

ORIGIN AND LIFE OF ELISABETH OF HUNGARY

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Abstract

Saint Elizabeth of Hungary born probably at Pressburg in 1207. At 14, she married Ludwig IV., Landgrave of Thuringia and they had three children. He joined the Fifth Crusade and died in Otranto in 1227. She died at Marburg, Hesse in 17 November 1231 at the age of 24 and was canonized in 1235.

Saint Elizabeth spent her life differently than most saints. She led a simple life, personally tended the sick and the poor, and spent long hours at prayer. She built the Franciscan hospital at Marburg and devoted herself to the care of the sick until her death.

Keywords: Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, spiritual life, sick and poor people, charitable activities, hospital in Marburg

1 Origin And Life Of Elisabeth Of Hungary

1.1 Arpad family

The beginning of the Kingdom of Hungary and its existence is closely connected with the saints, who emerged from it. There was a necessity of formation new states in Central Europe at the beginning of the middle Ages. The main purpose was to spread Christianity, and thus enforces the new Christian culture. People, who were at the emergence of the Kingdom of Hungary contributed to the improvement of life in the country not only locally but also in an international context.

„Three women with the name Elizabeth, born in the 13th century, came from the Hungarian Arpad family; their surname »of Hungary« granted them an official church account. While two younger ones, daughters of King Stephen V and Andrew III were worshiped as blessed, the oldest and the

most famous of them was honored as holy. She was called the Thuringia, because she lived in Thuringia.“¹

1.2 Birth of Elizabeth of Hungary

At the time when Herman I, the Count palatine of Germany, lived - ruled Thuringia, the territory of Transylvania, in Hungary, the scholastic Klingsor, rich and noble-minded philosopher, an expert in secular sciences, astronomy and nigromancy² lived. He was called to Thuringia to resolve a dispute between two men, but before visiting the Count he had observed stars and an interesting mystery revealed: „Know that this night Ugrian king daughter named Elizabeth is born and she will become holy. They will marry her to the prince son ...“³ The prediction of the birth scene can be found in the Krumlov Code⁴. The illustrated manuscript is from the period around 1350 and can be found in Cesky Krumlov, as well as the figurative legend in Lübeck cycle⁵, which decorates the outside of the singer stands banister in the municipal hospital Lübeck.

Elizabeth of Hungary was born in 1207 (some sources claim that the day of birth is July 7, but the current historian Geze thinks it is November). She was the daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary. (She was born two years after his coronation) and Gertrude of Andechs-Meran of Bavaria (daughter of the Duke of Carinthia). The noble status of Countess Elizabeth of Thuringia was Duchess of Saxony in Hesse and Countess Palatine. The historical sources differ in determining the place of her birth. Some listed Bratislava Castle, Castle in Blatny Potok, only a few miles south of the Slovak Nove Mesto, in Hungarian Sarospatak, which was one of the favorite residences of the royal family in northern Hungary.

Countless images in churches, monasteries, hospitals show the birth scene of St. Elizabeth. For several reasons, one of the most important records

¹ Rajmund, Ondruš s.j.: Blízki Bohu a ľudom – životopisy svätých (Close to God and People - Biographies of saints), TATRAN pre Spolok sv. Vojtecha, 1991, pp. 628-629

² Dark magic

³ In: Marsina Richard: Legendy stredovekého Slovenska – Ideály stredovekého človeka očami cirkevných spisovateľov (Legends of Medieval Slovakia – The Ideals of the Medieval people by the Church Writers), pg. 155, Publisher RAK, 1997, ISBN 80-85501-08-02

⁴ Krumlovský kódex (Krumlov Code), Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 370, fol. 85v. – 86r., ONB. This pen-drawing deals with the biblical story of a holy life. It was written around the year 1350 likely for Minorits monastery in Český Krumlov, under the Rosenberg patronate.. In: Gerát, Ivan: Obrazové legendy sv. Alžbety (Picture legends of Saint Elizabeth), VEDA, Bratislava 2009

⁵ Panel painting of the singer stand balusters, Lübeck, Špitálsky church, AA, around the year 1440th Painted plates depict twenty-three scenes from the life st. Elizabeth. In: Gerát Ivan: Obrazové legendy sv. Alžbety (Picture legend st. Elizabeth), VEDA, Bratislava 2009

of her life from the birth in Slovakia is the Kosice retable⁶. This series documents the images of Arpad wealth. It is also the evidence of more recent techniques of painting, revealing the individual events with a higher reality through a facial-gestural expressions.

