

## **SÁNDOR HAHN: THE JOURNEY AND FATE OF THE HOLY CROWN, 1944-1978**

This work opens up an unknown chapter of the history of that famous treasure. Several books have been written by art historians about the Holy Crown of Hungary as to its artistic value, or its historical and legal aspects, but the events of World War II and the subsequent years of the Crown's journey provide us with new information.

The author, who became head of the Hungarian Restitution Mission in 1946, followed the path of this royal coronation relics and documented their torturous journey. He gathered information from several sources, such as the National Archives in Washington, D.C., as well as from personal recollections and letters.

After the forced abdication of Regent Nicholas Horthy in October of 1944, the leader of the Arrow Cross (Hungarian Nazi) Party, Ferenc Szálasi assumed power. He ordered the Crown, the coronation mantle, and the various other regalia to be removed from Budapest to Veszprém, then to Kôszeg in December, and finally to Velem where his personal bunker shielded him in his westward flight. Colonel E. Pajtás, Commander of the Royal Crown Guard, followed this itinerary without ever leaving the relics unguarded. In March of 1945 these national treasures were taken to Mattsee, Austria where Col. Pajtás, buried the Crown hidden in an empty gasoline tank during the night, while the local pastor, Father A. Strasser, hid the mantle, the reliquary of the right hand of King St. Stephen, and the silver table service of Emperor Franz Joseph I. The reliquary was later transferred into the custody of the Archbishop of Salzburg and eventually returned to Budapest.

As head of the Hungarian Restitution Mission, Sándor Hahn was entrusted to verify the authenticity of the Crown, sword, scepter, orb, and other treasures removed from Hungary, which were by that time already in Munich in U.S. custody.

Some groups felt that the Holy Crown should rightfully be transferred to the Vatican, since it was Pope Sylvester II that had sent it originally to King Stephen in 1000, while others pleaded that it remain in American hands. The latter view prevailed, and Fort Knox became the new home of the coronation regalia until 1978, when President Carter returned them to the Hungarian people.

Hahn's book contains data and an extensive collection of photographs of earlier coronations, official and private documents, as well as photographs taken by the author. This painstaking work helps complete our knowledge about this dramatic journey, and would be a great addition to any historical or art library.