



*From Her Head to Her Toes:
Gender-Bending Regalia in the
Tomb of Constance of Aragon,
Queen of Hungary and Sicily*

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From Her Head to Her Toes: Gender-Bending Regalia in the Tomb of Constance of Aragon, Queen of Hungary and Sicily

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Abstract: This article re-examines József Deér's claim that the crown uncovered in the tomb of Constance of Aragon (d. 1222) was originally her husband's. His argument is based entirely on the shape of the crown itself, and ignores the context of her burial and the other idiosyncrasies of Frederick II's burial provisions at Palermo Cathedral. By examining the contents of the grave of Constance, and by discussing patterns related to the size of medieval crowns recovered from archaeological context, the evidence indicates that this crown would have originally adorned the buried queen's head. Rather than identifying it as a 'male' crown that found its way into the queen's sarcophagus as a gift from her husband, this article argues that Constance's crown is evidence that as a category of analysis, gender is not as simple as it may appear. In fact, medieval crowns often had multiple owners and sometimes a crown could be owned, or even worn, by someone who had a different gender than the original owner. This fact demonstrates the need for a more complex, nuanced interpretation of regalia found in an archaeological context.

Keywords: crown; regalia, gender; burial; queen; Middle Ages

In 1781, the tombs of the Sicilian kings and queens buried in Palermo Cathedral were opened up as part of the restoration and expansion projects of King Ferdinand I of the Two Sicilies. Inside the sarcophagus of Constance of Aragon (d. 1222), the first wife of king of Sicily and Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (r. 1212-1250), a crown was found placed at the queen's feet.¹ This crown is composed of a metal frame consisting of two crossed straps at the top, enclosed by fabric, and then dotted with various cabochon-cut gemstones such as emeralds, rubies, and sapphires, including a ruby inscribed with three lines in Arabic (Figure 1).² Current scholarship posits that this crown was most likely the work of Greek goldsmiths based in Palermo.³

¹ Francesco Daniele, *I Regali Sepolcri del Duomo di Palermo riconosciuti e illustrati* (Naples: Stamperia del Re, 1784), 80; József Deér, *Der Kaiserornat Friedrichs II* (Bern: A. Francke, 1952), 11; József Deér, *Dynastic Porphyry Tombs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 19, 79; Tünde Wehli, "Konstancia királyné a palermói dómban," [Queen Constance in the Cathedral of Palermo] *Ars Hungarica* 26 (1998): 11; and Alfredo Salerno, et al, "mtDNA analysis of the human remains buried in the sarcophagus of Federico II," *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 6 (2005): 314.

² The inscription roughly translates to "Isa bin Jabir is close to God." Almut von Gladiß, "Die Grabbeigaben der Konstanze von Aragon, der ersten Gattin Friedrichs II. Palermo, Tesoro della Cattedrale," in *Kaiser Friedrich II. (1194-1250). Welt und Kultur des Mittelmeerraums*, ed. Mamoun Fansa (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2008), 356.

³ Deér, *Der Kaiserornat Friedrichs II*, 24-26; Wehli, "Konstancia királyné a palermói dómban," 14.



Figure 1: The crown of Constance of Aragon. © José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro, used under CC BY-SA 4.0 license.

In the 1950s, József Deér completed an extensive study specifically on the crown uncovered from Constance's tomb. He concluded that King Frederick, distraught by the sudden death of his wife in 1222, placed his own crown in the sarcophagus as a token of his mourning.⁴ He based this conclusion on the shape of the crown, as well as on artistic representations of the crowns worn by kings and queens in Sicily, the Byzantine Empire, and the Holy Roman Empire. Deér's main argument that the crown is a masculine one lies mostly

⁴ Deér, *Der Kaiserornat Friedrichs II*, 56; Percy Ernst Schramm, József Deér, and Olle Källström, *Kaiser Friedrichs II. Herrschaftszeichen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1955), 14; and Percy Ernst Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik. Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte vom 3. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Anton Hirsemann, 1954-1956, 1978), 3:884-886.

with its form, a closed cap called a *kamelaukion*. This type of closed crown is usually associated with the Byzantine emperors, based on the tenth century *Liber Ceremoniarum*.⁵ This shape was favoured by Byzantine emperors until the final years of the Palaeologus dynasty.⁶ He supports his argument by pointing to artistic depictions of crowns on the heads of royalty in Byzantium, Sicily, and the Holy Roman Empire, reinforcing this rigid ‘rule’ that only men wore enclosed crowns.⁷ This article re-evaluates Deér’s conclusion from an archaeological perspective. There are two principal ways I will examine the crown found in Constance’s tomb. First, a close reading of the eighteenth-century report of the opening of the tombs in Palermo highlights several inconsistencies with the traditional hypothesis. Second, the size of the crown will be compared with other contemporary crowns—worn by both men and women—in order to assess whether the diameter offers any clues for identifying it as belonging to a king or queen. Ultimately, while Deér’s explanation for the presence of the crown in Constance’s tomb is more romantic, the evidence analysed here demonstrates that the queen was likely originally buried with her crown on her head: that it, this ‘male’ crown was worn by the queen when she was buried.

