Mission and Identity

Foreign Queens, Founding Dynasties and their Subjects in Central and Eastern Europe

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A reconsideration of the presence of queens in the medieval history of Central European nations leads to a more accurate understanding of social sensitivities, governed by Christian paradigms and by the absence of tolerance.

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BY RECOURSE to the authority of historical writing, the Middle Ages are defined in the quasi-official perception as a time of cultural involution and economic underdevelopment.[1] The scholars who support this opinion argue that historical memory could preserve the medieval reality thanks to the annals and chronicles written by men of the church, inspired by providential meanings. Consequently, individual behavior was firmly circumscribed by the rules and loyalties governing the multifaceted solidarities that ensured the functionality of medieval human communities.[2] This preconception resulted from a diversity of approaches and sources, ranging from cultural historical data that enthusiastically took precedents from classical antiquity and the spectacular developments of the Renaissance and Humanism, to conclusions pertaining to economic and social history, which conferred the Middle Ages the status of a transition period between two moments of grace in the history of mankind. The jurisdictional diversity, the predominantly

agrarian character of the European economy in the Middle Ages, the low level of commercial relations and the precariousness of the communication routes augmented the autarchy of communitarian life and inhibited the manifestations of dynamism and individual initiative beyond the boundaries of a geographical region. The territorial framework and the importance of family solidarities for the everyday life of medieval people represent the main arguments brought in the historiographical debate about the real meanings of ethnic solidarities in the Middle Ages,[3] which were episodically activated, given the absence of the circumstances that preceded the socio-political transformations and economic competition specific to the 19th century.[4] The mixture of wariness and enthusiasm that gives substance to the controversy surrounding the manifestations of ethnic consciousness in the Middle Ages is catalyzed by the multifaceted character of the concepts with which medieval writing operated. In annals, chronicles and *gestae*, the notions that define ethnicity in the lexicon of the main European languages incorporated family and social significances. Written medieval culture itself helped shape a contradictory image through the ethical paradigms with which it operated. Given its conservative outlook on social hierarchy, the theory of the society of the three Orders meant, at least at the level of canonical ideology, a distrustful attitude to personal success achieved outside a career predestined by virtue of family membership.[5] In addition to this, the unlimited credit invested in documents by authors who adhered to the positivist method meant that they took the medieval social and political theories ad litteram and equated historical reality with the theoretical projection through which it defined itself; in other words, they substituted discourse to reality. On the other hand, the symbolic geographies that the contemporary imaginary and the more recent anti-system ideologies operate with propose the representation of medieval history as a succession of heroic deeds, invested with normative finalities in relation to the potential recipients of the identitarian message.[6] Although they start from different and partly contradictory premises, the two approaches have a similar finality: a unilateral reconstruction of medieval realities. In both approaches, the participants in the founding of state and ecclesiastical structures are almost exclusively male figures,[7] political or spiritual leaders, validated through their outstanding gestures meant to certify the legitimacy of their new creations and their authority over land and people, expressed by the two attributes of medieval power: their ability to reward through land benefices and their arbitration of disputes.

The selection operated by the medieval authors was, in turn, the consequence of their own cultural background and of the official interest, dictated by the authority that was recognized as such or was presumed to be a patron. Because of their eclectic origins, the sources of the medieval cultural profile illustrate the moment of synthesis with which medievalist studies from the past half-cen-

tury have equated this timespan. The ethnic synthesis that began with the settlement of the migrant populations on the territory of the former Roman provinces and was translated onto the level of the new spiritual[8] and moral order established at the end of the first Christian millennium corresponded to a cultural osmosis that involved elements of classical writing in Latin, dominated by the pater familias, by the paradigms of the Old Testament texts which discursively focused on the sacred authority of the family head, and by the Indo-European gentilic traditions, which were patriarchal par excellence. The world resulting from this accumulation of values and practices perpetuated, in theory, the image of classical unity, rearticulated through the Christian moral ideal of the City of God proposed by St. Augustine, but the soundness of this reality was ensured by the existence of familial, social and jurisdictional particularities,[9] marked by specific relations with one another and with the legitimacy-imparting authorities. The constant invocation of the rules of social stability and the medieval moral ideal in the writings produced by men of the church and in university lectures ultimately demonstrated the limits of translating these ideological constructions into the actual reality of medieval society, which followed the coordinates of its own dynamics. Along with the vast population movements triggered by the Crusades, the re-establishment of urban centers and of legal or religious thought, the question of family alliances, ethnically mixed, established by members of the ruling dynasties of states on the eastern border of medieval Christendom provides an opportunity for a timely reconsideration of the Middle Ages from the vantage point of social history and the history of mores. Even though these first cases of marriages did not represent a mass phenomenon for the reasons mentioned above, to which was added the wariness of contamination by foreign influences that was specific to the medieval imaginary,[10] the covenants made at the level of the political and social establishment created the framework for the manifestation of social and spatial mobility trends. Historiographical reflection has thus the occasion to decode the individual or collective moral mechanisms underlying solidarity, conflict or dissent. On the other hand, a reconsideration of the presence of queens in the medieval history of Central European nations leads to a more accurate understanding of social sensitivities, governed by Christian paradigms and by the absence of tolerance.[11]

