

EAST CENTRAL EUROPE:
BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND THE ADRIATIC

OSTMITTELEUROPA: ZWISCHEN OSTSEE UND ADRIA

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The University of Debrecen
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Contents / Inhalt

ARTICLES / ARTIKEL

Katharina Kemmer: <i>Machtverhältnisse in Europa an der Wende vom 15. zum 16. Jahrhundert</i>	9
László Gálffy: <i>René d'Anjou in the Twilight of an Era: Last Prince or a "Roi Imaginé"</i>	21
Suzana Simon: <i>On the Manifold Identities of John Corvinus: The Question of Origins in Political Power Play at the End of the Fifteenth Century</i>	31
Zsolt Hunyadi: <i>Distancing or Breaking? The Relation of the Hungarian Hospitaller Priory to the Central Convent of the Order in the late Middle Ages</i>	39
Adam Szweda: <i>Diplomacy at the Time of the Breakthrough. Correspondence of King John I Albert (Jan Olbracht) with the Grand Masters of the Teutonic Order</i>	57
Alexandru Simon: <i>A Strange Year: 1513 viewed from the East</i>	67
Jürgen Sarnowsky: <i>The Last Year of the Hospitallers' Rule on Rhodes</i>	83
Zoltán Szolnoki: <i>Under the Shadow of Vendetta: Decision-making Situations in the Story of Anselmo and Angelica</i>	101
Tomáš Sterneček: <i>Ein böhmischer Ritter an der Epochenwende: Peter Doudlebský von Doudleby (* vor 1492, † 1550)</i>	117

Helmut Flachenecker: <i>Bauernkrieg in Franken 1525.</i> <i>Grundzüge – Begriffe – Ressourcen</i>	129
Giampiero Brunelli: <i>The Papal State and the Birth of the Modern Fortress: Innovation in Military Construction between the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period</i>	149
Renger E. de Bruin: <i>Balancing between Loyalties. The Teutonic Order Bailiwick of Utrecht and the Formation of the Dutch State, 1528–1648</i>	169
Réka Bozzay: <i>Europäische und ungarische Peregrinatio academica im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert</i>	193
Aleksandar Uzelac: <i>Some Notes on the Putsch Map (“Europa Regina”) and its Depiction of Southeastern Europe</i>	213
László Pósn: <i>Marktstädte in Ungarn an der Grenze zwischen Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit. Die ungarischen Marktstädte</i>	229
Attila Tózsá-Rigó: <i>Wirtschaftliche Ungleichheit oder ausgewogene Beziehungen. Das Königreich Ungarn im europäischen Wirtschaftssystem</i>	261
Dieter Heckmann: <i>Quellenerschließungsarbeiten am Beispiel des Herzoglich Preussischen Briefarchivs (HBA)</i>	277

REVIEWS AND REPORTS / REZENSIONEN UND BERICHTE

Zsolt Hunyadi: <i>Tünde, Árvai – Katona, Cséte (eds.), Medieviztikai Vándorkonferencia. Tanulmányok 2. (Studia Mediaevalia Itinerantia). Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi és Néprajzi Doktori Iskola, 2025. ISBN: 9789634907244</i>	293
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Gergő Németh: *Báthori family and Mohács and the History of Nyírbátor from 1279 to 1847 (Nyírbátor, 25 September 2025)*..... 297


Nicholas Paul Tayler: *Political, Cultural, Religious and Economic Transformations in the 15th and 16th Centuries (Debrecen, 27–28 February 2025)*..... 301



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Political, Cultural, Religious and Economic Transformations in the 15th and 16th Centuries (Debrecen, 27–28 February 2025)

This conference delved into a significant period in European history: the transition from the medieval to the early modern era. The specific experiences of Hungary, Poland, Italy, the Baltic East, and the Balkans were profoundly shaped by their proximity to the expansionist Ottoman Empire and geographical location.

Political centralisation and dynastic shifts typified this transformative period, with Katharina Kemmer (University of Würzburg) discussing power dynamics in Europe at the turn of the fifteenth–sixteenth centuries, emphasising Habsburg success in achieving territorial gains in the Burgundian Netherlands, the County of Burgundy/Franche Comté and the states described as the “Habsburg Monarchy”, Spain, Bohemia, Hungary and Croatia. Several researchers concentrated on the Teutonic Order, including Adam Szweda (Nicolaus Copernicus University), who examined how the Order instrumentalised the Ottoman threat to obtain diplomatic advantages in their negotiations with the Polish King. The Order was increasingly unwilling to fulfil its pledge to provide military support to the Polish Kingdom. Krzysztof Kwiatkowski (Nicolaus Copernicus University) concentrated on a specific Grand Master’s policy, Frederick Duke of Saxony, who was deeply embedded in the Holy Roman Empire, leading him to adopt a more assertive policy toward the Polish Jagiellonians, with a war with Poland seeming increasingly likely. Two speakers considered the Jagiellonians themselves. Attila Bárány (University of Debrecen) explored the Western diplomacy of Jagiellonian Hungary, asking whether Jagiellonian kin adopted a common approach, operating as Western diplomats suggested as a dynastic block, or merely as a “conglomerate of crowns”. He challenged the traditional narrative that considered the post-Matthias Corvinus Jagiellonians as overseeing a period of