The Life of Constance of Aragon

Constance of Aragon’s life reached far and wide across the Mediterranean Sea. Born around 1180 to Alfonso II of Aragon and Sancha of Castile,⁸ she married Emeric of Hungary (r. 1196-1204) in 1198 (Figure 2).⁹ Little is known about her time in Hungary, although she is the first Hungarian queen to have details of her marriage contract known in explicit legal detail.¹⁰ After only six years of marriage, Constance’s husband died, leaving her with an infant

⁵ Szabolcs de Vajay, “Der Kamelaukion-Charakter der heiligen Krone Ungarns. Die typologische Rechtfertigung einer Benennung,” in *Insignia Regni Hungariae: Studien zur Machtsymbolik des mittelalterlichen Ungarns*, ed. Zsuzsa Lovág (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum, 1983), 102-105. Claudia Guastella questions whether Constance’s crown falls into the category of ‘kamelaukion.’ See Claudia Guastella, “Per l’edizione critica della corona di Costanza,” in *La Cattedrale di Palermo: studi per l’ottavo centenario della fondazione*, ed. Leonardo Urbani (Palermo: Sellerio, 1993), 282.

⁶ Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatsymbolik*, 3:885; and Paul Hetherington, “The Jewels from the Crowns: Symbol and Substance in the Later Byzantine Imperial Regalia” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 96, no. 1 (2003): 158-159, 162n19.

⁷ Deér, *Der Kaiserornat Friedrichs II*, 26-32.

⁸ Wertner and Zsoldos estimate that she was born around 1180; Runde says around 1182/1183. Mór Wertner, *Az Árpádok családi története [The Family History of the Árpáds]* (Nagybecskerek: Pleitz, 1892), 371; Attila Zsoldos, *Az Árpádok és asszonyaik [The Árpáds and their women]* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2005), 189; and Ingo Runde, “Konstanze von Aragon,” in *Die Kaiserinnen des Mittelalters*, ed. Amalie Föbel, (Regensburg: Pustet, 2011), 233.

⁹ Pál Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen: History of Medieval Hungary 985-1526* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 86. György Szabados, “Aragóniai Konstancia Magyar királyné,” [Constance of Aragon, Queen of Hungary] in *Királylányok messzj földről: Magyarország és Katalónia a középkorban [Princesses from Afar: Hungary and Catalonia in the Middle Ages]*, ed. Ramon Sarobe and Csaba Tóth (Budapest and Barcelona: Hungarian National Museum and History Museum of Catalonia, 2009), 170-171; Iván Bertényi, “Az Árpád-házi királyok címere és Aragónia,” [Royal escutcheons of the Árpád house and Aragon] in *Királylányok messzj földről: Magyarország és Katalónia a középkorban*, 193-197; and Imre Takács, *Az Árpád-házi királyok pecsétjei [Royal Seals of the Árpád Dynasty]* (Budapest: Hungarian National Archive, 2012), 69, 104-106, 166-167.

¹⁰ While Emeric was alive, Constance was to have the income of two unspecified royal counties in Hungary, though if she left Hungary as a widow, she would have been entitled to 12,000 silver marks. Most of these details

son Ladislás III (r. 1204-1205).¹¹ Though Ladislás III was proclaimed king, her brother-in-law Andrew made a claim for the throne of Hungary. Constance and her son fled to Austria, where her son died, leaving Andrew the uncontested ruler of Hungary as Andrew II (r. 1205-1235).¹² The widowed Constance returned to Iberia sometime soon after. She was the guest of her mother Sancha in 1208 when she and her two sisters (Dulce and Leonor) were entertained at a feast at the monastery of Sigena, where her mother was a long-time resident.¹³

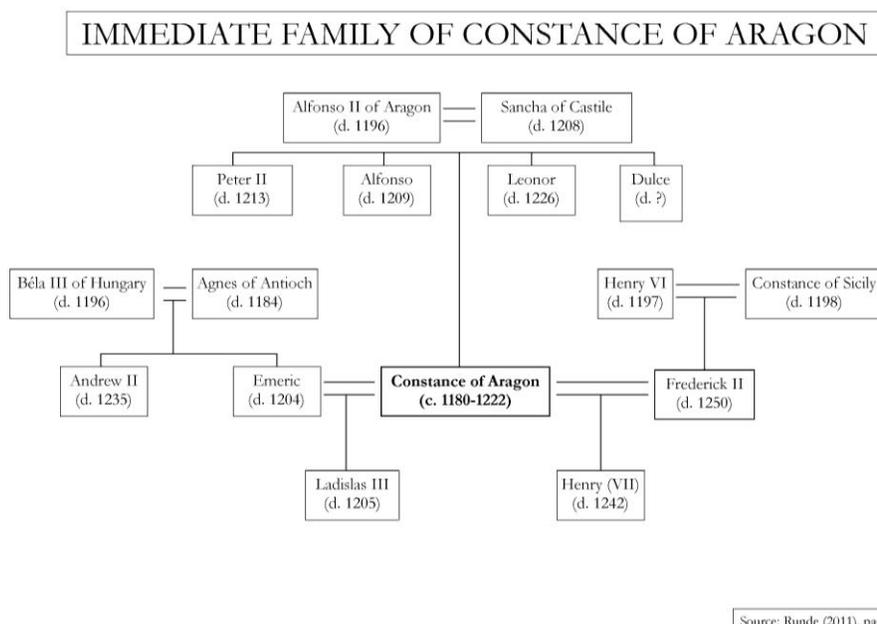


Figure 2: Family tree of Constance of Aragon.

