Anonymus and Master Roger. [Series: Central European Medieval Texts.] Edited, translated and annotated by JÁNOS M. BAK, MARTYN RADY and LÁSZLÓ VESZPRÉMY. Pp. 268. Budapest and New York: Central European University Press. 2010. $55.00. £40.00. Cloth. ISBN 9789639776951.

The fifth volume in the CEU Press' excellent *Central European Medieval Texts* (*CEMT*) series is a very welcome addition to an already impressive set of editions. In this case, the reader is given two accounts from medieval Hungary, although the texts are very different. Anonymus' *Gesta Hungarorum* is a description of Hungarian history, while Roger's work is an eyewitness account of the Mongol invasion (1241–1242). The only previous English-language version of either text was Martyn Rady's translation of Anonymus, which appeared in a journal.[1]

Both of the texts are given scholarly, informative and concise introductions which will orientate those uninitiated in medieval Hungarian history. A major problem with Anonymus' *Gesta* is clear from its moniker – we do not know who the author was. The text starts with 'P' but really this has been as much a hindrance to research as it has been a help. We know he was a notary for King Béla, but even this is problematic. There were, after all, four King Bélas of Hungary. Cross-checking information in the chronicle with information from contemporary charters would be the obvious remedy, but this is hampered by the lack of charters produced before the 1220s. An uneasy consensus has now settled on the possibility of the Anonymus notary working for Béla III (1172–1196), thus suggesting the *Gesta* was composed after 1172.

The *Gesta* itself is not a particularly trustworthy account of early Hungarian history and is, instead, 'a "toponymic romance"' (p. xxvii). The early history of the Hungarians is related to the reader through explanations of place names involving noteworthy people and/or events. Anonymus did this because he lacked reliable historical material concerning the Magyars and their movement westwards into the Carpathian Basin. Thus, he used what he knew about thirteenth-century Hungary to create a Magyar past. For instance, Szerencs is apparently so-called because Prince Árpád and his noblemen called the place 'lovely' which was, in their language, *zerelmes*. Similarly, a certain Bors built a castle which, because of its small size, was named Borsod, using the Hungarian diminutive suffix –d. Elsewhere Anonymus states that the Hungarians allied themselves with the Cumans even though they had not yet arrived in Europe, while the Hungarians defeated in battle the Romans. In other areas, he does get certain points absolutely correct. For example, he rightly identifies the earliest rulers of Hungary and even manages to name accurately certain tribal chiefs. Overall, however, the *Gesta* should not be seen as a trustworthy historical source. Instead its value lies elsewhere. As Rady says, 'it hardly needs to be emphasized that the *Gesta* is in no way a source of information for the events it pretends to narrate, but rather for the ideas about them current in the Hungary of the notary's times and for the literary skills of its author' (p. xxxi).

Roger's *Epistola* is a different sort of document. When the Mongols invaded Hungary in 1241, Roger was the archdeacon of Nagyvárad/Oradea in eastern Hungary. Upon the invasion the town's archbishop fled, but Roger remained, usually hiding out in the surrounding countryside. The first part of Roger's account

[1] *Slavonic and East European Review*, 87.4 (2009), pp. 681–727.

explains the internal political situation in Hungary and, remarkably, blames the Hungarian inability to resist the invasion on poor relations between the king and his people, naming five reasons for the 'enmity'. The rest of the *Epistola* is an often personal and touching eyewitness account of the Mongol assault. Unfortunately for Roger, he failed in his attempts to hide and was captured as the Mongols, or Tatars as they are called in the text, left Hungary in 1242. Nevertheless, he and his servant managed to escape by leaving the road 'as if following the call of nature' (p. 221).

One of the main virtues of this book, and indeed of any volume in the *CEMT* series, is the fact that the English translations are produced in parallel with the most authoritative Latin editions available. Therefore, these texts can be used by researchers and students alike. Publishers who do not use parallel texts should seriously consider doing so. This volume is finished with a select bibliography, an index and a pair of useful gazetteers of geographic terms which form, along with the translations and introductions, a very fine book indeed. Editions such as these of Anonymus and Roger should ensure a wider readership of Latin narrative sources crucial for the study of medieval central European history and culture.

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