decline. Alexandru Simon (Romanian Academy, Centre for Transylvanian Studies) examined the situation after the Peace of Bratislava (1491), whereby Hungary nominally had two kings, the Habsburg, Maximilian I, and the Jagiellonian, Vladislaus II. This presentation concentrated on the presence of representatives from Hungary at the Imperial *Reichstag*, with their influence over the dynastic agreements of 1515 and the political choices of 1526–1527. Individuals also had to negotiate rapidly shifting circumstances.

Teutonic Order decline previously mentioned also manifested itself in other manners. Dieter Heckmann analysed the Order's invaluable unbound records; numerous letters, invoices, official opinions and "journals" held at the Ducal Prussian Archive, one of Europe's finest archives, Renger E. de Bruin described the Order's declining influence in Utrecht, stressing the gradual nature of this transformation. The fiercely Catholic land commander, Jacob Taets van Amerongen, was a key figure resisting Protestantisation and sent knights to Hungary to assist the Habsburgs fighting the Ottomans, while the Dutch Provinces were allied with the opposing side.

A further main topic was diplomacy and adaptation to new realities. Suzana Simon (Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts) depicted John Corvinus's fractured loyalties after losing Hungary to Vladislaus II Jagiellon. John ended with three masters, Vladislaus II, Maximilian and the Republic of Venice, with the presentation examining the political ties of the lands governed by John and the Frangepans. Attila Györkös examined the impact of Charles the Bold's death in Nancy in 1477 on Matthias Hunyadi's diplomatic efforts. Having based his Western strategy on the Dukes of Burgundy in his struggle against the Habsburgs, Hunyadi now had to attract French support instead. László Gálffy (Károli Gáspár University) presented another case of adaption to new circumstances. René of Anjou's *persona*, part factual, part imaginary, blended the legendary attributes of a grand prince, King of Jerusalem, Sicily and Hungary while also suiting the needs of the new "unified" Kingdom of France.

Military innovations helped stem the Ottoman threat. Giampiero Brunelli (Pegaso Telematic University) examined papal bastioned fortification construction from the last quarter of the fifteenth century until approximately 1550, with bastioned fortifications *alla moderna* representing cutting-edge design. Europe's first regularly shaped bastion fort was constructed at Nettuno, with the design secrets being passed down orally rather than in writing. Ilona Kristóf (Eszterházy Károly Catholic University) examined

how the Ottoman threat was perceived by the Italian officials of the Bishop of Eger, Ippolito d'Este, and how a military response, a *banderium*, was assembled. An examination of the d'Este archival sources demonstrated how these efforts impacted on the episcopal budget. Zsolt Hunyadi (University of Szeged) investigated the relationship between the Hungarian Hospitaller Priory and its central convent in Rhodes. While it has been suggested that the Hungarian/Slavonian priory, also known as the Priory of Vrana, had broken away from the central administration, this presentation suggested that this could not have been the case, primarily due to exemptions offered to the Order's knights, binding them into the overall institutional structure.

Economic and urban developments also played a vital role. Attila Tózsá-Rigó (University of Debrecen) examined to what extent the economic relationship between Central Eastern Europe and Western Europe was evenly balanced. While Western European historiography portrays a fundamental imbalance between the globalising West and peripheral Central Europe, the second half of the fifteenth century was characterised by surprisingly balanced economic relations, with the Central European exporters realising high prices for their agrarian and mining products. László Pósán (University of Debrecen) described two types of market towns in Hungary: urban settlements on the Great Plain that specialised in cattle raising and owned vast grazing areas and wine-producing settlements in the uplands. The turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the Battle of Mohács saw few changes in the towns on the plains, with them developing further in an already familiar direction, while wine producers, forced to move from Syrmia due to Ottoman skirmishes, made the Tokaj wine region flourish, with its quality wines becoming more prestigious than its Syrmian antecedents. Upper Franconia offered an intriguing contrast, with Helmut Flachenecker explaining how asset usage reflected human existence and economic precautions. With no centralised authority, resource competition was concentrated in limited areas. Roman Czaja (Nicolaus Copernicus University) deepened our understanding of Poland's mid-fifteenth–sixteenth-century urban development. While earlier historiography claimed that towns were characterised by a general loss of autonomy and subordination to state authority, Heinz Schilling questioned this view in connection with German towns, pointing out that they retained most of their medieval characteristics. Polish towns were characteristically highly multifaceted.

