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Sashka Georgieva

How Valid Were the Marriages of Medieval Bulgarian Rulers

(Abstract)

The purpose of the article is to investigate the actual application of the laws on which the legality or validity of marriage in the marital life of medieval Bulgarian rulers depended. The research analyzes marriages concluded in violation of one or another restriction, which determined the legality and therefore the admissibility of a marriage. It also studies the types of prohibitions that were neglected in the implementation of the marital policy of the Bulgarian rulers and includes unjustified divorces, as well as cases of serial monogamy. The study traces the presence or absence of church reaction to infractions in the matter. The results show to what extent law was able to influence statesmen's marital policy. As a whole, the history of the marriage life of the medieval Bulgarian rulers shows that no obstacle, be it disparity in faith, age, kinship or marital status, was insurmountable when the rulers decided to use a marriage agreement as a means to achieve political ends. Medieval rulers preferred to violate laws and canons, but to strengthen their political arrangements with marriage, and hence with the unwritten laws of kinship loyalty, and the Bulgarian church, which was called upon to uphold the implementation of canons, in most cases silently accepted the rulers' decisions, and at times seems to have even assisted them.

Keywords: Medieval Bulgaria; royal marriages and medieval law