issuing charters — paving the way for an intellectual revolution in the recently Christianized country.¹⁹

Gizela's marriage to Stephen paved the way for a turning point in Hungarian internal and foreign affairs: it cemented the Magyar nation's orientation towards the West. Under Géza, as recorded by contemporary chronicler Bruno of Querfurt, the first western missionaries (who included St. Vojtěch [Adalbert]), took the Hungarian court only a little away "from sin," and only wreathed the Magyars in the shadow of Christianity: Géza paid homage to both pagan and Christian gods. Around the year 1000, however, an fundamental turn of events must have taken place. This is evident from the founding (in 996?) of the country's first – and still active – Benedictine abbey at Pannonhalma which was followed by the establishment of the first bishoprics in the kingdom. It is important to note that this commencement of ecclesiastical organization in Hungary preceded Stephen's coronation as king.

While medieval Hungarian historiography acknowledged the role of German warriors in the consolidation Géza's and Stephen's temporal power, it refused to admit the existence of any such assistance in the sphere of church organization. The country, it was claimed, was converted by King Stephen I, a real apostle as it were, who also founded the Kingdom's archbishopric and chain of bishoprics. Hungary's medieval chroniclers attribute to no role in this work to Stephen's father; and they give no concrete information about how far Géza got in converting the Magyar people to Christianity.

It is a telling sign that not a single exact date of the early phase of conversion survives in these Hungarian works — including the year of Stephen's baptism or of his wedding. It is most likely that historiography of that time deliberately shunned the subject, reckoning with Hungarian history from the year of the coronation in 1000/1001. Typically enough, the Bavarian version of the St. Venceslav legend (*Crescente fide*) also distorts the facts when describing the very first phase of Bohemia's conversion, keeping silent about the details of earlier Moravian-Slavic

evangelization.²⁰ Not even the names of German missionaries survive in the Hungarian sources, except that of St. Adalbert, mentioned as the bishop of Prague, who became the patron saint of the first Hungarian archbishopric.²¹

Nevertheless, the organization of the church did not become the subject of an open historiographic controversy because — unlike the bishopric of Lund in Scandinavia or that of Prague in Bohemia — Esztergom, the Hungarian ecclesiastic centre, was raised to the rank of an archbishopric parallel with Gniezno in Poland (established around the year 1000). This happened during the early phase of Hungary's conversion when the issue of "German dependency" was not as acute as it was later. The only moot question that remains is whether Stephen converted his people to Christianity out of his own conviction or in deference to his wife's wishes.²²

Several analogies can be cited to exemplify the "converting royal spouse."²³ In the Polish chronicles, Princess Dobrava, the daughter of the Bohemian duke Boleslav I, helped the work of missionaries in Poland. In 965 she married Mieszko, the duke of the Poles, an event that was followed a year later by the duke's baptism. Contemporary German historiographers emphasize the fact that "the poison of inborn heathendom left him [Mieszko] upon the frequent urging of his beloved wife." The missionary role of the royal spouse was accepted in Poland probably because Queen Dobrava's family ties with German imperial family were not close.

The image of the royal spouse as an instrument of conversion was stressed by German chroniclers in connection with the Hungarians as well. Chroniclers of the mid-11th century, Wipo and Herimannus Augiensis, make the pointed remark that Gisela "converted her husband Stephan," and through him, the entire Hungarian nation, by marrying him.²⁴ Medieval Hungarian historiography ignored Gisela's supposed missionary role. Quite the contrary, the Hungarian chronicle makes quite unfavourable mentions of Gisela, attributing cruel deeds to her. Underlying this was more of a wish to blur or discredit her role deliberately than reality itself. German liturgical sources on the other hand — the readings and prayers of the feast of St. Henry — propagated the opposite view. His *vita*, composed for his canonization in 1146, called Emperor Henry II "*apostolus Ungarorum*" who "converted" the Hungarians with the help of his sister.²⁵

This historiographical dispute regarding the identity of the converter of Hungary extends beyond the realms of the Germans and the Hungarians. The fact is that even some chroniclers in Poland commented about evangelizing in Hungary. Being aware of the controversy about the role of Queen Dobrava in the conversion of their own country, they present the converting of the Hungarians as their own achievement. They admit that Hungary's conversion might have been helped by missionaries such as St. Adalbert, whose activity in Hungary during Géza and Stephen was preserved by legends and chronicles alike. In fact in 12th to 15th century Czech and Polish sources he is depicted as the converter of "both *Hungaria* and *Polonia*."

