



Article

# A New Viewpoint to the Agatha Problem: Who Was the Mother of Margaret, Queen of Scots?

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**Abstract:** The family background of Agatha, the mother of Margaret of Scotland, is still one of the not yet fully clarified questions of Medieval European history. Here, the possibility that she could have been the daughter of Prince Imre, heir of the Hungarian throne, from the Árpád family and his wife, daughter of Romanos III Argyros, Emperor of the East Roman Empire, is discussed.

**Keywords:** Wessex Margaret of Scotland; Scots, Queen Margaret of; Queen Margaret, Mother of; Agatha, Mother of Queen Margaret; Agatha, father of, Imre; Crown Prince of Hungary, father of Agatha

#### 1. Introduction

Margaret, royal princess from the family of the Kings of Wessex and, later, of England (\*1045/47, +16 November, 1093) (data and references regarding persons appearing in the present study are presented in Appendix A), married Malcolm III King of Scots approximately in 1069 and, as Queen of Scots, became a key figure in Scottish cultural and religious history. Even if Margaret's father descended from one of the best-documented families of medieval Europe, the identity of her mother, *Agatha*, is still one of the interesting unresolved challenges of genealogical research, even today, almost a millennium later. In the present paper, a theory is described, according to which Agatha might have been the daughter of Crown Prince Imre of Hungary (Árpáds) and his wife, the daughter of Romanos III Argyros, Emperor of the East Roman Empire.

The father of Margaret, Prince Edward the Exile (\*ca.1016, +4 April, 1057), son of King Edward II, Ironside, had to leave England together with his brother Edmund because of political turbulences at a very young age, and after a few transfers, he found a relatively quiet exile in the Hungarian Kingdom, at the latest, in 1040 (there is a Hungarian estate around Réka Castle named Terra Britanorum de Nádasd, by tradition granted by King Stephen I (István I) of Hungary to the English Edward (Koller 1782; Horvát 1828; Xantus 1878; Rézbányay 1896; Malcomes 1937, 1938; Papp 1967; Szakonyi 2020), which if this tradition is true, would put him in Hungary before Stephen's death in 1038). According to another view, Margaret's family came to Hungary from Kiev together with another exile, Prince Andrew/András who became King of Hungary in 1047 (Jetté 1996; Keene 2011, 2013). In Hungary, Edward appears as husband of this (mysterious) Agatha, who is the focus of several earlier research efforts and of the present study. It is well documented that Edward turned back to England from Hungary in 1057, already married and as the father of a son and two daughters (one of these was Margaret, later Queen of Scots). Prince Edward died a few days after having returned to his homeland (e.g., Ronay 1989). Soon thereafter, the family of Prince Edward the Exile had to flee again, this time to Scotland. There, one of his daughters, Margaret, married Malcolm III (from the family of the Kings of Scotland). The identity (family background) of Margaret's mother, Prince Edwards's wife Agatha, awoke the curiosity of historians after a few centuries (e.g., Reusner 1592; Pray 1763; Cornides 1778; Katona 1779; Xantus 1878) without any final solution so far



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(Baldwin 2010, Conclusion: "given the current stage of knowledge, it is not possible to assign a specific parentage to Agatha, which carries conviction"). As often happens to difficult scientific problems, there are numerous hypotheses about her origin. These include German (Katona 1779; Pray 1763; Karácsonyi 1928; Herzog 1939; de Vajay 1962, 1971; Kraentzler 1978; Faris and Richardson 1998; Klaniczay 2002; Parsons 2002; Wolf 2011), Hungarian (see below), Polish (Ravilious 2009; Guido and Ravilious 2012), Bulgarian (Mladjov 2003), Russian (Wunder 1975; Ronay 1989; Jetté 1996; Ingham 1998; O'Brien 1999; Pavsic 2001; Humphreys 2003, 2004; Hlawitschka 2006; Keene 2011, 2013; Raffensperger 2012, 2016, 2018), Danish (Reusner 1592; Felch 1894), and Byzantine (Felch 1894; Humphreys 2004) origins (generally her descendance was supposed/deduced from the highest ranking families of these countries and/or even cross-variants of these families). Agatha studies are based on a few more-or-less contemporary informations from chronicles (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 1057, Cubbin 1996; Pretz 2012; John/Florence of Worcester 1881, ca. 1118; Thomson and Winterbottom 2003; Chibnall 1980; O'Brien 1999, ca. 1130; Hardy and Martin 1888; Dunphy and Bratu 2016) describing circumstances that are often contradictory. The studies concerned with the ancestry of Agatha have been reviewed several times; therefore, here we cite only a few relatively recent sophisticated publications that excellently cover and evaluate the relevant results and speculations (Lauder-Frost 2002; Humphreys 2003; Baldwin 2010; Wolf 2011; Keene 2011, 2013; Raffensperger 2012, 2016, 2018; Fest [1940] 2020; James 2021; Wikipedia Foundation 2021).

