

Crown and Coronation in Hungary 1000–1916 A.D.

By János M. Bak and Géza Pálffy.

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Attila Bárány 

University of Debrecen, H-4032 Debrecen, Egyetem tér 1, Hungary; barany.attila@arts.unideb.hu

The *Crown and Coronation* is János M. Bak's last work; a final piece in a long career of more than seven decades. Sadly, in June 2020, a few months after we celebrated his ninetieth birthday in 2019, he passed away—but Professor Géza Pálffy, the co-author of the present volume, let me know that he was full-heartedly working on this text, making final remarks even on the phone from his bed. Now having the book in hand, I believe he would have been greatly pleased to see it: thanks are due to Professor Pálffy for finalizing the manuscript.

It is a summary of several decades of the scholarship of János M. Bak, starting from his *Königtum und Stände*¹ throughout his efforts in the journal *Maiestas* (very close to his heart) to his grand enterprise, *Coronations*,² which gathers the works of Janet Nelson, Jacques Le Goff and Aleksander Gieysztor; not to mention here a less widely known venture of his: “Insignia of Rulership,” a keynote paper delivered at a conference dedicated to the representation of royal power.³ (Several of Bak's major pieces of writing in this field were published in Ashgate's *Variorum collected studies*).⁴

The volume also contains insights into Professor Bak's series of lectures and seminar on crowns, coronations, coronation insignia, symbols and political symbolism in medieval Europe at the Department of Medieval Studies at Central European University from the early 1990s, of which the author of these lines most proudly

1 Bak, *Königtum und Stände in Ungarn*.

2 Bak, *Coronations*.

3 Bak, “Holy Lance, Holy Crown, Holy Dexter: sanctity of insignia in medieval East Central Europe.” Published in the Festschrift dedicated to Boris Nikolajevič Florja.

4 Nagy and Klaniczay, *Studying Medieval Rulers*. This contains a revised version of “Coronation studies: past, present, and future”; or his “Holy Lance, Holy Crown, Holy Dexter.”

attended as an MA student. One may distinguish some particular elements of János Bak's teachings in the present book that have never been published, although one may have learnt about them personally from him through his classes on the Holy Crown, or on other insignia of the Central European kingdoms, or the medieval "multiple symbology" of the state—the term he used to refer to his Göttingen master, Percy Ernst Schramm.

This is the first comprehensive study in English of the Holy Crown of Hungary and its history during 1000 years, as well as the coronations of the monarchs of the kingdom from Saint Stephen (1000–1038) to Charles IV Habsburg (1916–1918). Since the essential *Die heilige Krone Ungarns* in the mid-1960s by the émigré József (Josef) Deér in German, there has been no such extensive and critical scholarly monograph dedicated to the "Sacra Corona" of the rulers of Hungary (not to speak of the fact that Deér only focused on the coronation jewel itself).⁵ Investigating the Holy Crown, the volume relies on the works of generations of scholars. Magda Bárány-Oberschall, Éva Kovács, and Zsuzsa Lovag have produced outstanding results in art history, of which only a few are available in foreign languages.⁶ One also needs to mention Erik Fügedi's article on coronations in medieval Hungary, published in a volume of collected studies in which János Bak also put in hard work.⁷

The authors make it explicitly clear at the outset that they do not only speak of the Holy Crown, but follow through its "fate" its "own" long and entangled history, as it was several times "on its own way"—that is, lost, stolen, recovered, rescued from invaders and taken into safekeeping, and buried, ending up in a rather unusual resting place for a medieval crown jewel—for more than 30 years at a US military base (Fort Knox, Kentucky). Furthermore, making its "adventures" more intricate, replicas were even made. Saint Stephen's *corona* has, in itself, a history, concerning which the book is—if one might put it in this way—the "crown" of Géza Pálffy's academic activity of decades. Pálffy has by now been the leader of a special research group for ten years at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, supported by a fund for excellent scholarly achievement ("Lendület" [Momentum]) where he has been studying the Holy Crown and the coronations.

The Holy Crown "Lendület" Research Group have revealed hitherto little known but significant details, of which the book provides the first insights for an international public.⁸ The group explored the earliest inventories of the insignia

5 Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 1966.

6 See: e.g. Bárány-Oberschall, *Die Sankt-Stephans-Krone*; Fülep, Kovács, and Lovag, *Insignia Regni Hungariae* 1.

7 Fügedi and Bak, "Coronation in medieval Hungary."

8 On the more recent findings, a brief summary has been published: Pálffy and Tóth, "Les couronnements en Hongrie à l'époque modern," 253–76.

