The Unique Holy Crown of Hungary

Article by Sandor Balogh

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One of the world's most unique relics is the Holy Crown of Hungary, also known as the Crown of _Saint Stephen_. According to Wikipedia, it was the coronation crown used by the Kingdom of Hungary for most of its existence. The Crown was bound to the Lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen, (sometimes the Sacra Corona meant the Land, the Carpathian Basin, but it also meant the coronation body, too). No king of Hungary was regarded as having been truly legitimate without being crowned with it. In the history of Hungary, more than fifty kings were crowned with it.

The Hungarian coronation insignia consists of the Holy Crown, the sceptre, the orb, and the mantle. Since the twelfth century kings have been crowned with the still extant crown. The orb has the coat-of-arms of Charles I of Hungary (1310–1342); the other insignia can be linked to Saint Stephen.
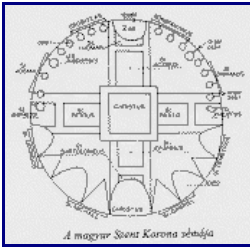
It was first called the Holy Crown in 1256. During the 14th century royal power came to be represented not simply by a crown, but by just one specific object: the Holy Crown. This also meant that the Kingdom of Hungary was a special state: they were not looking for a crown to inaugurate a king, but rather, they were looking for a king for the crown; as written by Crown Guard Péter Révay. Révay also suggested that "the Holy Crown is the same for the Hungarians as the Lost Ark is for the Jewish". Révay also informed us that this is the same crown that Saint Stephen received from Pope Sylvester II, and that there was a picture of the Virgin Mary on the Crown. This picture, and two others have been replaced by some

unknown persons, since they do not fit the available space, and it is obvious that they are crude replacements. The Mary picture was removed probably while the Crown was in Vienna, 1784-1790, in the custody of Joseph II of the Austrian Habsburg dynasty, who had refused to be crowned because it would have obliged him to follow the laws of Hungary. According to goldsmith Lajos Csomor, who had an opportunity to examine the Crown along with several other experts, the pictures of Geobitas and Constantinus, have been replaced earlier, during the 16th Century, so when Revay made his report, they were on the Crown already.

During World War II

The Hungarian Crown was taken from Hungary, and in the summer of 1945 it ended up in the custody of the American troops. President Truman allowed bringing it to the United States, where it was kept at Fort Knox, along with the gold reserve of the United States. In 1978 it was returned to Hungary on Jimmy Carter's order. So, for over three decades it was in the US, yet, the American public knew very little about this priceless treasure.

The most important feature of the Crown as an object is its religious symbolism. While most crowns have artistic and abstract decoration, the Holy Crown is full of religious symbolism. Many believe that although it was made in some earthly goldsmith shop, its design was inspired from above.

The scheme of the Holy Crown

Rear view of the Crown. The three pictures surrounding the blue stone are not original.

Hidden behind the pearl and the shield is the original picture of St. Thomas.

The front view of the Crown: St. Michael and Gabriel archangels on the bottom, Christ and St. John on the crossband.

Bottom left side view: St. Cosma and St. George; St. Peter on top; and St. Andrew on the bottom of the crossband.

Bottom right side view: Saints Demetrius and Damianus, and Saint Philip and Saint Paul apostles on the cross band. Saint George and Saint Demeteris are two soldiers to help protect the Kingdom. Saint Cosma and Saint Damianus are two doctors to safeguard the health of the king.

The picture of Jesus appears twice, once in the front as the King of the world.

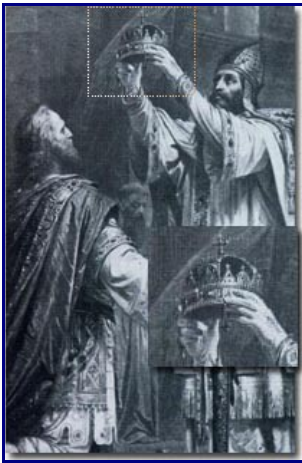*Jesus also appears on top as King of the Universe. In the center stands the cross.*

The Coronation of Charlemagne

There are two interesting paintings in Europe that not only complement each other, but tell an. interesting story. Ludwig of Bavaria was crowned Bavarian king in 1859. He commissioned a German painter, Friedrich Kaulbach, to paint a picture of Charlemagne's coronation. The painting would be placed across a painting of Ludwig's coronation. Charlemagne was the First Holy Roman Emperor, and is considered the Father of Europe, Pater Europae. The task was to show the importance and magnificence of Charlemagne's coronation, so the artist had to find a crown suitable for such a dignified event. There is a crown known as the Crown of Charlemagne or the Imperial Crown from the 10th Century. Yet Kaulbach did not use it.

Instead, he had chosen the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen of Hungary!

The picture is still in the Hall of the Bavarian Landtag.

Detail of the painting. Inset shows the Crown in some detail.

Full view of Charlemagne's Coronation.

The Death Bed of King Arthur

Also in the middle of the 19th Century an English painter, Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), was disappointed by the demise of the noble culture, Christian morality and values that characterized England of the middle ages, and the appearance of the various modern isms. He expressed his frustration by painting a picture, with the theme that the spirit of King Arthur is dead.. Of course, King Arthur is an invention that became the symbol of the good and noble in the English knights, and of Camelot, the Court where

virtue flourished. So he painted the last night of the dying King Arthur in bed, an angel at his head, and his crown was on the floor, in front of the bed. But Arthur did not have a real crown that he could paint . Therefore Burne-Jones, just like Kaulbach, had to find a proper Crown. I let the reader to decide if it was coincidence, or something more, that Burne-Jones, instead of picking one of the British Imperial or other crowns, painted the same Crown for King Arthur that Kaulbach used for his Coronation of Charlemagne. Yes, it is the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen that lies in front of King Athrur's bed. So, the Holy Crown and the image of the two kings symbolizes the beginning and the end of the medieval Christian civilization of Europe.

"The Last Sleep of Arthur" by the Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898).

Section of "Arthur's last sleep" with the Holy Crown.

It is interesting to note that the two paintings present the Holy Crown in detail, and the image on both painting is surprisingly accurate. It makes one think that in an age when photography did not exist yet, and the Crown was locked of under guard, both painters could paint such an accurate picture, when even in Hungarian literature one finds only simplified images of the Crown.

Saint Stephen offers the Crown to the Blessed Mother. Painting over the altar of Saint Stephen Church in Passaic, NJ.

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sylvain
October 7, 2013 at 9:14 am

Legend or not, Arthurwas not an English king, but the Celtic king of Britain, whos enemies were the invading Anglo-Saxons, the ancesters of the English people. The successors of Arthur's Britons are today the Welsh people of Wales, the Cornvallians and the Britons of Bretagne, France.

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Atilla

The painters knews something that right now we can`t know: Atilla made it one big empire,possible his son ,Alarik (invers the name,as the huns writings was, from right to left in that time:KiRaL~ KaRoL~CaRoL~CaRLe-MaGNe = Big CaRoL) became king of west ,even king of britain, that`s why we can`t know so much from Arthur,he came to rone from east with sarmatian/schytian army(C or KaRoL = KiRaLy (hungarian) = meens king)