



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Thesis in Medieval Studies

by

Orsolya Réthelyi

on

Mary of Hungary in Court Context (1521–1531)

will be held on

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Doctoral Thesis Abstract

Orsolya Réthelyi

Mary of Hungary in Court Context (1521–1531)

Mary of Hungary (1505–1558) in the context of her courts is placed in the focus of my dissertation, from her arrival to the Austrian provinces of the Habsburgs in 1514 from the Low Countries, through her coronation as queen of Hungary in 1521 and her appointment as the regent of the Netherlands in 1531. The court is a place for the practice and display of power, the stage for diplomacy and political life, as well as the focal point for the accumulation and distribution of art, science and new trends. However, it is also a group of people with various backgrounds, social standing and interests living together in a regulated manner. In this study the court is examined primarily as a group of people structured by social relations and tensions. Questions about the political, religious and social context of the royal court are approached through investigating the relationship of household and power, both formal and informal. Special attention is given to questions of religion, ethnic and linguistic identity, gender, and age. All these fields accommodate what contemporaries saw as problematic issues pertaining to the queen.

The best known issue of tension is the queen's interest in the ideas of the early Reformation. There is no end to sources in which Mary is accused of harbouring protestant sympathies, by friends and enemies alike. Indeed, she was an admirer of Erasmus, was familiar with the teachings of Martin Luther and sympathised with the scripture-based reform movement within the Church. Several members of her immediate surroundings, among others, her court priests, were also associated with the reform movement. Even though most recent scholarship agrees that despite her interest and sympathy she cannot be considered "protestant", her attitude to the religious controversy in her surroundings focused much religious tension on her person. One of my intentions was to study her religious interest and preferences within the context of the court. Did religious affinity play any part in the personal alliances and party politics?

Can the signs of religious preference be found in the choice for employment in the household?

Since to many contemporaries, being "German" was an equivalent to being "Lutheran," the question of national and linguistic identity stands in close connection with the religious tension. Hungarian queens were nearly always foreigners and often the object of mistrust and hate in medieval Hungary. In addition to her foreignness, Mary was a representative of the Habsburg influence in Hungary, which was feared and disliked by the majority of the Hungarian nobility. Recent research has demonstrated that the political controversies within Hungary in the years before Mohács cannot be simplified as the struggle between the "national party", supported by the lesser nobility on the one hand, and the barons, representing the Habsburg interests, on the other. In a large number of studies of the political power centres of the Jagiello period, András Kubinyi has shown that the situation was far more complex, characterised by shifting alliances between different sections of both groups of the nobility, and the court. In this background the queen emerges as a figure of some importance, interests of whom did not always coincide with those of her family. Nevertheless, the traditional xenophobic sentiments of the Hungarian nobility, which reached a peak in the motions ruling to expel foreigners from the court brought by the Diets of 1524 and 1525, were aroused to a great extent by the queen's preference of "German" advisors and courtiers, and directed against them. In an age which does not yet consequently apply the theory of a nation as a geographical and linguistic unity, the use of the concept of "foreignness" in political discourse and ideology is especially intriguing. In this field of tension also, Queen Mary seems to have had an emblematic position, as the embodiment of foreignness. Within this topic I have investigated the concept of foreignness, how it was used, by whom, against whom, and for what purpose. The royal court was necessarily a group with a high concentration of non-Hungarians. The king himself, though born in Hungary, was from the Polish Jagiello dynasty and was king of Bohemia as well. Therefore, the number of Czechs and Poles at the court was significant. Did they also count as foreigners, or was this title restricted to the Germans? Which languages were spoken in the different layers and how did this influence communication? What was the

ratio of Hungarians and foreigners at the different levels of the court? Can the personal views and preferences of the queen be traced?

Unlike the question of religious and ethnic tensions, which has received ample scholarly attention, the problems concerning gender issues in connection with the court of Mary of Hungary have not been thoroughly researched. Gender identity certainly was referred to in contemporary descriptions of the queen, who was often characterised as a strong woman endowed with the “masculine” virtues of political and strategic intelligence as well as physical skill and endurance. However, it is necessary to take a step further and re-examine the sources for gender relationships and tensions within the court. What is the relationship between the queen and the predominantly male world of officers and menial servants? What do we know about the *Frauenzimmer*, the female household of the queen? What kind of information can be found on the structure and functioning of the economically separate queen’s court? Is there any reason to suppose that some of the tensions surrounding the queen were due to the appearance of a female presence at the court? Here, as in the field of religion, a comparison between my period of research and earlier periods is called for. The queen’s court under Mary is contrasted to the courts of the previous queens of medieval Hungary.