Our hypothesis, described later in this paper, is more-or-less in line with those variants, according to which Agatha was of Hungarian origin (chronicles: Thomson and Winterbottom 2003; Chibnall 1980; Hardy and Martin 1888; Dunphy and Bratu 2016—studies: Cornides 1778; Bresslau [1879] 1884; Fest 1935, 1938, Fest [1940] 2020; Moriarty 1952; Barrow 1993; Czigány and Korompay 2000; Sauser 2000; Lauder-Frost 2002; Mladjov 2003, 2015). These theories include the possibilities that she was the daughter of Granduke Géza (\*940/45, +1 February, 997), that is, she could have been a sister of King (Saint) István [Stephen] I (\*969/75, +15 August, 1038); the daughter of István I and his wife Gisela of Bavaria (Liudolfinger/Ottonen-Bayern, \*ca.985, +7 May, 1065); or the daughter of one of István's successors, Salamon (\*1052, +1087) and his wife Judith Maria (\*1054, +1092/96), who was the daughter of Emperor Heinrich III (Salier, \*28 October, 1017, +5 October, 1056, Schwennicke 1998, Table 12). Against each of these possible variants, however, powerful counter arguments can be found (e.g., Baldwin 2010). On the other hand, it is accepted by some scientists (first, in Hungary, e.g., Fest 1935, 1938, Fest [1940] 2020; Malcomes 1937, 1938) that Margaret was born in the Hungarian Kingdom, which makes the Hungary-based options attractive.

The theories deducing Agatha's German origin have their strong supporting argument based on the primary sources cited earlier in this paper (which identify Agatha as a "niece/daughter of Emperor Heinrich"), and this is coincident with the fact that István's wife Gisela came from a German (Liudolfinger-Bayern, Schwennicke 1998, Table 10) family, involving also the Hungarian royal dynasty in the chain of family relations.

The option that Agatha might have been the daughter of István and Gisela (Cornides 1778; Fest 1935, 1938, Fest [1940] 2020; Moriarty 1952) has the advantage that it joins the supporting arguments *both* for Agatha's Hungarian *and* German origin. The hypothesis described below has the same advantage.

## 2. The Imre Hypothesis

The most convincing counterarguments against the earlier Hungary-based theories are of biological character. Agatha is supposed to have been born some time between 1023 and 1030 (see, e.g., Wolf 2011, p. 508). Géza died decades before these dates (997); thus, the "sister-of-István" theory can be excluded with a high level of certainty. At the time mentioned, István and Gisela were fairly old, with István in his 50s and Gisela around or over 40. However, István, who introduced far reaching reforms in Hungary, had a strong ambition (well-documented, Szentpétery and Balogh 1938; Bollók and Kristó 2020) for his

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heir to continue his work, and when he lost his only grown-up son, Imre, in 1031, he and his wife might have made a desperate attempt to obtain an heir after Imre's death (which, if true, could have been a girl, Agatha), but this variant seems to be fairly improbable. One of István's successors, Salamon, on the other hand, was much too young even if his family relation had the same Hungarian/German characteristic that István had; he was born in the years when Margaret was born (and not Agatha!)—thus, this variant (Chibnall 1980) can also be excluded.

There was, however, a member of the Arpád family who fits very well within these requirements of age. István and Gisela's son, Imre (Gombos 1938; Kurcz 1983; Török 1986, 1994; Nemeskürty 1993; Magyar 2000; Barna 2006; Bradács 2008) was born in 1007, married in 1022 (to the daughter of Byzantine Emperor Romanos III Argyros), and passed away on September (November?) 2, 1031 (Schwennicke 1984, Table 153). Thus, he had 9 years of marriage exactly in the period when Agatha was supposed to have been born. Moreover, Imre had the same Hungarian/German descendance that could fulfil a compromise between the Hungary-based and Germany-based ("niece of Emperor Henry") theories of the origin of Agatha. Religious tradition describes (Erszegi 2001) Imre as a person, restraining (chastity, Lat.: continentia) himself from conjugal life, but this might be regarded as a somewhat exaggerated fruit of religious spirit and became popular during later dates (from the 12th century) (Concilium 2002; Kniewald 1939; Schmale 2002; Zapp 2002; Bartók and Horváth 2019). Other documented facts about Imre have shown that he was educated (Nemeskürty 1993; Török 1994; Magyar 2000; Erszegi 2008) to the fairly sportive life of rulers of the Middle Ages; he was sent to be a leader of military missions by his father and resolved these successfully. The circumstances of his death (boar-hunting) show again a manlike life-style too. Thus, it can reasonably be concluded that in the 9 years of his married life, he might have conducted a usual conjugal life—which, on the other hand, would be by no means in contradiction with his strong religious commitment.

