



# THE HUNGARIAN HOLY CROWN



# THE PLACE OF THE HUNGARIAN HOLY CROWN AMONG THE EUROPEAN CROWNS

There are various traditions concerning coronations and crowns all over the world, but even within Europe numerous differences can be observed. Both in the Middle Ages and modern times, rulers have generally had several crowns for various ceremonies, including masses or feudal assemblies. Prominent among these was the coronation crown, also known as the inauguration crown, which in most countries was linked either to the dynasty that founded the state, or to their saints. In the Holy Roman Empire, the Kingdom of Hungary and the Kingdom of Bohemia, it was customary to crown the ruler with the inaugural crown. It was often the case that the coronation would only be recognised as legitimate if it was carried out using this crown.

The medieval coronation regalia of England were destroyed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, so only the crown of Charles II (1660-1685) is preserved in the Tower of London. Only a small part of the French regalia survived the revolution, which can now be seen in the Louvre. The Bohemian crown, known otherwise as the Crown of Saint Wenceslaus, dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and can now be found in the

treasury of the Cathedral of Saint Vitus in Prague. The Polish coronation treasures were stolen by the Prussians in 1795, who later destroyed them. In contrast, the regalia of the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire have – similarly to the coronation regalia of the Russian Czar – survived almost unscathed and are now preserved in the Schatzkammer of the Hofburg in Vienna. The regalia of the Holy Roman Emperor are linked to the empire's founder, Charlemagne. However, the imperial crown that has survived to this day was not made for him but rather for the coronation of Otto I the Great in 962, and assumed the form it has today in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The imperial crown is the only coronation crown to have survived that is roughly as old as the Hungarian Holy Crown. However, since the Holy Roman Empire no longer exists as a state, the Hungarian Holy Crown – the symbol of Hungarian statehood and legal continuity – is the oldest inaugural crown.

This undoubtedly confirms the unique nature of the Hungarian Holy Crown, which, like no other, is a crucially important relic of over one thousand years of Hungarian history.







# THE HOLY CROWN AS AN OBJECT

The circumstances of the origin of the Holy Crown have been shrouded in mystery for centuries since there are no written records attesting to when and where it was made. Moreover, a true-to-life depiction of it was strictly forbidden for centuries, and for a long time it was only represented in a stylised form. According to tradition, the crown was made as a complete piece at a single time in a single place and sent by Pope Sylvester II to the founder of the Hungarian state, King Saint Stephen, who was crowned either on Christmas Day in 1000 or January 1, 1001.

The Holy Crown, which weighs approximately 2 kilograms, consists of two main parts: the diadem and the darker intersecting bands made out of gold. The pictures of the former are accompanied by explanations in Greek; thus, it is called the Greek crown – or the *corona graeca*, while the intersecting bands bear captions in Latin; thus, in literature this part is referred to as the Latin crown – or *corona latina*.





*Christ Pantocrator*



*Emperor Michael VII Doukas*

## CORONA GRAECA

The 5.1 cm-wide band of the somewhat elliptic Greek crown is decorated by rows of Oriental pearls strung on gold wire, precious stones and enamel pictures. The upper rim of the front of the diadem is adorned by the image of the Pantocrator seated on a throne, i.e. Christ as the ruler, while opposite him is a smaller enamel picture of the Byzantine emperor, Michael VII Doukas (1071-1078). Lower down, flanking the depiction of Christ, are the archangels Michael and Gabriel, beside whom are the solidier saints of the Greek Orthodox Church, George and Demetrius. The series of pictures is closed

by the martyred physicians Cosmas and Damian, who watch over the physical well-being of the ruler. On the back of the diadem, on the two sides under the picture of the emperor, are his son, Constantine, and the Hungarian king, Géza I (1074-1077). The pictures were made using the enamel cloissonné technique much favoured in the Eastern Roman Empire. On the front of the crown — on the upper rim of the band — there are plaques that gradually and symmetrically diminish in size towards the two sides. The peaks of the plaques are adorned with amethyst stones, while the plaques themselves were made using