(1551, 1608), including an unparalleled register of the chest of the regalia from 1622,⁹ eye-witness reports in Latin and Hungarian from 1563 and 1655, and the notes of King-Emperor Leopold I Habsburg about the removal of the crown to Vienna during the Turkish campaign in 1663–64—the only known surviving document written by a ruler regarding the insignia. Pálffy and his colleagues also discovered the hitherto unknown coronation sandals, the oldest surviving coronation flags of Hungary and Croatia (1618, 1647),¹⁰ and the standard-bearer lords, as well as the ceremonial baton of the Hungarian Lord Steward for 1792. New information is provided, for instance, on the coronation *ordo* of Ferdinand II (1618); its manuscripts also disclosing colored images of the related flags. The surviving Latin and German manuscripts of the first authentic *ordo* have been investigated. The scholars have undertaken a thorough investigation of the last coronation in 1916, of which we have now footage on film; and completed enormous research into the coronations in present-day Bratislava (Pressburg, Pozsony)—disclosing, for example, the itinerary of the crown to St. Martin's Cathedral—and Sopron. The group has had the particular goal of treating Pressburg, a real seat of the monarchy for centuries, in its own right, as it has been much neglected in this role in historiography. Particular attention is devoted to the coronation church in the volume. The authors also examine St. Martin's role as a funeral place for the aristocracy, thus shedding light on the relationship of crown and elite and the latter's representation policies. The research team have also studied the history of coronation diets, particularly in the latter city, as well as examined the representation of coronations in numismatic evidence.¹¹ The research also involved a fundamental enquiry into the history of the reginal coronation since 1563 (see e.g., the one in 1714 in Pressburg) and female monarchical insignia as well. (To be precise, Anne de Candale was of the *Foix* comital family.) Pálffy analyses the customary ritual—alongside coronation with the queen's own private crown—of touching the right shoulder of the queen consort with the Holy Crown. The volume attests that the reginal ritual must have its own political significance and is to be investigated more profoundly in historical scholarship.

The research group have paid specific attention to the “fate” of the insignia, including its “eleven trips abroad” from 1205 until its final “homecoming” in 1978, which is also reconstructed in detail in the latest volume of studies. The book not only covers the latest developments in research in all these subfields, but also brings forth even more novel findings—for example concerning painted “coronation panels,” formerly unknown “crown verses,” an exceptional iron door in the Crown

9 See a whole monograph on the subject: Buzási and Pálffy, *Augsburg – Wien – München – Innsbruck*.

10 Pálffy, “The Heraldic Representation of Croatia at Hungarian Coronations,” 80–93.

11 Pálffy, Soltész, and Tóth, *Coronatio Hungarica in Nummis*.

Tower in Bratislava, and details about a less known coronation in the latter city in 1830. The authors also give an overview of their results concerning the years (1619–1622) when the Holy Crown was in the possession of Gábor Bethlen, Prince of Transylvania, making a detailed itinerary of the regalia. The *Crown and Coronation* brings to light new *consuetudines* in the first Pressburg inauguration of a Habsburg monarch (Maximilian II) in 1562/63 and the ceremonies for Charles III in 1712; the latter also seen through the eyewitness account of a Cistercian monk. It also examines Rudolph II's 1572 Hungarian coronation.

Bak and Pálffy also cover the extended ceremonies and rites of accession, together with all the constitutive acts implying the enabling of the candidate to their high office. In addition, as the rites of inauguration had particular political implications in Hungary, and underwent special transformation in local traditions, the peculiarities are investigated using a complex, comparative approach, and treated in parallel mainly with Bohemian and Polish examples—a methodological approach which was always warmly treated by János Bak and, in the field of mainly Czech developments, can be similarly observed in the works of Pálffy. Pálffy has been working in co-operation with Slovak, Croatian, Austrian, and Czech scholars (e.g., Tünde Lengyelová, Václav Bůžek, Rostislav Smíšek, etc.), whose results are to be found in this volume as well. The authors count on the special expertise of Manfred Hellmann, Stefan Albrecht, Hilda Lietzmann, Benita Berning, Harriet Rudolph, Michal Bada, Michaela Bodnárová and Friedrich Edelmayer in coronation research, as well as, for instance, the art history research of enameling of David Buckton and Paul Hetherington and the iconography studies on the “corona graeca” by Cathérine Jolivet-Lévy. The findings of recent Slovak scholarship on Bratislava are referred to.¹² It should also be pointed out that the Holy Crown research group publish in the Romanian, Czech, Croatian, and Slovak languages to make their work available to a larger public in Central Europe, thus promoting academic communication as well. The findings in the Esterházy *Schatzkammer* concerning the castle of Forchtenstein are unique even for Croatian historical scholarship.¹³ The group is committed to interdisciplinary research, relies heavily on art history and numismatic and literary evidence, as well as works in cooperation with experts in sigillography, vexillology, and heraldry (e.g., the art historian Enikő Buzási), this way making János Bak's heritage come alive in the field of symbology and political ritual. For power rituals the volume relies on cooperation with Slovak scholarship. The volume does provide fresh insights into symbolic political communication in the sixteenth-nineteenth centuries, a field where the legacy of János Bak seems to have been carried forward by Pálffy—the volume specifically addresses coronation oaths (e.g. the earliest authentically recorded one by Charles I