In researching the period one forgets all too easily that the young age of the royal couple was a significant feature of the Buda court. In 1521, when she arrived to Hungary, Mary was only sixteen years old; King Louis II was half a year younger. Five years later the king died and Mary became a widow at the age of twenty-one. Much of the grievances about the life of the royal couple (too much dancing, hunting and amusement, improper behaviour, etc. that gave rise to a lack of respect among the courtiers) was understandable, if not excusable in the light of their age. Similar complaints can be found referring to other young sovereigns. The question of the age of the people surrounding the queen is also addressed in the dissertation. To what extent can this be determined? Does this provide any extra information about our understanding of the queen’s court?

The sources

Sources traditionally used for the investigation of the royal and reginal court do not exist for the court of Mary of Hungary in the period between 1521 and 1531. Since we do not have either household ordinances, or court accounts of the queen's court, information had to be collected from a number of divergent source types, chiefly from letters, charters and narrative sources from the period. This has been supplemented by material (ordinances, accounts) from the years preceding the time period under investigation, from which a richer source material exists. When appropriate, images and other sorts of non-written evidence were also consulted.

Conclusions

The picture emerging from the accumulation of data about Mary's courts shows a reginal institution that can be compared to those of other late medieval queen's courts of Europe in size, form, function, even inherent problems. On the other hand Mary can be placed in the succession of queen consorts of the Kingdom of Hungary in the later middle Ages with considerable power and influence on the political life of the Kingdom. The extent of Mary's influence on politics, despite the short period under investigation is significant. In my analysis I have argued that two factors play a decisive role in the power of Mary of Hungary, both of which express themselves in the queen's household.

One of these is the vast size of the reginal domains, which made the late medieval queens one of the most wealthy, if not the wealthiest landowner of the kingdom. This great increase of reginal domains can be traced back to the first half of the fifteenth century, when Emperor Sigismund (1368–1437) systematically increased the estates of his second wife, Barbara of Cilli. Though scholars have not yet uncovered the motives behind this extreme empowerment of the queen by Sigismund, we know that in the years to follow the queen was repeatedly a source of ready cash in the form of loans for the Emperor's military campaigns and acted as a stabilising factor in the Kingdom. Because of the unique position of the queen, being a female landowner bound with strong ties of loyalty to the king and dependent on him, thus with lesser risk of power ambitions at the expense of the king, her empowerment may have been part of

Sigismund's larger strategy in decreasing the power of the magnates. Unsurprisingly, as much as a large body of reginal estates meant a stabilising power in the lifetime of the king, they became a destabilising feature and a problem if the king died and the bond of loyalty was broken. The potential of power inherent in the reginal estates as well as the destabilising aspect if the king predeceased the queen can be traced in the case of several Hungarian queens of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. When Mary received the management of the reginal estates, much of these were mortgaged to others and brought her limited profit, nevertheless both her income from the estates and her potential to gain influence through patronage and appointments were very large in European context. She was the last in the line of queens from Barbara of Cilli to profit from the immense reginal estates. She can also definitely be said to have recognised the potential and have utilised the possibilities provided by the estates, both financially and politically.

The second factor is the right to appoint members to court functions. Besides being an obvious means to exercise patronage and win supporters, authority in appointment also meant a personally selected, close body of loyal followers around the queen. Traditionally the king has the authority to appoint officials of the queen's court, a practice reflected both in the comparative European examples, and in the stages of Mary's court before 1521, when she was under the authority of her grandfather, Maximilian, and after 1526, when she stood under the protection of her brothers, Ferdinand and Charles. The sources indicate Mary's high grade of authority in decisions about the members of her household. In the period between 1521 and 1526, no signs of any kind of limitation on the number, or person of her appointed officials can be found. This observation is underlined by the complaints of the nobility regarding the high number of foreigners in the queen's household and their repeated requests to the king to limit this – with no perceptible results. The intriguing question is whether the apparent lack of intention by Louis II to limit or influence the composition of the household of his wife should be considered as yet another sign of the youthful sovereign's careless negligence in state matters – a frequent complaint about the king –, or can it perhaps be regarded as another form of empowerment of the queen. In lack of conclusive evidence it is difficult to argue this latter version, but it is worth keeping in mind that Louis II and

