





# CONVIVIUM

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval  
Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean  
*Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova*



UNIVERSITÉ DE LAUSANNE  
• ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF  
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## CONVIVIUM SUPPLEMENTUM 2022/1

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Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean**

*Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova*

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of the Department of Art History of the Masaryk University, and of the  
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# **Royal Nunneries at the Center of Medieval Europe**

Art, Architecture, Aesthetics  
(13th–14th Centuries)

edited by Klára Benešová, Tanja Michalsky,  
Daniela Rywиковá, Elisabetta Scirocco  
with the collaboration of Zuzana Frantová

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# Royal Nunneries at the Center of Medieval Europe

## Art, Architecture, Aesthetics (13th– 14th Centuries)

Tanja Michalsky, Daniela Rywíková & Elisabetta Scirocco

### The art, architecture, and aesthetics of royal female foundations

Let us begin with declaring what *this is not*: this is not yet another volume on medieval women's monasteries in general. Under the lens here is a very specific category, in a defined chronology. This category unites some of the best known and well-investigated examples of nunneries, by virtue of their relevance, richness, state of documentation, and conservation: the female monasteries linked to the ruling houses of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe.

Within the late-medieval monastic universe characterized by the presence and alternating fortunes of ancient and new religious orders, male and female monasteries founded by royal patrons share particular characteristics that can be identified across the specific political contexts and beyond the space-time mapping of artistic and architectural phenomena. Besides being an expression of the piety of their promoters, royal foundations often worked as *instrumenta regni*. Endowed with special privileges and enriched by royal

and aristocratic donations, they were active cultural hubs, stages for royal promotion, and places of personal and dynastic self-representation. From an architectural and artistic point of view, these prerogatives were reflected in the strategic choice of the foundation site, or in the design and decoration of curated and sumptuous architectural spaces allowing the participation of the royals in the liturgy and selected moments of the monastic life. Images and objects guaranteed the *praesentia* of the patrons even in *absentia*, in both the cloistered and the public spaces of the convents. Monasteries often preserved royal treasures or archives and were elected as burial places, according to memorial strategies designed for declaring continuity or rupture with the past.

In this context, female religious communities occupy a special place, and offer the possibility to investigate the agency of female elites in medieval society. Often – but not exclusively – linked to the initiative of a queen or a princess, a duchess or a countess, nunneries connected to ruling houses were mostly motivated by devotion or piety (e.g. charitable foundations for women and children), or by their own decision or desire to take the veil, but also by more evident intentions of personal and dynastic representation and memory [Figs 1–2]. The royal religious foundation, which was in itself a mirror of the feudal society identified with the crown, was often subject to special rules, differing in various ways from those established by the religious orders. For these reasons, the architecture, artistic production, and material culture of royal nunneries lend themselves to specific inquiries. To mention just a few: the political and dynastic value of the foundation of a female community, as well as patterns of women’s patronage acting within and beyond this realm; the royal supervision for the design and decoration of spaces, both inside and outside the *clausura*, in the tension between seclusion and exhibition; the specifics of visual and material culture in the royal nunnery; the construction of appropriate models of feminine holiness and blessedness outside and inside the community; and, specifically to the latter context, the manipulation of the memory of the royal patrons within everchanging dynastic and political frameworks. Other lines of inquiry might turn to trying to define specificities for such establishments within the more general framework of medieval female monasticism. For example, since, as has been pointed out, a great amount of artistic production (from altarpieces to panel paintings, from manuscripts to embroideries) encouraging visualization can be associated with women’s houses, what are particularities unique to royal foundations? And, taking another perspective: which of these architectural and artistic phenomena can be read on a trans-regional scale, through trajectories that follow not only dynastic and diplomatic relations between European courts, but specifically female networks based on ties of faith and blood?

Some of these questions remain open; others find answers, insights and new stimuli in the papers collected in the present volume. As its title declares, this *Supplementum of Convivium* collects some of the papers presented at the international conference *Royal Nunneries at the Center of Medieval Europe. Art, Architecture, Aesthetics (11<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries)*, co-organized by the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Science, the University of Ostrava, and the Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History (July 1–3, 2021)<sup>1</sup>. It is undeniable that female monasteries have been benefitting from sustained and constant attention in the past decades, within and beyond gender studies. Research endeavors devoted to the art, architecture and material culture of medieval nunneries have even fostered a reconsideration of the categories of medieval “art” and “aesthetics” in general<sup>2</sup>. The special subset of nunneries linked to royal patronage as a phenomenon to be analyzed across medieval Europe, on the other hand, has been thematized and explored primarily by historians until now, although in a productive

dialogue with historians of art and architecture<sup>3</sup>. A comparable art historical inquiry on a wider transregional scale, however, is still in the making. It is this endeavor which our volume seeks to further stimulate<sup>4</sup>.