Consequences

All that we know about the first royal coronation in East Central Europe is that Stephen received "a crown and a blessing at the mercy and behest of the Emperor," according to Thietmar of Merseburg, "to establish the bishoprics." Hungarian historical tradition (the *Pozsonyi/Bratislava Chronicle*) dates this to 1000, the *Várad-Oradea/Zagreb Chronicle* to 1001, and prevailing opinion to Christmas or January 1000/1001.²⁶ Other modern-day historians note that Holy Roman Emperor Otto III (ruled 983-1002) was in Rome between August 1000 and February 1001, and then in Ravenna in April, where he would have had occasion to attend to the matter of the Hungarian coronation in consultation with Pope Sylvester II, his former teacher and close confidant, and with the duke of Bavaria.²⁷ Historian János M. Bak recently reminded us that Otto and Sylvester acted several times hand in hand.²⁸ The story of the Hungarian delegation to Pope Sylvester II requesting a crown was written down only at the beginning of the 12th century (the Hartvic legend) on the basis of a possibly true historical tradition that is now completely unknown, and was the subject of an attempt at substantiation around 1630 by means of the fake papal *bull* attributed to Sylvester II.

Unlike previous German emperors, Otto III viewed East Central Europe as an enormous political chessboard or, rather, as a region fantastically favourable for a religious revival, the Roman "*renovatio*" in the strictest sense of that term.²⁹ His vision took in the entire area from the Adriatic to the Baltic Sea, and he planned to spread his empire from Venice, through Prague, to Gniezno, by founding new kingdoms and

archbishoprics.³⁰ For diverse reasons, his efforts had only varying degrees of success. Among the region's new states, only in Hungary was a king crowned during Otto's reign, in 1000 or 1001. Much ink has been expended on the question of why such coronation did not happen in Bohemia and Poland. Among the Poles, it was probably impediments of the canon law that prevented both Gniezno's establishment as an archbishopric and Boleslaw Chrobry's coronation. A contributing factor to Otto's failure to have a Christian king crowned in Bohemia was the intensification German-Czech tensions, the Premyslida-Slavnik conflict and the Czech leaders' anti-Otto and anti-Piast policies. Most important of course, was the untimely death of the "great chess-player."

Otto's successors, Henry II and Conrad II, understood the language of armaments much better than the refined manners of political negotiations. The victims of this turn of events were Poland and Bohemia, whose incipient development as Christian kingdoms came to a temporary halt, as is illustrated by the long wait for the Prague bishopric, which had been founded around 972, to be raised to an archbishopric — which did not actually take place until 1344. The duke of Bohemia assumed the title of king on a continuous basis only in 1197. (Although this did happen earlier on occasions on an individual basis: Vratislav II became king in 1085 and Vladislav II in 1158.) The Poles had to wait until 1025 for the first coronation, and until 1300 their ruler bore the title of king only sporadically. These problems were felt least in Bohemia, which was throughout this period the closest to Western standards: statistical indicators for the country during the Middle Ages — such as population density, the density of parishes, and degree of urbanization — consistently surpassed those of Hungary and Poland.³¹

A key characteristic of Hungarian development was the fact that the Árpád dynasty held sway over the entire country which had been presented to Stephen I as a kind of "*tabula rasa*", that is he was left with a free hand in setting up Hungary's ecclesiastical organization. Stephen founded bishoprics without papal interference throughout his whole life, even if not twelve of them as a legend claims. By virtue of this centralized development and the good relations that prevailed between Hungary and the Holy Roman Empire during the reign of Henry II, the Hungarians were able to stand up to the German armies in 1030 during the first post-1000 Hungarian-German armed conflict, when the attackers were forced back and dealt a humiliating defeat at Vienna.³² The Hungarians were assisted by the swamps and rivers that defended their western frontier.

These wastelands, augmented by castles and water defences, helped to fend off what were in every case militarily much stronger attackers, right up to the last German onslaught in 1108.