are known from Pope Honorius III advocating on her behalf for the money that was never received. It is possible that Constance's Aragonese coat-of-arms was the inspiration for the Hungarian coat of arms for the Angevin dynasty, though this has recently been disputed. See: Z.J. Kosztołnyik, *Hungary in the Thirteenth Century* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1996), 29; Pál Engel, *The Realm of St Stephen: History of Medieval Hungary 985-1526* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 86; Iván Bertényi, "Az Árpád-házi királyok címere és Aragónia," [Royal escutcheons of the Árpád house and Aragon] in *Királylányok messzj földről: Magyarország és Katalónia a középkorban*, 193-197; Szabados, "Aragóniai Konstancia Magyar királyné," 170-171; Runde, "Konstanze von Aragon," 236-237; Takács, *Az Árpád-házi királyok pecsétjei*, 69, 104-106, 166-167; and Christopher Mielke, "Medieval queens and the Diaspora of Escort, Conquest, the Crusades and Military Orders," in *Military Diasporas: Defending, Shaping, and Connecting Power in the Euromediterranean from the Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Georg Christ and Patrick Sängér (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming 2019).

¹¹ Wertner, *Az Árpádok családi története*, 373; Zsoldos, *Az Árpádok és asszonyaik*, 189; and Kosztołnyik, *Hungary in the Thirteenth Century*, 29.

¹² Kosztołnyik, *Hungary in the Thirteenth Century*, 32.

¹³ Constance remembered the Sigena years later in 1217 when she sent documents related to her marriages to the convent. Agustin Ubieta Arteta, *Documentos de Sigena I* (Valencia: Anubar, 1972), 86, 88; E.L. Miron, *The Queens of Aragon, Their Lives and Times* (New York: Brentano's, 1913), 77-79, 130; and Luis García-Guijarro Ramos, "The Aragonese Hospitaller Monastery of Sigena: Its Early Stages, 1188-c. 1210," in *Hospitaller Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Anthony Luttrell and Helen J. Nicholson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 125.

In 1208, marriage negotiations began between the widowed Constance and Frederick, the young king of Sicily; the groom would have been about fourteen while the bride was at least a decade older. Constance landed in Palermo on 15 August 1209 for the wedding, accompanied by her brother Alfonso and 500 Aragonese knights.¹⁴ Early in 1211, Constance gave birth to a son, Prince Henry (d. 1242).¹⁵ From 1212-1216, Constance served as regent of Sicily while her husband was pursuing his imperial ambitions in Germany.¹⁶ It is around this time period that Constance appears on Sicilian coinage.¹⁷ Frederick's dream of becoming Holy Roman Emperor was realized soon after, and Constance was crowned Empress in Rome on 22 November 1220 by Pope Honorius III. However, on 23 June 1222, Constance died in Catania, and was buried in Palermo Cathedral.¹⁸

The Afterlife of Constance's Burial

While the rest of the Sicilian royal family was buried in porphyry sarcophagi, Constance was buried in a sarcophagus originally from the Roman era, made of white marble that featured a hunting scene. Her tomb was opened twice: first in 1491, and then later in 1781.¹⁹

¹⁴ "Fredericus rex duxit in uxorem dominam Constantiam filiam regis Aragonum, que fuerat uxor quondam regis Ungarie, quam duxit in Siciliam cum navali exercitu frater suus comes Provincie anno Dominice incarnationis MCCVIII, mense augusti." Fulvio Delle Donne, ed., *Breve chronicon de rebus Siculis* (Florence: SISMELE, 2017), 68-69; Most of these knights (including Constance's brother) would die of the plague shortly after landing, postponing Frederick's military plans on the Italian mainland. See: David Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 106; and Ernst Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194-1250* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957), 32-35.

¹⁵ Usually known as Henry (VII), he had been crowned King of Sicily in 1212 and King of the Romans in 1220. He is mostly remembered for his rebellion against his father and for spending the last seven years of his life imprisoned before riding his horse off a cliff. An analysis of his skeleton showed that he suffered symptoms of leprosy. Thomas Curtis Van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen: Immutator Mundi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 365-379; Gino Fornaciari, Francesco Mallegni, and Pietro De Leo, "The leprosy of Henry VII: incarceration or isolation?," *The Lancet* 353 (1999): 758; and Runde, "Konstanze von Aragon," 237-238.

¹⁶ Van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen*, 80; Runde, "Konstanze von Aragon," 238-240. Four charters from the time of Constance's regency can be found in Jean-Louis Alphonse Huillard-Bréholles, *Historica diplomatica Friderici II* (Paris, 1852), 1.1: 241-242, 253-255, 265-266, 282-283.

¹⁷ The date ascribed to coins with Constance on them is roughly 1209-1213. See: Alan Stahl, "Coinage in the Name of Medieval Women," in *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History*, ed. Joel Rosenthal (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 333. Jitske Jasperse points out that in twelfth-century Germany, women appear on coins most often when they are administering affairs in their husband's absence. See Jitske Jasperse, "A Coin Bearing Testimony to Duchess Matilda as *Consors Regni*," *Haskins Society Journal* 26 (2014): 169-176.

¹⁸ "Nam imperatrix Constantia, uxor eius, iubente Domino, mense iunii X indictionis de hac luce subtracta est apud Cathaniam civitatem Sicilie et in Panormo sepulta." Delle Donne, ed. *Breve chronicon de rebus Siculis*, 74-75. See also: Wertner, *Az Árpádok családí története*, 373; and Runde, "Konstanze von Aragon," 242-243.

