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Confraternity, Mendicant Orders, and Salvation in the Middle Ages: The Contribution of the Hungarian Sources (c. 1270–c. 1530). By Marie-Madeleine de Cevins. *Europa Sacra* 23. Turnhout: Brepols, 2018. 365 pp.

Surprising as it may sound, there is a group of medieval sources in which Hungary is rich: the spiritual confraternity letters. Although such letters are not unknown in Hungarian scholarship, they were not dealt with comprehensively until Marie-Madeleine de Cevins published a monograph in Hungarian in 2015 with the title *Koldulórendi konfraternitások a középkori Magyarországon (1270 k. – 1530 k.)*. The present volume is the English version of the abovementioned work. Like her earlier works, also this book is problem-oriented. The application of comparative methods making use of similar research in Western and Central European regions makes this monograph a fundamental reference work not only for those dealing with medieval religious history in the Carpathian Basin, but also for a much wider scholarly audience. The book also contains the edition of sixteen confraternity letters and various figures, maps, tables, and graphs, all of which provide essential support for the conclusions proposed in the body of the text. Chapter 1 is dedicated to the spiritual confraternities of the mendicant orders and a survey of the existing scholarship. Confraternity letters were first issued by the monastic orders in exchange for material benefits as early as the eighth century, and a new “mendicant compatible” form with a “*bic et nun*” character started to develop in the second half of the thirteenth century. Mendicant spiritual confraternities, based on the idea that the friars had to “pay back” the debt by providing their benefactors with the spiritual goods they had to offer, were particularly popular in Central Europe, especially in the fifteenth century. De Cevins ventures suggestions as to why, compared to other regions of Europe, so many spiritual confraternity letters survived in medieval Hungary. The Hungarian documentary corpus is presented in Chapter 2. The 125 spiritual confraternity letters examined were issued between ca. 1270 and 1530 by the four mendicant orders present in medieval Hungary. The overwhelming majority of the letters come from the Franciscans, and the rest come from the Dominicans, the Augustinian Hermits, and the Carmelites. Chapter 3 investigates the success of mendicant spiritual confraternities in Hungary. De Cevins explicates the correlation between the development of the spiritual confraternities and the rise of the Observant movement, and she draws deductions regarding the geographic and social distribution of the members of the spiritual confraternity. In Chapter 4, de Cevins explores the benefits potentially enjoyed by the members of the

spiritual confraternities of one (or more) mendicant order(s). They received a bouquet of spiritual benefits the size of which varied according to two types of spiritual confraternities: the “ordinary” and the “major,” which were available only to a privileged few. Moreover, the most generous benefactors could enjoy supplementary graces, such as burial within the walls of the friary, occasionally even in the habit of the order. In the heyday of the spiritual confraternities, as de Cevins points out, while mass admissions were not unusual elsewhere in Europe, it seems that in Hungary mass admissions were not practiced by the provincial superiors of the orders and lay confraternities did not join mendicant spiritual confraternities. The last two chapters are about the “uses” of spiritual confraternities from the point of view of the granters and the recipients, respectively. In most cases, the provincial superiors were the dispensers. In order to avoid being accused of commercializing salvation, they distributed the benefits of spiritual bonds rather moderately. In Chapter 5, de Cevins discusses the orders one by one, she seeks patterns or tendencies characteristic of them, and she also poses the intriguing question as to whether these letters reflect in any way the identity of the mendicant order by the authority of which they were issued. While in general it can be said that the *bona spiritualia* listed in the texts themselves tend to be more characteristic of the *devotio moderna* rather than of the spirituality of the individual orders, each of the four mendicant orders presents a slightly different view. De Cevins takes into account other features, such as figures on seals and occasionally other symbols. The earliest known Franciscan confraternity letters date back to the first half of the fourteenth century. John of Capistrano’s impact on the popularization of joining an Observant Franciscan spiritual confraternity cannot be underestimated in Central Europe. In line with this, we see that in Hungary, from the 1460s onwards, confraternity letters follow the archetypal formulary used by him. A noteworthy phenomenon highlighted by de Cevins is the great importance attributed to the autograph subscription of the dispenser, namely to John of Capistrano. The second largest group of the letters was issued by the Dominicans, who started to issue these documents as early as 1270, and by 1400, they had produced five other letters. The reform in the order brought moderation in the use of spiritual affiliation: the slow increase of the issue of the letters seems to have slowed down after 1500. Due to the number of extant sources, far fewer observations can be made in the case of the Augustinian Hermits and the Carmelites. What these documents reveal, however, is that in Hungary mendicant orders did not consider such confraternity letters an important instrument to promote their order or way of

life, yet the letters had an authentic and performative nature, which may account for the care devoted by the families to their preservation. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the views of the affiliates on mendicant confraternities. A precious source in this respect is the well-known Dominican register of benefactors from Segesvár (now Sigişoara, Romania) from the early sixteenth century. Of the 28 entries of donors, 6 were in spiritual brotherhood with the friars, all of them coming from the top of the social scale. The entries show that people tried to accumulate spiritual credits in several different ways, of which spiritual brotherhood was only one. The chapter concludes with three itineraries of spiritual associates known from the existing secondary literature, but this time, in order to estimate the importance of belonging to a spiritual family, the cases are presented from a different perspective: Benedict Himfi, Peter of Söpte, and Magdalen from Kolozsvár/Cluj. As a conclusion, it can be said that this book is a good example of how informative a group of sources which had an (almost) fixed structure for two and a half centuries can be when placed in the hands of a scholar whose experience in this field allows her to make the most of them, even if in some cases she can only make hypotheses which, however, can then be points of departure for further research.

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