The constant border disputes between the Czechs and the Poles were not paralleled in the Hungarians' relations with their neighbours. The country's boundaries along the Carpathian mountain ranges presented effective defense, except for the debacle against the Tartars in the thirteenth century. Another factor that may have reduced the number of conflicts the Hungarians had to cope with was the incomplete settlement of the Carpathian Basin's frontier areas, as a result of which internal population surpluses — as well as the influx into the country of large numbers of refugees — could be accommodated through the process of the settlement of these regions. No lasting military threat arose from the country's immediate neighbours: the Austrian or Moravian dukes, or from those of Galicia, Wallachia or southern Slav areas. At the same time, the vastness of the Carpathian Basin was one of the impediments to the expansionist ambitions of Hungary's rulers: population growth could not be sustained at a rate sufficient to support political and military expansion. Expansion into Galicia (Halic) and the Balkans would only have been viable in the long term if it had been possible to Magyarize the Slav populations there, which was not feasible. Prior to the appearance of the Turkish threat, Hungary's rulers had surprisingly wide strategic and political freedom of movement, sufficient even to enable them to find the means and the time to correct their bad decisions, and win back the territories and fortifications that they had lost.

Despite the challenges to the throne in medieval Hungary, the kingdom was rarely seriously threatened by lasting territorial divisions, and the chiefs of the administrative units along the borders (the Transylvanian or Slavonian officials), more often than not remained loyal vassals of the king. Indeed the extent of the Hungarian king's power was written about with astonishment by the German historian Otto of Freising in the middle of the 12th century.³³ This situation presented some disadvantages. Being a centralized country, in Hungary regional political centres that could have led to the formation of local centres of culture and learning failed to develop. Furthermore, since Hungarian-language literature was associated throughout this age with paganism, the written language of the realm remained Latin. There are only two short Hungarian-language sacred texts that survive from before 1300, although there is some oral record of Hungarian heroic poetry.³⁴

The foundation of the Hungarian state had a determinative influence in the history of what are now the Central European countries of Croatia, Slovakia and Romania, since their present-day territories partly or wholly consist of land that lay within the Kingdom of Hungary. By the end of the 11th century, Hungarian expansion had secured for its kings the crown of Croatia, a country that was coveted by both the Venetian and Byzantine empires and had already adopted the Latin Christian faith. The Croatian crown was retained by the Hungarian kings right up to 1918, but Croatia retained its territorial integrity throughout, largely as the result of the inability of the medieval state of Hungary to bring about the developed coastal areas' full economic and political integration into the Kingdom of Hungary. It is not an unrelated fact that the borders of Latin Christendom in the Balkans have remained coincident with the borders of Croatia right up to present times.

A particular mention should be made of the Hungarian Kingdom's relations with Europe's great powers, or more precisely, with the Holy Roman and Byzantine empires. As a medium-sized power, Hungary could not take up the struggle against either of these with any hope of success; however this did not have to be done often in the period under discussion. In the challenge from the Holy Roman, i.e. the German Empire, the years between 1030 and 1108 were critical: there was a real danger that in the midst of the country's periodic civil warring the German Emperor could reduce Hungary to vassalage.³⁵ Fortunately, Hungary's natural defences, in particular the marshlands of the kingdom's western approaches, often helped to thwart German incursions. When the imperial armies managed to penetrate the kingdom and it came to open warfare, the situation was different. Under these circumstances the Hungarian army never won a significant battle during this period, and indeed in 1044 (at Ménfő not far from the fortified city of Győr), it suffered a spectacular defeat. Crucial to Hungary's success in avoiding subjugation was the intensifying struggle between the emperor and the pope, which relegated the Hungarian front to a second-rank theatre of conflict for the German imperial court.

