

## HUNGARY IN THE AGE OF THE ANJOU KINGS

The fourteenth century began ominously for Hungary. On January 14th, 1301 András III, the young King of Hungary, died unexpectedly, and with him the dynasty of the Árpáds, which had ruled the country for four centuries, came to an end in its male line. During the 14th century, several other European realms would witness the extinction of their "ancient" royal families /e.g., the Přemysl dynasty of Bohemia in 1306, the Capets of France in 1328, the Piasts of Poland in 1370/, but none of these caused so serious and fundamental a crisis as the one in Hungary.

In the first decade of the 14th century, the real rulers of Hungary were the oligarchs who had acquired immense domains, virtually entire provinces, and reigned over their territories as though they were kings. Máté Csák is the best known of them, but there were also nearly a dozen other oligarchs, who ruled over different parts of Hungary, such as, László Kán in Transylvania, Kopasz Borsa in the Tiszántul /east of the Tisza/, and members of the Kőszegi family in Transdanubia. These provinces were situated on the peripheries of the country, forming a continuous ring and thus the king, wielding a relatively modest power over the centre of Hungary, was hermetically sealed off, making direct contacts with neighbouring states impossible.



Kings also changed frequently during this decade.

Immediately following the death of András III, two candidates claimed the crown of the Árpáds:

Vencel, the minor son of Wenceslas /Vencel/II, King of Bohemia, and Károly Róbert, also a minor, the grandson of Charles II, King of Naples, a descendant of the French Anjou family. Both Vencel and Károly Róbert were related to the Árpád dynasty on the female line.

Károly Róbert had arrived in Hungary during the time of András III and was crowned king in the first months of 1301, but the majority of the country backed the child Vencel, also legally crowned King of Hungary in 1301 and ruling under the name of László. The great oligarchs paid lip service to one or the other king, calling them their sovereigns, but in reality they acted independently of the Crown. They conducted their own foreign policies, and some of them even had their own coinage and assumed royal prerogatives in their own provinces. It is telling of their power that in 1304 they forced the young Vencel-László to leave the country, although he was supported by his father, Wenceslas II king of Bohemia and Poland. Károly Róbert, enjoying the effective support of the Pope, remained in Hungary, but his influence was rather limited.

A group of the oligarchs invited the Duke of Bavaria, Ottó Wittelsbach, a relative of the Árpáds' on his mother's side, to be King of Hungary. He was also



crowned king, but reigned only for a short time, and then only nominally. In 1307, on a visit to Transylvania, he was captured and imprisoned by László Kán, the overlord of that province, and escaped only by leaving the crown itself behind. Károly Róbert thus remained the only claimant on the scene. The number of his supporters slowly increased as more and more people in Hungary realized that the power of the oligarchs jeopardized their lives and properties and could not safeguard the conditions for peaceful production.

In 1307 a group of the great lords was prepared to recognize Károly Róbert as king. His chances were further improved when the Pope sent a legate, Cardinal Gentilis, to Hungary in 1308, who energetically promoted the recognition of Károly Róbert as King of Hungary. He did not refrain from negotiating with the great lords, bargaining with them for the sake of the recognition of the Anjou king. In 1308 most of the oligarchs were ready to accept Károly Róbert as their king, although, as later events were to prove, they acted out of tactical considerations rather than conviction. In 1309, Károly Róbert was crowned for the second time, but this second coronation, like the first, was not performed with the traditional crown of Hungary /the crown originally belonging to Saint István/. With the recovery of the original crown from László Kán, the third coronation of Károly Róbert in the summer of 1310 provided the



necessary legitimacy to the reign of the Anjou king.

Ten years had passed before the claimant, who had come to Hungary from Naples at the age of twelve, mounted the throne at 22 as Hungary's king. However, the fact that he had acquired the crown by legal means did not make him the actual ruler of the country. Much improved as his position was within Hungary, compared to the situation five to ten years earlier, the greater part of the territory of the country was still in the hands of the aristocrats. It had become obvious that, even if they had to accept a king, they would not tolerate a strong one. Károly Róbert, however, intended to function as the real ruler of the country, not as a puppet of the aristocracy, which led to a series of armed clashes between the king and the oligarchs. Fortunately for the former, the oligarchs were envious not only of his power, but were in competition with one another as well, which prevented the formation of alliances against the king, who was thus able to deal with them on a one-by-one basis.