The involvement of Imre and his wife in the ascendence of Agatha, similar to a (supposed) daughter of István and Gisela, has the same intermediary characteristic of providing both Hungarian *and* German ascendence (from Imre's side) as it would be for a sister of Imre. There is, however, no trace in the relevant documentation that a daughter of István I and Gisela arrived at adult age or that Imre and his wife had a child. These considerations point at the necessity of future research.

There is an additional interesting (onomastic) point in the possibility that Imre could have been the father of Margaret's mother. Agatha in Western and Central Europe is a fairly rarely given name. Agatha is of Greek origin (Kohlheim and Kohlheim 2007), and it was more frequently used in the Byzantine Empire. Actually, one of the grand-grandmothers of Imre's wife was named Agatha (Runciman 1929; Ostrogorsky 1968; Cheynet and Vannier 2003; Ravegnani 2006, 2008). Moreover, this (grand-grandmother) Agatha was the daughter of Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (ca.870—15 June 948), who was married to an earlier Romanos Argyros, grandfather of Emperor Romanos III, and this marriage was a key event in the (social and political) ascent of the Argyros family, culminating later in the imperial throne. The habit of giving names of famous progenitors to new-born family members was present also in the Byzantine Empire.

Imre's given name also can be commented upon. According to some sources originally, he was called Heinrich (Schwartz 1930; Kristó 2000; Szabó and Sudár 2021), most probably referring to Gisela's influential German relatives (this is in consonance with the information that Imre's older brother, who passed away young, was named Otto). It cannot be determined with certainty when and why this name change took place, but it may have caused some confusion for later historians. For example, as husband of the daughter of Romanos III Argyros, some sources write Heinrich (e.g., Italian Wikipedia), which may also be due to this uncertainty in Imre's given name. In the present study, however, we accepted the data provided by Detlev Schwennicke in his fundamental work Europäische Stammtafeln (Schwennicke 1984, Table 153).

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If Agatha was in fact the daughter of Imre and she was born in the period between 1022 (Imre's matrimony) and 1031 (Imre's death), she might have been fairly young (7 to 16 years old) when king István I passed away in 1038. Being young and being a woman, she was "out of the game" at the turbulent events accompanying the succession to the throne. In fact, in the following years, six persons changed alternately on the Hungarian throne (one of these twice), which was occupied by István I for 41 relatively quiet years (Péter (first time), Sámuel, Péter (second time), András I, Béla I, Salamon, and Géza I), until longer, stable periods came after 1077 with (St.) László I (18 years) and Kálmán (21 years). It can reasonably be assumed that Agatha looked for matrimony as soon as she could, and in fact, we find her to be a mother of three children when leaving from Hungary to England in 1057.

It might be additionally considered that *if* Agatha had been exclusively of German origin, she (and later her family) could have found a more quiet, safe, and respected place in the German (Holy Roman) Empire than in Hungary, which experienced a climate of political instability for a few decades after the death of István I in 1038.

It is an interesting aspect of the genealogy of Agatha (and Margaret) that, if Agatha were a descendent of King István I, she could have been one of the pretenders of the Hungarian throne. As we mentioned above, it appears that she (and her husband) did not have such ambitions, at least as it is seen from the vast majority of the literature dealing with 11th century Hungary. However, there is one exception in this literature. Gaimar, in his poetic, literary chronicle (Hardy and Martin 1888), describes a visit of Edward the Confessor (before he became King) to Hungary with the goal giving some kind of "support" to the political ambitions of his cousins in Hungary. The extent of historical truth behind this description can be debated, but it still gives an indisputable proof of the fact that the possibility of the English princes in Hungarian exile being (at least) considered as participants in the rivalry for the Hungarian crown after the death of István I was a part of public discourse. This gives an argument for the view that Agatha, the wife of one of these princes (Edward), was a close relative of the prestigious monarch István I, who passed away in 1038. The exact nature of this relation is not documented, but there are not too many choices. The possibility that Agatha could have been the sister of Queen Gisela can be ruled out on the basis of age (Gisela's father died in August 995), and the possibility that Agatha could have been the daughter of one of the sisters of István I (e.g., Mladjov 2015) can be ruled out on the basis of the widely accepted German family relation; then, there remains nothing else than to consider Agatha either the daughter of István I and Gisela or as the granddaughter of the same couple. On the basis of the biological arguments mentioned above, this last possibility seems to be more realistic. If so, then, Agatha can be considered no other than the daughter of Crown Prince Imre and his wife, as described earlier in this paper.