The medieval writing regarding noble women shows same hesitation between wariness and devotion. The series of medieval cultural revivals and the recovery of certain patristic interpretations came to highlight the historical presence of women, invoked through examples of martyrdom and sanctity. An issue which has been especially interesting for the history of law concerns the position of women pertaining to the social elite as regards the family fortune and its social and institutional significances. In this respect, the developments in Central and Eastern Europe were affected by the survival of communitarian traditions

which diminished the influences of the Salic Law.[12] The queen's contribution to the sovereign's decisions and the importance of certain titles and fiefs she brought to the dynasty she married into led to alliances and rivalries between kings and nations. Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine's career is the best documented example, connected with the Anglo-French disputes. Another spectacular case of successful consolidation of a political structure through dynastic alliances is the expansion of Hohenstauffen authority over southern Italy in the second half of the 12th century.[13] Emperor Frederick II's interest in his Italian kingdom, his maternal inheritance, led to a crisis of power in the empire and shaped future developments in Central Europe. A general analysis of medieval sources illustrates the multifaceted significances of foreign queens for the long-term development of kingdoms. States founded by Hungarian, Czechs and Polish leaders advocated ethnic and jurisdictional plurality as a prerequisite for territorial expansion. The queen's conduct became a catalyst for the dialogue between the power and the elite who ensured the Central European institutional equilibrium in the Medieval and Modern Era.[14] The impact of this innovative trend, activated somehow against the grain of the political paradigms prevalent in the Middle Ages, produced contradictory reactions in the discourse of the chronicles and in the mind-set of educated observers. The foreign wife of the leader generated incipient xenophobic attitudes and misogynist stereotypes. At the same time, the future sovereign's mother or the queen involved in charitable acts and protecting the church inspired enthusiastic expressions of loyalty on the part of the subjects.

This unstable balance between devotion and distrust placed her in a challenging position as regards the social and political structures. Firstly, her initiatives or those that were assigned to her incorporated an innovative dimension, in the sense that they made the relations within the noble elite more dynamic, being identified in most cases with the policies of change. In the Middle Ages, matrimonial alliances stimulated the transfer of human resources and knowledge. The political and patrimonial ambitions of the queen's relatives activated the domestic competition with the champions of local interests. This complex set of contradictions raised questions about the functionality of certain affinities essential for the medieval set of values, such as the horizontal solidarities which united the members of privileged social classes or loyalty to the sovereign. If the historians of the medieval church concluded that before 1204 the differences between Eastern and Western Christianity were stimulated by jurisdictional controversies and theological meanings were ignored by believers, a social analysis illustrates a considerable difference regarding social permissiveness. The Byzantine world, which programmatically assumed the Roman classical tradition, also preserved the Hellenistic paradigms as regards social mobility and the useful partnerships with foreigners. The revived Byzantine elite realized the

