

The Late Medieval Cult of the Saints. Universal Developments within Local Contexts. By Carmen Florea.

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The Late Medieval Cult of the Saints. Universal Developments within Local Contexts by Carmen Florea was published within the series *Global Sanctity* under the aegis of the Hagiography Society. The author is a lecturer at the Department of Medieval History and Historiography at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. Her monograph explores the dynamics of sanctity in late medieval Transylvania.

The investigation of the cult of saints has been a popular topic in the last few decades. Several scholars have scrutinized the different aspects of sanctity on a macrohistorical level, such as the genesis of this phenomenon and the changing of saintly models through the centuries. At the microhistorical level, there are different options for a scholar: one can investigate a certain saint or type of saint within a specific geographical- and/or timeframe or examine the cult of saints in a region in a narrow period. There are advantages and disadvantages to all approaches. If one deals with a saint or a type of saint, one can track the changes within the cult and compare them to the European parallels, but it is hard to put this into a bigger frame and see the real position of the holy figure(s) among other saints. While if someone investigates the cult of saints in a region, they may generate a more complete picture, but it is difficult to concentrate on the details.

Carmen Florea has chosen the latter option. The author investigated the late medieval (from ca. 1300 to the Reformation) cult of the saints in Transylvania with excellent results: she has been able to sketch a complete picture of the history of propagating saints in Transylvania, yet has also managed to go into detail. Transylvania as a region was a good choice since it was a well-defined region of medieval Hungary under the administration and jurisdiction of voivode. The co-existence of different ethnic groups, Hungarians, Germans, and Romanians, made the religious life of the territory more colorful, thus it is an interesting area for investigation.

The difficulty of such an investigation is that, besides the multilingual and multidisciplinary source material, the above-mentioned three national historiographies deal with the topic in their own national languages. Carmen Florea not only knows the German, Hungarian, and Romanian literature and historiography about the different topics she touches upon in-depth but is equally familiar with the general trends associated with the cult of different saints in Western and Eastern Christianity. Also, she introduces the reader to hagiographical research in Central Europe and sketches the general trends of the spread of the different cults in the region.

The author divided her book into three parts, which also denote the book's structure. In a historical analysis, it is always a hard question what to omit from a book and how to approach the different cults. Florea has again chosen an excellent methodology and approach. In the first chapter, she analyses the different cults of saints from the perspective of the cathedral of Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár) and the dissemination of the veneration of holy figures from there. The second chapter deals with the role of the mendicant orders in the spread of different cults. The third chapter concentrates on different case studies about religious life in the most important Transylvanian towns, mainly based on sources connected to guilds. The book also contains numerous illustrations that strengthen the author's argumentation and facilitate the reader's understanding. She has carefully arranged the most important photographs of altarpieces, panel paintings, and churches. Moreover, the author also made available the reconstructed medieval layouts of the analyzed towns, which all help to understand the dynamics within the city walls.

In the first chapter, the basis of her research was the altars in the Saint Michael's Cathedral of Alba Iulia. She starts from the thirteenth century since this was when the sources about the altars started to appear, and the parochial network was developed by that time. However, she goes back to earlier periods when necessary. As she summarizes, "The detailed analysis of the initiatives of the Transylvanian bishops and the clergy of the cathedral chapter offers the starting point for the exploration of the way saints' cults multiplied in the cathedral and reverberated in the Transylvanian ecclesiastical units." (p. 13). Through this detailed investigation, she was often able to identify the reason for the initiation of a new cult and its dissemination and propagation on the parish level. Also, she has identified the popularity of each saint in the episcopal milieu. Not surprisingly, the Virgin Mary, Saint Michael, Nicholas, Peter, and John were the preferred patrons in the bishopric of Alba Iulia. A very interesting part of Florea's book is when she demonstrates how the celebration of the feast of the Apparition of Saint Michael contributed to the growth of the cult. Also, the author analyzes how the different religious trends and cults reached Transylvania, such as the Christocentric devotion due to the emergence of the cult of Corpus Christi, or the cult of the Virgin Martyrs, Mary Magdalene, or Saint Anne,

whose cults became popular in the later Middle Ages in connection with female religious movements and the deeper beliefs about the intercessory power of saints. The author also sheds light on why the cult of the newly canonized saints did not become popular, except for the cult of the Árpáadian saints. Their figures were highly popular in Transylvania, related to the fact that they were strongly connected to the introduction of Christianity, and their cult was also favored by the noble elite.