Few days later it was held a magnificent feast in Bratislava Castle – the baptism of Elizabeth of Hungary. She was brought to the church covered by the canopy from the most expensive fabric, where her own uncle Berchtold, later Patriarch of Aquilej baptized her. Since early childhood she was a great joy for parents. It is said that her first word was word of the prayer and the first thing she did was the act of kindness for the poor. For her innocent kindness the entire Hungarian royal court called her angel of love. She preferred from her early childhood prayer and giving alms to ordinary children's games. This early developed devotion, which predicted the notorious glorious future of the young princess of Hungary, can be seen in Krumlov Code (two-page spread on 86v/87r).

1.2.1 The engagement of Elisabeth of Hungary to Ludwig of Thuringia

According to the customs of the medieval nobility and because of the political reasons, Andrew II promised his daughter, Elisabeth, at the age of one year to marry eight-year-old Earl Ludwig IV of Thuringia, firstborn son of Prince Herman⁷. King of Hungary believed that this marriage will strengthen the political position of Hungary in Europe. The Imperial Count Herman of Thuringia, in turn, hoped to get the rich dowry, since Hungary was one of the richest royal courts in Europe.

In 1211 when she was four years old, she was entrusted to the German delegation. This delegation was „headed by Count von Meinhardt Mühlbergom and noble Walter von Vargil and Lady Bercht Bendeleiden. They escorted her with the great nobles and influential personalities,“⁸ through Saxony, Bohemia and Moravia to Pressburg (Bratislava). Pressburg was the westernmost fortress of Hungary Kingdom. Prince Ludwig of Thuringia, who was to become Elizabeth husband, was then 11 years. This diplomatic agreement between Herman I and Walter von Vargil is recorded in two board's balustrades in the Lübeck church.

The delegation from Thuringia stayed for a few days in Bratislava. In order to strengthen the Hungary alliance with Thuringia, King Andrew II accepted the political advantages of a future marriage, and therefore agreed with it.

⁶ Košické retabulum (Kosice retable) wing is the main altar of St. Elizabeth in Kosice, In: Gerát, Ivan: *Obrazové legendy sv. Alžbety* (Picture legends of Saint Elizabeth), VEDA, Bratislava 2009

⁷ Herman was the cousin of the German Emperor.

⁸ Géze, Ernest: *Princezná chudobných* (The Princess of poor), Publisher LÚČ Bratislava, 2007, ISBN 80-7114-601-3

Queen Gertrude, Elizabeth's mother, was much more decisive and energetic. Like her father, she was very purposeful, ambitious and striving to keep the glory of her family. For this reason, she started to prepare the dowry for her daughter from her birth. She was committed to entrust a daughter to the hands of a new family. She wrapped her in silk, placed into the silver cradle and she sent her with a „large number and variety of gold and silver, rare jewels and tiara, rings, necklaces, different clothing, gold bath tub, bed linen, blankets, silk blankets, coats and purple fabrics, as well as other valuable things.“⁹ Among the generous gifts there was also the golden crown, which is still placed at the Castle Braunfels. In the Reinhardsbrunne monastery the art book of Psalms was illustrated for Princess to read it during the journey. It is believed that among the pictures were inserted portraits of her parents.

The security of all procession, which had together thirteen carriages, three of Thuringia and ten from Bratislava, was overseen by knight Walter von Vargila Dörenberg and six armed men whose role was to bring the news concerning the happy arrival of Elizabeth and the entire escort to Thuringia.

The education of Princess of Hungary was thus entrusted to her future husband's family in Thuringia. At that time, the separation of royal children, usually girls, from an original family tradition was normal. The reason was to adjust the girl to the new family traditions, landscapes and people who she will rule in the future.

She was educated with her fiancé Ludwig, his sister Agnes, as well as with other girls from the nobles' houses. Guda, one year older girl, became her accompanying person and faithful friend till the end of her life. (In the process of canonization of Elizabeth in 1235 she even repeatedly deposed as the most important witness.)

