

have also been helpful. These shortcomings notwithstanding, the monograph is a fascinating study about medieval Christian border regions and their political dynamics.

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***Medieval East Central Europe in a Comparative Perspective: From Frontier Zones to Lands in Focus.*** Ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Katalin Szende. London: Routledge, 2016. xiv, 265 pp. Tables. Figures. Illustrations. \$49.95, paper; \$145.00, hard bound.

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As Nora Berend subtly alludes to in her opening chapter to this welcome book, Europe, especially its eastern part—eastern, east central, or now central—today finds itself at a difficult historical juncture. Hence the importance of sustaining the interest in its inclusion into general medieval history and historiography, which was dramatically accelerated by the great breakthrough of 1989. This book is a marker in that project. Edited by two senior colleagues from Central European University, Gerhard Jaritz and Katalin Szende, it consists of fifteen revised conference papers originally presented at CEU in 2014, bracketed by an introduction and a final comment, authored by Jaritz and János Bak, respectively. The chapters are arranged into five parts. Part 1 is conceptual, titled “What is East Central Europe?” Parts 2–5 are thematic. Two chapters concern politics, three each address religion and towns, and four are grouped as “art and literature.”

Each of the seventeen pieces is succinct—an outcome accentuated by the inclusion of detailed reference matter and an excellent bibliography. The decision to squeeze a large amount of matter into a small space is the key to the good aim of the book, and the source of one serious flaw in the attainment of that aim. Each article provides a point of entry into a major subject pertinent to east central Europe. Each operates, or at least begins, at a high level of generality, pointing the reader toward big conceptual issues concerning the subject and its direction. Above all, each is resolutely comparative—within east central Europe, with other outlying regions of Europe, with Europe’s notional cores (the west and Byzantium), plus, occasionally, the globe. The articles are quite uneven, in quality and execution, in their descent from the general into the specific. As a result, some of the parts, and the whole, can be read as work in progress, rather than as complete—within their intended scope, finished—contributions. The effect is enhanced by occasional reference to collective ongoing research projects, of which we are presented here with a tentative moment.

Five authors are distinctly effective in attaining the complex aims of this book. József Laszlovszky presents an excellent, continent-wide picture of one aspect of ecclesiastical space—the norms and practices relating to burial in Cistercian churches—and situates in that picture their regional variations, and, as a case study, the gravesite of one specific Hungarian queen. Beatrix Romhányi interrelates the expansions of the population and of the mendicant network throughout the region, and so nicely complicates the intersection between demography, the Orders, and urbanization—within implications for Europe in general. Michaela Antonín Malaníková offers a textured study of a key aspect of the later medieval urban economy—trading by women—in Moravia, likewise in a broad context of the same phenomenon elsewhere. Julia Verkholtantsev caps her subject—eponymous derivations of the names of large political units (dynasties or kingdoms), made by medieval narrators—with an excellent analysis of conceptions of language and

reference in medieval Europe. In this collection's most successful reach across the globe, Anna Adamska masterfully treats phenomena related to literacy—its meanings, languages, alphabets, and material forms—and, in the process, offers exceedingly valuable comments on the method and scope of comparison as a project, across very different cultures, places, and times.

Two articles navigate toward the specific more tentatively. Katalin Szende and Béla Zsolt Szakács each identify an exceedingly interesting phenomenon, well defined and situated in several frameworks, but fall short of developing in specific terms the resulting comparison and its implications. Szende brilliantly observes the “grid pattern” common to cities and towns in medieval Europe and early post-contact South America, while Szakács selects the Romanesque church, as an architectural object—so as to recover, and map out, its presence across the continent, with the “east” now definitively included. Szende's demonstration of a similarity is intriguingly suggestive, but the suggestion is not quite clinched. Instead of a substantive conclusion, Szakács's presentation resolves itself into an unusually-detailed survey of international research schemes in progress.

The remaining articles present more serious gaps: (1) adoption of a large-scale analytical framework which seems conceptually overwrought, given the evidentiary material it serves to organize (Stephan Burkhardt's politics “between empires”); (2) identification of phenomena that are, without more elaboration, too broad for the book's purposes (Julia Burkhardt's late medieval “political representation”); and (3) comparison which seems either traditional or entirely familiar in its conceptualization or conclusions (Olha Kozubska-Andrusiv's presentation of medieval town types, Johnny Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen's information about mendicants, and Márta Font's roster of criteria of intra-regional similarity and difference).

The framing at the start and end of the book does not ease this uneven development. The book begins with the eternal conceptual conundrum concerning east central Europe: its meaning, importance, location, indeed its reality and place in “Europe.” Fifty years after Oskar Halecki, this problematic remains important. Unless developed in demonstrably fresh directions, it is also relentlessly familiar. Berend's puzzling decision to call the book's entire subject a “mirage,” expresses, yet again in her recent work, a curious skepticism concerning the reality of either this region in general, or of the best name for it—I am not sure which—uttered in a tone that is more didactic than analytical. Anna Kuznetsova presents a most welcome survey of the treatment of analogous issues in Russian and Soviet historiography—where the striking lesson is the enormous, tectonic conceptual difference from any of its counterparts concerning east central Europe—and thus from the rest of the book. Neither she nor anyone else engages with that difference.

Conclusions are a good place to bring together article collections, but here this does not happen. János Bak M. apparently meant to do so in his final comment (“What did we learn? What is to be done?” [254]), although consisting of exactly two pages, it is simply too short for this purpose—one which, moreover, he seems to avoid consciously by a puzzling refusal to engage with the individual articles (256n1). Thus, as well conceived as this book is in its aims and in their partial attainment, its literal last word is incompleteness. It is one of those rare books that should be longer than it is. Continued markers of importance of “our” part of medieval Europe—explicit, transparent, and above all carefully executed—are now of the utmost importance. I look forward to work by this community of scholars that is longer, fuller, and worthy of the authors' collective and individual distinction.

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