

## Preface

### **Late Medieval Hungary: Its Impact and Reputation in Italy and England, and its Image in Hungarian Literature**

The Kingdom of Hungary in the late medieval period was one of Europe's richest and most powerful monarchies. Some of her kings, in particular Louis the Great (1342–1382) and Sigismund (1387–1437), were major actors in European politics of their era. Two essays in this issue detail some hitherto little-known aspects of these kings' dealings with such other European lands as Italy and England, while two others analyze the images that this era has bequeathed to Hungarian poets and writers of later ages. The final paper in the volume elaborates on certain cultural contacts between Hungary and Italy in this period and three subsequent centuries. All of these studies touch on international cultural or political interactions, and perceptions that people formed of Hungary of the day—whether in medieval Italy and England, or in latter-day Hungary. This volume then deals with the echoes of the deeds (or misdeeds) of Hungary's powerful kings of the late medieval period.

The period of Hungarian history under consideration in this volume spans the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> It began with the coming of Angevin rule to Hungary, and closed with the reign of Matthias Corvinus. This era was Hungary's golden age. It witnessed several remarkable individuals ruling the country.

One of the most noteworthy of these was Charles Robert, Hungary's first Angevin king. He was the great-grandson of Charles I of Anjou, the brother of the most famous of medieval kings, Louis IX of France (later known as St. Louis). On the maternal side, Charles Robert was the great-grandson of Stephen V of the House of Árpád of Hungary. In 1265 Charles I, with the help of the Pope, had become the King of Naples and Sicily. He dreamed

of the re-establishment of the Byzantine, more precisely, the Latin Empire, under French auspices—but his ambitions were dashed. He could not even hold on to Sicily. An opportunity presented itself for the Angevins of Naples to expand in another direction as a result of the marriage of Charles II to Mary, the daughter of Stephen V. When Mary's brother Ladislas IV of Hungary died in 1290, the Angevins of Naples tried to claim the Hungarian throne for Mary's son, Charles Robert. This time they failed, as another prince, the last surviving male member of the Árpád dynasty became the king of Hungary. In 1301, however, Andrew III also died and Charles Robert got another chance. This time he was successful. Helped by the Pope, the traditional backer of Angevin ambitions, and a few Hungarian feudal lords, Charles Robert was able to outlast his Czech and Bavarian rivals (both descendants of Árpád on the female side), and managed to overcome the opposition of several of Hungary's most powerful oligarchic families.

Charles Robert was an astute diplomat and administrator. After consolidating his royal power in Hungary, he embarked on making his new-found kingdom one of the most influential in Central Europe. His treasury enjoyed probably the highest income of any royal treasury of the day. He used his Kingdom's strength to effect a Czech-Hungarian-Polish alignment and tried to reinforce it through a series of marriage alliances. Charles Robert himself had married a Polish princess. His eldest son, Louis, was to wed the daughter of the heir to the throne of Bohemia; while his second son, Andrew, was married at a youthful age to the granddaughter of the King of Naples. Andrew's marriage to Joanna, Charles Robert's grandniece and the heir apparent in Naples, was to complete an Angevin dynastic empire stretching from the Mediterranean to the Baltic with its new focal point at the Royal Palace of Visegrád, north of the present-day city of Budapest.

Charles Robert's ambitions were realized as far as the northern half of this vast territory was concerned. Louis I became the King of Hungary and, later, King of Poland as well. As a result, he became the arbiter of the affairs of East Central Europe. The expectations attached to Andrew's future, however, were soon dashed and became the source of anguish for Hungary's Angevins. It would be these factors that would lead to the Hungarian interventions in Italian politics which are described in Carla Corradi Musi's paper in this volume.

The fact was that when King Robert of Naples died in 1343, Joanna—and Joanna alone—inherited his throne. Instead of becoming a king, Andrew became a prince consort. The court at Visegrád spared no effort or money in trying to see to it that Andrew was crowned; however, before the Hungarian admonitions and bribes could bear fruit, Andrew was murdered by opponents of this idea. To avenge this deed and to assert his power in Naples, Louis I invaded Italy. Though initially successful, his campaigns

achieved not much more than proving Louis's valour. They illustrate the inclination of this valiant knight and warrior-king to expend his kingdom's manpower and resources without consideration of long-term consequences. In the end, most of Louis's Italian ambitions were not realized,<sup>2</sup> and the cost of his campaigns prejudiced the future prosperity and security of the rest of his domains.<sup>3</sup>