1.3 Wedding of Elisabeth of Hungary and Ludwig IV (Prince of Thuringia and Saxony)

1.3.1 Ludwig IV

He was the son of Herman and Zsofia. His younger brother Herman died at the age of fifteen, other brothers were Conrad, Henry Raspe and sister Agnes (who became the countess Meissen).

On the 6 July 1218 in Eisenach (before marriage), Ludwig was knighted and received the knighthood. Becoming the prince he got the throne with both wealth and power but also responsibility for the country and possible errors of his father. Herman I had many problems with the tax collection from Archbishop Siegfried of Mainz, who imposed curse on him.

⁹ Marsina, Richard: *Legendy stredovekého Slovenska – Ideály stredovekého človeka očami cirkevných spisovateľov* (Legends of Medieval Slovakia – The Ideals of the Medieval people by the Church Writers), Publisher RAK, 1997, ISBN 80-85501-08-02

Young Ludwig inherited this curse from his father. They reached the peace in 1220 (indicated from Geze) in the Fulda temple.

„He had very elegant, beautiful slim figure, bright noble face, as it is said, he was a representative picture of the sons of mankind. Everybody loved his kind appearance, he was virtuous, modest and when he became a young man, such a moral purity was characteristic for him that many considered him unsuitable for marriage.“¹⁰

They tried to seduce him to the immoral way several times, but Ludwig remained faithful. He was shy and respectful, but very generous and kind-hearted to women.

Ludwig was really brave, prudent and fair. In the Reinhardsbrunn Chronicle it is written about him: „He never lied. His speech was: Yes, yes, no, no. His words were kind and honest, so everybody believed them as it was an oath. Every day this pious man held his official duties and he prayed to his God in fear. When this kind man came to a settlement, the first thing he did was that he went to the almshouse and he supported the sick people, giving them clothing and other gifts.“¹¹

After the setting peace between the king and the countryside, the church launched question concerning Ludwig's marriage. Whether Elizabeth will really become his wife was not so obvious. Several people from the close family had significant doubts. They planned to send Elizabeth of Hungary back home and marry Ludwig to some German princess. Elizabeth, in fact was not the ideal bride, because the idea of the dowry increase could not be implemented since at the time of a possible wedding Elizabeth's mother Gertrude, did not live. On the other hand Elizabeth did not meet the criteria of a noble lady who lives the life full of wealth and privileges.

Elizabeth was too religious and too modest, what was contradictory regarding some visions of the future princess.

There were some people in Thuringia court who admired Elizabeth personality and they fully supported her. It was also a knight Vargila von Walter among them. He was with her on the way from Bratislava to Wartburg. It was him who dared to ask Ludwig what he intends to do with it. He was determined to bring Elizabeth back to Hungary if the prince relinquishes her. Ludwig pointed to the high mountain Inselberg and said, „Can you see the great mountain, which rises in front of us? If it was of pure gold, and my property, I would forget it rather than my love to Elizabeth.

¹⁰ Marsina, Richard: Legendy stredovekého Slovenska – Ideály stredovekého človeka očami cirkevných spisovateľov (Legends of Medieval Slovakia – The Ideals of the Medieval people by the Church Writers), Publisher RAK, 1997, ISBN 80-85501-08-02

¹¹ Géze, Ernest: Princezná chudobných (The Princess of poor), Publisher LÚČ Bratislava, 2007, ISBN 80-7114-601-3

People can keep saying what they want; I say that I love her and I do not have anything dearer."¹²

1.3.2 Wedding

Elizabeth grew up together with Ludwig as brother and sister, as it was customary in those days in the court. In 1221, when Elizabeth reached the age of maturity - 14 years, a decade after engagement to Ludwig she married him. Marriage took place in St. George Church in Eisenach.

The wedding was stunning. It was held during the feast of Holy Spirit, because of the nice weather as the wedding was to attend the nobility throughout the country. The whole Wartburg Court, as well as the corridors, were decorated with fir wreaths and flower garlands. Bells and horns started the large celebration. „From the inspiration of God a devoted man married a true woman, holly with holy, innocent to innocent.“¹³

The mutual love of the spouses was the exception rather than the need to conclude the marriage in the middle Ages. Emotions did not take into account those days. Marriage was more diplomatic step to achieve the greatest benefits derived from it. The intended beneficial marriage uniting two powerful families was eventually a tender love and they both found a great joy and peace in their marriage.

