

Anna Kis-Kádi: Fabula Picturata: Epic Elements, Heroes and Power in the Miniatures of the *Chronicon Pictum* (Vinni Lucherini: *La Cronaca angioiana dei re d'Ungheria. Uno specchio eroico e fiabesco della sovranità*. Paris. Classiques Garnier. 2021. 460 p.+ 150 pictures [p. 274–422.]) DOI: 10.15170/SPMNNV.2025.14.16

Vinni Lucherini, a historian at the University of Naples Federico II, examines Hungarian-Neapolitan dynastic relations through art historical analysis. Her book, *La Cronaca angioiana dei re d'Ungheria* (The Angevin Chronicle of the Kings of Hungary), published in Paris in 2021, bears the subtitle 'a heroic and epic mirror of the sovereignty.' This subtitle underscores the epic and folkloric dimensions of the *Chronicon Pictum* and the chronicles' function as a 'mirror' for rulers.

Lucherini's work is organized into three main sections. The first (*Dall'Ungheria e a ritroso: una premessa storica*, p. 19–28) provides an overview of political history, focusing on the Neapolitan-Hungarian double marriage and Charles I's accession to the Hungarian throne. The Árpád and Neapolitan Angevin dynasties strengthened their alliance by marrying Mary, the daughter of the Hungarian rex junior, Stephen to Charles, the Neapolitan heir to the throne, and the Neapolitan Princess Isabelle to Ladislaus, the son of Stephen V. After the death of Ladislaus IV this double marriage provided the Angevins of Naples with legal grounds to proclaim their right to the Hungarian throne. After gaining support both from some members of the Hungarian elite and from the pope, the young pretender, Charles I, sailed to the Hungarian Kingdom in 1300, but could only become the rightful king after a long campaign.

The second section (*La storiografia di fronte all'oggetto-codice*, p. 33–43) addresses the manuscript's narrative, principal chronicle families, dating, authorship, and the significance of the *Chronicon Pictum*, its artistic styles, and its potential uses in subsequent periods. The third part (*La fabbricazione del codice e la sua ricezione*, p. X–Y) examines the manuscript's production, the narration of epic events, and the accompanying illustrations. These chapters are supplemented by a dedicated subchapter containing notes.

Following these sections, the majority of the book is devoted to reproductions of the manuscript's illustrated pages. Each miniature and initial is accompanied by a brief description and a summary of the events depicted on the folio. A dedicated section presents these illustrations in high quality (*Illustrazioni*, p. 273–422). The final part of the book provides information on the images' provenance, a thematic bibliography, and an index of names and locations.

The section analysing the miniatures offers new insights for both Hungarian and international scholars. Lucherini highlights the diverse representations of ethnic groups within the codex such as the oriental attire, long beards and hair of the Cumans, contrasted with the long blonde locks of the Western followers of the Hungarian kings. In the examination of the pictural representation of the royal thrones, Lucherini observes that only Louis the Great is depicted on a throne befitting a monarch, while other rulers are shown on simpler thrones lacking a baldachin and elevated by only a single step. Louis the Great's throne is described as a work of microarchitecture: a marble structure shaped like a *cupola*, adorned with geometric patterns, a canopy, and an elevated dais. The placement of the geometric forms at the top of the baldachin and at the king's feet creates an unrealistic effect of multiple viewpoints and gives an almost metaphysical dimension to the scene. The observation that only Louis the Great's throne is depicted in a superior position may reflect the dynasty's prestige, though this interpretation requires further investigation.

Lucherini states that, following Louis the Great's campaign to Naples, Neapolitan manuscripts were brought to Hungary and served as models for court illustrators. Some of these manuscripts subsequently travelled from Hungary to France during the marriage negotiations between Louis the Great's daughter, Catherine, and Louis of Orléans. The Angevin Bible and the *Chronicon Pictum* may have been made as gifts from Louis the Great around 1374 for the French royal family. Both codices included genealogical diagrams that met the requirements of documents produced during Franco-Hungarian negotiations and effectively highlighted the dynastic alliance between the two royal houses. Lucherini suggests that Giotto's influence can be detected in the manuscript's artistic style. Regarding the artist's identity, she proposes two possibilities: either a Hungarian artist who got familiar with Giotto's work in Italy, or an Italian painter who had assimilated into Hungarian artistic traditions. Lucherini emphasizes compositional features, particularly the prevalence of natural landscapes and geometric patterns, and also addresses architectural motifs, such as depictions of churches and cities.

