

ACTA NUMISMATICA  
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# ACTA NUMISMATICA HUNGARICA

## I

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## Reviews

Gödölle Mátyás – Pallos Lajos (Eds.): *Knights of Saint Stephen. 250 Years of the Most Illustrious Hungarian Order. An Exhibition Guide. Hungarian National Museum. Budapest 2014. pp 360. ISBN 978-615-5209-34-5*

An imposing-looking and richly illustrated volume has been published recently much to the delight of the members of the profession of museology, cultivators of the science of phaleristics and for all those who are interested in orders, decorations and medals. The exhibition guide presenting the history and remaining artefacts of the Royal Hungarian Order of Saint Stephen founded in 1764 commemorates the exhibition which celebrated the 250th anniversary of the Order in the Hungarian National Museum and could be visited between May and August 2014.

The volume lets one glimpse into the rich material of the – both professionally and aesthetically extraordinary – temporary exhibition entitled “The Knights of Saint Stephen”: the carefully selected relics of 25 institutes (including six from abroad) and numerous private collectors. The above figures and the studying of the catalogue make it even more obvious that this (regrettably short-standing) exhibition was one of the largest of all phaleristic exhibitions ever organized in Hungary. The illustrious Hungarian decoration, the Order of Saint Stephen was bestowed in large numbers to members of various strata of the society for a long period, therefore both the prestige of the Order and the social status of its Knights contributed to the preservation of numerous presentations and artefacts in connection with the Order. The material available perfectly enabled the creation of a rich exhibition, which was positively worthy of recording for posterity.

The 360-page volume aims at commemorating the Order of Saint Stephen; furthermore, it provides a wide range of detailed information for those generally interested in the history of Austro-Hungarian and Hungarian orders and medals. The studies making up the first part of the book will certainly be of help in that.

The first study titled “Royal Orders in Medieval Hungary” by Pál Lővei offers a summary of the precedents in the history of orders in Hungary. The author discusses the history of the Order of Saint George founded in 1326 by Charles I and that of the Order of the Dragon founded in 1408 by King Sigismund.

Expert of the history of orders, decorations and medals Ágnes Makai gives an overall account of the history of the Military Order of Maria Theresa founded in 1757. The significance of the study lies in the fact that the author offers information on the formerly less-known circumstances of the establishment of the Order.

It is hardly surprising that the most extensive study was written by Attila Pandula, the leading authority in the field of researching the Order of Saint Stephen. He gives a detailed 40-page review of the history of the Order (renewed twice, first in 1938, and then in 2011), and reveals a number of new research results. The author touches upon the subject of the manufacturing of the insignia; introduces personal items from estates; deals with the intriguing topic of the costumes of the Order; as well as the subject of the ceremonies of the Order. As he played an active role in the renewal of the Order in 2011, he offers an insight into the backstage secrets, too.

Zsolt Kökényesi describes the ceremonies of the Order. He discusses the social aspects of the Order of Saint Stephen, and touches upon the topic of Hungarian presence in the Imperial and Royal Court in his study.

One of the two curators of the exhibition, art historian Mátyás Gödölle analyses the works of art presenting the founding of the Order. With the help of the examination of art works the reader can learn about the political and social significance of the institution of the Order. An insight into the curiosities of the presentations of the founding Grand Master and the Grand Masters that followed is also offered.

The other curator of the exhibition, Lajos Pallos, expert of the history of orders, decorations and medals writes about the recipients of the Order and their social status in his study. The social standing of the knights of the Order and their national distribution within the empire are described divided into four main periods. He also gives an account of the proportion of foreigners among the recipients. One can follow how the Order became the means of diplomacy and how the practice of awarding reflects historical events. The study is closely related to the database at the end of the volume.

The catalogue, which forms the second part of the book, presents the exhibition material in a chronological and thematic order, following the concept of the exhibition. One can become acquainted with the exceptionally unique archival, archaeological, artistic, phaleristic, numismatic and bibliographical material arranged into nine thematic and chronological groups. The artefacts and documents are presented as a result of the work of as many as 31 experts. Most regrettably, the work of one of the authors, Sarolta Lakatos, onetime head of the Kállay Collection of the András Jóna Museum in Nyíregyháza, could only be published posthumously.

The last part of the volume is a true treasure chest: in the database all those are included who received the Order of Saint Stephen between 1764 and 2013 (since then, four more persons have been added to their list) and those who bore offices within the Order between 1764 and 1918. Additionally, there are figures reflecting the practice of award throughout the centuries, and two orders of precedence of Austro-Hungarian and Hungarian orders, decorations and medals from 1918 and 1939 are also included. A bibliography and an index help the reader with orientation.

One of the numerous merits of the book is the high quality photography. It is worth mentioning that the photographs of artefacts and documents presented in the catalogue do not only function as illustration but also as sources referred to in the studies. The large scale use, presentation and iconographical analysis of art works and photographs are truly remarkable. Due to the exhaustive work of the authors, editors and experts, one can follow the fascinating provenance of several artefacts in the catalogue, and at that point the importance of the thorough knowledge and the support of private collectors must also be underlined.

It is a great pleasure to be able to take in our hands such a high quality catalogue which will also prove as a useful phaleristic handbook and which captures the exceptional material and rich informational content of a brilliant exhibition for posterity.

*Gergely Pál Sallay*