1.3.3 The fulfilling life in marriage

In March 1222, at the age of fifteen, the first son Herman (1222-1241), successor to the throne, was born. (He was named after his grandfather on the father's side.) He was born in the manor of Werra Kreuzburg, near Wartburg. In autumn that year, the young couple decided to visit Elizabeth's father Andrew II who lived in Bratislava. Hungary was in troubles those days, as Elizabeth's oldest brother, Bella, later king of Hungary, along with other nobles fought against his father and then his (second) wife Jolanta. Even though it was the peak period of Andrew II glory and the famous Golden bull was that year issued. It codified the relationship of the nobility to the royal court and their subordinates. This actually laid the foundations of the feudal state. Historical sources mentioned the reason for this visit, but it was Elizabeth's first and the last visit of her homeland since she moved to Thuringia. She traveled through Austria with the big group, which was led by honorable knights and nobles – Walter von Vargila, Henrich von Stahlberg, Rudolf von Berlstadt, Reinhard Farch, Rudolf Schenk and others.

¹² Géze, Ernest: Princezná chudobných (The Princess of poor), Publisher LÚČ Bratislava, 2007, ISBN 80-7114-601-3

¹³ Marsina, Richard: Legendy stredovekého Slovenska – Ideály stredovekého človeka očami cirkevných spisovateľov (Legends of Medieval Slovakia – The Ideals of the Medieval people by the Church Writers), pg.. 152, Publisher RAK, 1997, ISBN 80-85501-08-02

Two years later, in March 1224, in the castle of Wartburg, her daughter Sophie (1224-1284) was born. Three years later daughter Gertrude (1227-1297) was born after her husband's death in the 1227th Elizabeth was the excellent wife, mother, and the Countess of Thuringia. She prepared the child's layette, she sewed and embroidered. Her marriage was influenced by political motives; however, it did not follow the usual style of the time because her marriage was an authentic brotherly love and marriage. She dedicated a lot of time to prayer late at nights in the bedroom she shared with her husband. She was abided by her marriage vows, but her life was fully committed to God, which led her to charitable activities. This dual love gave her power and goodness, which she spread amongst the poor. In her case, Antoine de Saint Exupéry's words are confirmed. He says that true love never retained, the more you give, the more you have.

She helped with mercy and care of poor patients every day. Being the mother increased her need to care for abandoned children. One evening when she was on the way from Eisenach, she found a sick and starving child. She took the child to the castle Wartburg. There she bathed him, gave him food and let him sleep in Ludwig's bed, because she knew that the bed will be empty at night, since Ludwig was away. This aroused a great indignation among not only servants, but especially in mother-in-law, Zsofia. But Elizabeth knew that Ludwig had fully agreed with her activities and supported her in them.

In 1225 in the winter time, Ludwig went to Italy to the imperial court in Cremona to meet Emperor Frederick. A serious famine started that winter in Germany. Elizabeth opened the granaries to help the poor people. She allocated to each person as much food as was needed per day.

1.4 Elizabeth and her spiritual life

Saint Elizabeth did not start her spiritual life in adulthood, or as a result of some misfortune or injustice. Elizabeth lived for the poor and those „less fortunate“ since childhood. She prepared herself for the life after death – she played, dreamed and prayed. The most important was that she did not do anything for her glory but the glory of God.

She wanted to live by the Gospel, in full devotion to God and the renunciation of all secular. Her strength and determination for life had a profound basis in prayer which facilitated the continuous appreciation of God's presence while meeting the poor and sick people.