Networks, religious, intellectual and informational in nature played a significant role in the transformational processes of the era. Antal Molnár (HUNREN Research Centre of Humanities) introduced us to a Catholic institution fully engaged in the social transformations of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Observant Franciscans (Friars Minor), forming the ideological backbone of the struggle against the Ottomans, due to their Balkan roots. It was their highly developed organisational culture and literacy that helped them overcome the challenges of the era. Their adoption of Humanist thought meant that they not only helped preserve Catholicism in Hungary but also introduced modern intellectual thought to the country. Religious and intellectual transformations typified the period. Religious change, the Renaissance, and Humanism introduced new intellectual currents, challenging medieval scholasticism and Catholic dominance. Protestantism encouraged students to choose distant universities in line with their confession, a process known as *peregrinatio academica*. Réka Bozzay (University of Debrecen) described Hungarian university selection strategies and increased institutional choice. Csenge Timár (University of Debrecen) examined Girolamo Priuli's diaries, a merchant family diarist who became a banker and member of the Great Council of Venice. While less known than Marino Sanudo, his works operate as a valuable control source, personally evaluating, among other things, the financing of Vladislaus II's army in Hungary in preparation for the Ottomans. Márton Szovák (National Széchenyi Library/University of Debrecen) used Marin Sanudo's diaries to analyse changes in Venice's information networks and the speed at which information on such events as the Siege of Belgrade (1521) and the Battle of Mohács (1526) spread to the republic.

Finally, the era was also characterised by scientific and cultural transitions. The scientific transition from the medieval to the early modern era was mirrored in the field of astronomy by the transition between university instruction based on *De sphaera* by the Englishman Johannes de Sacrobosco and the Aristotelian *De caelo*, whose theoretical foundations hindered the transition towards the new Copernican world. Jürgen Sarnowsky provided an overview of this challenging process. Geographical discoveries inevitably led to new representations of physical reality. While some depictions resembled reality, others depicted an imaginary world, such as Putsch's map, *Europa regina*. Aleksandar Uzelac (Institute of History, Belgrade) described the (re)discovery of an earlier version of the map than the Paris version of 1537, dating from 1534, now kept at the Retz Museum in Austria. Between the Middle Ages

and the Early Modern Period, an increasingly bureaucratic world, resorted to greater variety in the use of wax colours used for seals, including the wider use of cheaper green wax. Ádám Novák and Sándor Ónadi presented the new database, “Seals of 15th Century Polysigillic Charters,” under the auspices of DE TKP “The Place and Image of Hungary in Medieval Europe.”

Special thanks also go out to Déri Museum, and János Angi the Museum Director, who gave the participants such a warm welcome and provided a perfect venue, the Ceremonial Hall, for this fascinating conference.

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Aims and Scope

The East Central Europe: Between the Baltic and the Adriatic (ECE) is a peer-reviewed academic journal published by the Institute of History at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Debrecen. As its title suggests, the journal focuses on the history of Central Europe, covering the region between the Baltic and Adriatic Seas. This region was for centuries a crossroads and meeting point where diverse ethnic groups, religions, traditions, and political entities interacted in unique ways. In addition to studies directly examining the history of the region, the editors welcome methodologically and/or theoretically relevant contributions for the analysis of historical processes.

The journal seeks to create an interdisciplinary platform to facilitate dialogue and disseminate new research on the region, whose findings are often limited in international scholarship due to language barriers and the influence of national narratives. To support this goal, ECE is an open-access journal, published at least once annually, available in both print and online formats.

Zielsetzung

Ostmitteleuropa: Zwischen Ostsee und Adria (ECE) ist eine begutachtete wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift, die vom Historischen Institut der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Debrecen herausgegeben wird. Wie der Titel schon andeutet, konzentriert sich die Zeitschrift auf die Geschichte Mitteleuropas, insbesondere auf das Gebiet zwischen Ostsee und Adria. Diese Region war über Jahrhunderte ein Schnittpunkt und Begegnungsraum, in dem unterschiedliche ethnische Gruppen, Religionen, Traditionen und politische Einheiten auf einzigartige Weise interagierten. Neben Studien, die die Geschichte der Region direkt untersuchen, erwarten die Herausgeber methodisch und/oder theoretisch relevante Beiträge zur Analyse historischer Prozesse.

Die Zeitschrift möchte eine interdisziplinäre Plattform schaffen, um den Dialog zu fördern und neue Forschungsergebnisse über die Region zu verbreiten, deren Ergebnisse aufgrund von Sprachbarrieren und der Prägung durch nationale Narrative international nur begrenzt bekannt sind. Zur Unterstützung dieses Ziels ist ECE eine Open-Access-Zeitschrift, die mindestens einmal jährlich erscheint und sowohl in gedruckter als auch in digitaler Form verfügbar ist.

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