We can reach a similar conclusion regarding Hungarian-Byzantine relations. During the resurgence of Byzantine power in the 12th century, Hungary had to retreat in the face of Constantinople's belligerent military and foreign policy. An event of major significance was the defeat in 1167 (at Zimony, today in Belgrad) suffered by what was the century's strongest Hungarian army — comprising half of the country's total military

forces and equipped with Western European-type armour and arms. The territory given up to Byzantium as a consequence was only regained by the Hungarians (by King Béla III) after the death of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel at the end of the century. It was partly in response to these events that the above-mentioned chronicler Anonymous felt obliged to deny the justifiability of the Byzantine territorial claims, and to bolster his argument, began tracing the Árpáds' rightful title to the entire Carpathian Basin as far back as the Attila the King of the Huns, thus laying the foundations for a virulent Hungarian political myth that lasted for centuries.

A peculiar and fortunately exceptional event of Hungarian history prior to 1300 was the clash between the Mongol Empire and Hungary. Although the Mongol-Tatar advance did not catch the country unawares, the kingdom's army nevertheless suffered a catastrophic defeat at Muhi (not far from modern city Miskolc), in the spring of 1241. Afterward the invaders took possession of large parts of the country, with the exception of some fortresses.³⁶ The massive demographic losses suffered as a result of this conquest by the kingdom's Magyar ethnic group became a political question only several centuries later, and the Mongol occupation's rather short duration did not undo the country's international reputation. Indeed, the country's reconstruction resulted in economic and social advances and the attainment of a new level of modernity. It was the defeat at Muhi that first generated the idea of seeking Western assistance for the country. In response to the defeat of the Hungarians the Pope and the German emperor started to recruit a Christian army, but their efforts were frustrated by distrust between the two and by the pope's untimely death.³⁷ This would not have been the first instance that an international peace-making force did not get organized in time, and the Mongol victory certainly demonstrates that without foreign assistance, Hungary had little chance against the vast conquering empires emerging from Asia even in the days of its greatest military glory.

Population density figures offer a further insight into the situation in East Central Europe of the times.³⁸ Unfortunately, the data available is unreliable and is somewhat contradictory. The reconstruction of the demographic situation in the Carpathian Basin between the 9th and 13th centuries is very difficult. No censuses were conducted in Hungary until the eighteenth century. The first Hungarian census, that of 1784/87, gave the population of the kingdom as 8,492,000. Estimates for the country's population in 1495 range between 2 and 3.5 million. The first reference to

the numbers of the Hungarians before the conquest comes from the writings of the Arab historian Ibn Rusa, who claimed that around 880 the Hungarians had 20,000 armed horsemen. Some modern-day historians (György Györffy in particular) infer from this that there were 400,000 Hungarians and 200,000 Slavs in the Carpathian Basin at the beginning of the tenth century. Others (Gyula Kristó for example) have recently proposed radically smaller figures, putting the Hungarian population at 120,000, with a local non-Magyar population being about the same size. The calculations rest largely on whether the Hungarians are thought to have been semi-nomads, as in Györffy's view, or full nomads, as in Kristó's, because the population of semi-nomads derived from the number of warriors is estimated using a multiplier that is twice as high. Another recent reassessment challenges the proposition that the Hungarians necessarily required superiority in numbers to assimilate the existing Slav population and to retain the Hungarian language. Of the Carpathian Basin's 330,000 square kilometres, some 200,000 may be taken as being inhabited at that time, which with Györffy's figures gives a population density of 3 per sq. km., and at the end of the 11th century, the population figure of 1 million gives a density of 5 per sq. km, which matches the figures for Poland of the time. The lower estimates put population at the end of the 11th century as only half a million. The comparative figures around 1000 are: Italy, 7 million with a population density of 24/sq. km; Germany, 5.4 million, with 10/sq. km; and Bohemia, 1 million, with a population density of 7.8/sq km.

Conclusions

Even Stephen's contemporaries must have been in awe of the enormous significance of his life's work, because they usually referred to him as a saint long before his canonization in 1083. The turning point from a constitutional point of view came with the rule of the Hungarian king, Andrew I, who came to power after the bloody civil wars that followed Stephen's death. He anchored the legitimacy of his rule directly to the person of Stephen, by seeking out Stephen's coronation jewels when he took the throne. The canonization of Stephen, the first in Hungary, took place during the rule of Ladislas I (ruled 1077-95). Stephen was the first in the ranks of European royal saints who did not suffer martyrdom; he

achieved his elevation by virtue of his distinctions as ruler and spreader of the faith.³⁹