Ludwig's mother, Zsofia, took care of her future bride's education. She helped her with spiritual matters and taught her a few prayers. Before going to bed she prayed: „I'm going to sleep and twelve angels will be with

me, two at the head, two at the bed side, two at my feet, two will cover me, two will guard me and two will lead me to Paradise. Amen.“¹⁴

Saint nobility

ôCourt nobility organized spectacular celebrations, hunting and enormous parties in Wartburg. Elizabeth participated only because of necessity and because of social etiquette. During such feasts she used to sit alongside her husband, which was not customary at that time. Elizabeth was very hospitable, but she did not eat much. It happened very often that she left the party full of delicious meal hungry. Her confessor, Conrad of Marburg, suggested her to eat only food that was obtained in a „right“ way, and servants did not suffer. As the priest Tedorik writes, she had often five pieces of gingerbread or a piece of bread. On the other hand, she tried to bring some delicacies to her servants.

She even did not considered her clothing to be very important. One day she went to the village church below the castle Wartburg with her mother-in-law Zsofia dressed in a splendid dress, adorned with jewelry, tiara and a crown on her head. When they stepped inside and she saw the cross, she realized that Christ is on it naked, crowned with thorns and nailed. During the Mass, she took the crown of her head because she realized the difference between Him and herself and decided to enter the temple without the jewelry and use it only when necessary. Her mother-in-law Zsofia did not agree with her decision.

Although she was educated at the royal court and noble society, Elizabeth decided to wear simple clothes of ordinary people; she gave her expensive clothes to the poor, so that they could sell her cloths and buy something for their living. She kept only a little noble dresses which she wore for the royal family events. „She did not wear colorful peplus and flashy veil, not too knit sleeves, silk ribbon in her hair, wrapped waist belt, entangled hair, too long clothes and futility And even if she wore gold-plated or purple garment, she was modest inside. She had appropriate Christian religion clothing.“¹⁵ By the time Ludwig was away, and Elizabeth could not accompany him, she wore a simple dress. She behaved humbly as she was the widow, and when her husband returned, she put on her expensive clothes in order to welcome him. She explained she had tried to prevent a sin with this behavior.

¹⁴ Alloisio, Mária: Svätá Alžbeta Uhorská (Saint Elizabeth of Hungary), Publisher, Dobrá kniha 1995, (from Italian origin: Maria Alloisio: Elisabetta d'Ungheria, Padova 1979 – translated Štefan Smržík), ISBN 80-7141-047-0

¹⁵ Marsina, Richard: Legendy stredovekého Slovenska – Ideály stredovekého človeka očami cirkevných spisovateľov (Legends of Medieval Slovakia – The Ideals of the Medieval people by the Church Writers), pg. 155, Publisher RAK, 1997, ISBN 80-85501-08-02

1.4.1 Monastic vow

We can find two Elizabeth's monastic vows in the biographical sources. During her marriage life she was regularly meeting with the religious priest Conrad of Marburg. This was approved and accepted by her husband. Together with her three duennas (maids), they entered into the repentant order and created a little prayer „brotherhood“ and promised obedience and restraint. The closest duenna was Guda and Isentruda. They became Elizabeth's friends. The other two – Elizabeth and Imengarde were assigned her by Conrad of Marburg.

In the file „Regula non Bull“ (1221), saint Francis referred that „no woman should pledge an oath of obedience to any religious, but as soon as she receives a spiritual advice, she should lead apologetic life anywhere she wants.“ (kap.12).

She pledged the second oath after her husband's death, 24 March 1228. It was on Good Friday, in the Franciscan chapel – she accepted a gray dress as a sign of repentance. An unknown Cistercian author of Zwettl (1236) says that Elizabeth „was wearing a gray dress of Minor Friars.“ Together with her four duennas, loyal companions who accompanied her until her death and during the canonization process witnessed about her mercy, she created the community of sisters.

The monastic life was the only canonical form; the Church permitted women in religious communities. However, Elizabeth was able to coordinate intimacy with God with active service for poor.

1.4.2 Conrad of Marburg

He came from Marburg, but we know almost nothing about his youth, nor whether he was the son of noble or citizen. Historical sources describe him as highly educated and knowledgeable man and gave him the title „Master“, which could carry only the person studying at a university (which anticipated a university degree). There wasn't University in Germany that time so in he probably studied in Paris. He rode the mule round Germany and inculcated about the Crusades. As heretics started, Conrad received an Inquisitor responsibility from the Pope Gregory IX to be active in Germany. His task was to solve the problems in legal ways. His role in the history is therefore highly doubtful. Although historical sources declare that he was a member of Dominican order, recent studies claim that he was not.