¹⁹ Wehli suggests that the inscription on Constance's sarcophagus (right above the hunting scene) dates from 1491 as well. See: Wehli, "Konstanca királyné a palermói dómban," 14. According to Daniele in the eighteenth century, her coffin was opened up in 1491 at the behest of Ferdinand de Cugna, the vice-regent of Sicily in the presence of the archbishop of Palermo and several of the town's leading patricians. Sicily at this point was under the control of a distant kinsman of Constance's, Ferdinand II of Aragon (r. 1479-1516). József Deér remarks that Constance's sarcophagus breaks from a tradition of the Sicilian royal family being buried in porphyry and that her own sarcophagus was not of the best quality. See Deér, *Der Kaiserornat Friedrichs II*, 11; and Deér, *Dynastic Porphyry Tombs*, 19, 79. See also: Daniele, *I Regali Sepolcri del Duomo di Palermo*, 81-84; and Guastella, "Per l'edizione critica

Her body had been wrapped in crimson cloth adorned with pearls and gold foil, though only fragments had survived until the eighteenth century. She was also buried with an inscribed breastplate, belt decorations, the jewelled collar on the hemline of her dress, and five finger rings, only three of which survive to the present (Figure 3). Even strands of her fair hair were found when the sarcophagus was opened for the second time.²⁰ The most remarkable part of this grave assemblage was the fact that her magnificent Byzantine style crown was found in a wooden box at her feet in 1781. The box only contained the skullcap part of the crown, while the pendilia—which would have hung off it—were discovered on her torso.²¹ That the pendilia were found with Constance’s body, rather than in the box containing the crown, indicates that the crown was moved at some point. The most likely explanation is that the crown was originally placed on Constance’s head when she was buried in 1222, and that the crown was displaced as a result of the 1491 exhumation, leaving the pendilia either around her shoulders or next to her body.²² Déer’s theory that the grief-stricken Frederick left his own crown behind out of love for his wife is therefore best dismissed as a myth. I move now to analyse the question of whether Queen Constance was indeed wearing a king’s crown.

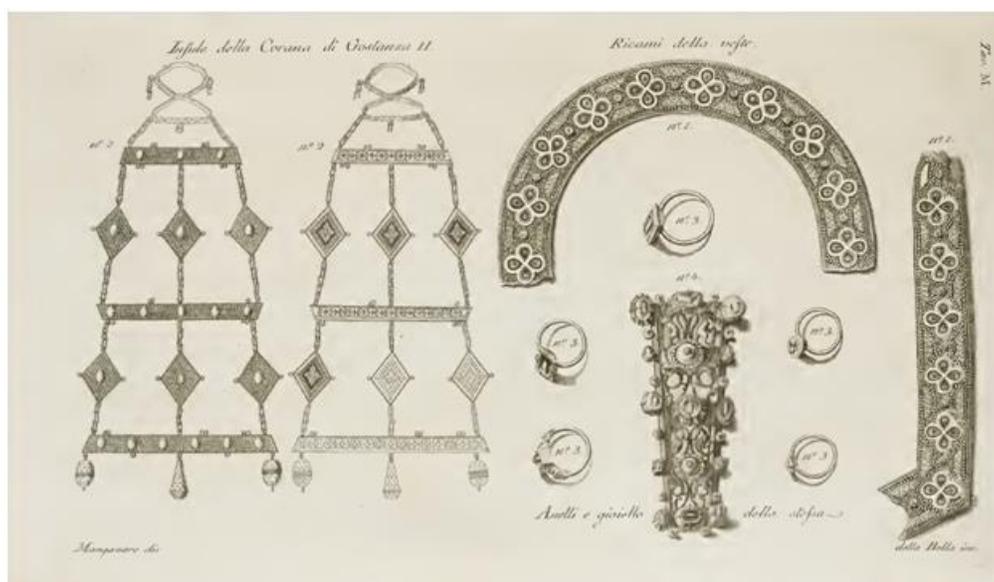


Figure 3: Pendilia, rings, and decorations recovered from tomb of Constance of Aragon. Source: Francesco Daniele, *I Regali Sepolcri del Duomo di Palermo: riconosciuti e illustrati* (Naples, 1784), Table M.

della corona di Costanza,” 274.

²⁰ The belt decorations were lost shortly after Constance’s 1781 exhumation, and only the crown, the circular breastplate, and three of the five rings could be found when putting together the 1997 exhibition at Palermo Cathedral. Daniele, *I Regali Sepolcri del Duomo di Palermo*, 82; Rosalia Varoli Piazza, “La fodera della corona di Costanza: un’ipotesi di lavoro,” in *La Cattedrale di Palermo: studi per l’ottavo centenario della fondazione*, ed. Leonardo Urbani (Palermo: Sellerio, 1993), 361-366; Wehli, “Konstancia királyné a palermói dómban,” 12; von Gladiß, “Die Grabbeigaben der Konstanze von Aragon,” 356-357; and Imre Takács, “*Opus duplex* in der Goldschmiedekunst des 13. Jahrhunderts und die höfische Kultur” *Ars Decorativa* 26 (2008): 11-12.

²¹ Daniele, *I Regali Sepolcri del Duomo di Palermo*, 79-82; and von Gladiß, “Die Grabbeigaben der Konstanze von Aragon,” 355-357.

²² This was the conclusion of Daniele after the 1781 exhumation. Daniele, *I Regali Sepolcri del Duomo di Palermo*, 84; and Wehli, “Konstancia királyné a palermói dómban,” 14.