The hostilities, which began in 1311, yielded the first success in 1312, when the king defeated the army of the sons of Amadé Aba supported by the troops of Máté Csák, at Rozgony, near Kassa. Despite the victory, it still took several years for Károly Róbert to gain control of Northeastern Hungary, the province of Amadé's sons. The particular significance of this event was that the ring of provinces, which had confined the king to the centre of the country and had made



it impossible for him to establish foreign contacts, was thus broken. Direct contacts were made with Poland, from where, in 1320, Károly Róbert brought his wife, Erzsébet, who was to bear his children, among them his successor to the throne, Lajos.

The remaining oligarchs were defeated in protracted wars, some of them dying off, thus making things easier for the king. László Kán died not later than 1315; Máté Csák, in 1321. The provinces, deprived of their overlords, were soon overcome by Károly Róbert. Last came the showdown with the powerful lords in the south and along the Adriatic coast, who had been supporting the king for decades, doing much to help him to victory in Hungary, but who were, nevertheless, oligarchs building up their own provinces and limiting the power of the sovereign. Károly Róbert faced a difficult situation but was compelled to take this step to secure sovereignty over the entire realm. In 1322 he defeated the Subics and in the following year the Babonics families; thus, in addition to being the crowned head of Hungary, he became its actual overlord, despite a few minor subsequent revolts.

It took Károly Róbert nearly 25 years to achieve full sovereignty over the country and he was only 35. He had twenty more years, before his death in 1342, to strengthen and bring prosperity to the country, which had been, for decades, weakened and tormented by domestic



wars and strife. Although Károly Róbert had come from Naples, he did not intend to follow Italian examples during his royal activities and took the realities of Hungary into account. First of all, he created a new aristocracy to replace the old, compromised, defeated and destroyed barons. The majority of the new aristocracy consisted of the scions of Hungarian noble families, who had fought along Károly Róbert, proving their loyalty in battle, and who owed their rise to him. Thus were the Szécsényis, the Szécsis, the Kanizsais, the Losoncis, the Garais, and later the Lackfis made leading aristocrats of Hungary.

Although Károly Róbert had received significant support from the Church -- both from Rome and at home -- for the consolidation of his sovereignty, he opposed all attempts to significantly extend the influence and the power of the church. He strengthened the state weakened during the era of the oligarchs, putting a wide range of reforms into practice. With the reforms he introduced in connection with finance and mining, he established the financial basis of his royal power. His name is associated with the minting of the gold forint after the Florentine example, and the prohibition of the export of gold and silver. He encouraged landowners to promote mining on their estates, thus stimulating ore-mining in Hungary. It was then that the gold mine of Körmöc and the silver mine of Szomolnok were started in Northern Hungary.



The essence of the military reforms initiated by Károly Róbert was that he based the military of the country upon the utilization of private troops, in addition to the royal army. These private troops were established by the secular and clerical lords and the counties, and marched to battle under a common banner /banderium/. Károly Róbert also effectively supported the development of towns, granting the status and privileges of townships to a number of settlements.

Károly Róbert's fervent domestic activities and numerous reforms did not leave him much opportunity to conduct an intensive foreign policy. In 1330, his troops suffered a serious defeat at Posada in Havasalföld /Wallachia/, the battle resulting in the formation of an independent Rumanian voivodeship south of the Carpathians, led by Bazarab. Much of Károly Róbert's foreign policy was based on economic considerations. The alliance concluded at Visegrád in 1335 among the Kings of Bohemia, Poland and Hungary was directed against the Habsburgs, since the staple right of Vienna had a damaging effect on the foreign trade of these countries. As a result of the Visegrád summit, Hungary joined European trade by opening new commercial routes. Károly Róbert also took steps to have his son, Prince András, recognized as legal heir to the throne of Naples. The latter action was, however, to lead to a new turn of events under the reign of Károly



Róbert's elder son and successor, Lajos I /1342--1482/.