He appeared in Saint Elizabeth's life in about 1225. Despite his merits and the high post in the church, Conrad remained very modest and simple in spiritual matters. It was one of the reasons why Saint Elizabeth chose him to be her confessor. Ludwig trusted him so much that he asked him to manage all the valuables which belonged to him according to the sponsorship rights.

In the autumn of 1228 Elizabeth accepted from Conrad of Marburg the gray dress as a visible sign of her promise of poverty. She was like the

"sister on the ground "(soror in saeculo), who spent her life not inside the cloistered monastery, but as one who actively accepted in „her“ life unfortunate and poor people. She took her first vow in the monastery of St. Catherine in Eisenach.

In 1233, Conrad accused Henry II, Earl „of Sayn“ from taking part in »satanic orgy«. Henrich, however, required the convening of the bishops in the „Mainz“ and was eventually declared innocent. Conrad refused to accept this decision and requested the change of the verdict, but eventually left Mainz, to return to Marburg. On the way, however, several knights attacked him and killed not only him, but his servant, too. (They say ...) That could have been knights serving Henry II.

After his death, Pope Gregory IX declared Conrad the supporter of the Christian faith (religion, belief) and ordered to punish the murderers. However, Conrad's perception in Germany was apparently less favorable, and his reputation remained confusing for many years.

Conrad of Marburg was actually very educated and well-informed man. His harsh methods shaped the spiritual life of Saint Elizabeth. It can be justified by the fact that he also lived a very virtuous and ascetic life. Although he helped her to abnegate all material joys, he also restrained her desire to be a beggar and the last of the poor. He tried to reconcile her spiritual life with the material support of the poor.

St. Elizabeth rules of life by Master Conrad of Marburg

Elizabeth of Hungary not only lived by God's commandments, but she lived under the rules which were drawn up by Conrad of Marburg for her.

„These environmental rules give good insight on the way Conrad tried to shape and guide her life:

1. Take the scornfulness (contempt) in voluntary poverty patiently
2. Let to rest suffering (humility) on your heart
3. Give up human solace and desires
4. Be merciful to your fellow creatures
5. Have God in your heart and in your thoughts
6. Thank God that through his suffering and death he redeemed you
7. Because God has suffered a lot for you, you also bear your cross patiently
8. Totally (completely) devote your body and soul to God
9. Often remember that you are God's masterpiece, he created you and therefore try to be connected with him
10. Do to others as you would have them do to you
11. Always thank for that life is short and that young men, as well as the old ones are dying. Therefore, always determine to eternal life

12. Always forgive your sins and pray to God that he forgives, too.“¹⁶

The authenticity of these rules is indisputable, and it is not known when he prepared them for Elizabeth. According to the first and third rule it is assumed that it was after the death of her husband, when, as a widow, she lived in absolute poverty.

1.5 Death of Ludwig and Elizabeth's departure from Wartburg

Elizabeth was only 20 years old when her husband Ludwig died in 1227. He died of plague on the ship while on the crusade to the Holy Land in Otranto. After his death, the Countess „died“ too and the apologetic person came to the forefront.

Leaving Wartburg

Various historical sources describe Saint Elizabeth's departure from the castle of Wartburg. Till 1888, because of the testimony of one of Elizabeth's duennas in the process of canonization, the belief prevailed, that Elizabeth was, in the winter 1227 expelled from Wartburg by her brother-in-law Henry, who was regent of her son (temporary governor), who was then only five years old.

Around 1888, several investigators (Börner, Mielke, Wenck, E. Michael, etc.) said that Elizabeth left the Wartburg voluntarily, led by her own morals and beliefs. Since the castle was not able to fulfill Conrad's orders – e.g. to eat only food obtained in a manner that the poor was not harmed (which was definitely correct). However, in the year 1907 Huyskens tried to prove that Elizabeth was expelled from the castle of Marburg in Hesse. This dilemma is not entirely resolved.

