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Mendicant Economy and Estate Management in Late Medieval Hungary. By Beatrix F. Romhányi.

East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450. 99. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2026. 348 pp.

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This book is the English translation of *Kolduló barátok, gazdálkodó szerzetesek. Koldulórendi gazdálkodás a késő középkori Magyarországon* (Budapest: Martin Opitz, 2018), with updated content and a bibliography. Beatrix Romhányi, a professor at the Károli Gáspár University in Budapest, has devoted her research over the past twenty years to the economic functioning of monastic and mendicant orders in late medieval Hungary. Combining textual-philological and archaeological approaches, she first studied the economy of the Paulines (*Pauline Economy in the Middle Ages.* Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2020). Divided into seven chapters, the book deals with the material management of the (male) mendicant friaries. It is supplemented with full references to sources and a bibliography, two indices, ten figures, and twenty-four tables.

Chapter 1 presents the underlying research question and the methodology applied. It explores how the mendicant orders tried to build an economic base to carry out their spiritual mission in Hungary, and how they adapted their economic 'strategies' to shifting external and internal conditions. The study also situates the mendicant economy within the wider East Central European context and draws comparisons with other European regions. Beyond economic facts, it scrutinises interactions between the mendicant friars and diverse social strata of the Kingdom of Hungary.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive, spatial and quantitative overview of the spread of the mendicant orders in East Central Europe from the thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. It underlines the leading role of Hungary (compared to fifteenth-century Austria, Poland, and Bohemia, and even France) on the one hand, and of the Franciscans, on the other. The geographical distribution around 1500 shows a high density of friaries in southern Transdanubia and northern Slavonia, as well as their frequent settlement in towns. However, for the Observant Franciscans, the foundation of a friary often stemmed from the manorial estate organisation.

By far the longest, Chapter 3 deals with mendicant estate management. It first gives a survey of historiography, then stresses the lack of surviving sources in East Central Europe prior to the mid-fifteenth century (in Hungary, more than fourty percent of sources are from the first decades of the sixteenth century), and sketches the typology of the documentation (given that no cartulary or obituary has survived). The inquiry is based on nearly 600 charters (ca. 1250–1570), conventual and tax registers, account books, donations, and last wills, mostly preserved in Transylvania, Pressburg, Sopron, and Zagreb.

The first crucial statement is that mendicant friaries—with the exception of the Observant Franciscans, who had no landed property, not even temporarily—did own properties of various kinds, although admittedly rather small and scattered compared to monastic estates. They had landholdings, granted from the thirteenth century to the Dominicans and to the Austin Hermits, from the mid-fourteenth century to the Franciscans, who held them uninterrupted for centuries. From the fifteenth century onwards, vineyards constituted an important part of mendicant estates. The emphasis shifted to production (wine) and the use of real estate (renting meadows, ploughlands, and mills) rather than capital investment, unlike monastic estate management. The well-documented examples reveal adaptation to local conditions and confirm that the primary concern for the Franciscans and even for Dominicans was not the property itself but the income it generated. Mills and fishponds were owned especially by the Austin Hermits and the Dominicans. Very few townhouses and urban plots appear as mendicant properties. In addition, many mendicant friaries had monetary income and benefices, such as salt privileges (usually donated by the king), customs duties, and tolls. Some Dominican and Franciscan friaries made loans to institutions (including the king) and individuals.

Chapter 4 addresses alms, starting with wills and donations. About 17 percent of the surviving wills (mostly from Pressburg) give mendicant friaries (almost exclusively Dominican and Franciscan) as a beneficiary between 1450 and 1550. They probably received much more monetary and in kind (horses, grains, etc.) donations than is known from the scarce written records. The practice of mendicancy raises several problems due to a blurred system that made the identification and delimitation of the zones of quest assigned to each friary very difficult even for the friars themselves. Unsurprisingly, the size of these zones *(terminus*, *contrata)* depended on the area's population density and the economic capacity. Whether the friaries owned estates or not, without alms it was impossible to feed the friars: see the high proportion of the amounts provided to mendicants (especially Observant Franciscans, insistently asking for financial help) in Duke Sigismund of Poland's account book (1500–1505). Indulgences could help: Nearly forty indulgence privileges to mendicant friaries in Hungary have survived, most often to the Franciscans (mostly Conventual), granted at the request of the patron, the founder, or its heirs.

