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De sacra corona regni Hungariae

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English summary

This dissertation treats the connection between the developments of national identity in the Hungarian Kingdom and the changing meaning of the crown of Hungary between 1572 and 1665. Using a constructivist method of research, an attempt is made to answer the question of how the Hungarian political community and its relation to the Hungarian crown was depicted, in what way the function of the crown legitimized this depiction, how this image and function of the crown changed, and how this change can be explained. Starting point for this approach was the notion that the “doctrine of the holy crown” is a modern invention. This doctrine makes it impossible to explain the meaning of the crown in early Hungarian political culture in the early modern period. (László Péter)

The first chapter of this study introduces the origin of the Hungarian Crown Jewel, the Hungarian monarchy, and the development of the “tradition of the crown” in the Middle Ages. The importance of the crown to claims of power of the Hungarian kings increased in the course of the Middle Ages. This was mainly due to the violent succession of royalty. “The crown” did not have a set meaning, and there was an intentional development of the tradition of the crown which achieved its apex during the reign of Matthias Corvinus. Additionally, the alleged meaning of the crown, which was introduced in the work of István Werbőczy at the beginning of the early modern period and summarized in the nineteenth century *Doctrine of the Holy Crown*, is examined critically using the ideas of Timon Ákos, Ferenc Eckhart, and László Péter.

The second chapter explains the used methods of research, and gives an analysis of the development of national identity and the meaning of the crown in the kingdom of Hungary in the period around 1526. Applying the notions of *natio, regnum*, and the crown, an explanation is given of how in Hungary the transformation from a cultural to a political community took place. The influence on this transformation of the tripartition of the kingdom after the battle of Mohács in 1526 is also discussed. During this period, the crown began to symbolize the unity of the as yet divided political community and of the kingdom.

The third chapter discusses the changed legitimizing function of the crown in the period between 1572 and 1606. Due to the political weakness of King Rudolf II of Habsburg, the crown was used increasingly in political literature to strengthen the demands of the community. The function of the crown changed from a symbol of legitimacy of royal power to that of the political claims of the community during the insurrection of Bocskay against Habsburg authority. This development is shown mainly in the creation of the fiction of “the refusal of the Turkish Crown” and the content of the political testament of Bocskay.

Elaborating on the important legitimizing function of the crown in political culture, the fourth chapter further explains a number of texts and events which demonstrate this new importance of the crown. This development is set against the creation of the court of Matthias of Habsburg in Hungary in 1607-1608, the transfer of the Hungarian Crown by Rudolf to Matthias, and the latter’s coronation in Hungary in 1608. The ideas of Matthias, István Illésházy, Elias Berger, Péter Révay, and János Jessenius, are used to show how the political compromise between Matthias and the Hungarian classes was legitimized by a certain image of the Crown, the Hungarian community, and the kingdom.

The fifth chapter focuses on the political thinking of Révay on the crown and on national identity. It elaborates on the origin of his book on the crown and the political community, the intellectual context of his thinking and the reception of his ideas about the crown. The central thesis of this chapter is that the way in which Révay depicts national identity can be traced back to the method used by Justus Lipsius of Leiden to describe history. Furthermore Révay, supported by Lipsius' political theory, creates the notion of the sovereignty of the Hungarian political community using a fiction of the "effects of the crown". These constructs of Révay concerning the crown (and not those of Werbőczy or the "doctrine of the holy crown") determined the Hungarian national identity in the early modern period, as is shown by the reception and popularity of his work concerning the crown until the rise of modern nationalism at the end of the eighteenth century.

In conclusion, the sixth chapter treats a part of the reception of the work of Révay using the history of the "Bull of Silvester": an eleventh-century fiction made up in the seventeenth century. By explaining the role of the crown in the discussion between the kings of Habsburg of Hungary and the popes about the right of appointing bishops in the seventeenth century, it appears that the ideas of Révay within the changing political context gained a contemporary meaning. Révay's book clearly played a part in the origins of the Bull. Eventually, the text of the Bull was smuggled into the contents of an eighteenth-century edition of Révay's work. A deliberate adaptation to contemporary politics of Révay's meaning of the crown changed national identity once again.

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