



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation of

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on

The Cult of the Chaste Imperial Couple: Henry II and Cunigunde in the Hagiographic Traditions, Art, and Memory of the Holy Roman Empire (c. 1350–1500)

will be held on

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Examination Committee

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Dissertation Abstract

St. Henry (973–1024, can. 1146) and St. Cunigunde (c. 980–1033, can. 1200) are an imperial couple who, within a few centuries after their death, were invested with saintly powers and were believed to live in a virginal union. In the late medieval Holy Roman Empire, these saints were appreciated by their devotees as powerful intercessors, saintly founders, virgins, and imperial saints, while their cults became integral to symbolic and religious communication of the Empire. On an everyday basis and solemn occasions, through lavish artworks and printed images, during communal liturgical services and in private prayer, when narrating the history of a tiny monastery and of the Empire, multiple individuals and groups chose to turn to SS. Henry and Cunigunde.

When communicating with and through these saints, these groups and individuals constructed their private and communal pasts, embraced cultural memories of certain locations and institutions, expressed hopes for the future, conveyed political ideas, found solace and edifying examples, and entertained themselves. The saints' key commemorative center remained in Bamberg, but they were known and engaged with in other parts of the Empire, where contested and novel interpretations of their sanctity were offered, especially in devotional and representational acts of the Habsburg rulers. While the title of the current study is solely dedicated to St. Henry and St. Cunigunde, the study itself is not—as much as the analysis revolves around the two saints, it still discusses the devotees of various social standings who believed in, communicated about, or doubted the saintly capacities of Emperor Henry and his spouse Cunigunde.

The study reveals the “ways and motives of remembering” SS. Henry and Cunigunde, present on various levels defined by different types of communication and the actors involved. The potential of this saintly couple to be perceived as rulers, donors, intercessors, and virgins had a profound political and cultural impact, triggering multiple forms of commemoration and devotion, engaging various communities and individuals—from parturient women and well-off clerics to famous humanists and German emperors. Altogether, the research offers a new perspective on the history of the cults in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that has not been comprehensively explored

before. Moreover, the thesis brings to scholarly attention several unknown or under-researched texts and objects produced in the late medieval Holy Roman Empire, paying attention to their content, mediality, and circumstances of production and use.

The dissertation has a three-fold structure, with each part being further divided into two or three chapters. While the first part outlines the early developments of the cults and analyzes various literary and devotional forms associated with SS. Henry and Cunigunde, the other two parts explore the functions and impact of the saints in the milieu of private and communal devotion and imperial symbolism.

The first part—“**Becoming Saints**”—provides an introduction into the early history of SS. Henry and Cunigunde’s sanctity, from the first narratives hinting at their holiness to the unfolding of the canonization procedures, and overviews the development of their commemoration traditions in hagiography, history writing, and liturgy. **Chapter 1** observes the change in Henry and Cunigunde’s commemoration from that of rulers and founders to saints and discusses their Latin hagiographies and their most important legends. Moreover, the role of the Bamberg ecclesiastical elite and German rulers in promoting their canonizations is discussed, as well as the place of these newly canonized saints in the existing patterns of holiness. This part does not entirely fit the proposed temporal framework, but it is essential to review the early beginnings of the cults and the saints’ major hagiographic themes before proceeding with the analysis into the late Middle Ages.

Chapter 2 further follows the development of SS. Henry and Cunigunde’s hagiographic traditions, attending to their representation as virgins. Shaping the couple as a pair united by virginal marriage contributed to their joint remembrance, and such a commemorative scenario was later exploited by Bamberg clerics as one of Bamberg’s urban and episcopal symbols and was also used for several familial dedications as well as lauded in the monastic milieu. Further, the introduction of Henry and Cunigunde’s saintly images in the thirteenth-century historiography is discussed, together with the liturgical and devotional practices surrounding their late medieval cults and the cults’ geographical dissemination and imprint in material culture.

“**The Cults in Action**”—the second part of the dissertation—explores SS. Henry and Cunigunde’s functions as communal and private patrons in urban, clerical, and monastic environments among various groups, giving special attention to female individual devotees and religious communities. **Chapter 3** investigates the late medieval urban and diocesan cults of SS. Henry and Cunigunde in the Prince-Bishopric of Bamberg, bringing forward new textual and visual forms of devotion that witness the holy couple’s framing as the sign of Bamberg bishops and clerics, while monastic communities often furthered the local trinity of saints that also included St. Bishop Otto. Later, these practices are contrasted with the use of the saints as auxiliary patrons and their roles in the “imagined pasts” of other ecclesiastical centers and towns.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the functions of the saints in the monastic environment, in which Benedictine devotion was the most evident. The modes of engagement with SS. Henry and Cunigunde’s cults are explored in three female monastic communities as case studies for memory creation and maintenance in spaces and texts. Monastic communities also appear as crucial outposts for upkeep and enriching the textual cult-related production through their literary networks, through which the cults of SS. Henry and Cunigunde were introduced into a new cultural milieu in Brabant.