12 Holčík, *Krönungsfeierlichkeiten*.

13 Pálffy, *Die Krönungsfahnen in der Esterházy Schatzkammer*.

in 1312 held at the Vatican Archives), inaugural *decreta*, as well as (pre-)election promises and agreements (Bak compares some to the practice of *Wahlkapitulation*). It is seen how the prerequisite of observing *conditiones* developed into coronation patents written into law. The *diploma inaugurale* served as a preeminent guarantee of constitutional rule.

Beyond gathering all available sources on the acts of accession and accompanying festivities (references in liturgical books, ordinances, the *Ceremonia privata* and the *Zeremonialprotokoll* of the Vienna court), the volume gives an overview of the recently revealed written sources—for example, an unprecedented inventory of Johann Probst's works on the 1681 reginal coronation in Sopron and the Diet in the following year in Vienna. The authors provide insight into the history of accession and unearth a range of symbolic rituals (the main actors, the role of the *coronator*, investment with the mantle of St. Stephen, and the “swinging of the sword” in the four cardinal directions); and secular acts (dubbing of the Knights of the Golden Spur; the ruler dressing in traditional Hungarian noble attire or even wearing the uniform of a Hussar general; the erection of a coronation mound, sometimes from clods of earth brought from various locations; the offering of a piece of the ox roasted in the open air to the populace; and the gift of the coronation carpet to the commoners who were afterwards allowed to cut themselves a piece).

The authors introduce, for example, the heraldic representation of the oratory of St. Vitus Cathedral, Prague, providing novel insights for Czech art history. The book introduces very important new—sometimes formerly unpublished—iconographic sources: coronation tokens (jettons), copper engravings, lithographs, heraldic banners flying the colors of the “members” of the “lands of the Crown of St. Stephen”, portraits of rulers, commemorative gift coins and offering medals.

The volume sheds light on the earliest credible depiction of the Holy Crown in Clemens Jäger's *Ehrenspiegel des Hauses Österreich* (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cgm895) and makes it clear that it has nothing to do with a so-called “Fugger chronicle” (for long maintained in Hungarian scholarship), as well as gives a precise dating of between 1553 and 1561. The pictorial image and the newly revealed details of its birth also help with exploring the custody of the Crown in Vienna from 1551. The authors give some less widely known coronation objects their rightful significance: arm-bands, the cap worn inside the crown (also explaining why it was needed), coronation gloves, stockings (and their pictorial representation), paraments (chasubles, the pluvials of the Archbishops of Esztergom), the stoop for holy water, the “last” 1916 chalice, and the altar antependia and benedictionals. A miniature from the Gospel-book dedicated to Otto III (ca. 1001, Domkapitel Aachen), depicting Stephen I at the Emperor's feet with a lance in hand may justify the ruler's *lancea regis* gift, corresponding to the image of Stephen's silver denarius, a hand holding a lance with a flag. A most unique jewel is

a thirteenth-century “swearing cross,” but no less important is a seventeenth-century *pax aurea* (‘kissing cross’) by a Prague master. A very modern type of historical source is treated alike: postcards from the 1916 ceremony.