While recent contributions expand the geo-cultural scope beyond the geographical and historical borders of medieval Europe toward the Americas<sup>5</sup>, we must acknowledge that some types of intellectual “borders” are still very present and that most of the literature of reference remains Western-centered and oriented. One must also admit that a significant number of scientific results produced in the languages of Central and Eastern Europe

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- 1 The event also benefitted from partnership with the National Gallery in Prague and the Center for Early Medieval Studies at the Masaryk University in Brno. The final program of the conference and the booklet with full abstracts of the papers presented are available here: <https://www.biblherzt.it/events/28932/2643800>.
  - 2 It would be impossible and beyond the scope of this short introduction and this volume to draw an exhaustive picture of bibliographical references, from both a geographical and chronological point of view. For fundamental references to approach the universe of medieval nunneries, see: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, Berkeley 1984; *eadem*, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley 1988; *eadem*, *Fragmentation and redemption. Essays on gender and the human body in medieval religion*, New York 1991; *Monastic Architecture for Women*, special issue of *Gesta*, xxxi/2, Caroline A. Bruzelius, Constance H. Berman eds, 1992; *Les religieuses dans le cloître et dans le monde des origins à nos jours*, Saint-Etienne 1994; Jeffrey H. Hamburger, *Nuns as artists. The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*, Berkeley / Los Angeles / London 1997; *idem*, *The Visual and the Visionary. Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*, New York 1998; *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Helen Hills ed., Aldershot 2003; *Citeaux et les femmes. Architectures et occupation de l'espace dans les monastères féminins; modalités d'intégration et de contrôle des femmes dans l'Ordre; les moniales cisterciennes aujourd'hui*, Bernadette Barrière ed., Paris 2001; *Femmes, art et religion au Moyen Âge*, Jean-Claude Schmitt ed., Colmar 2004; *Krone und Schleier. Kunst aus mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern (Die frühen Klöster und Stifte, 500–1200; Die Zeit der Orden, 1200–1500)*, catalogue of the exhibition (Essen – Bonn, 19.03.–7.07. 2005), Jutta Frings, Jan Gerchow eds, München 2005; Carola Jäggi, *Frauenklöster im Spätmittelalter: die Kirchen der Klarissen und Dominikanerinnen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert*, Petersberg 2006; *Frauen – Kloster – Kunst. Neue Forschungen zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters*, Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Carola Jäggi, Susan Marti, Hedwig Röckelein eds, Turnhout 2007; *Crown and Veil. Female monasticism from the fifth to the fifteenth century*, Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Susan Marti eds, New York 2008; *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture*, Therese Martin ed., 2 vols., Leiden/Boston 2012. For more extensive literature, see also the articles in this volume.
  - 3 See for example *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, Anne J. Duggan ed., Woodbridge 1997; Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, Cambridge 2002; *Queens, Princesses and Mendicants. Close relations in a European perspective*, Nikolas Jaspert, Imke Just eds, Wien 2019.
  - 4 A recent research desideratum was expressed in these terms: “There is a history of royal support for the Mendicant orders and individual houses that still needs to be written – monographic and comparative studies are even now very much required”; see Nikolas Jaspert, Imke Just, “Queens, Princesses and Mendicants: Systematic Thoughts on Female Aristocratic Agency and Piety”, in *Queens, Princesses and Mendicants* (n. 3), pp. 3–12, esp. p. 4. This need is even stronger, if one looks at other religious orders. Studies of broader and more comparative nature have developed, starting from the examples in German-speaking countries (see n. 2), while recent years show a new focus on the Mediterranean kingdoms and their interconnections: *Redes femeninas de promoción espiritual en los reinos peninsulares (s. XIII–XVI)*, Blanca Garí ed., Rome 2013; *Les princesses angevines. Femmes, identité et patrimoine dynastiques (Anjou, Hongrie, Italie méridionale, Provence, XIII–XVe siècle)*, Marie-Madeleine de Cevins ed., with the collaboration of Gergely Kiss, Jean-Michel Matz, *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*, cxxix/2, (2017); *Clarisas y Dominicas. Modelos de implementación, filiación, y devoción en la Península Ibérica, Cerdeña, Nápoles y Sicilia*, Gemma Teresa Colesanti, Blanca Garí, Núria Jornet-Benito eds, Firenze University Press 2017. From the perspective of the Angevin Kingdom of Naples, see also: Tanja Michalsky, *Memoria und Repräsentation. Die Grabmäler des Königshauses Anjou in Italien*, Göttingen 2000; Caroline A. Bruzelius *The Stones of Naples. Church Building in Angevin Italy, 1266–1343*, New Haven 2004; *The Church of Santa Maria Donnaregina: Art, Iconography and Patronage in Fourteenth-Century Naples*, Janis Elliott, Cordelia Warr eds, Aldershot/Burlington 2004; *La chiesa e il convento di Santa Chiara. Committenza artistica, vita religiosa e progettualità politica nella Napoli di Roberto d'Angiò e Sancia di Maiorca*, Francesco Aceto, Stefano D'Ovidio, Elisabetta Scirocco eds, Battipaglia 2014. About the Czech Lands, most recently see: Daniela Rywíková, *Medieval Art in the Czech Lands through the Prism of Gender: The Visual Culture of Female Monasteries in Medieval Bohemia and Moravia*, in *Premodern History and Art through the Prism of Gender in East-Central Europe*, *eadem*, Michaela A. Malaníková eds, Lanham / New York / London 2021, pp. 35–58; Daniela Rywíková, “Art and Devotion in the Female Religious Communities of Late Medieval Český Krumlov”, in *Medieval and Early Modern Art in Central Europe*, Waldemar J. Deluga, Daniela Rywíková eds, Ostrava 2019, pp. 61–85. Further literature about Central Europe can be found in the essays of this volume.
  - 5 *Franciscan Women: Female Identities and Religious Culture, Medieval and Beyond*, Lezlie Knox, David B. Couturier eds, St Bonaventure 2020; *Women Religious Crossing between Cloister and the World. Nunneries in Europe and the Americas, ca. 1200–1700*, Mercedes Pérez Vidal ed., Amsterdam 2022.