Chapter 5 deals with manual labour, whose remuneration contributed to the friars' livelihood, although documents on workshops and craftsmen are scanty. The latter appear in the late fifteenth century among the lay brothers. They were mostly engaged in clothing-related and building crafts, and sometimes produced for the market.

Chapter 6 examines the role of secular stewards of the mendicant friaries *(vitricus / provisor / kirchvater)* generally mentioned from the fifteenth century onwards. Working next to friaries under city patronage, they either belonged to the city's ruling class and expressed the power of the city, or the authority of the noble patron. They often supported the friary entrusted to their care with money, making up for occasional deficit. In the observant friaries, their function was primarily money management, as it was prohibited for friars. Some stewards wrote account books compiled in town books. The only account book that allows substantial analysis comes from the Franciscan friary of Sopron. It testifies that part of the alms was sold, that income and expenditure were highly irregular, and that the patron's support was essential to the friars' sustenance.

Chapter 7 deals with the material management of the mendicant friaries, applying a synthetic approach. To prevent risks, the size of each community reflected its means of subsistence, including the patron's support and the alms from the local population. Around 1500, half the friaries had property or regular income (excluding the Observant Franciscans) but, unlike the Paulines, they neither rented out their own estates nor leased those of others. Expenditure (according to the Sopron account book) consisted of food (fish and meat), clothing, repairs, and cost of cultivating the vineyards, which in return provided the largest income for Sopron. The friaries' revenues seldom sufficed to cover the friars' daily needs. The friaries did not generate revenues that they could loan for interest. Income comprised mostly monetary donations, i.e., fixed annual donations (like salt benefices), bequests, and *pro anima* donations. Actually, each order had its own strategy. Franciscans and Dominicans essentially based their livelihoods on various forms of alms, while for the Austin Hermits, landed estates had a greater role from the outset. Data on the Carmelites are, unfortunately, too scarce to make any statement. Franciscans adapted ideals to the local realities, yet observant reforms introduced significant changes. From the earliest time onwards, the upkeep of their friaries was funded by regular donations from the founding patron. Conventuals had small, scattered estates, mainly mills, vineyards as well as modest ploughlands and meadows. In contrast, the Observants tried to cover their needs from the donations of the faithful;

they only accepted benefices paid in money or in kind, eschewing not only properties but also the usual regular subsidies granted by town councils. The social support also differed: Conventuals were supported mostly by urban burghers, while the Observants relied on nobles and aristocrats. Dominicans owned land properties from the very beginning, acting as real owners (not as usufructuaries) and with an increasing number of tenant hides, although they did not accumulate large estates. The Austin Hermits had the most stable and extensive estate out of the four mendicant orders, and they apparently received few bequests. The Carmelites, a very small community mostly coming from German areas (outside Hungary), received donations from the local German-speaking burghers of Hungary.

As a conclusion, F. Romhányi attributes the large number of mendicant friaries in late medieval Hungary to the support of several social strata (aristocrats, noblemen, and burghers of market towns) and (for the Observant Franciscans) to the alliance with the political and ecclesiastical elite of the kingdom in the mobilisation against the advancing Ottoman threat.

The reviewer found only minor flaws. The presentation of sources (sketched in Chapter 3 and detailed in Chapter 6 for account books) could have constituted a specific, liminary chapter; the conclusion could have been isolated from Chapter 7. In several tables and analyses, Paulines are included in the 'Mendicants', whereas in other parts of the study they are excluded from this category, which may be confusing. A few repetitions (e.g., about the economic strategy specific to each order) are uncomfortable for the reader. Confraternity charters are repeatedly presented as a 'source of income', which is a distorting view, as demonstrated by recent research. Nevertheless, this thorough monograph will soon become a standard reference work due to its extensive documentary basis and its methodology, which masterfully combines analysis and synthesis. Its results shed new light first on the (social, economic, and religious) specificity of late medieval Hungary, and second on the fascinating ability of mendicant orders to adapt to local conditions.