The (possible) chain of descendance **István I/Gisela => Imre/**Argyra => Agatha/ Edward => Margaret/Malcolm III => David I has yet another unusual feature: the persons in these five generations, who are indicated here in **boldface** letters, lived their religious commitments at such a high level that they became canonized (declared to be blessed or saint) by the Roman Catholic Church. One could add that Queen Gisela's brother, Emperor Henry II (+1024), became canonized (1046); that Queen Margaret's daughter Mathilde/Editha of Scotland (\*1079, +1118, Schwennicke 1984, Table 89) was also known as an outstandingly pious person even if she did not become canonized (Huneycutt 2003; Green 2006; Keene 2011, 2013); and that the brother of the grandfather of Edward the Exile, King Edward II, the Martyr (+18 March 979, Schwennicke 1984, Table 78; Yorke 1999), became canonized in 1001. Obviously, there is no natural law in genetic biology that could prove that "sanctity" is hereditary, but strong character features, together with the physical appearance of living organisms, are frequently hereditary (e.g., Bouchard and Loehin 2001; Mufanò and Flint 2011; Zwir et al. 2020). One could say that ruling families had "good contact" with the Church and thus their merits became more recognized than those of "ordinary" citizens, but several counter arguments can be found against such a perspective, starting from the saints from the poorest parts of society or of the most ascetic life-style (e.g., Francis of Assisi, Genealogy **2022**, 6, 22 5 of 9

1181/2—2 October, 1226, canonized in 1228) or considering Emperor/King Carl (Károly) I (IV) Habsburg-Lothringen (\*17 August 1887, +1 April 1922, beatified in 2004), who was the *first* beatified member of his family (having ruled in various countries of Europe for nearly a millenium, also giving a number of emperors), as a counterpoint. Thus, we can dare say that the above chain of canonized persons is not a result of political influence but rather can be considered as a noticeable indication of a close family relation between the persons mentioned above.

#### 3. Conclusions

We put forth a hypothesis that the father of the mother of Margaret of Scotland, Agatha, could have been Prince Imre (son of King István I of Hungary, from the Árpád family and heir of the throne in the Hungarian Kingdom, who died before his father died and that royal succession in Hungary thus took different routes). Imre was married for 9 years before his early death in 1031 at the age of 24 years. The dates known about this prince fit very well in a possible time-frame around Agatha's life.

It should be pointed out that this theory is put forth as a possibility of a new direction in this area of research, which merits and needs deeper future investigations.

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## Appendix A

Table A1. Persons, (family), status, dates, and references.

Name	(Family)	Status	Born	Deceased	Married	Remarks	Notes
Margaret	(Wessex- England)	Queen of Scots	(?)	16 November 1093	ca. 1069	Rom. Cath. Saint	ES.II.T.78.
	-		(1045)	16 November 1093	1069/70	Rom. Cath. Saint	ES II.T.89.
Edward	(Wessex- England)	Prince	(?)	1057	(?)	"the Exile"	ES.II.T.78.
	<i>O</i> ,		(?)	19 April 1057	(?)	"the Exile"	ESXXIX.T.36.
Agatha	(Brunonen- Braunschweig?)	Princess	(?)	(?)	Edward the Exile	-	ES.II.T.78.
	0 /		(?)	1067/68	Edward the Exile	-	ES:XXIX.T.36. (*)
Malcolm III	(Scotland)	King of Scots	(?)	13 November 1093	1069: Margaret	-	ES.II.T.78.
			1031	(war) 13 November 1093	(2nd) 1069/70: Margaret	-	ES.II.T.89.
David I	(Scotland)	King of Scots	(1080)	24 May 1153	1113/4	son of Margaret	ES.II.T.89.

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Table A1. Cont.