The evidence suggests that there was not always a strict adherence to gendered norms for crowns at the court of Frederick II. In the early thirteenth century, Frederick moved two empty porphyry sarcophagi from the Cathedral at Cefalù and brought them to Palermo to house his body as well as that of his father, Henry VI (r. 1169-1197). The two sarcophagi had been made around 1145 at the request of Roger II of Sicily (r. 1130-1154).²³ While Frederick's sarcophagus featured a symbol of an enclosed *kamelaukion*-style crown, his father was buried in a sarcophagus decorated with an open crown topped with ogival points. Taking as evidence representations of Byzantine empresses, open crowns uncovered in the tombs of German empresses, and the way the queen's crown on the seal of Frederick's mother, Constance of Hauteville (d. 1198) was represented, Déér concluded that this open type of crown with rounded points would undoubtedly have been the type of crown worn by queens.²⁴ It is a solid assumption, and one that will not be wholly disputed here, but this clear-cut conclusion left Déér struggling to explain why Henry VI was buried in a sarcophagus with such clearly 'feminine' imagery, as well as why Roger II would have commissioned a sarcophagus with a queen's crown when his first wife had been dead and buried for ten years when he had it made.²⁵ What further complicates the matter is that the tomb of Constance of Hauteville is decorated with the enclosed *kamelaukion*-style crown, which Déér states is strictly only for male royalty (Figure 4).²⁶ If the gendered norms for headwear were so rigid at the imperial and royal courts of the Mediterranean world, then it begs the question of how Henry VI can be associated with a feminine crown without any problems, whereas Déér could not envision Constance of Aragon wearing a masculine one (especially when her mother-in-law was buried in a sarcophagus featuring an open crown, which Déér identified as a 'feminine' attribute).

²³ "Sarcophagos vero duos porphyriticos ad decessus mei signum perpetuum conspicuos in praefata ecclesia stabilimus fore permansuros, in quorum altero iuxta canonicorum psallentium chorum post diei mei obitum conditus requiescam, alterum vero tam ad insignem memoriam mei nominis, quam ad ipsius ecclesiae gloriam stabilimus." Roccho Pirri, *Sicilia Sacra* (Palermo, 1733), 2:800. A charter from 1145 refers to two porphyry sarcophagi commissioned by Roger II for Cefalù, but Roger was buried at Palermo upon his death in 1154 instead. Henry VI had also been buried at Palermo and his wife, Constance of Hauteville, had seen to the arrangements, though nothing specific is known of their appearance. Déér, *Dynastic Porphyry Tombs*, 1-3, 16-23.

²⁴ Déér, *Der Kaiserornat Friedrichs II*, 26-32; and Déér, *Dynastic Porphyry Tombs*, 170-176.

²⁵ Roger's first wife, Elvira of Castile, had died in 1135 and was buried at the Chapel of St. Mary Magdalene in Palermo, which would serve as the burial place of the Sicilian Queens and princes. It is doubtful Roger had this sarcophagus made with the intent of transferring Elvira, and he would not marry again until four years after the two porphyry sarcophagi were made, begging the question of who he intended the second sarcophagus for. A document from the canons of Cefalù indicates that they believed the sarcophagi were intended for Roger II and his son, William I (who was also ultimately buried in Palermo). Déér, *Der Kaiserornat Friedrichs II*, 31; and Déér, *Dynastic Porphyry Tombs*, 2-3, 7, 173-176.

²⁶ "The presence of both a *camelaucum* and an eagle makes it perfectly clear that the present-day tomb of Constance [of Hauteville] was constructed for a male ruler of imperial rank." Déér, *Dynastic Porphyry Tombs*, 79-84.



Figure 4: Detail of enclosed crown from the tomb of Constance of Hauteville (d. 1198). © José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro, used under CC BY-SA 4.0 license.



Figure 5: Reliquary of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, c. 1236. Swedish History Museum, 41345. Photo by Ola Myrin, used under CC BY 2.5 SE license.

Finally, there are Frederick's own relationships with other crowns to consider. In 1236, while visiting the shrine of St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231), Frederick II donated a crown from his own treasury to adorn the reliquary of the royal saint (Figure 5).²⁷ This crown—a jewelled band topped with lilies and crossed by bands—bears a remarkable similarity to the crown found in Frederick's tomb when it was opened in 1781.²⁸ These later crowns seem to indicate a shift in artistic taste at the Sicilian court. The crown of St. Elizabeth's reliquary and the crown Frederick is buried with show more of a western influence, while Constance's earlier crown appears to be more influenced by Byzantine artistic tradition. While the possibility that Constance's crown was made for the imperial coronation in Rome in 1220 has been raised before, if it were an older crown used as a burial item at the end of its life, it would fit with a pattern of lesser-quality objects being deposited with a royal body.²⁹ Even if Constance of Aragon's burial reflects only the agency of Frederick II, it does not change the fact that a closed crown, traditionally associated with men, was buried on a queen's head. Either Constance was very much an exception, or the *kamelaukion's* gender association was more fluid at the Sicilian court than in Byzantium proper.

²⁷ This artefact is currently at the Swedish History Museum, Stockholm. See: Schramm, Deér, and Källström, *Kaiser Friedrichs II. Herrschaftszeichen*, 14; and Guastella, "Per l'edizione critica della corona di Costanza," 270, 279.

²⁸ Daniele, *I Regali Sepolcri del Duomo di Palermo*, Table Q.