Accompanied by two maids Elizabeth left the castle, which was built at the top of Marburg. The next day her children were brought to her, but they were soon taken into the custody elsewhere. Elizabeth's aunt, Matilda, abbesses from the Benedictine monastery in Kitzingene, near Wartburg, took poor Princess and sent her to her uncle Eckbert, bishop of Bamberg. Bishop decided to arrange another marriage despite the fact Elizabeth, during her husband's life, passed the promise of restraint in case he dies and the same oath paid for her maids. While Elizabeth maintained her position against her uncle, her husband's body was transferred to Bamberg by his loyal supporters, who brought him from Italy. Weeping bitterly she buried his body in the family tomb of Thuringia, in the monastery called Reinhardsbrunne. With Conrad's help, she received a widow's share; the value in cash was 2000 Marks. She divided 500 Marks among the poor in one day. On Good Friday in 1228, Elizabeth formally renounced the outside

¹⁶ Edeltraud, Ambros: Die heilige Elisabeth, Fürstin und Heilige (Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophie aus dem Fachgebiet Geschichte, eingereicht an der Universität Wien) Wien, 2006

world in the Franciscan monastery in Eisenach. She joined Master Conrad of Marburg and she and her maids received from him the garment of the Third Order of St. Francis. They became one of the first tertian in Germany. In the summer 1228 she built the Franciscan hospital at Marburg and took care of sick, disabled people who suffered from the most repulsive diseases. She was devoted to God but destroyed by her charitable work and died at the age of 24, when the life for most people just starts.

1.6 Caring for the poor and sick

Elizabeth way of life, behavior and attitude to the poor are not obvious for the 9 -12 centuries. Her charitable activities were different from the noble or royal princesses who used to care for the poor, too. Elizabeth divided not only money, food or cloths, but she also expressed her love, politeness and understanding. She regularly visited the poor, without considering expenditures or exhaustion. She even worked with her own hands: in the kitchen preparing meal, servicing people in the hospital, washing the dishes, knitting wool and sewing clothes for the poor, and cleaning houses of poor and fishing to bring them food. Her activities of mercy were often displayed in churches (see attachment).

Countess endowed only those ones who could not work but words of support handed out to all without distinction. She asked for a meaningful use of her gifts.

Special attention, whether personal or financial, gave to people suffered from leper, scrofulous people, monstrous and degenerate people.¹⁷ Elizabeth courageous and unselfish commitment to the unfortunate people was known through her life as a countess. On Maundy Thursday she used to wash lepers feet and hands and kissed them terrible sores. She did not point only to a sense of humility and martyrdom when she kissed them, but it was primarily a sign of equality in social, physical and emotional sense. Through this act of kindness she pointed out that pain and suffering with patience will be rewarded in heaven. Elisabeth managed to connect a healthy and sick people and helped them as much as it was possible.

Hospital in Marburg

From the money she received as a widow she built a hospital in Marburg, Germany¹⁸. As for all hospitals in the Middle Ages, because of

¹⁷ For the medieval people the fate of the leprosy was given directly from God, it was a sign of his grace, but also his refusal. Since there was no effective medical treatment, the only effective way was separation of risk of infection, which in any case reluctantly, but enforced at the end.

¹⁸ The first hospital which st. Elizabeth founded was in the German town of Eisenach, which was located in Thuringia under the Wartburg castle and after her husband's death she established a hospital of pp. Mary Magdalene in Gotha.

hygiene reasons, the priority for building the hospital was to find the place next to water and not too far from the city.

She began with building her hospital in summer 1228 and in winter the same year the hospital was finished and consecrated to St. Francis, who personified for her the ideal of voluntary poverty. The property, which remained her, was donated to the hospital. Elizabeth's hospital resembles the place for sick in many ways. It was actually built from a simple old house and accepted furniture from several surrounding buildings.

Construction of this hospital and related services to the poor and sick people enabled Elizabeth to meet the life wishes. In particular, she looked after the people who suffered from the worst diseases at that time.

The first praeses of a hospital in Marburg was Conrad of Marburg. He lived in a hospital provided nursing clothes for nurses and watched the spiritual discipline of this place. The community nurses kept growing. Not only girls from the poor families were accept, but even ladies from the noble families, girls who were willing to sacrifice their luxury lives and change their chambers to hospital rooms. He later Marburg pries Herman joined them and even one citizen of the city Marburg became the member of the hospital community.

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