The book's central thesis concerns the royal imagery depicted in the manuscript. Lucherini argues that the miniatures possess a fairy-tale, folkloric, and heroic tone, illustrated by several examples. These include the portrayal of animals as companions or substitutes for human heroes, such as the episode in which Coloman's soldiers castrate a dog instead of the child Béla, and the coronation of Géza I, where a deer appears with burning candles on its antlers. Lucherini also identifies the motif of talking animals, interpreting Prince Álmos's hunt as a fable-like narrative device. Although Duke Álmos was initially expected to inherit the throne, during the conflict between the two brothers Coloman gained the support of the elite and the prelates, and as a result, he was designated as heir by King Ladislaus.² Álmos, however, never accepted this decision and rebelled against King Coloman. The *Chronicon Pictum* tells the story of a hunt in which Álmos's falcon captures a crow. Álmos asks whether the falcon would release the crow if it promised never to caw again. His entourage responds that the crow, being a mindless animal, cannot swear an oath, and even if it could, the falcon would not release it. This motif aligns with fables, in which animal characters embody human characteristics, and behaviours. The episode in which Saint Ladislaus rescues a kidnapped girl from a Cumanian warrior is also interpreted as a fairy-tale, heroic element. This scene became a recurring motif in the iconography of Saint Ladislaus during the Angevin period in Hungary, as demonstrated by Zsombor Jékely's recent research.³

The kings, as the manuscript's protagonists, are consistently depicted as graceful, ethereal, and somewhat static figures, standing apart from other characters. This majestic representation is reinforced by scenes illustrating the divine origin of royal authority, such as angels placing the crown on Saint Ladislaus' head. Notably, the most ancient and significant symbol of the Hungarian Kingdom, the Holy Crown, is absent from the manuscript. According to the legend compiled by Hartvicus, the crown was sent by the pope following a dream in which an angel instructed him to send it to Saint Stephen, the first king of Hungary. The Holy Crown is frequently referred to as 'the crown given by an angel.' (However, historical evidence indicates that the Holy Crown was assembled in the twelfth century from two separate pieces.) Lucherini proposes

² KRISTÓ Gyula – MAKK Ferenc: *Az Árpádok – Fejedelmek és királyok*. Szeged. 2000. 142.

³ JÉKELY, Zsombor: *Szent László kunok elleni csatájának képciklusai a középkori falfestészetben* [Cycles of images depicting Saint Ladislaus' battle against the Cumans in medieval mural painting]. In: *Szent László emlékkönyv*. Ed. BÓDVAI, András. Budapest. 2021. 144–171

that the absence of the Holy Crown may be due to its sacred status, which could have made its depiction forbidden, or to the artist never having seen it. In the manuscript, the Holy Crown is described as a supernatural or magical object, comparable to a fairy-tale artifact. Lucherini supports this interpretation with the episode in which the crown, held by the Bavarian Duke Otto, is concealed in a small wine cask that itself functions as a magical object. The miraculous nature of this episode is further emphasized by the detail that, after Otto lost the Holy Crown in the wine-cask, it remained in plain sight yet untouched by anyone.

Lucherini assumes that *ioculatores* may have influenced the *Chronicon Pictum* through its numerous fairy-tale, epic, and heroic elements, both on the miniatures and in the narration, despite medieval authors' generally negative views of *ioculatores* expressed in their prologues. The exaggerated, theatrical expressiveness of certain characters—such as the chieftain Bulcsú's bewildered expression as he witnesses Lehel strike the German ruler with his horn, or the child Charles I raising his hands in astonishment—supports this interpretation. However, the claim that these features reflect the influence of contemporary theatre seems somewhat overstated. Such theatrical representation serves not only to legitimize royal authority but also to evoke a sense of wonder in the viewer. Lucherini also addresses the depiction of queens, noting that their portrayal is elevated, as with kings, due to their role in ensuring dynastic continuity. She suggests that Elizabeth Łokietek, as a possible patron, may have significantly influenced the chronicle's elaboration. In a notable scene, Elizabeth is depicted in a dramatic, heroic pose, shielding her husband, Charles I, from the assassin Felicián Zách. This episode is characterized less by a fairy-tale tone and more by a didactic presentation of the queen's virtues.

In conclusion, Lucherini's work highlights remarkable aspects of research on the Hungarian-Neapolitan dynastic representation, for example, the hypothesis that the *Chronicon Pictum* and the Angevin Bible may have been made as a gift to the French royal family. Its value is further enhanced by the fact that a comprehensive, thorough analysis and presentation in Italian has not been available until now. The book is undoubtedly valuable for the international audience as well. It enriches the manuscript's research by highlighting new aspects, such as the fairytale-like, epic, folkloric elements or the role of Queen Elisabeth.