The recognition of Stephen as an apostolic king and a founder of church and state became particularly important to Hungary in the second half of the 11th century, when the kingdom became caught up in the crossfire between papal and German imperial claims. Legends from this time relate the quest for recognition of the Hungarian king's apostolic rights from the pope and contemporary Europe. These legends were the basis for the Hungarian kings' petition for papal recognition of Stephen's virtues, and indeed it was the writer of the third legend of St. Stephen, Hartvic, whose ecclesiastical-legal arguments gained the approval of a later pope, Innocent III, in 1201 — with the exception of the parts most offensive to the papacy. In 1233, King Andrew II ascribed the origin of his power *expressis verbis* to Stephen. The process went in parallel with the cult of St. Wenceslas in Bohemia and partly with that of St. Vojtěch / Adalbert in Poland, where the key figures in the formation of Christian nations became the patron saints of the countries and kings in perpetuity ("rex perpetuus").

From the time of Ladislav and Coloman (in Hungarian, Kálmán, ruled 1096 to 1116) the source of legitimacy for Hungary's kings was the person and reign of Stephen, and so matters related to him took on a unique significance. Stephen has nearly every virtue of the mythical state-founders of medieval legends: he makes laws, mints coins, makes peace, adopts literacy, founds towns and churches.⁴⁰ Much of court pomp and ceremony is associated with Székesfehérvár, made by the king into the country's sacred centre, on the model of Aachen: from Coloman onwards most Hungarian kings were buried here, they were crowned here, the royal throne was kept here. A condition of legitimacy was that the coronation be carried out with St. Stephen's crown and take place in Székesfehérvár. It was here that the royal archives and treasury were kept. The royal assizes that involved court and legislative sessions were also held here, on the holiday of the sainted king. This date has a particular significance in the history of legislation in Hungary.⁴¹

The beginning of the 11th century marks the end of the first great stage in the process of founding church and state in Hungary. Hungarian Christianity and the kingdom's ecclesiastical and temporal administrations survived the onslaughts of pagan uprisings (in 1046 and 1061) and reached consolidation towards the end of the 11th century, especially under Ladislav I and Coloman when the feudal order was finally estab-

lished, the first saints were canonized, and new dioceses were founded. The canonization of Stephen I constituted the recognition that Hungary had finally arrived among the Western, Latin Christian kingdoms. Even among contemporaries, this process became merged, partly unconsciously and partly by design, with the memory of the first king. By around 1100 it had become widely believed that the state of Hungary and its church had been founded by King Stephen as the single resolution of a sovereign ruler.

King St. Stephen himself regarded the conversion to Christianity to be the main achievement of the age of the Hungarian kingdom's establishment. This is the message of his "*Admonitions*," the earliest "king's testament" in East Central Europe. Written by an anonymous ecclesiastic but attributed to the king, this document expressly links the future of the country with the keeping the Christian faith. In his *Admonitions* Stephen counsels his son, and all his descendants, to act accordingly. The posterity took St. Stephen's advice to heart: his *Admonitions* were embodied in the *Laws of St. Stephen* and remained the basis of the Hungarian *Corpus Iuris* up to the twentieth century.⁴²

In time, the three new states of Hungary, Bohemia and Poland became part of Christian Europe, "*Europa occidentalis*" as opposed to the world of the Byzantine Orthodox Christendom. In medieval times the modern political terminology of "Central Europe" or "East Central Europe" were unknown.⁴³ In the first centuries of these kingdoms' existence, the dynasties of the new states forged close relations with each other and with the ruling houses of their "Western" neighbours through marriage alliances. These three countries also joined the world of the Western, Latin church and accepted its traditions including monastic life. Nevertheless, modern historians have rightly pointed out that the new states that occupied the swathe of land between the Adriatic and the North Sea bear similarities in their statistical indicators which, despite variations, classed them as a group of countries undergoing a shared process of social and economic development. Having started off with clear disadvantages, these countries' social and economic development during the 11th and 12th centuries had brought the region very close to the standards of more advanced Western lands by the following century. Total integration into — and complete catching up to — "Western" Europe was never achieved and the new lands remained a zone of the frontier or periphery. The eleventh century in Europe gave birth not just to new states but to a new region which later became known as East Central Europe.⁴⁴