1-2/ Tino di Camaino, Funerary Monument for Queen Mary of Hungary, details, Santa Maria Donnaregina, Naples, 1325-1326



REGIA IN SANCTO  
DUM KROI SACRO  
SIC REGIUS

ANNO 1773

ANNO REGIUS SACRO  
DUM KROI SACRO  
SIC REGIUS

have been (and remain) hardly accessible outside the region, and the same can also be said for most of the languages of Western Europe<sup>6</sup>. This issue is neither unknown nor new, but it is not trivial, especially if one tries to think in terms of “transregional networks” and is prevented from accessing the most recent literature on comparable case studies, or even the sources for new research. This linguistic issue is strictly intertwined, moreover, with an historiographic one. As in many other fields of study – but perhaps even more so because of the inevitable political connotations of the topic – European regions (from West to East, from North to South) have developed parallel historiographic traditions in art history, often on a national basis, resulting in separate narratives of phenomena which in fact were often strictly interconnected, if considering the networks and actors involved (religious orders, royal and aristocratic connections, *concepteurs*, craftsmen, artists, and architects).

One of the main objectives of the conference *Royal Nunneries at the Center of Medieval Europe* and this resulting publication was precisely to bring back to the center, on the same stage, cases that are well known and explored together with others that have remained unjustly “peripheral” and less known, so as to solicit a dialogue among scholars with different backgrounds around monuments, objects and images, looking for common questions – old and new ones –, for some answers, and for novel research perspectives.

### **Royal nunneries in the Czech lands: old and new questions and approaches**

The medieval world did not know borders in the way we understand them today; the intellectual and imagined borders of the period did not necessarily reflect the physical and political borders and limitations of medieval Europe and beyond. One of the reasons for organizing this conference was to demonstrate that for the monastic culture as well, borders were fluid, and individual nunneries – in our case the exclusive “cast” of the royal nunneries – maintained rich contacts across Europe shaped by blood (political contacts and family relationships), and also, by region and hierarchy (from South to North and West to East). This fact has, however, been somehow overlooked in the relatively recent large international research projects dealing with the medieval European nunneries such as, for example, *Krone und Schleier*<sup>7</sup> or the *Repertorium of Manuscripts Illuminated by Women in Religious Communities of the Middle Ages*<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, one of the tasks of the conference was to introduce the Bohemian and Moravian royal nunneries to wider academia, as well as to explore recent Czech art historical findings and frame these works and this scholarship within the international research on medieval nunneries<sup>9</sup>.

The research on the nunneries of Bohemia and Moravia has a long tradition within Czech art history. We know today a great deal on the architecture of the nunneries and its function in the context of *clausura*, communication, corporality, liturgy, paraliturgy, and religious practice in general<sup>10</sup>. Czech medieval research often stresses the lack of a great number of visual and literary sources caused by the dramatic religious situation in the Czech lands in the fifteenth century. This handicap, however, should not prevent Czech art historians from acknowledging the agency of medieval nuns and problematizing their representation, as well as recognizing them as active and self-confident users, donors, and commissioners of medieval art, who looked at, responded to, appreciated, and even produced high-quality artwork [Fig. 3].

