

ABSTRACT

THE PATRON SAINT OF TRANSYLVANIA
TYPE- AND MOTIF INDEX OF LEGENDS
ABOUT SAINT LADISLAUS

The Saint Ladislaus legend cycle is one of the richest narrative traditions of the Hungarian folklore from typological point of view. Amongst notable historical heroes, only the narrative tradition born around the personality of King Matthias exceeds it in magnitude and spread. The diversity of this cycle of traditions is indicated by the fact that ethnographic motifs from before the Hungarian conquest are as constitutive of it as 20th century folk poetry, and especially popular traditions shaped as local legends linked to a concrete place – spring, tree, rock, gorge etc. Essentially, this intensive localisation has helped in most cases the survival of the respective traditions over many centuries. Not to mention their virulence in oral folk culture.

Mediaeval sources indicate that the narrative tradition developed around the figure of Saint Ladislaus was organized into a legend cycle as early as the first centuries of his cult. The Saint Ladislaus legend cycle is one of the few epic folk traditions whose elements are nearly as old as the Hungarian presence in the Carpathian Basin, and whose many segments have a documented continuity across several centuries. Although the legend cycle is interwoven by various international and hagiographical motifs, overall it constitutes an ethnic specificity similar to the Saint Ladislaus fresco cycle in iconography. According to the available data, the cult and popular veneration of Saint Ladislaus – also as the patron saint of Transylvania – was particularly intensive in the Middle Ages in Bihar (Bihar) county and in areas beyond the Királyhágó (Pasul Craiului). His grave in Nagyvárad (Oradea) was a pilgrimage site of European fame, where even monarchs visited or were buried there, and, mirroring this cultic site in Nagyvárad, several other local pilgrimage sites emerged across Transylvania (for example in the region of Turda and the Şieu val-

ley). When large parts of Transylvania were converted to Protestantism, the ecclesiastical veneration was progressively replaced by already widespread folk traditions, which kept the memory of the saint king as alive as before also in areas that became Protestant since the mid-16th century, such as Aranyosszék (Valea Arieşului) and Kalotaszeg (Țara Călatei). In the 19th – 20th centuries, the popular veneration of Saint Ladislaus was recorded mostly in the form of such local, regional legend cycles, spreading from Zala (Sălaj) county to the river Garam (Hron, Slovakia), from Baranya county to the Zobor region in the Hungarian Highlands (Zobor nad Nitrou, Slovakia), from Palócföld to the Torna Karst (Turniansky Kras, Slovakia), and finally, to the east from Bihar county and the Torda region, especially in the Şieu valley, known also as Cserhalomtáj, certain village groups in Szeklerland (Székelyföld, Ținutul Secuiesc), the Nyárád (Niraj) valley, Csík (Ciuc) and the old Udvarhely comitatus (Udvarhelyszék, Scaunul Odorhei), and, in its longest surviving and most diverse form, in Gyimes (Ghimeş) and among the Moldavian Csángó people.

In the pages of this volume we attempt a comprehensive presentation of the (written/surviving) narrative traditions relative to the cult of Saint Ladislaus, which took shape in the past eight hundred – nine hundred years in Transylvania and Partium. Here it must be mentioned that this index of types represents one chapter of a larger, more comprehensive book series, *A magyar történeti mondák katalógusa* (*The Catalogue of Hungarian Historical Legends*), whence the indexing of subjects according to ethnographic criteria (MZ II. D.), as well as the occasional use of cross-references. The several thousand folk texts that form the database of this partial catalogue are integral part of the Magyar Történeti Mondák Archívuma (*The Archive of Hungarian Historical Legends*), and amount to about half-hundred published sources, nearly one hundred manuscript dossiers, as well as a significant number of recent fieldwork collections. The catalogue of types, containing several hundred legend types, is supplemented by a detailed index of motifs, an index of motifs arranged alphabetically and with references to the context of the indexed term, so as to facilitate the search for the respective traditions. The Transylvanian Saint Ladislaus legend cycle is a poetic folk tradition that represents, from an ethnographic and interdisciplinary perspective, the cultural heritage of all Hungarians.