potential of marriages as political and confessional instruments. Emperor Justinian II (685–695, 705–711) regained his throne thanks to his marriage to a Khazarian princess.[15] The successful Christianisation of the Slavs was made possible by a mix of political developments, military campaigns and marriages of Byzantine princesses to leaders from the Balkans. These arrangements incorporated the perspective of political competition, because the new Christian sovereigns began to claim imperial legitimacy.[16] This option raised harsh criticism in the West, where the Carolingian moral paradigms strictly prescribed a woman's public presence. The first skeptical attitudes expressed by the German ecclesiastical circles towards the political ambitions of a Byzantine princess were occasioned by a political marriage that was meant to settle the disputes between the Byzantium of the Macedonian dynasty and the empire restored in the German West by the Emperor Otto the Great (936–973), disputes which escalated in southern Italy. The decisions of Empress Theophano from the period in which she functioned as regent during the minority of her son, Otto III (983–1003), were recorded in harsh terms in contemporary chronicles.[17] The medieval studies reinterpreted the significances of this interesting example of medieval synthesis which continued the Saxon policies regarding the Slavs and promoted a restoration of the Roman political tradition.[18] The emperor constantly supported the partnership between Papacy and Empire and his well known magnanimity was essential for the emergence of the kingdoms of Hungary and Poland. The contributions of Byzantine princesses to the Christian mission in the age of the "Great Fear" was illustrated by another example: the marriage between Princess Anne, Theophano's sister, and Saint Vladimir of Kiev brought Kievan Rus' under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchy of Constantinople. The victories of the first Crusaders over the Saracens in the Holy Land and the founding of Latin principalities were made possible by the dynastical marriages between emperors from the Comnenus and Angelos dynasties and French princesses, and those events inspired the writings of troubadours.[19] Those alliances furnished grounds for claims to the Byzantine throne, and the marriage of Emperor Isaac II's daughter to Margrave Philip of Swabia was instrumental in the first Latin intervention in Constantinople in 1204. The political and moral crises which affected the Byzantine world amended the public attitudes regarding the women's social and political role in the 14th century. Another example of the diversity of medieval social realities was the permissive attitude towards the women's involvement in political leadership among the Scandinavian peoples. The paradigmatic influences from the northern and southern vicinities affected the political dynamics in Kiev. The policies initiated by Olga of Kiev and her commitment to the Christianization of her people have the same meanings as the reign of the Hungarian Duke Géza.[20] Her career was considered a proof supporting the so-called Normanist

theory which claims the Russians' Varangian descent.[21] Some scholars explain this uncharacteristic situation and events through the dynamic proclivities of the Vikings and the need for social and patrimonial stability that women ensured in the communities that were on their way to becoming sedentary.[22]

T HE QUEEN as a vector of political initiative and as the catalyst of cultural and identitarian reactions achieved the most spectacular career in the political entities on the eastern frontier of the Roman *Christianitas*. Here the spiritual, ethnic and institutional osmosis specific to the Middle Ages ended with the second wave of migrations and entailed different forces and practices in relation to the former Roman provinces. This was the case of the state entities established in Central Europe following the conversion of the Czechs, Poles and Hungarians to Christianity, where the aristocracy's penchant for dissent created a specific division of power, expressed by the theory of the Holy Crown.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the queen as a factor of power was in an intermediate position in the abovementioned situations, in the sense that the limits of her functions were set in accordance with the Carolingian paradigms. This was the consequence of transplanting social structures that had accompanied the transition from tribes and clans—subjected to the authority of military leaders—to the medieval state, governed by a Christian sovereign assisted by the former warriors and relatives, who had become part of a noble hierarchy that had been adopted, in specific circumstances in each case, from the former enemies.[23] The moment of the irreversible integration of the Slavic and Hungarian populations into the political and confessional order of Christianity is considered to have been the result of the convergence between two complementary and partly contradictory circumstances: the economic and moral recovery of the West from the Great Fear from the end of the first millennium, and the firm option of some of the leaders targeted by the Christian initiatives. The former pagan chieftains were successful in exploiting to their own benefit the competition between Christian actors. On a concrete level, the approach initiated under the auspices of the papacy activated a series of disputes among the power holders. The options of the Holy See, which privileged persuasion, had to be reconciled with the interests of the powerful Bavarian bishops, who favored conversion via Crusades,[24] as postulated by Charlemagne's experiences regarding the Christianization of the Saxons. From the perspective of the leaders of the new Christian nations, the difficulty in accepting a faith celebrated in a language unknown to the majority population was added to the demand that they should demonstrate their loyalty to the Roman Church, the body that had previously granted them authority over their own land and people. The solution chosen was the integration of the founding dynasty within the system of family alliances that ensured political legitimacy. The

emergence of foreign queens in the history of the Central European nations was thus part and parcel of the founding of states, so dominated by the identitarian discourse. The baptism and consecration of the pagan leaders coincided with or were followed by matrimonial alliances with Christian dynasties from the vicinity, the latter considering that by bringing their recent relatives to the faith they had gained their right to spiritual and political patronage.