*Géza I, Hungarian king*



*Saint Cosmas*

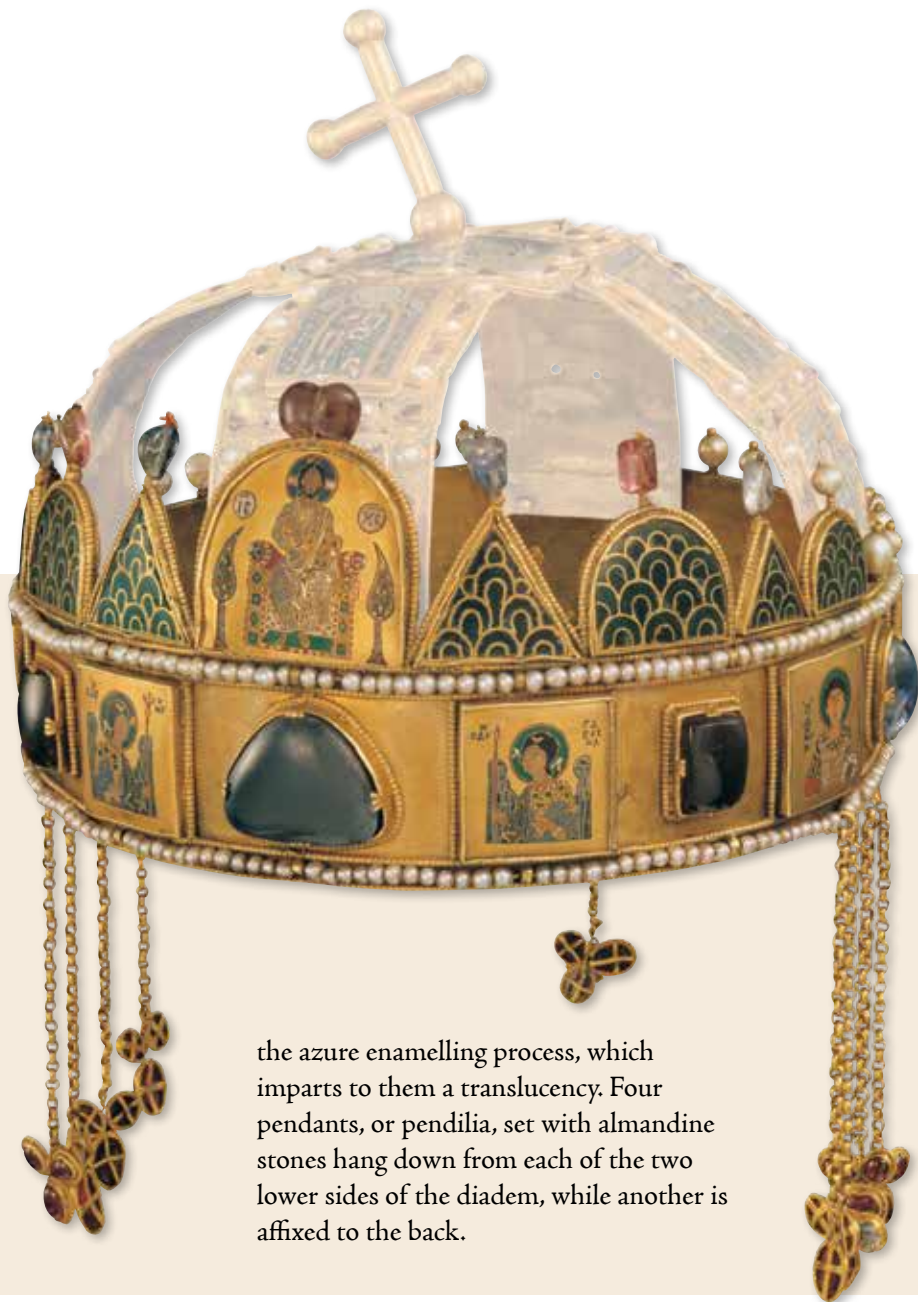


*Saint George*



*Archangel Michael*





the azure enamelling process, which imparts to them a translucency. Four pendants, or pendilia, set with almandine stones hang down from each of the two lower sides of the diadem, while another is affixed to the back.



*Archangel Gabriel*



*Saint Demetrius*



*Saint Damian*



*Emperor Constantine*

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