NOTES

¹ For an overview see Herwig Wolfram, *Die Geburt Mitteleuropas. Geschichte Österreichs vor seiner Entstehung 378–907* (Vienna: Kremayr und Scherian, 1987); András Róna-Tas, *Hungarians and Europe in the Early Middle Ages. An Introduction to Hungarian History* (Budapest and New York: Central European University [hereafter CEU] Press, 1999), 239–265; Gyula Kristó, *Hungarian History in the Ninth Century* (Szeged: Szegedi Középkorász Műhely, 1996); György Györffy, "Die Landnahme der Ungarn aus historischer Sicht," in *Ausgewählte Probleme europäischer Landnahmen des früh- und Hochmittelalters*, ed. Michel Müller-Wille and Reinhard Schneider (Sigmaringen, 1994) Part II, 67–80.

² Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Price of Freedom. A History of East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 18–47; Oscar Halecki, *The Millennium of Europe* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963) chapter I.

³ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe. Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5–9.

⁴ For a history of medieval Hungary see Gyula Kristó, *Die Arpaden--Dynastie. Die Geschichte Ungarns von 895 bis 1301* (Budapest: Corvina, 1993), 55–61; Ferenc Makk, "Une époque décisive: la Hongrie en milieu du Xe siècle," in *Les hongrois et l'Europe: Conquête et intégration*, ed. Sándor Csernus and Klára Korompay (Paris and Szeged: Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1999), 313–326.

Parts of Hungary, in particular its Transdanubian territories, were subject to the influence of the Holy Roman (German) Empire. Around 997, when the heir to the crown, Stephen, secured the hand of Gisela, sister of the future Holy Roman Emperor Henry II, this zone of influence was extended even further.

⁵ For general information see György Györffy, *King Saint Stephen of Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Marianne Sághy, "La christianisation de la Hongrie," in *Gerbert d'Aurillac. Actes du colloque d'Aurillac, 1996*, ed. Nicolle Charbonnel and Jean-Eric Jung (Aurillac: Société des lettres, science et arts, la Haute-Auvergne, 1997), 255–262; Richard Marsina, "Christianization of the Magyars between the East and the West," *Studia historica Slovaca* 19 (1995): 37–52; László Koszta, "L'organisation de l'Eglise chrétienne en Hongrie," in *Les hongrois et l'Europe*, 293–312. In this connection see my "Conversion in the Chronicles. The Hungarian Case," in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*, ed. Guyda Armstrong and Ian N. Wood (Turnhout: Brepols, in print).

⁶ "The Greater legend of St. Stephen," in Imre Szentpétery ed., *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum*, vol. 2. (Budapest: Akadémia, 1938; reprint Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 1999), 379.

⁷ Arnold Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe. Kaiser, Könige und Päpste als geistliche Patrone in abendländischen Missionsgeschichte* (Berlin and New York: W. De Gruyter, 1984), 313–14.

⁸ József Gerics, *Egyház, állam és gondolkozás Magyarországon a középkorban* [Church, state and mentality in medieval Hungary] cited hereafter as *Church, State* (Budapest: METEM, 1995), 144–64.

⁹ See Norbert Kersken, *Geschichtsschreibung im Europa der Nationes. Nationalgeschichtliche Gesamtdarstellungen im Mittelalter* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau, 1995), 814–16; László Veszprémy, "Historical Past and Political Present in the Latin Chronicles of Hungary (12th–13th Centuries)," in *The Medieval Chronicle*, ed. Erik Kooper (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999), 260–68.

¹⁰ The Greater Legend of St. Stephen, in *Scriptores*, vol. 2: p. 378; also, Gerics, *Church, State*, 158–60.

¹¹ Recent edition by Gabriel Silagi with László Veszprémy eds., *Die Gesta Hungarorum des anonymen Notars* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1991).

¹² On the subject of Attila, the Huns, the Magyars and the Hun-Magyar kinship, see Róna-Tas, *Hungarians and Europe*, 423–26; as well as Kristó, *Hungarian History*, 71–84.