The political leadership of the new Christian monarchies found effective support in the policies initiated by papacy after the Cluniac Reform. The Holy See preferred the partnership with territorial states in its dispute with the German emperor and confirmed and reaffirmed the apostolic mission assumed by the Hungarian and Polish kingdoms. Christianity captured the loyalty of some of the wives and daughters of the Moravian Slavic dynasts,[25] even before the conversion was officially recognized. The lives of Saints Cyril and Methodius and the Chronicle of Thietmar of Merseburg mention the important contribution of St. Lyudmila who, along with Saint Václav, was later revered as one of the Czech nation's patron figures. Tradition knows another successful example from the second generation of duchesses from the Przemyśl family, in neighboring Poland, where the baptism of Duke Mieszko I and the establishment of the Diocese of Gniezno were accomplished with the assistance of Duke Boleslaus II of Bohemia and through the marriage between the Polish dynast and his daughter, Dubrovka.[26] The chronicle of Jan Długosz mentions that the Czech duchess was accompanied in her new homeland by many Czech prelates and artisans, and these influences were documented in the vocabulary of the vernacular Polish language. The dynastic alliance was quick to demonstrate its patrimonial significance. The absence of a recognized heir to the duchy of Bohemia during the first decades of the 11th century enabled the new King Boleslaus I the Brave (992–1025) to claim his maternal inheritance.[27] Although the vacillating loyalty of the Czech nobles and the hostility of the German emperor caused the failure of this initiative, this was the first attempt to restore the political unity of the Western Slavs, this time through a mixture of legitimate feudal succession and Slavic great family tradition. The claims of Prince Yaropolk of Kiev, married to the Polish king's daughter, led to the first military conflict between Piasts and Ruricids. This event was integrated in an identitarian succession of disputes between Russians and Poles, and the devastation of Kiev is mentioned in various Ruthenian chronicles. The defense of the heritage of wives and orphans continued to legitimize the political arrangements inked by knezes and boyars, alongside confessional reasons.[28] These protective attitudes anticipate new social options as regards the noble women's position, affected by the Mongolian invasion of 1240–1241. Starting with the 14th century, the Russian political elite experienced a conservative rebuilding of moral paradigms, and the best known example in this respect are the hostile commentaries

of politically motivated chroniclers about Marfa Boretskaia's conduct as the leader of the Republic of Novgorod.[29] The repeated kinship alliances established between the ruling houses provided an opportunity for greater territorial and social mobility, some nobles and prelates passing from the service of one realm to that of another. The newcomers, in turn, established cross-border family ties, but they also aspired to an economic position ensured by the granting of landed estates. The competition between the Czech and the Polish nobles for offices and privileges was strong enough to inhibit the repeated attempts to unify the two kingdoms, resumed at the initiative of the Przemyśl dynasty, with the proclamation of the Kingdom of Bohemia. The marriages with Piast heiresses were ultimately ignored by the Polish nobility, who rebelled against King Wenceslaus III because he had installed Czechs officials in his Polish fiefs.[30]

Medieval nationalism foreshadowed the emergence of the pre-modern corporate solidarities and the assertion of the so-called nobiliary nations. It originated in the xenophobic attitudes inherent to territorial vicinity, but also in the affirmation of a right belonging to the local elites, which claimed the legitimacy of their access to secular and ecclesiastical offices in their homeland. The presence of German queens and their entourages caused great discontent among the aristocracy and the clergy, censored, in part, by dynastic loyalty and by the opportunities for close relations with the German principalities, as the marriage between King Ottokar II (1253–1278) and the heiress of Babenberg provided the grounds for Bohemian claims to Austrian estates. At the same time, the royal family supported the founding of German settlements in southern Bohemia. The king's second marriage to a descendant of a Ruthenian princely family generated appeals from the clergy to protect the rights of native Czechs to ecclesiastical dignities.[31] The theme of the nefarious influence exerted by a foreign queen made a most spectacular career in the Hungarian chronicles. The problem had its beginnings in the effects of the dynastic alliance that had preceded the Christianization of the kingdom and was motivated by the influence of Queen Gisela, the daughter of Duke Heinrich of Bavaria, over Saint Stephen, king of Hungary (997–1038). This arrangement was intended to settle the divisions between the Hungarians and the Bavarians that had impeded the conversion of the latter; the German prelates and warriors who had arrived in the kingdom were instrumental to the victory of the king over his heathen domestic enemies.[32] The chronicles see the king's victory against Kopany of Somogy as a success of the Teutonic Knights over the Hungarians. The queen's role in the political and spiritual life illustrates the lingering competition between Hungarian and Germans. The German sources highlighted the queen's active participation in the conversion of her husband and the founding of the first monasteries in Hungary, but Simon of Kéza and other Hungarian authors criticized her involve-