The second chapter focuses on the saintly models promoted and propagated by the Dominican and Franciscan friars and the tensions between the friars and the local clergy. As her research shows, one of the main features of the Transylvanian mendicants was their adaptability and innovation. They frequently integrated old, traditional cults and innovated them. This process is clearly visible in the case of the Virgin Mary, who was one of the most popular saints of the Late Middle Ages, and whose veneration was strengthened by the newly established forms of devotion, such as that of the Rosary, the feast of the Visitation, and Our Lady of the Snows. However, the mendicant orders were similar and thus rivals from several perspectives; they followed different paths regarding the promotion of saints. The Dominicans preferred those saints to their patrons whose penitential lifestyle embodied their goals. Thus, the Dominicans esteemed the cult of Anthony and Mary Magdalene, whose cults became popular Europe-wide. This was in contrast to the Observants' way of choosing their favorite saints, who centered their devotion on the holy family, visible through the Marian devotion and belief in the Immaculate Conception.

The third main chapter of the book concentrates on the third important factor of late medieval religiosity: the dwellers of towns. During the Late Middle Ages, the burghers' growing involvement is visible regarding the veneration of saints and the organization of their cults. Florea offers four case studies about the four most important towns, Sibiu (Nagyszeben), Braşov (Brassó), Bistriţa (Beszterce), and Cluj (Kolozsvár). These four towns developed rapidly in the Late Middle Ages, and all of them enjoyed wide liberties and privileges, such as the free election of their priests, thus these towns are perfect examples for an inquiry into the urban developments and features of the cult of the saints. With the help of administrative sources, indulgences, charters about the guilds, and art historical sources, the author makes several important observations about the dynamics of the cult of saints. There were general phenomena and patterns by which the parochial cults were transformed into civic cults in these towns.

The case study about Sibiu shows how the patron saint of the parish church became more and more important. Besides the general growth of the cult of the Virgin Mary in the Late Middle Ages, as Florea demonstrates, the importance of the mother of Christ increased further for residents of Sibiu. As she formulates: "The concentration of power so visible and well documented in the functioning of

the city council has been matched, most likely under strong impulses, towards control and reform of religious life, by a concentration of sainthood represented by the exclusivist favoring of the parish-based patronal cult of the Queen of Heaven on the part of the town's leading elite." (p. 230)

Regarding Braşov, Florea thoroughly analyzed and separated the different layers of the cult of saints. The town itself emerged from several smaller parts, the most important of which was *Corona* (now a district of Braşov), and these units bore unique features. The town's oldest church was dedicated to Saint Bartholomew due to the Saxon settlers and the presence of the Teutonic Order in the thirteenth century. I found the investigation of the patron saint of the church in *Corona* one of the most interesting parts of the book. With the help of the written sources and evidence about sacral architecture, the author shows that the church of the Virgin Mary in Braşov bore another dedication: it was also dedicated to the early medieval female martyr Saint Corona. This cult most probably arrived with Premonstratensians, who founded a monastery there in the thirteenth century but disappeared due to the Mongol Invasion.

Cluj was different from the other three towns regarding its habitants. While Sibiu, Braşov, and Bistriţa were predominantly German-speaking, in Cluj, Hungarians and Germans became the two most important groups by the mid-fifteenth century. This also resulted in the cult of saints, as the author demonstrates, since another parish church emerged, which served the religious needs of Hungarians.

Florea analyzed the dynamics of saintly patronage in Transylvania with an interdisciplinary approach. She has used a great variety of historical, art historical, and liturgical sources. I must stress again that the book offers an innovative approach in that Florea has analyzed the spread of saints' cults through three main agents: the diocese, the mendicant orders, and towns. The book's numerous findings make it a must for future scholars who deal with the medieval cult of saints in the Carpathian Basin.