Communication with these saints was not always a matter of politics and affiliation since the saints oozed into individual’s daily lives as a part of religious experiences and sacral spaces. Therefore, **Chapter 5** investigates various contexts in which either of the saints functioned as a private patron and an object of devotion or antiquarian interest, also attending to the saints’ thaumaturgical role. As the analysis has shown, St. Henry and St. Cunigunde were often chosen as personal patrons in the areas where their cults were already institutionalized and appreciated (e.g., Nuremberg or Regensburg). The saint’s spiritual marriage embodying the celestial ideal of wedlock inspired married couples to seek their patronage, while St. Cunigunde emerged as a powerful patron of parturient women. At the same time, SS. Henry and Cunigunde represented the diocese of Bamberg and referred to personal affiliation with the bishopric or the cathedral chapter. In the eyes of Hartmann Schedel, acute with his knowledge of the regional and

imperial history, SS. Henry and Cunigunde, though clearly entangled with Bamberg and his personal devotion, were indispensable for the broader context of imperial succession.

The present study also brings up an overlooked context in which this saintly imperial couple was systematically employed in the late medieval period—that of saintly politics and rulers’ symbolic communication that occurred beyond the initial political circumstances of SS. Henry and Cunigunde’s canonizations. This aspect is discussed in the final part of the dissertation—“**Imperial Saints.**” **Chapter 6** provides a historiographic introduction to the scholarly trend of studying “holy rulers” and presents the image of St. Henry in imperial chronicles, connected to the concepts of the college of electors and the *beata stirps* of the Empire. Emperor Charles IV’s pioneering activities in deploying saints—including SS. Henry and Cunigunde—for imperial representation are analyzed as well.

Chapter 7 scrutinizes Frederick III of Habsburg utilizing the saints’ imagery—especially their royal and imperial implications—for his political representation, correlated with his private devotion and the politics of “returning” to the core Imperial lands from his Austrian domains in the 1470s. Moreover, Frederician devotion continued on a familial, or dynastic, level, as shown in **Chapter 8**: the veneration of SS. Henry and Cunigunde was later preserved by his daughter Kunigunde of Austria and had its repercussions in extensive genealogical and hagiographic projects of Maximilian I. Moreover, SS. Henry and Cunigunde’s imperial status proved to be attractive for several members of the imperial nobility.

Overall, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, SS. Henry and Cunigunde became recognized in their imperial, supra-regional status, devoid of unambiguous affiliation with a region or a community. Nevertheless, the cults, in their imperial signification, relied on a regional supply of relics as well as existing iconographic, hagiographic, and liturgical forms that were adapted and recrafted to suit these new communicational and representational purposes.

The study has contributed to our understanding of how rulers of the past centuries were apprehended in the medieval period, with sanctity being only one of the possible commemorative scenarios. Moreover, this research has pointed out the efficiency of

studying saints' functions beyond explicitly liturgical circumstances and researching the interweaving of "hagiographic" and "historiographic" knowledge about saints. Essentially, the study has revealed how SS. Henry and Cunigunde's figures contributed to the interlacements of the memories of the imperial pasts and sanctity across local, regional, and imperial dimensions, though being just two threads in the socially diverse web of symbolic communication of the late medieval Empire.

Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

PhD in Late Antique, Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Central European University, Budapest/Vienna (September 21, 2021 expected; GPA: 3.97)

MA in Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest (July 2016, with distinction)

BA in History, National Research University “Higher School of Economics,” Moscow (June 2015, with distinction)

SELECTED RESEARCH AND STUDY VISITS

Visiting doctoral student at the **University of Helsinki** (September 2019 – May 2020)

Visiting researcher at the **Institute for Austrian Historical Studies, University of Vienna** (April – June 2019)

Exchange student at the **Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich** (September 2018 – March 2019)

Exchange student at the **Humboldt University, Berlin** (September 2014 – March 2015)

SELECTED TEACHING AND WORKING EXPERIENCE

Academic Editor at *Vox medii aevi*, a Russian digital journal for medieval history (2017 – present)

