

Preface

This book was written for the non-Hungarian reader who wishes to discover what happened in the Carpathian basin during the Middle Ages. It is to be hoped that nobody living in that region who has strong national feelings will find comfort in it. Each of the nations of the region has its own vision of the past, incompatible with that of the others, and it was my firm intention that none of these visions should be represented in this volume.

Throughout this book are to be found topics which do not sit comfortably with particular national perspectives on the past. Many Slovaks do not like to read, for instance, that their country was once merely part of Hungary. Similarly, many Romanians prefer not to be reminded that in the Middle Ages Transylvania was a Hungarian province, for they would like to believe that it was in fact a Romanian principality, only loosely attached to a foreign power. All Croats know well that Croatia as a kingdom was older than Hungary, but many of them would prefer to forget that this kingdom was much smaller than modern Croatia and that their modern capital, Zagreb, lay in Hungary. As for Hungarians, they still cling on to the fiction that there has only ever been one Hungary: the one that was founded by St Stephen in 1000 AD, and which still survives after a thousand years, even if it happens to be much smaller now than it once was. They will never accept the obvious fact that the republic of Hungary is not identical to the ancient kingdom of Hungary; that, as political entities, these are as different as are Turkey and the Ottoman Empire.

A particular area of sensitivity where national feelings are concerned is the use of personal names and place names. There are as many name forms as there are languages in the region, but there is no rule to determine which form is correct when the language of communication is English. Košice in modern Slovakia can be called Kassa, for it was, after all, a town in Hungary; but it was also known as Kaschau, for at