Louis died in 1382. He was followed on the Hungarian throne by his only Angevin male relative, Charles of Durazzo and Naples, who was soon assassinated. In the end, the man who ascended the throne, first as co-sovereign and then as king, was Sigismund of the House of Luxemburg, the husband of Louis's daughter Mary.<sup>4</sup> Sigismund differed from his Angevin predecessors. These had focused their imperial ambitions on the lands south and east of the "German realm." The Hungarian sovereign's schemes extended to most parts of Europe and, especially, the Holy Roman Empire. In 1410 he was elected Emperor and, much later, became the King of Bohemia as well. Moreover, unlike Charles Robert and Louis the Great, Sigismund was an absentee lord in Hungary, allowing royal power to decline in that country. Naturally he was not above using the proceeds of the Hungarian treasury to finance his far-ranging and far-reaching activities and schemes. While he furthered the reputation of Hungarian largess and knightly valour as far away as England—as Norman Simms describes in this volume—he did little for the well-being of his Hungarian subjects.

The last of the remarkable and/or powerful Hungarian rulers of the period considered here, was Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490). His significance, as far as our collection of essays is concerned, lies mainly in the fact that he and his kingdom served as a source of great inspiration to following generations of Hungarians. Matthias, more than Charles Robert, Louis the Great and, especially, Sigismund, has been seen by Hungarians of subsequent ages as a national monarch, someone who had Hungary's interests at heart, first and foremost. He possessed, moreover, all the attributes and more, that his illustrious late medieval predecessors had shared among the three of them. He was intelligent, firm, systematic and purposeful; and he became just as influential in international affairs as they had been. He was a reformer, a patron of the arts and learning, and the victor of many military campaigns designed to strengthen Hungary's position in the expected confrontation with the ever-expanding Ottoman Empire.

Compared with the disastrous situation of Hungary in subsequent centuries, the Hungary of Matthias stood resplendent, a shining example what the Magyar nation could accomplish if only it could get rid of the foreign invader and achieve unity of purpose. Not surprisingly, the memories of Matthias's age lived on in Hungarian national consciousness and literature just as much as the recollections of the greatness of the Angevin period did. All this is examined and illustrated in the papers of Amedeo Di Francesco

and Gianpiero Cavaglia. The former deals with the images of the fourteenth century in Hungarian epic poetry of the early modern and modern period, while the latter outlines the reflections of King Matthias's age in end of the nineteenth century Hungarian prose. A fifth paper, by Péter Sárközy, explores a sub-theme of this collection of essays, cultural contacts between Hungary and Italy from medieval to early modern times.

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The tasks of preparing this volume for publication were handled by the journal's co-editors. George Bisztray tackled the difficult and time-consuming work of translating some of the papers from the Italian and Hungarian originals into English. He and Nándor Dreisziger respectively edited the papers from the point of view of literary and historical scholarship. In the work of translation and editing, certain arbitrary decisions had to be made regarding terminology. In using names, English rather than Hungarian or Italian practices were followed. Historical figures and places were usually identified by their most commonly used English names. We used the adjective Angevin for what some Europeans prefer to call Anjou, and have even used the noun Angevin(s), though we retained the term the "House of Anjou." We used Florence for Firenze, Padua for Padova, as one would be expected to use Naples and not Napoli. We used Mantua for the city of Mantova, but Mantova for the province or state surrounding that city (the adjective in both cases is Mantuan), in accordance to what we believe to be the common practice in English-speaking countries.<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 In writing this brief historical introduction to this volume, we have relied on standard reference works including the most recent English-language survey of Hungary's history: Peter Sugar *et al.* eds., *A History of Hungary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). The pertinent chapters are by Pál Engel and János Bak.
- 2 Louis the Great did gain Dalmatia from Venice in 1381 after a protracted struggle.
- 3 Louis's early Italian military campaigns no doubt contributed to the turmoil in Italy which made that land unsafe for the popes to live in. They preferred to live at Avignon, France, until 1378.
- 4 Poland eventually went to Louis's other surviving daughter, Hedvig (Jadwiga), and to her husband, Jagiello, the Duke of Lithuania. They were the founders of the Jagellonian dynasty of the late medieval Polish-Lithuanian kingdom.
- 5 In the case of Hungarian place names, we used the Magyar versions, even though some readers in the English-speaking world might be more familiar with German or other designations, or the places we referred to are no longer part of Hungary and have non-Magyar names that have become current in recent times.