²⁹ This is evidenced by a great number of gilt crowns and gilt items with wooden cores from the eleventh through fourteenth centuries. See: Edward F. Twining, *European Regalia* (London: Batsford, 1967), 291, 303-307; Guastella, "Per l'edizione critica della corona di Costanza," 279-283; and Wehli, "Konstancia királyné a palermói dómban," 14.



Figure 6: The Holy Crown of Hungary. Public Domain, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Crown_of_Hungary#/media/File:A_Szent_Korona_el%C3%B6l%C5%911_2.jpg.

‘Male’ versus ‘Female’ Crowns: The Question of Diameter

The problem of identifying whether a crown belonged on the head of a king or queen is not as straightforward as it may initially seem. The example of the Holy Crown of Hungary shows how a crown created with a certain sex in mind can morph and change over time (Figure 6). This particular crown is composed of two parts: an open circlet on the bottom made of enamelled plates with Greek inscriptions and jewels (known as the *corona graeca*), while the upper part (the *corona latina*) is made of two bands that form a cross made up of enamels with Latin inscriptions featuring eight of the twelve apostles.³⁰ The lower part of the Holy

³⁰ The *corona latina* seems to have had its origins either as a reliquary or as an *asteriskos* (a covering for the Eucharist). Since four of the twelve apostles are missing, it has been argued that it was originally part of another piece. Éva Kovács and Zsuzsa Lovag, *The Hungarian Crown and Other Regalia* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1980), 54; Endre Tóth and Károly Szelényi, *The Holy Crown of Hungary: Kings and Coronations* (Budapest: Kossuth Publishing,

Crown (the *corona graeca*) most probably came to Hungary as part of the trousseau of the Byzantine wife of the eleventh-century Hungarian king Géza I (r. 1074-1077).³¹ It is only in the later twelfth or thirteenth centuries that this crown takes on its role as the sacred diadem, which was necessary to crown the legitimate king of Hungary. The main argument that it was originally a woman's crown focuses on its larger diameter (likely necessitated by elaborate hairstyles), as well as the pinnacles on the top of the crown that only appear on Byzantine women's crowns.³² The lower part of the crown is adorned with enamel portraits of the Byzantine Emperors Michael VII and Constantine Porphyrogenetos, as well as King Géza I, indicating that it would have been worn by a woman as Byzantine royal women wore portraits of the emperors to implicitly suggest an allegiance to those whose image is depicted.³³ Deér even suggested that since the lower part of the crown is unquestionably meant for a woman's head, it could have been made for the head of Agnes of Antioch (d. 1184), wife of Béla III of Hungary (r. 1173-1196).³⁴ Nonetheless, by the thirteenth century, the Holy Crown of Hungary—in spite of its origins as a queen's crown—was undoubtedly used to crown the kings of Hungary. While the earliest references to regalia of St. Stephen I of Hungary (r. 1000-1038) date from the 1240s, it is clear that by the reign of Andrew III (r. 1290-1301), this crown was believed to have belonged to St. Stephen himself.³⁵ This queen's crown had transformed not only into a king's crown, but has even become *the* king's crown.

2000), 18-24; and Zsuzsa Lovag, "L'intégration de la couronne latine et la couronne grecque" *Acta Historiae Artium* 43 (2002): 62-71.

³¹ The niece of Byzantine Emperor Nikephoros III Botaniates (r. 1078-1081), this queen is usually called "Synadene" in the secondary literature, after her family name Synadenos. Kiss suggests the possibility that the crown was originally made for a Byzantine empress and then modified for Géza I. See: Etele Kiss, "La 'couronne grecque' dans son contexte," *Acta Historiae Artium* 43 (2002): 47-48. See also: Wertner, *Az Árpádok családi története*, 18-189; Raimund Kerbl, "Byzantinische Prinzessinnen in Ungarn zwischen 1050-1200 und ihr Einfluß auf das Árpáden-königreich" (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 1979), 20-25; Szabolcs de Vajay, "Byzantinische Prinzessinnen in Ungarn" *Ungarn Jahrbuch* 10 (1979): 17-18; and János M. Bak, "Holy Lance, Holy Crown, Holy Dexter: Sanctity of Insignia in Medieval East Central Europe," in *Studying Medieval Rulers and Their Subjects: Central Europe and Beyond*, ed. Balázs Nagy and Gábor Klaniczay (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 58.

³² Magda Bárány-Oberschall, *Die Sankt Stephans-Krone und die Insignien des Königreichs Ungarn* (Vienna: Herold, 1961), 43-44, 63-76; and Jozsef Deér, *Die Heilige Krone Ungarns* (Vienna: Hermann Böhlau, 1966), 62, 79.

³³ The Byzantine emperors are in the most prominent position while Géza is on the rear. Not all scholars agree with this theory that the crown was made for the wife of Géza I; some observe that the pinnacles and some of the enamels might have been added at a later date. See: Szabolcs de Vajay, "Corona Regia – Corona Regni – Sacra Corona: Königskronen und Kronensymbolik im mittelalterlichen Ungarn," *Ungarn Jahrbuch* 7 (1976): 47-48, 56; David Buckton, "The Holy Crown in the History of Enamelling" *Acta Historiae Artium* 43 (2002): 14-20; and Cecily Hilsdale, "The Social Life of the Byzantine Gift: The Royal Crown of Hungary Re-invented" *Art History* 31, no. 5 (2008): 614-618.

