

THE KINGDOM OF HUNGARY UNDER MATTHIAS CORVINUS: A CENTRAL EUROPEAN STATE

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The 500th anniversary of the death of King Matthias Hunyadi-Corvinus has provided the opportunity for consideration of the historiography of an important era in the development of East Central Europe during the late Middle Ages. The rule of Matthias in Hungary (1458–1490), and for part of the period in Moravia, has been characterized as “Great Power”, as “Renaissance State” (Gy. Szekfű), and as “Centralized Monarchy” (L. Elekes). These terms, along with the related “new Monarchy,” contradict historical reality as we know it. The Great-Power idea was used anachronistically, while the narrow definition of a “Renaissance-State” (F. Chabod) was fulfilled more in a rhetorical sense than in reality. And, the overrating of “Centralization” has little relevance for the case of Hungary and is also scarcely applicable to Matthias’s rule. The real successes of the king in military matters, his attempts to make the crown independent of the magnates, and the progress in administration and legislation were indeed impressive. In summary, author points out the ideological and political dangers of an unfounded overestimation of the past in contrast to a critical-positive evaluation. This, for East Central Europe apparently most important, problem has been recognized by enlightened Hungarian thinkers (Szűcz, Bibó) as the central question of national self-confidence.