ment in the royal family disputes,[33] which ended with the punishment of some of the king's relatives and the exile of others to Poland and Kiev. The succession of power in favor of Peter I of Orseolo, the Venetian son-in-law of the king, and the contempt of his German entourage towards the Hungarians brought further arguments for a censorious attitude towards the German queen and ultimately triggered the great pagan rebellion of 1046. This episode and the permanence of conflicts, solved through dynastic alliances, generated a hostile perspective on Hungarian realities. Otto of Freissing, who passed through Hungary in the second half of 12th century, wrote that the country was inhabited by monsters with human faces.[34] His opinions was very popular among the authors of writings on Eastern Europe, but these preconceptions didn't impede the dynastic alliances with the Arpadian monarchs. This policy brought great benefits at the end of the 11th century, when King Ladislaus the Saint (1077–1095) claimed the title of king of Croatia, as the protector of queen dowager Helen, his sister.[35] The dynastic union was finally established after negotiations with the Croatian nobility.

The conduct of the German, Ruthenian or Cuman queens was a commonplace in the chronicles written during the repeated dynastic crises in Arpadian Hungary. The contestation of King Béla II's rights by the pretender to the throne Boris Arpad led to the summoning of a nobiliary assembly that was to declare the latter illegitimate, as well as issue notations on the immorality of the Ruthenian nation.[36] The influence of Queen Gertrude of Meran and especially the usurpation of some of the Crown estates for the benefit of her German relatives were the main reason of discontent against King Andrew II (1205–1235). The German influence on the king's policies was instrumental in the short-lived presence of Teutonic Knights in southern Transylvania.[37] These domestic quarrels led to the queen's murder, an obvious case of *nota infidelitatis*, committed by the Hungarian palatine himself.[38] The legal solution was ultimately the proclamation of the Golden Bull, the cornerstone of the Hungarian nobility's privileges. In the history of Hungary, the 13th century marked the moment when the Hungarian gentry's identitarian consciousness articulated a discourse meant to legitimize political rights in relation to the monarchical authority, based on the Hunnic lineage and on the role played by the founders of the 108 Hungarian noble clans in re-conquering the country, which was defined in the official correspondence as the frontier of Christendom.[39] This message with political purposes also included a xenophobic dimension, designed to undermine the position of the king and his foreign allies as defenders of the country and to confirm the authority of the nation's true sons. One of the main charges that were brought against King Ladislaus IV the Cuman (1272–1290) and that ensured the papacy's support in favor of his opponents was his preference for Cuman women

and the risk that the influence exerted by these recent converts to Christianity might lead Hungary back into heresy. The disputes for legitimacy between king and nobility diminished the external position of the kingdom. Bishop Bruno of Olomouc wrote to the pope that Hungary was lost to Christendom thanks to the alliances established by the king with the Cumans and the Ruthenians.

The evolution of dynastic loyalties during the 13th century would suggest that the sources of this hostility ought to be sought in the reactions of corporate medieval nationalism rather than in a misogynistic background, given the ethnic and institutional profile of the Central-European states and the incompatibility between tolerance and the medieval norms.[40]

An analysis focused on the significance of queens for the conduct and sensibilities of their subjects in Central and Eastern Europe is necessary for a better understanding of history as a general recovery of the past, without any preconception and with a justified interest in the collective mentalities of the communities which experienced throughout the Middle Ages an ethnic and confessional plurality.

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Notes

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Abstract

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The Middle Ages are presented by the contemporary historical writing as a time of cultural and ethnic syntheses and equally as the time when European nations were born. From a regional viewpoint, the successful Christianization of Slavs and Hungarians corresponded to the founding of new kingdoms, led by their own dynasties, who developed specific relations with the local elites. Dynastic marriages were a method of legitimizing their political position in the Christian world, but the presence of foreign queens triggered internal competitions and stimulated xenophobic feelings. The family alliances involving the members of royal and princely families inspired the first forms of institutional integrations in this region, but the oscillation between devotion and distrust on the part of their subjects ultimately illustrates the difficulties of a successful partnership between Central-European nations and the beginnings of ethnic solidarities and conflicts.

Keywords