The description of the crown jewels and other regalia (sceptre, orb, mantle, sword) contains the results of the most recent research, based to a great extent on Endre Tóth’s monograph, of which an English translation is planned.¹⁴ This is still a highly controversial issue. The date and origin of the “Crown of St. Stephen” have been ardently debated for centuries, and there is still no unchallenged common agreement on all points. However, the authors take into account all hypotheses and, while treating them critically, take a sober and cautious stand. They stress that as there are no written or iconic sources for its early history, “everything has to be gauged from the object itself.” To begin with, there is no reliable contemporary evidence that Stephen either had a crown at all, or that he received one from the pope. Despite the many speculations of amateurs, there is no unequivocal evidence that *this* surviving “Holy Crown”—a circular diadem with enamels of Byzantine origin surmounted by two bands in cross form with Latin-inscribed plates—can be connected to the ruler at all. Stephen might have had a crown, but there is no way to find out anything about this hypothetical first one. This is a question that may never be answered unequivocally, even if “some parts of it [the crown] may be coeval with the founding monarch.” The enamel plates of the lower part are fairly well dateable, belonging originally to a Greek crown—*corona Graeca* in literature—from ca. 1074–77. Nonetheless, the authors are critical about whether this piece was originally a crown and propose it might have been some other object—perhaps a present to King Géza I and his queen of Greek origin, related to a future emperor. The volume argues that it has a “female character” and was designed for a lady. The authors also make it clear that the two crosswise bands have been incorrectly referred to as the “Latin crown.” Although scholars have always seen—or wished to see—it resemble a “closed crown” or an “arched crown” (*Bügelkrone*) in the “fashion” of the German-Roman imperial crown, the *corona Latina* (although the authors refrain themselves from using this anachronistic term) “is not a crown.” The enamel plates on the bands came from some other object. The style and the inscriptions point to a southern Italian workshop. The authors argue that the peculiarity of their lettering points to Sicily and is similar to that found on a royal ring, which had for long been taken as Béla III’s (1172–1196), but according to a more recent analysis is now assumed to be Coloman’s, from ca. 1100, who had a consort from Sicily. (It is however not true that the queen was “the daughter of the King of Sicily”; her father was *Count* Roger I.) There has been much speculation about the original function of the bands (and that of the enamels on them). It has been suggested that they might have been

14 *A magyar Szent Korona és a koronázási jelvények.*

either part of a book cover or a *stella*, an arched cover over a liturgical plate, but the authors argue that (as the form of a Latin cross fits ill with a book-cover, while no *stella* is known with enamel decoration) the bands may have been made for the very purpose of utilizing enamels of older origin, probably in the royal treasury.

Nevertheless, the basic question is when were the two parts assembled and to what purpose. The presently known form of the crown is authentically documented only from the early seventeenth century, after which a realistic image was introduced to the coat of arms of Hungary. The authors treat all hypotheses critically. The argument that Béla III had the crown “manufactured” is in no way compelling. The assumption by Josef Deér was that a highly prized crown, maybe even dating to the eleventh century, was taken to Bohemia in 1270, and a new one was needed. However, the authors—while taking the cautious stand that a combination of the Byzantine lower part with closing bands is unlikely to date to before 1100—suggest a solution “much more fitting to medieval practice,” and emphasize that “we may not need to look for a politically or otherwise significant moment for the construction.” Jewels and crowns were regularly reworked. All treasuries contained several crowns and “only in late medieval and modern times did one of them become the particular and only valid insigne.” It was only in the late thirteenth century that the Hungarian crown was referred to as being “holy” and as dating back to St. Stephen. After the extinction of the House of Árpád (1301) it acquired special significance and linking it to St. Stephen made it a crucial object of legitimation, together with another two “necessary conditions” (crowning at Székesfehérvár and by the primate of Esztergom). János Bak argues that such “sanctity” would have in some way been transferred to the bearer of Stephen’s crown. The book oversees how the crown became “irreplaceable”; the “one and only.” It also explains why a “fake” festive crown-wearing event (*Festkrönung*) was staged in 1304.

Furthermore, the golden cross mounted on top of the arches is undoubtedly of late medieval origin. It is bent to the right, which anomaly has been the subject of much unfounded speculation. However, early images show the cross as straight, and the first time it is reliably noted to be bent is 1784. Géza Pálffy, revealing eyewitness accounts, has come forward with a convincing solution: the chest for the crown had an “accident” in 1638: the locks had to be broken and the case of the crown was damaged, which must have caused the bend. The authors detail another four more times when the chest had to be pried open.

The volume reports on succession and its peculiar relationship to the Holy Crown—from “the right of blood” and then that of the estates to the hereditary right of the House of Austria. They explore heredity versus suitability (*idoneitas*) and election as well as other limited forms of inheritance. It also examines disputes over coronation orders (Anglo-Saxon or German) and the acceptance of papal liturgy.

The authors also give insight into the doctrine of the Holy Crown—a theory rooted in the Middle Ages but elaborated only in the nineteenth century—that maintains the public legal status of the crown: the physical object merged with an abstract, “invisible” notion of kingship.

The Holy Crown is “one of the rarest signs of rulership.” The volume helps to understand why it is still treated with special reverence. The symbolic affiliation with King Stephen was needed to buttress sovereignty. It came to safeguard constitutional developments and became a symbol of noble commonwealth—the estates as a *corona regni*; that is, the “political nation.” As it stood metaphorically for authority, even when no ruler was inaugurated with it, between the two world wars it remained a paramount symbol of national sovereignty. The research on its symbology explains why it adorns the coat of arms of a republic, and why it was a custom even in 1916 for the queen to make a few stitches on the mantle.

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