Certificate Program for Excellence in Teaching in Higher Education, Central European University, Budapest (September 2016 – June 2017)

Teaching Assistant for graduate courses “Holy Roman Empire (900–1400)”, “Saints and Society: Late Antique and Medieval Hagiography,” Central European University, Budapest (2017–2018)

Teaching Assistant for undergraduate courses “English for Specific Academic Purposes,” “Europe in 500–1600,” Higher School of Economics, Moscow (2012–2014)

Trainee-researcher at the Centre for Medieval Studies, Higher School of Economics, Moscow (August – December 2012)

SELECTED GRANTS AND AWARDS

Award for Advanced Doctoral Students, CEU (2021)

OEAD Ernst Mach Grant for a research period in Vienna (2019)

Oxford Russian Fund (2014)

Award for research achievements, Higher School of Economics, Moscow (2014)

2nd place in the nomination “History” at the Contest of Students’ Research Papers, Higher School of Economics (2013)

SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Gisela of Hungary as an Agent of Christianization in Selected Historiographic and Hagiographic Traditions, presented at the International Conference “St. Ludmila — Women in Central Europe’s Transition to Christianity,” Charles University, Prague (May 26–28, 2021)

Wives and Widows in a Monastic Space: Kunigunde of Austria (1465–1520) and the Carthusian Monastery in Prüll, presented online at the conference “‘Remarkable Women’: Female Patronage of Religious Institutions, 1300–1550”, The Courtauld Institute of Art (January 29, 2021)

Narrating the Invisible: The Virginity of St Empress Cunigunde in Late Medieval Texts and Images, presented online at the 14th International Conference of Iconographic Studies: Iconography and Hagiography “Visualizing Holiness” (October 15–16, 2020)

Personal Devotion or Royal Abuse? Henry and Cunigunde as (Un)successful Saints of the Holy Roman Empire, presented at the AISSCA Hagiography Workshop, Rome (January 16–18, 2019)

Appropriation of St Lawrence of Rome in hagiographic and iconographic traditions of St Emperor Henry II, presented at the Hagiotheca Conference: “The Saints of Rome: Diffusion and Reception from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period,” Rome (October 5–6, 2017)

Otto III and Italian Saints: Emotions of Royal Repentance as Bonds for Communities, presented at the 5th Biennial Conference of the Society of the Medieval Mediterranean: “Communities, Imaginations and Emotions in Medieval Mediterranean,” Ghent (July 10–12, 2017)

Overcoming Family Disputes: Disappearing Narratives within the Ottonian Historiography, presented at the 51st International Congress on Medieval Studies in the session: “Narratives of Forgetting and the Forgetting of the Narratives: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Erasure, Revision and the Loss of Memories,” Kalamazoo (March 12–15, 2016)

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Peer-reviewed journal articles:

“Visualising the Invisible: Various Understandings of Female Virginity in Late Medieval Images of St Cunigunde,” *IKON* 14 (2021): 189–200.

“Images of St Henry II, St Cunigunde, and Imperial Holiness used in the Political Communication of Emperor Frederick III (1440–1493),” *Il capitale culturale: Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage*, 20 (2020): 145–175.

“Virgins on the Throne: The Chaste Marriage of Emperor Henry II and Empress Cunigunde in Medieval Narrative Traditions,” *Royal Studies Journal*, 6/2 (2019): 104–126.

Book chapters:

“Female Saints as Agents of Female Healing: Gendered Practices and Patronage in the Cult of St Cunigunde,” in *Gender, Health, and Healing, 1250–1550*, ed. Sara Ritchey and Sharon Strocchia (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 67–92. (This volume is a co-winner of the 2020 Collaborative Project Award by the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women and Gender).

“Confessor, Traitor or Prosecutor: On the Ritualized Relationships between Kings and Bishops through the Prism of Ottonian Historiography,” in *Thiddag: Intellektueller und Reichsbischof*, ed. Václav Drška, Jakub Izdný, Drahomír Suchánek (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2020), 87–102.

Other publications:

“Royal Penance as Quasi-legal Argument in Ecclesiastical Disputes: Representation of Ritual in Ottonian Historiography (919–1024),” in *Annual for Medieval Studies at CEU*, ed. Gerhard Jaritz, Kyra Lyubyanovics, Judith A. Rasson, Zsuzsanna Reed (Budapest: CEU Press, 2017), 35–46.

“The Migrating Legend of Saint Emperor Henry II: Representations of the Soul-Weighing and the Chalice-Miracle in Medieval Frescoes on Gotland,” *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*, 74 (2017): 28–56.