³⁴ Deér, *Die Heilige Krone Ungarns*, 67-68. Vajay adds that the enamels on the upper crown could have come from an object owned by Agnes as the blended Latin, Byzantine, and Arab motifs seem to indicate a Crusader connection, though he refused to believe that the lower part of the crown was ever meant for a queen. See: Vajay, "Corona Regia," 56.

³⁵ Erik Fügedi, "Coronation in Medieval Hungary" *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 3 (1980): 179; and Bak, "Holy Lance, Holy Crown, Holy Dexter," 60.



Figure 7: Crown from Margaret Island, Budapest (Hungary). Source: Hungarian National Museum (Inventory Number 1847.43.a)

Another Hungarian crown—a burial crown like the one found in Constance’s tomb—further demonstrates the problems with strict interpretations relying on gendered tropes, especially when there are numerous candidates of both sexes who could have been buried with it. An open circlet crown from the end of the thirteenth century was discovered at the Dominican nunnery at Margaret Island in Budapest (Figure 7). It has usually been attributed to the Hungarian king Stephen V (r. 1270-1272), but other potential owners of this burial crown include his wife, Elizabeth the Cuman (d. 1290?); his brother, Béla, Duke of Slavonia (d. 1269); his sister Anna, Duchess of Halich (d. after 1274); his daughter-in-law, Isabella of Naples (d. 1303); Fenenna of Kujavia (d. 1295), the first wife of Andrew III (r. 1290-1301); or Tomasina Morosini (d. 1311/1315), the mother of Andrew III.³⁶ Considering that Isabella of Naples, Fenenna of Kujavia, and Tomasina Morosini were all buried outside of Hungary,³⁷ that Béla of

³⁶ Erzsébet Vattai, “A margitszigeti korona” *Budapest Régiségei* 18 (1958): 200-202; Rózsa Feuerné-Tóth, “V. István király sírja a Margitszigeti domonkos apácakolostor templomában” [The Grave of King Stephen V in the Dominican nunnery of Margaret Island], *Budapest Régiségei* 21 (1964): 115-118; Erzsébet Vattai, “A Margitszigeti korona és gyűrű” [The crown and the ring from Margaret Island] *Folia Archaeologica* 18 (1966-1967): 131-134.

³⁷ Ildikó Hankó, *A Magyar királysírok sorsa: Géza fejedelemtől Szapolyai Jánosig* [The fate of the royal Hungarian graves: from Prince Géza to John Szapolyai] (Budapest: Magyar Ház, 1987), 137; Caroline Bruzelius, *The Stones of Naples: Church Building in Anger in Italy, 1266-1343* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 99; Kosztolnyik. *Hungary in*

Slavonia was buried in Esztergom,³⁸ and the crown was likely found far from the gravesite of Stephen V,³⁹ this leaves Elizabeth the Cuman and Anna of Halich as the people most likely connected with this crown, even though there is no concrete evidence from the contemporary record that either was buried on Margaret Island. Since the fourteenth century *Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle* mentions that Stephen V was indeed buried at the monastery,⁴⁰ scholars have interpreted this archaeological find solely through this lens, rather than questioning why the owner of this crown has to necessarily be male.

In order to more solidly identify the owner of the crown, Rózsa Feuerné-Tóth measured the diameters of known ‘male’ and ‘female’ crowns in the 1960s, and compared the results to the crown from Margaret Island (Table 1).⁴¹ In the crowns she sampled from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, she found that male crowns tended to be somewhere around 20cm in diameter, while female crowns tended to be slightly smaller, such as in the case of the burial crowns of Agnes of Antioch or Gertrude of Hohenburg. However, looking at the bigger picture provides a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the size of a crown’s diameter and the biological (or assumed) sex of the person who wore it. The most immediately obvious pattern evident is that crowns in the eleventh century are much bigger than crowns that date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This is one of the reasons why the diameter of the lower part of the Holy Crown of Hungary (20.9-21.8cm) compares more readily with the crown of Gisela of Swabia (24cm), while a century later, the burial crown of Béla III (a man who towered at 186cm) measures only 21.3cm.⁴² The crowns of queens were so large in the eleventh century due to a very simple fact: they were meant to fit over an elaborate hairstyle and veil.⁴³

the Thirteenth Century, 296; Martin Štefánik, “The Morosinis in Hungary under King Andrew III and the two versions of the death of the Queen of Hungary Tommasina,” *Historickýčasopis* 56 (2008): 12-15.

³⁸ Hankó, *A Magyar királyi sorsa*, 136; Kosztolnyik, *Hungary in the Thirteenth Century*, 248

³⁹ Feuerné-Tóth, “V. István király sírja”: 118-125; Erzsébet Vattai, “A Margitszigeti korona és gyűrű”: 126-128.

⁴⁰ “[Stephen V] reigned for two years, and he died in the third year of his reign on the Great Island; he is buried in the church of the Blessed Virgin on the island of Buda, at the place of the Beguines.” Dezső Dercsényi, ed. *The Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1969), 141.

⁴¹ Feuerné-Tóth, “V. István király sírja,” 119.