¹³ László Veszprémy, ed., *Simonis de Kéza Gesta Hungarorum* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Jenő Szűcs, *Theoretical elements in Simon of Kéza's Gesta Hungarorum* *Studia Historica* 96 (Budapest, 1975), a revised translation appears in Veszprémy, ed., *Simonis de Kéza*. Simon of Kéza fails to explain the origins of servitude and social inequality among the Magyars. If the Hungarians were guided by the Holy Ghost from the beginning, the difference between noblemen and non-nobles could simply not stem from the embracing of Christianity. Simon of Kéza argues that those were cast into subjugation were those who failed to turn up when their leaders summoned them to take up arms in defence of the new religion.

¹⁵ *Das Register Gregors VII.*, ed. Erich Caspar (Berlin: MGH reprint, Munich, 1920) nr. II. 13. p. 145. Cited by J. Gerics, *Church, State*, p. 150. By offering the kingdom to the Holy Virgin, i.e. to a "higher dignity," Hungary's ruling elite probably wanted to weaken the papal court's claim to the country.

¹⁶ See Angenendt, p. 313; and Gerics, *Church, State*, 162–63.

¹⁷ Gerhoh, *Iber de Corrupto Ecclesie statu*, ch. 58, P.L. Migne, (reprint, Turnhout: Brepols, 1990–1992. Vol. 194); and Otto of Freising, *Chronica* VI, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990; 5th ed.), 27.

¹⁸ Johannes Fried, *Otto III and Boleslaw Chrobry* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989), 21–64. It is a well-established view that according to Emperor Otto III's *Evangeliarium of Aachen* (1001–1002) there were two princes admitted by the

Emperor into the family of European Christian peoples: Boleslav the Bold of Poland and Stephen I of Hungary.

¹⁹ Ekkehard Völkl, ed., *Bayern und Ungarn. Tausend Jahre enge Beziehungen* (Regensburg: Osteuropainstitut, 1988).

²⁰ Marvin Cantor, *The Origins of Christianity in Bohemia. Sources and Commentary* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 99, 143–54, 271 (n. 10), 288 (n. 1).

²¹ Thomas von Bogay, "Adalbert von Prag und die Ungarn — ein Problem der Quellen-Interpretation," *Ungarn Jahrbuch* 7 (1976): 9–36; *idem.*, *Stephanus Rex* (Vienna and Munich: Herold, 1976); L. Veszprémy, "Der Hl. Adalbert im wissenschaftlichen Gespräch ungarischer Historiker," *Bohemia* 40 (1999): 87–102.

²² For Scandinavian parallels see Birgit Sawyer, "Scandinavian Conversion Histories," in *The Christianisation of Scandinavia*, ed. B. Sawyer, Peter Sawyer and Ian Wood (Alsingsås: Viktoria Bakförl, 1987), 88–110.

²³ An overview can be found in Kersken, *Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 815.

²⁴ Gerics, *Church, State*, pp. 71–76., quoted by him Wipo II, 24. On Gisela see János M. Bak, "Roles and Functions of Queens in Árpadian and Angevin Hungary," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (Wolfboro Falls: Sutton Publ., 1994), 14–15.

²⁵ Medieval sources on Gisela have been collected and reprinted by András Uzsoki, *Az első magyar kiráályné, Gizella sírja* [The tomb of Gisela, the first Hungarian queen] *Publicationes museorum comitatus Vespreniensis* 16 (1982), 125–68.; see also Uzsoki's "Die Echtheit des Grabes der ungarischen Königin Gisela in Passau," in Völkl, *Bayern und Ungarn*, pp. 13–22.

²⁶ Josef Deér, *Die Heilige Krone Ungarns* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Kl. Denkschriften, Vol. 91, 1966); Kálmán Benda and Erik Fügedi, *Tausend Jahre Stephanskronen* (Budapest: Corvina, 1988).

²⁷ Péter Váczy, "Thietmar von Merseburg über die ungarische Königskrönung," in *Insignia Regni Hungariae. Studien zur Machtsymbolik des mittelalterlichen Ungarn*, ed. Zsuzsa Lovag (Budapest: Nemzeti Múzeum, 1983), 29–54.