Mary also showed a conscious strategy to build a new power basis against the magnates with the help of the lower nobility. Furthermore, several members of the queen's household and officials seem to have played a significant role in the political events of the Diets of 1525–1526. It is conceivable that the queen had a free hand in appointments because those forces at the court which wished to strengthen the authority of the king realised that her political ambitions and intelligence backed by the weight of the reginal estates could act as a stabilising factor for the kingdom.

There is a third significant characteristic of the court of Mary of Hungary contributing a distinctive element to its functioning. This is the position of Mary's court within the complex matrix of the courts of the king and queen of Hungary-Bohemia and the archduke and archduchess of Austria, connected by the double marriage between the Jagiellon and Habsburg dynasties. The results of the investigation show that a close relationship existed between the royal and archducal courts. This manifested itself primarily in the close ties between the households of Mary and Anne, with roots often going back to the shared princess court in Innsbruck. Several families had members in more than one of the four households and many examples of movements of officers from one of the households to another are shown. In some cases the king's and queen's court at Buda seemed to act as a place for politically undesirable elements of the archducal court. There is also a stream of information and intrigue being passed back and forth through official and unofficial channels, which only surfaces in the sources occasionally, but which must have been a central characteristic of the relationship between the four households. A closer investigation of the household element of the much better documented court of Archduchess Anne would considerably widen the possibilities for comparison and also further our understanding of the functioning of the Mary's court. It seems likely, for instance, that the conspicuous lack of daughters of the Hungarian nobility in the *Frauenzimmer* of Queen Mary can be explained with the fact that these daughters were rather sent to Anne's court in hope of a good marriage, while Mary's *Frauenzimmer* was expected to provide heiresses from outside Hungary for the sons of the Hungarian nobility. However, these must remain hypotheses until more research is done. In addition to the strong connections existing through the personal

element, there is a more conceptual connection between the four courts. Several sources indicate that the specific circumstances of the double marriage made the contemporaries envision the Hungarian-Bohemian and the Austrian courts in contrast to each other, expressed especially in the comparison of the position of Anne with that of Mary. The early years of the courts of Hungary and Austria had many similarities and the royal couples had to struggle with similar challenges, like the demands of the estates, the spread of Reformation ideas, and the distrust of foreign advisors in the household. I believe that such a comparison gives the possibility for future scholarship to gain further insight in the working of the separate courts, their relationship and the dynamics of politics, gender, and power.

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Research interests

Medieval and early modern queenship, comparative court studies, women's history, courts and towns in the early modern period, early modern towns and literature, early modern towns and civic ceremonial, cultural transmission, cultural contacts between Hungary and the Netherlands

University Education

2000–present Central European University (CEU), Budapest Medieval Studies PhD; (Title of dissertation *Mary of Hungary and the Institution of the Queen's Court*. Supervisor: Dr. Katalin Szende.)

1999–2000 Central European University (CEU), Budapest. Medieval Studies MA; (Title of Thesis: *The lion, the dragon, and the knight: an interdisciplinary investigation of a medieval motif*. Supervisor: Dr. Gerhard Jaritz)

1993–1997 Utrecht University (Major: English Language and Literature specialization: Medieval Studies; (Title of Thesis: "*Apostles & martirs pat hardy kni3tes were*" *Saint's Lives from the South English Legendary and their Relation to Middle English Romances*. Supervisor: Dr. Erik Kooper.) Second Major: Medieval Studies

1990–1993 Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest (Major: English Language and Literature, Second Major: Dutch Language and Literature)

Employment and Professional Experience

Sept 2006 – present Full-time lecturer (now assistant professor) in Medieval Literature and Cultural History at the Department of Dutch Studies of the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest (ELTE).

