

TEI Letters: The Encodings

The letters of Constance of Hungary are more than records of royal transactions, they are embedded acts of authority, memory, and social negotiation. By encoding these documents using TEI, we illuminate the structural features that shape their meaning: who is named, where power resides, and how spiritual, legal, and familial relationships are represented. TEI allows us to move beyond surface readings to explore how queenship operated through language, witnessing, and the material geography of medieval rulership. Each encoded feature, from the naming of places to the roles of individuals, opens a new lens on how Constance articulated and exercised power across decades.

What is TEI and Why Use It?

The Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) is an XML-based standard for encoding texts in a machine-readable and semantically rich format. Designed primarily for scholars working with literary and historical materials, TEI enables the structured representation of people, places, dates, roles, institutions, and more, making it ideal for digital humanities projects.

Using TEI allows us to go beyond simply displaying historical documents. Instead, we can mark up the political, religious, social, and rhetorical dimensions of these texts in a way that both reflects and reveals their complexity. In this project, TEI makes the structure of medieval charters visible and machine-processable. It allows for precise identification of queens, kings, witnesses, churches, towns, and more, while also highlighting themes of gender, power, and memory embedded within the language of rulership.

constance_rajhrad_1222.xml

A letter from Constance of Hungary (1222)

The TEI encoding of the 1222 letter makes Constance's embedded authority visible by tagging her name alongside that of her husband, Otakar I, using `<persName>` and `<roleName>` elements. This affirms her legal co-signature and presence in the charter's opening lines. Encoding `<roleName>queen</roleName>` and `<roleName>king</roleName>` shows how authority was distributed within the royal couple.

Geographic and institutional connections are meticulously marked using `<placeName>` (e.g. Brno, Brodskih, Kunovice, Mirozlav) and `<orgName>` (e.g. convent of Rajhrad), which makes it easier to map the spatial reach of Constance's influence. Furthermore, encoding religious references such as `<name type="deity">god</name>` frames the charter's theological legitimacy, a rhetorical device common in medieval documents.

The use of `<name type="ethnic">Bohemians</name>` situates the letter in a national-political context, emphasizing the territorial identity of the monarchy. TEI markup enables researchers to programmatically search or sort documents by roles, places, and named individuals here, a functionality that plain text cannot support. This markup reveals how Constance's queenship was both performative and embedded in legal, economic, and sacred frameworks.

constance_olomuc_1233-01-21.xml

A letter from Constance of Hungary (1233, January 21)

This 1233 charter, fully authored by Queen Constance, encodes a moment of widowed authority and dynastic continuity. The TEI tags `<persName>`, `<forename>`, and `<roleName>` identify not only Constance and her son Premysl but also the supportive nobleman Albert, affirming her independent juridical capacity.

Tagging religious bodies and locations through `<orgName>` (e.g. church of St. Peter, bishopric of Olomuc) and `<placeName>` (e.g. Olomuc, Drozdovice, Novy Hradek) traces Constance's spiritual patronage and geographic reach. The `<name type="deity">` tags for "God" and "Christ" reflect the spiritual justification for land donation, aligning with medieval ideologies of queenship as divinely sanctioned.

By encoding the witnesses' clerical and secular roles, such as `<roleName>deacon</roleName>` and `<roleName>castellan</roleName>`, the markup also documents the layered social network that supported and validated royal authority. TEI thus helps recover the performative and communal nature of medieval documentation, where power was exercised collectively and spiritually.

constance_public_1235-02-12.xml

A letter from Constance of Hungary (1235, February 12)

The TEI markup for this letter captures a moment of intergenerational royal patronage. With extensive use of `<persName>` to tag Queen Constance, her daughter Agnes, and son Wenceslas, the document emphasizes familial continuity in religious endowment. The `<roleName>` tag identifies Constance as queen and Agnes as lady, preserving the nuances of hierarchical and gendered power in the court.

Tagging places like `<placeName>Prague</placeName>`, `<placeName>Hloubetin</placeName>`, and `<placeName>Zupanovice</placeName>` highlights the breadth of land included in the donation. These encodings allow for later geospatial mapping and comparative analysis of landholding practices.

Multiple religious and institutional affiliations, such as `<orgName>hospital of the monastery of St. Francis</orgName>` and `<orgName>hospital of St. Mary of the house of Teutonic Knights</orgName>`, show the letter's dense network of religious and political allegiances. Encoding `<name type="ethnic">Bohemians</name>` also continues to situate Constance's rulership within a national-political identity.

Unlike plain text, TEI markup makes it possible to trace recurring figures, places, and institutional ties across letters. This reinforces how Constance operated within complex power structures that included family, church, and court.

constance_public_1236-12-07.xml

A letter from Constance of Hungary (1236, December 7)

The final letter, marked up in TEI, documents Queen Constance's use of memory and moral authority to restore justice. `<persName>` tags highlight both Constance and her daughter Agnes, connecting the

mother's enforcement of tithe rights to her daughter's monastic foundation. The `<roleName>queen</roleName>` and `<roleName>king</roleName>` elements reinforce her invocation of past sovereign authority, even in widowhood.

The encoding of `<orgName>`, especially the Crusaders of the Teutonic house and the hospital of St. Francis, exposes a political and spiritual struggle over resources. This reflects Constance's role as both a legal arbitrator and a spiritual guardian.

Religious language is encoded through `<name type="deity">god</name>`, `<name type="deity">Christ</name>`, and `<name type="deity">Lord</name>`, underscoring her rhetorical emphasis on divine justice and righteous order. The `<placeName>` tags allow scholars to trace both ecclesiastical geography and patterns of donation.

While a plain text version captures narrative, the TEI markup provides layered metadata for each participant, institution, and location, allowing for network analysis, role-based queries, and more nuanced studies of how royal women like Constance structured their authority.

Encoding Constance's letters in TEI reveals layers of significance that remain obscured in plain text. Through `<persName>`, `<placeName>`, `<orgName>`, `<roleName>`, and other elements, we make visible the networks of people, institutions, and locations that composed the world of royal governance and spiritual patronage. Just as the queen used charters to assert legal and moral claims, TEI offers a digital framework to represent those claims with precision and nuance. Ultimately, these encodings affirm that medieval queenship was not only lived but also meticulously recorded, and now, digitally reimaged for contemporary scholarship.

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