Name	(Family)	Status	Born	Deceased	Married	Remarks	Notes
Edward II	(Wessex- England)	King of England	(?)	(murder) 30 November 1016	1016 N. Eldgyth	"Ironside"	ES.II.T.78.
Edward III	(Wessex- England)	King of England	(1004)	5 January 1066	1.23.1045, Wessex E.	"Confessor"	ES.II.T.78.
Harold II	(Wessex- England)	King of England	(1020)	(war) 14 October 1066	1065, Mercia Ealdgyth	-	ES.II.T.78.
Géza	(Árpád- Hungary)	Gr.duke of Hungary	940/5	1 February 997	(1) 967, (2) 985	-	ES.II.T.153.
István I	(Árpád- Hungary)	King of Hungary	969/75	15 August 1038	996	(Stephen)	ES.II.T.153.
Gisela	(Ottonen- Bayern)	Queen of Hungary	(985)	7 May 1065	996 (István I)	1045:noun	ES.II.T.153.
			(985)	7 May 1065	996 (István I)	1045:noun	ES.I/1.T.10
Imre	(Árpád- Hungary)	Crown Prince of Hun.	ca.1007	4 November 1031	1022	(Heinrich), R.C.Saint	ES.II.T.153.
Sámuel	(Aba- Hungary)	King of Hungary	(?)	July/August 1044	(?)	1st nephew of István I	ES.II.T.153.
Péter	(Orseolo- Hungary)	King of Hungary	(?)	30 August 1059	(1) 1031/8, (2) 1055	1st nephew of István I	ES.II.T.153.
András I	(Árpád- Hung.)	King of Hungray	(1014)	fall, 1060	(1) (?), (2) 1037/8	2nd nephew of István I	ES II.T.154.
Béla I	(Árpád- Hungary)	King of Hungary	(?)	1063	1039/42	2nd nephew of István I	ES.II.T.154.
Salamon	(Árpád- Hung.)	King of Hungary	1052	(war) 1087	1063 Salier Judith	son of András I	ES.II.T.154.
Géza I	(Árpád- Hungary)	King of Hungary	1044/5	25 April 1077	(1) 1062, (2) 1065	son of Béla I	ES.II.T.154.

### Notes

ES I/1.: Schwennicke, D. *Europäische Stammtafeln. Neue Folge.* Band I/1., V. Klostermann, Frankfurt/Main, 1998.

ES II.: Schwennicke, D. (Hrg.) *Europäische Stammtafeln, Neue Folge*. Band II., J. A. Stargardt Verl., Marburg, 1984.

ES XXIX.: Schwennicke, D. Europäische Stammtafeln, Neue Folge. Band XXIX. V. Klostermann, Frankfurt/Main, 2013.

## Remarks

- (a) (\*) It is not very clear from this table who were supposed to be the parents of Agatha (see also the text).
- **(b)** Queen **Margaret** and King **Malcolm III** had eight children—six sons and two daughters—and three of them were Kings of Scots (ES.II.T.89.):

**Edward** (c.1071—13 November 1093), killed along with his father in the battle of Alnwick;

**Edmund** (c.1071—post-1097);

Ethelred, abbot of Dunkeld (Perthshire, Scotland);

Edgar (c.1074—11 January 1107), King of Scots, reigned 1097–1107;

Alexander I (c.1078—23 April 1124), King of Scots, reigned 1107–1124;

Edith (c.1080—1 May 1118), renamed Matilda, Queen of England;

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Mary (1082-1116), Countess of Boulogne;

David I (St.) (c.1084—24 May 1153), King of Scots, reigned 1124–1153.

Margaret was the second wife of Malcolm III, whose son with his first wife (Ingibiorg Finnsdottir, widow of Thorfinn Sigurdsson, Earl of Orkney), Duncan, was briefly King of Scots in 1094.

**(c)** To avoid confusion, we mention here that there were also two princesses *Margaret* (*Margit*) from the Hungarian royal family (Árpád), (ES.II.T.154/155.):

Margit/Margaret (daughter of King Béla III and his second wife, Anna/Agnes de Châtillon-sur-Loing/Antiochia, \*1175, +post 1223), married to (1) Emperor Isaakios II Angelos of Byzantium; (2) Margrave Boniface of Montferrat, King of Thessalonica; and (3) Nicholas de Saint Omer, Sn. of Boetien.

**(St.)** Margit/Margaret (daughter of King Béla IV. and Maria Laskarina of Nicaia, \*1242, +18 January, 1271), Domenican nun.

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