2007 – March 2008 Advisor of the exhibition *Matthias Corvinus, the King: Tradition and renewal in the Hungarian Royal Court 1458–1490* at the Budapest History Museum

Oct 2005 – 2007 Co-editor of the conference volume *Maria von Ungarn, eine europäische Persönlichkeit zu Anbruch der Neuzeit* in the series *Geschichte in der Epoche Karls V.* (Aschendorff-Verlag) in cooperation with Dr. Martina Fuchs from the University of Vienna.

April 2004 – Oct 2005 Organisation (including fundraising) of the international conference *Maria von Ungarn, eine europäische Persönlichkeit zu Anbruch der Neuzeit* realised as a cooperation between the Budapest Historical Museum and the Institute of Habsburg History of Budapest.

Sept 2004 – 2005 Co-editor of the English and Hungarian exhibition catalogue *Mary of Hungary: The Queen and the Court 1521–1531*.

Jan 2004 – Sept 2004 Preparing the detailed plan and budget of the *Mary of Hungary Project*, including international including international sponsor recruitment activities and EU grant application. Writing of the exhibition concept for the exhibition *Mary of Hungary: The Queen and the Court 1521–1531* for the Budapest History Museum commemorating the 500th anniversary of the birth of the queen.

May 2003 – Oct 2004 Initiation, organization and coordination of the international workshop entitled *Medieval Queens and Queenship*, at the Medieval Studies department of the CEU.

Recent Conference Participation

„'Catholics' and 'Protestants' in the shadow of the Ottoman threat." *Interconfessional frontiers in the late Middle Ages*. Organised by the CEU Medieval Studies Department, Budapest, Agence Nationale de la Recherche (Paris), Casa de Velázquez (Madrid). Budapest, 15–16 October 2009.

„A Rose és De stede der vrouwen: a francia udvari irodalom Németalföldön [The Rose and De stede der vrouwen: Medieval French courtly literature in the Low Countries]." *ELTE BTK Középkorász Konferenciák – A Rózsaregény: Kontextus, Üzenet, Recepció*. ELTE, May 2009.

“Habsburg Mária királyné mint közvetítő a kultúrák között” [Mary of Hungary as cultural mediator]. *Magyarország és Németalföld kapcsolata* [Contacts between Hungary and the Netherlands]. University of Debrecen. November 2008.

“King Matthias on the Marriage Market: Diplomatic and Ceremonial Aspects of Marriage Contacts and Marriage Contracts involving Matthias Corvinus". *Mathias Rex (1458–1490) magyarország a reneszánsz hajnalán – Hungary at the Dawn of the Renaissance*, ELTE, Budapest, 20–24 May 2008.

„Adalékok Habsburg Mária udvari papjainak kérdéséhez: Johannes Croner, Habsburg Mária udvari lelkésze [Johannes Croner, court priest of Mary of Hungary]”. *A reformáció kezdetei Magyarországon* [The beginnings of the Reformation in Hungary] Károli Gáspár Protestant University 7–9 November 2007.

“Vorsten en talen: Het wisselende taallandschap rond Maria van Hongarije (1505–1558) [Princes and languages: The changing linguistic landscape around Mary of Hungary]” *Regionaal Colloquium Neerlandicum voor Midden Europa 2007*. 20–22 September 2007.

Awards and Grants

September 2009–June 2010	Research Grant from the Public Foundation of Habsburg Studies
January 2005	Advanced Doctoral Students Award
April–June 2004	Doctoral Research Support Grant (CEU) to the Netherlands for archival research
January–March 2004	Doctoral Research Support Grant (CEU) to the Vienna for archival research
February 2003	Research Travel Fund (CEU) to Vienna for archival research
June 2002	Research Travel Fund (CEU) to the Netherlands for archival research
June 2000	Tanasa Award for Outstanding Scholarship

Selected List of Recent Publications

Books – (Co-)Edited volumes
2007

Fuchs, Martina, and Orsolya Réthelyi (Eds.). *Maria von Ungarn, eine europäische Persönlichkeit zu Anbruch der Neuzeit*. Series *Geschichte in der Epoche Karls V*, vol. 8. Münster: Aschendorff-Verlag. 416 pages.