András was assassinated in Italy in 1345, just before he was to be crowned King of Naples. He no doubt fell victim to a plot on the part of the lords of Naples and the members of the Neapolitan branch of the house of Anjou. Lajos I, at the age of 21, resorted to arms and commenced his campaigns to Naples in 1347. His nature and mentality differed considerably from those of his father. While Károly Róbert had worked steadily and consistently on the modernization of domestic conditions, Lajos did not hesitate to plunge into adventures abroad. It has been established that, during his reign of forty years, Lajos himself took part in sixteen campaigns, with thirteen more being led by his generals. During most of his reign, therefore, the able-bodied population of Hungary was bearing and wielding arms. With the exception of a Tartar raid in the mid-1340s in Eastern Hungary, these wars were all fought on foreign soil.

The Neapolitan wars in 1347 and 1350 were explicitly dynastic in character, i.e., waged for the crown of Naples by the Hungarian branch of the Anjous. Although these campaigns yielded remarkable successes, the city of Naples itself taken twice by the Hungarians, the Hungarian rule over the city and the Kingdom of Naples was impossible to sustain for any great length of time. The expeditions in connection with Poland also had a dynastic character. Until 1370,



the throne of that country was occupied by King Casimir III, brother to Lajos's mother. Lajos often led his troops in Casimir's aid to Lithuania. On Casimir's death, Lajos ascended the throne of Poland in accordance with a Hungarian--Polish treaty concluded in 1339, during Károly Róbert's reign. A personal union was thus established between the two countries, i.e., Hungary and Poland were connected by the person of their common king. Lajos, however, cared little about affairs in Poland, his main concern being to secure the Polish succession for his daughter, since he had no sons.

With regard to Hungary's relations with its neighbours to the south, the relations of Lajos with Venice were hostile due to the controversy over the wealthy Adriatic coast and the possession of Dalmatia. However, it was in this area that Lajos was to achieve his greatest international success. After hostilities with varying success, a peace treaty was concluded at Zára in 1358, in which Lajos was able to force Venice to surrender Dalmatia, thus the long coast of the Adriatic down to Dubrovnik coming under Hungarian rule.

During the forty years of the reign of Lajos I, significant changes took place along the southern borders of Hungary. At the time he was crowned, the strongest state of the Balkans was Serbia, its king, Stephen Dushan, grandson of the Transylvanian László



Kán on his mother's side, having been crowned tsar. Upon his death in 1355, however, Serbia began to rapidly disintegrate, the same fate befalling Bulgaria as well. Wallachia was also unable to maintain its independence from Hungary won by Bazarab, the latter's son recognizing the sovereignty of Lajos I. It was among these small Balkan states, constantly reconciliating and warring with each other that the Osmanli Turks, appearing in Europe in 1354, wedged themselves in from the 1360s. Lajos conducted several campaigns to the south /to Wallachia, Bosnia, Serbia, Bulgaria/, and during one of these, in 1375, the Hungarians clashed with the Turks for the first time, far from Hungary's borders. It was also during the reign of Lajos I that the Rumanian Voivodeship of Moldavia was formed along the eastern borders of Hungary.

Diametrically different as the foreign policies of Károly Róbert and Lajos I were, their domestic policies showed close similarities. Lajos also introduced reforms, mostly administrative, and his name is associated with the famous renewal of the Golden Bull in 1351. He supported the lesser nobility and relied on their counties taking shape all over the country. He aided towns, granting them privileges, and was a patron of commerce. He was also surrounded by the "new" aristocracy founded by his father. Even if the legend of the "empire" of Hungary washed by three seas during



the reign of Lajos is not quite true, neither is the view that Lajos wasted the results of Károly Róbert's long, diligent labours. In Lajos's time, Hungary was governed by a strong royal power, and it was only after his death, in 1382, that the strong links attaching the aristocracy to the king were loosened or broken, and that the falling into private hands of royal estates commenced.

Károly Róbert and Lajos ruled over Hungary altogether for eighty-one years. Their greatest credit was that while Károly Róbert managed to raise the country out of anarchy, preventing it from collapsing, and was able to strengthen it in ways based on both traditions and reform, Lajos I, in turn preserved and often strengthened these earlier achievements. Lajos also created for himself a name in the international arena, thus presenting the image of a knight-king in the eyes of his contemporaries and ultimately winning for himself the title of his great predecessor and befitting peer, László I, the saint-king of the Árpáds.

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