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. xvii + 365 pp. €100.00 cloth.

A generation of scholarship has rescued late medieval piety from its reputation as the embodiment of crisis and decline. This book is another commendable contribution to that ongoing effort. Marie-Madeleine de Cevins offers a reassessment of the phenomenon of spiritual confraternity among the mendicant orders. This practice was one in which religious superiors extended to individuals and groups a portion of an order's corporate spiritual merits, the offer guaranteed by letters that outlined their terms. The phenomenon was long trapped in stereotypes, read above all as a marker of its era's debased piety. This book rejects such a simplistic and outdated model. Focusing on the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinian Hermits, and Carmelites in Hungary from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, it offers a thorough, careful analysis of the phenomenon based on that region's circumstance and its unique patterns of documentation.

The first two chapters frame the inquiry and its source base. Though a "blind spot" in modern scholarship, spiritual confraternity appears here as a phenomenon of conceptual and theological complexity, with deep roots in monastic tradition. Its eventual appropriation among the mendicants, however, has been ignored or approached only haphazardly, reflecting fragmented source bases and competing national traditions. Chapter 2 brings that problem into focus for Hungary, where a large corpus of confraternity letters has long awaited analysis. The chapter explores the nature of that corpus (divided broadly into letters offering evidence of actual practice and model letters) and some of the key problems surrounding their interpretation (hypothesizing that their exceptional preservation stems from the interests of the aristocrats who so often sought them, for example). It also offers a survey of their diplomatic form and function.

The next two chapters introduce the corpus and place it within Hungary's distinct institutional landscape. After an overview of Hungary's mendicants and the contours of its later medieval piety, chapter 3 turns to a twofold analysis of the confraternity phenomenon. The first, largely quantitative, details the fragmentary survival of acts of affiliation (perhaps 2 to 5 percent of the original number). The second, much longer, offers a "sociography of the affiliates" (94). Collectively, these sections suggest that spiritual confraternities were "the near-exclusive prerogative of the mendicants" in Hungary (86) and that "they experienced a success that was lively, that began early, and that had a remarkable longevity" (116). They also had distinct social contours, focused largely on the nobility (and, by the end of the Middle Ages, on the aristocracy), though with a certain openness to urban circles and women.

Chapter 4 turns to the "process of spiritual affiliation." It investigates the "nebula of graces" (120) captured in letters of spiritual confraternity, outlining a hierarchy of "minor" admission (which granted participation in the spiritual benefits of an order) and "major" admission (which added the benefit of various forms of commemoration after death). It then analyzes how such graces were conferred—not in ceremony or in formal lists of membership but in "made-to-measure" documents (138) that, while in one respect "boiler-plate," were also distinctly individualized. Careful reading of seals and other solemn material features renders the typical letter, convincingly, as a kind of performative embodiment of a spiritual bond, "almost physically the transfer of the grace

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that it expressed" (146). The Hungarian corpus also reveals how often individuals were taken up into affiliation with the mendicants as members of extended families—primarily flesh-and-blood kin but also as extended "household." Yet there were few "mass admissions"—of entire parishes or towns, for example, or, as in one spectacular case by the Franciscan Observant John of Capistrano, of all who heard his sermons. In the end, these many acts did not create strong bonds. The letters were markers of a "conceptual community," a loosely constituted group whose existence "paradoxically encouraged the growing individualism of religious practices at the end of the Middle Ages" (160).

Chapter 5 investigates mendicant uses of confraternity. It shows how provincial superiors served as gatekeepers of a process whose impetus very often came from the outsiders themselves. In other words, rather than revealing spiritual confraternity as a mendicant fundraising bonanza that inflated and diluted the spiritual value of their graces, careful consideration of these letters shows how cautiously Hungarian friars guarded the favor of affiliation. They did admit candidates for confraternity in ways marked by material exchange but always selectively and always wary of the charge of simony. Nor do the Hungarian letters reveal that the mendicants used their letters to advance their own charism or spirituality. We confront here a reactive, defensive stance. The management of bonds of confraternity was a burden to be borne, an energy to be reined in. Only when properly "corseted" (208), especially by Observant reformers, were the graces most effective, their potentially inflationary damage limited.

Chapter 6 turns the book's perspective inside out to consider the reception and resonance of confraternity among the broader population. What did these bonds mean to the people who sought them out? Here de Cevins turns to sources beyond the letters of confraternity themselves—to a Dominican register of benefactors of Sighişohara dating from the 1520s. These sources suggest how confraternity often occupied a middling position, its social profile stopping short of the extremes of either poverty or privilege. The chapter then fleshes out such structural observations with three case studies of individuals whose details allow hypotheses about them. Among these, perhaps the most revealing is the case of the widow Madeleine of Cluj, whose 1531 will hints at how strong confraternal ties could be for the identity of urban women.

The conclusions of this study are, like the study itself, carefully calibrated. The Hungarian corpus is unique, we are reminded, reflecting both the kingdom's dense landscape of mendicant houses as well as distinct patterns of preservation. The documents reveal a phenomenon that had, overall, a modest religious and cultural significance. Confraternal ties were only one stone in the "many-hued mosaic of solidarities" (248) that shaped religion and culture in Hungary in this era. And they were, again, one often grudgingly managed, not enthusiastically embraced, by the friars themselves. But even these measured conclusions reinforce our broader reassessments of the era. Confraternal ties are now more visible among the era's many other practices of piety. And thanks to this study's careful work with the sources, we have a model for reading them that is exemplary for its careful lessons: how to pay attention to the particulars of a complex documentary corpus; how, at the same time, to venture judicious broader interpretations that avoid easy dichotomies; and how to ground broad patterns of piety in particular geographical and institutional settings in ways that balance the spiritual, economic, and social.

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