2005

Réthelyi, Orsolya, Beatrix Romhányi, Enikő Spekner, and András Végh (Eds.). *Mary of Hungary, Widow of Mohács. The Queen and her Court 1521–1531*. Exhibition catalogue. Budapest: Budapest History Museum. 308 pages.

Articles

Forthcoming

“Habsburg Mária királyné és a királynéi kultúraközvetítés” [Mary of Hungary and the question of cultural transfer]. In *Magyarország és Németalföld kapcsolata* [Cultural relations between Hungary and the Low Countries]. Ed. Gábor Pusztai, Réka Bozzay.

“A *Rose* és *De stede der vrouwen*: francia udvari irodalom fordítása Németalföldön” [The *Rose* and the *De stede der vrouwen*: Medieval Dutch translations of French courtly literature. In *A Rózsaregény: kontextus, üzenet, recepció*. [The *Roman de la Rose*: Context, interpretation and reception. Proceedings of the first interdisciplinary medievalist conference at the ELTE]. Ed. Marianne Sággy.

2009

“Vallás és nyelv: Johannes Croner, Habsburg Mária udvari lelkésze” [Religion and Language. Johannes Croner, Court Priest of Mary of Hungary]. In *Szentírás – Hagymány – Reformáció. Teológia- és egyháztörténeti tanulmányok* [Holy Scripture – Tradition – Reformation. Studies on Church history and theology]. Ed. Romhányi Beatrix and Kendeffy Gábor. Budapest, 2009. Pp. 189–202.

2008

“King Matthias on the Marriage Market.” In *Matthias Corvinus, the King. Tradition and Renewal in the Hungarian Royal Court 1458–1490*. Exhibition catalogue. Ed. Péter Farbak, Enikő Spekner, Katalin Szende and András Végh. Budapest: Budapest History Museum. Pp. 247–50.

„Religie en taal in de hofhouding: Johannes Croner, de eerste hofkapelaan van Maria van Hongarije”. In AMOS – Elektronisch tijdschrift voor de neerlandistiek in Midden- en Oost-Europa (Amos-ETVN) (jg. 5, 2 – juni 2008).

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“Ambiguous Loyalties? Mary as Queen of Hungary (1521–1526).” In Proceedings of the conference *Marie de Hongrie. Politique art et culture sous la Renaissance aux Pays-Bas*. Musée Royal de Mariemont, 2008. Pp. 13–24.

2007

“Főhercegnői udvarból királynéi udvar: Habsburg Mária királynéi udvartartásának kezdetei” [From Archduchess to Queen. The Beginnings of the Court of Mary of Hungary]. *Századok* 5: 1193–1216.

“Die Anfänge der Ofener Hofhaltung der Maria von Ungarn.” In *Maria von Ungarn, eine europäische Persönlichkeit zu Anbruch der Neuzeit*. Ed. Martina Fuchs and Orsolya Réthelyi. Series *Geschichte in der Epoche Karls V*, vol. 8. Münster: Aschendorff-Verlag. Pp. 221–44.

2006

“II. Lajos [King Louis II Jagiello].” In *Magyar Művelődéstörténeti Lexikon. Középkor és kora újkor* [Encyclopaedia of Hungarian Cultural History. Middle Ages and Renaissance], vol.6. Ed. Péter Kőszeghy. Budapest. Pp. 357–59.

2005

“*“Maria Regina nuda venerat ad Hungariam”*. The Queen’s treasures”. In *Mary of Hungary. The Queen and Her Court 1521–1531*. Exhibition catalogue. Ed. Réthelyi Orsolya, F. Romhányi Beatrix, Spekner Enikő és Végh András. Budapest: Budapest History Museum. Pp. 107–13.

“Mary of Hungary.” In *Great Lives from History: The Renaissance & Early Modern Era, 1454–1600*. Ed. Christina J. Moose. Pasadena: Salem Press. Pp. 636–38.

Habsburg Mária, Mohács özvegye. A királyné és udvara 1521–1531 / Mary of Hungary, Widow of Mohács. The Queen and Her Court 1521–1531. Exhibition guide. Written and edited by Orsolya Réthelyi et alii. Budapest: Budapest History Museum. 32 pages.