However, the study of international networks and relationships maintained by the nunneries represents a great desideratum in Czech research. There were numerous examples of direct mutual inspirations, exchanges of ideas, circulation of art objects, and a variety of personal contacts and interconnections amongst these establishments. Although there





3/ Christ carrying the Cross, Abbess Kunigunde gazing into Christ's wound, Passional of Abbess Kunigunde, 1314–1321, Národní knihovna České republiky, Prague, xiv A 17, fol. 71r.

- 6 The bibliographical selection proposed in the notes to this introduction is of course no exception to this rule, as well as the choice of using English as the *lingua franca* for the conference and the following publication.
- 7 *Krone und Schleier* (n. 2).
- 8 See here about the project: <http://www.agfem-art.com>.
- 9 For reasons related to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, the conference was held online, but it was originally planned to take place in Prague's Na Františku double convent, founded by the Přemyslid princess St Agnes and her brother King Wenceslas I. The original program included a series of on-site visits and discussion at the medieval nunneries in Prague. To compensate for this lacuna, the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences made a series of videos under the guidance of Klára Benešová, now available online: <https://youtu.be/kwAV8dpBxac> (St George's Basilica in Prague Castle); <https://youtu.be/zwDoBvjEcxY> (Convent of St Agnes of Bohemia); <https://youtu.be/9xlrEHdRObk> (Dominican Church of St Anne).
- 10 Thanks to the research of Klára Mezihoráková, Helena Soukupová, Klára Benešová and others. See, for example, Klára Mezihoráková, *Architektura středověkých klášterů dominikánek v Čechách a na Moravě*, Prague 2016; Helena Soukupová, *Anežský klášter v Praze*, Prague 2011; Helena Soukupová, *Svatá Anežka Česká – život a legenda*, Prague 2015; Jan Dienstbier, Klára Mezihoráková, Lenka Panušková, "Ženské kláštery a jejich obrazy", in *Imago. Imagines. Výtoarné dílo a proměny jeho funkce v českých zemích od 10. do první třetiny 16. století*, I, Kateřina Kubínová, Klára Benešová eds, Prague 2019, pp. 104–141; Helena Soukupová, "Program Anežčina kláštera a jeho vliv na architekturu mendikantů", in *Sztuka w kręgu krakowskich franciszkanów i klarysek*, Marcin Szyma, Marek Walczak eds, Cracow 2020, pp. 45–66; see also the Afterword by Klára Benešová in this volume, with her further bibliography.

is a plethora of remarkable art objects in the Czech lands that were demonstrably connected with female commissioners or made for/by female religious communities or individuals, this fact has generally been either ignored or marginalized in the “mainstream” Czech medieval art historical research. Consequently, there is a lack of more ambitious interpretation of medieval visual culture, particularly concerning the function fulfilled by such objects in the context of women’s personal and collective devotion and religious practice, their regime of discipline (especially in nunneries), social activities and contacts.

### Royal nunneries across medieval Europe

Apart from the geographical expansion of case studies, a specific approach was chosen, and the individual topics investigated show that in the view of changed methods of art history, a new look at the broad material is worthwhile.

In this volume, women are not primarily understood as isolated actors or even objects of history. Rather, the authors discuss the networks they formed, how far their self-determination went, and what radius of action they were able to achieve. Of course, the aristocratic networks (especially the royal houses) played a major role in this, but members of the “lower” nobility also had a substantial share in preserving the networks. Female agency was to a large extent tied to patronage, but the nunneries also served as recruitment centers for the international aristocracy. The image of the chaste, charitable woman was echoed in the creation and veneration of saints. In these processes, the power of tombs, relics, and liturgical objects can hardly be underestimated. While this applies to the cults of saints in general, the particularities of the cult of female saints still need to be further worked out and (once again) compared within the broader European context.

The lines of comparison and areas of comparison have changed: Byzantium and the West remain an important pair, but in addition to East-West, the connection of North and South also occurs and is explored. A wider geographical area is therefore examined. In addition to the internationally better known and studied nunneries in Italy, Hungary, France, and Germany, those of Poland, Spain, Portugal, and Bohemia now come into focus. This list alone reveals how far away national art historiography is from historical-political conditions. This expansion of the area studied not only offers new case studies but also, above all, enables comparisons on a different scale. A great advantage of recent art history is that we can always readjust the scale of our comparisons due to better and greater knowledge of individual actors, monuments, or objects and European relations. The narratives of the well-known centers and their peripheries, which characterized the older history of art, can thus be changed.