⁴² Béla Czobor, “III. Béla és hitvese ékszerai,” [Jewels of Béla III and his wife], in *III. Béla Magyar király emlékezete*, [The Memory of the Hungarian king Béla III], ed. Gyula Forster (Budapest: Hornyánszky V, 1900), 216-217; Gábor Hutai, “III. Béla király és Antiochiai Anna sírleteinek restaurálásairól” [The restoration of the findings from the graves of King Béla III and Anna of Antioch] in *150 évetörtént... III. Béla és Antiochiai Anna sírjának fellelése*, ed. Vajk Cserményi (Székesfehérvár: Szent István Király Múzeum, 1999), 54-58; and Kinga Éry, et al. *A Székesfehérvári királyi bazilika embertani leletei 1848-2002* [The Human Remains of the Royal Basilica of Székesfehérvár, 1848-2002] (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2008), 573-574.

⁴³ Deér, *Die Heilige Krone Ungarns*, 76-77; János M. Bak, “Roles and Functions of Queens in Árpáadian and Angevin Hungary (1000-1386 A.D.),” in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1993), 21.

| Owner | Year of death | Diameter | Notes |
|---|---------------|---------------|--|
| Conrad II of Germany | 1039 | 21cm | |
| Gisela of Swabia | 1043 | 24cm | |
| Henry III of Germany | 1056 | 22.5cm | |
| <i>Corona graeca</i> of the Holy Crown of Hungary | 1070s | 20.9-21.8cm | Gift to the wife of Géza I (r. 1074-1077) |
| Henry IV of Germany | 1106 | 21cm | |
| Richenza of Northeim | 1141 | 19.7cm | Currently in the Braunschweigisches Landesmuseum |
| Agnes of Antioch | 1184 | 18-19.5cm | |
| Béla III of Hungary | 1196 | 21.3cm | |
| Constance of Aragon | 1222 | 18.5cm | Measurement from von Gladiß (2008). |
| Reliquary Crown of St. Elizabeth of Hungary (Stockholm) | c.1236 | 24cm | Guastella (1993), 279. |
| Crown from Margaret Island | 13th century | 17cm | Attributed to Stephen V of Hungary. |
| Gertrude of Hohenburg | 1281 | 17cm | |
| Sancho IV of Castile | 1295 | 17-18cm | |
| Rudolf of Habsburg | 1307 | 20cm | |

Table 1: Table of Funerary Crowns with known diameters. Source: Rózsa Feuerné-Tóth, “V. István király sírja a Margitszigeti domonkos apácakolostor templomában” [The Grave of King Stephen V in the Dominican nunnery of Margaret Island], *Budapest Régiségei* 21 (1964): 115-131.

Where does the crown of Constance of Aragon fall within this pattern? At 18.5cm in diameter, the crown is closer in size to those of her female contemporaries such as Agnes of Antioch (the mother of her first husband) than it is to the crowns of Béla III or Rudolf of Habsburg.⁴⁴ This comparison is put forth in acknowledgment that there are many possible variations to this pattern and that, ultimately, the sample size of medieval crowns from a burial context with their full diameter known is extremely limited. Ultimately, such a comparison shows how the diameter of a crown is not only influenced by a person’s gender, but also contemporary fashion (particularly for women’s crowns in the eleventh century). It is also worth noting that a burial crown did not need to have an exact fit, considering that the wearer was in no state to complain about it being too loose or too tight.

⁴⁴ Feuerné-Tóth gives the diameter of Constance’s crown as 20cm, but the measurement of von Gladis of 18.5cm seems to be more accurate. Since the crown of Agnes of Antioch has been renovated so extensively, its diameter currently ranges from 18.0cm to 19.5cm. Feuerné-Tóth, “V. István király sírja,” 119; Hutai, “III. Béla király és Antiochiai Anna sírleteinek restaurálásairól,” 36-40; 54-58; and Gladiß, “Die Grabbeigaben der Konstanze von Aragon,” 356.

Conclusions

Deér's study of the crown of Constance of Aragon has been incredibly influential in highlighting the unique nature of this artefact, but a close analysis of his arguments, as well as an archaeological approach, have revealed that his conclusions need to be revised. His argument mainly hinges on the fact that the crown was found in a secondary position, which I think must be explained by the exhumation of 1491. The location of the pendilia on the queen's body indicates that Constance of Aragon was originally buried wearing the crown on her head, and not displayed at her feet as Déer assumed. He was so convinced of the gendered use of crown that when he observed that Constance of Hauteville was buried in a sarcophagus that featured a 'male' *kamelaukion*, while her husband Henry VI was buried with a 'female' crown (an open circlet with ogival points), he suggested that this mix-up was the result of Frederick II re-using earlier sarcophagi made for other people. Ultimately, he failed to explain why Frederick would bend the strictly gendered use of this royal insignia not only for his parents, but also for his wife. Finally, when compared with other crowns, Constance's crown is both close in size to open circlets made for the heads of contemporary queens, and also not the only crown to change owners throughout the object's social life. Interpreting this crown within the rigid protocol of the Byzantine world three centuries prior to Constance's own life has essentially forced the known data into an unbending and unrealistic structure that ignores both the archaeological context, and the nature of crowns in the medieval period. Crowns usually appear in inventories under lists of jewels that could be sold, broken-up, melted down, or passed on to different family members and monastic institutions, and it must be kept in mind that the modern conception of a crown as an inalienable symbol of the state is a very recent phenomenon. The assumption that a crown found in a medieval archaeological context must automatically be a king's crown has in this case distorted a truth that is much more straightforward and exciting. If we take into consideration the placement of the pendilia within the tomb, the opposite sex crowns displayed on the tombs of Frederick's parents, and the diameter of known crowns, there can only be one conclusion: the crown buried on Constance's head was most likely worn by her while she was alive.