²⁸ János M. Bak, "Some Recent Thoughts of Historians about Central Europe in 1000 A. D.," *Hortus Artium Medievalium. Journal of International Research Center for Antiquity and Middle Ages* 6 (2000): 65–71.; for earlier literature see Percy Ernst Schramm, Kaiser, *Rom und Renovatio. Studien zur Geschichte des römischen Reichs bis zum Investiturstreit* (2 vols) (Leipzig: Hermann Gentner, 1929; reprint, Darmstadt, 1975).

²⁹ János M. Bak, "Some Recent Thoughts," pp. 65, 68.

³⁰ On his activity see Gert Althoff, *Otto III* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996); also the same author's *Amicitiae und Pacta*.

Bündnis, Einung, Politik und Gebetsdenken im beginnenden 10. Jahrhundert (Hannover: Hahn, 1992).

³¹ For a broader perspective see Wandycz, *The Price of Freedom*, pp. 19, 39; also, Marie-Madelaine de Cevins, "Les paroisses hongroises au Moyen Age", in *Les hongrois et l'Europe*, pp. 341–58.

³² For a new interpretation of these events see Herwig Wolfram, *Konrad II* (Munich: Beck, 2000); by the same author: "Die ungarische Politik Konrads II," in "...The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Full Many Ways..." *Festschrift in Honour of János M. Bak*, ed. Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebők (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 1999), 460–69.

³³ Otto of Freising, *Gesta Friderici I* (Hannover 1912, reprint Hannover, Hahn, 1978), 33.

³⁴ Klára Korompay, "Naissance des premiers textes hongrois," in *Les hongrois et l'Europe*, pp. 359–74.

³⁵ Egon Bonshof, "Das Reich und Ungarn in der Zeit der Salier," in Völkl, *Bayern und Ungarn*, 41–63; Csaba Szabó, "Die militärischen Aspekte der deutsch-ungarischen Beziehungen während der Salierzeit," *Ungarn-Jahrbuch* 21 (1993–1994): 1–18.

³⁶ Hansgerd Göckenjan, "Der Westfeldzug (1236–1242) aus mongolischer Sicht," in *Wahlstatt 1241. Beiträge zur Mongolenschlacht bei Liegnitz und zu ihren Nachwirkungen*, ed. Ulrich Schmilewski (Würzburg: Bergstadtverlag W.G. Korn, 1991), 35–76.

³⁷ Peter Jackson, "The Crusade against the Mongols, 1241," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42 (1992): 1–18.

³⁸ Wandycz, *The Price of Freedom*, pp. 18–47; György Györffy, "Einwohnerzahl und Bevölkerungsdichte in Ungarn bis zum Anfang des XIV. Jahrhunderts," in *Etudes historiques publiées par la Commission Nationale des Historiens Hongrois* Vol. 1. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1960), 163–94; and recently, József Kovacsics ed., *Magyarország történeti demográfiája: A honfoglalás és az Árpád-kor népessége* [The population of Hungary in the time of the conquest and the Árpád-age] (Budapest: KSH, 1995).

³⁹ Gábor Klaniczay, "Rex iustus. Le saint fondateur de la royaume chrétienne," in *Les hongrois et l'Europe*, pp. 265–92.

⁴⁰ Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, pp. 269–88; Norbert Kersken, *Geschichtsschreibung*, pp. 811–16.

⁴¹ Joseph Deér, "Aachen und die Herrschersitze der Arpaden," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichte* 79 (1971): 1–56.

⁴² St. Stephen's work is variously translated as "Admonitions" or "Exhortations." Jenő Szűcs, "King Stephen's Exhortations and His State," *New Hungarian Quarterly* 29 (winter 1988): 89–98. An English translation by János Bak and James Ross Sweeney, *ibid.*, pp. 98–105.

⁴³ Jenő Szűcs, "Three Historical Regions of Europe," *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae* 29 (1983). For a better French translation see *Les trois Europe* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1985); Frank Hadler, "Mitteleuropa – Zwischeneuropa – Ostmitteleuropa. Reflexionen über eine europäische Geschichtsregion im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," *Slovanské Študie* (1996:1): 14–21.

⁴⁴ It might be significant to add that in his magisterial history of this region Piotr Wandycz covers precisely these three countries and leaves out the states of the Rumanians and the South Slavs. Wandycz, *The Price of Freedom*, *op. cit.*