With respect to the broader chronological spectrum of the conference, the papers published here are primarily concerned with royal patronage of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but also include processes of broader duration<sup>11</sup> and cases for contrast<sup>12</sup>. As one might expect, the Franciscan order plays a major role but, in addition to the Poor Clares, there are also convents inhabited by nuns of the Cistercian and Dominican orders. Another aspect that emerges prominently is the coexistence of male and female communities, which both deepens and questions the category of “double convents”, when looking simultaneously at cases that differ in terms of time of foundation, spatial arrangements, and the mode of interaction between the two communities<sup>13</sup>. Architectural analysis appears preeminently and presents a tangible trace of the circulation of models and shared patterns of patronage<sup>14</sup>, but the broader material culture — the artworks

and the treasures of nunneries — are also the object of careful examination in terms of contemplative and performative aesthetic values<sup>15</sup>. Sepulchral choices, strategies of self-representation, memorial care for the afterlife, ways of constructing kingship/queenship based on the nunnery's patronage and care emerge as a characterizing plot in many of the case studies examined here<sup>16</sup>. The persistence of liturgical and memorial practices for the royal founders and their relatives over the centuries finds its counterpart in the re-writing of their biographies in early modern times<sup>17</sup>.

Another important aspect of this volume is that a stronger emphasis is placed on the history of (even small) objects, and the different agencies associated with immobile and mobile decorative elements. This relatively new branch of art history gives more weight to the intrinsic power of objects, their ability to create meaning and communicate through their form, materiality, and specific use. When we speak of networks in this volume, we mean not only the relationships between people, but also between buildings, images, and liturgical furnishings that keep memories alive in the space. And “space” itself has taken on a much broader meaning than in the earlier studies on women's monasteries. After the “spatial turn”, it is self-evident that alongside the concrete architectural spaces, one must also consider those of the networks, as well as the ephemeral spaces of the liturgy, in which both the enclosure of the nuns and an occasional public sphere were created<sup>18</sup>. The proceedings of this truly transdisciplinary conference at which royal nunneries, especially those from lesser-known areas, are assigned their appropriate place in a European context, address new methodological territory, insofar as the scales and parameters of the comparisons are always called into question, as we have learned from the *histoire croisée*<sup>19</sup>. We would like to express our gratitude to the speakers at the conference and to the contributors to this issue, as well as the many colleagues and specialists in history, art history, architectural history, history of music, and medieval liturgy who participated in the conference as chairs or discussants or who provided their expertise and bibliographical aids in the publication process<sup>20</sup>. The names of many of them surface in the bibliography on these pages, or at various points in the articles in this volume. The vitality of the conference debate brought to the center questions that demand further study, demonstrating the great potential of this topic for art history in a transdisciplinary dialogue. The essays collected here aim to contribute to this broader and more complex frame with fresh ongoing research, through selected case studies that locate female royal foundations and their networks at the center of a significant part of European history.

11 In more than one case, analysis includes the post-medieval life of nunneries and the related production of arts and documents up to the nineteenth century.

12 The baronial convents of Latium offer an eccentric point of view, more focused on bottom-up networks, useful to compare and contrast with the specificities of royal patronage.

13 On this topic: *Doppelköster und andere Formen der Symbiose männlicher und weiblicher Religiösen im Mittelalter*, Kaspar Elm, Michel Parisse eds, Berlin 1992; Alison I. Beach, Andra Juganaru, “The Double Monastery as a Historiographical Problem (Fourth to Twelfth Century)”, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West*, Alison I. Beach, Isabelle Cochelin eds, Cambridge 2020, pp. 561–578.

14 See the articles by Jakub Adamski and Piotr Pajor (pp. 22–37); Michaela Zöschg (pp. 56–75); Giulia Rossi Vairo (pp. 76–91); and Angelica Federici (pp. 92–111).

15 See the articles by Agnieszka Patała (pp. 112–135); and Susan Marti (pp. 38–55).

16 See the articles by Susan Marti (pp. 38–55); Giulia Rossi Vairo (pp. 76–91); and Michaela Zöschg (pp. 56–75).

17 See the article by Eszter Konrád (pp. 136–153).

18 Stephan Günzel, *Raum. Eine kulturwissenschaftliche Einführung*, Bielefeld 2017; Jörg Dünne, *Raumtheorie. Grundlagentexte aus Philosophie und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt am Main 2006.

19 Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison. Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity”, *History and Theory*, XLV (2006), pp. 30–50.

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