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The hagiography of Saint Elizabeth of the Árpád dynasty and Saint Elizabeth
of Portugal

To the research of Early Modern veneration of saints

Abstract of the thesis

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I. The subject of the thesis

My dissertation deals with the comparative study of the veneration history of St. Elizabeth of the Árpád dynasty (or Elizabeth of Hungary, 1207–1231) and of St. Elizabeth of Portugal (1270–1336), with particular emphasis to the evolution of their medieval hagiographic tropes. My examination concentrates on the close reading of primary texts in Latin, Hungarian, Portuguese and Spanish legendaries written in the early modern era. As I have found, most of these collections of the Life of Saints contain both of their lives. The shared context of their legend could particularly confirm the migration of the miracles and motifs.

Therefore, the dissertation is typically resource-oriented and seeks to closely examine these contemporary texts. Its practical purpose is, on one hand, to incorporate so far unknown sources into the literature discourse, and on the other hand, to analyse the already known texts from a new perspective.

II. The central figures of the thesis

One of the most well-known female saints of the middle ages was St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–1231). She was the descent of András II of the Árpád dynasty and his spouse Gertrude of Merania. Her place of birth can be most likely put at Sárospatak. Then, since the age of four Elizabeth was raised in the court of the Landgravine of Thuringia together with her future husband, Luis IV of Thuringia. They got married and had three children, Sophie, Henrik and Gertrude. She lived a charitable and religious life and after four years of her death,

Elizabeth was canonized as the first female representative of the new type of female sanctity of the middle ages. This ideal organized around apostolic life, poverty and the helping of those in need. Later on, the queens and noble women of this lifestyle were commissioned to pursue the glory of their family.

The medieval life, legend and iconography of Elizabeth of the Árpád dynasty is a well-researched area of the literature, yet less emphasis has been placed on the development of her early modern veneration. Therefore, one of the main goals of this dissertation is to partly fill this gap by giving a brief overview of her legends known and used in the 15–16th century.

In addition to the Hungarian saint, my thesis also highlights the life and legend of St. Elizabeth of Portugal. Despite being an important character of the Spanish, Portuguese-Hungarian relations there are surprisingly few works of literature available related to her in Hungarian.

Her various names are Isabel, Rainha Santa, i.e. the Holy Queen, in Hungary she is referred to as Elizabeth of Portugal. She was born in 1270 in the Royal Court of Aragon and was named after her great-great aunt, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, who was recently canonized.¹

¹ The emphasis on this dynastic relationship is often the subject of later biographies and legends, thanks to the new evolving conception of the royal holiness in the Middle Ages. The Saints give a pattern through their virtues to follow, and they also provided the opportunity to enforce the benefits of the family's sanctity on a political field. Cf.:

Isabel was raised with her grandparents, James I of Aragon and Jolan (Jolanda) of the Árpád-dynasty. After his grandfather's death in 1276, she returned to her parents, and in 1282 she was married to Denis I of Portugal, a descendant of the Burgundy dynasty (r. 1261-1325).

The medieval development of the two female saints' veneration is described summarizing the results of the literature in this subject. In addition, I rely on my own research to report new results about its development in the early modern era. These chapters including the changes and interactions of their legends form a prominent part of the dissertation. Especially, because the cult and veneration of the Portuguese saint have become widely known in Europe from the beginning of the 16th century.

The interactions and overlaps presented in their hagiographies are based on their descents from the Árpád dynasty. This connection was reinforced by their self-identification with the ideals of the Franciscan order and their personal connections to it, this strong bond was also enhanced by their identity of names in the Latin literature.

It has already been confirmed by previous research that in the Middle Ages the legend of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary influenced the development of the Portuguese saint's hagiography. However, the present thesis examines the impact that St. Elisabeth of Portugal that

KLANICZAY, Gábor, *Az uralkodók szentsége a középkorban. Magyar dinasztikus szentkultuszok és európai modellek* [Holy rulers in the Middle Ages. Hungarian dynastic saint cults and European models]. (Budapest: Balassi, 2000), 171.

after her canonization (1625) had on the cult of the Hungarian saint, whose veneration was persisting since the Middle Ages.

III. The examined sources

In the *Resources* section of the dissertation, I analyse texts divided into three groups. The first group deals with the hagiographies of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary from the early modern period written in Latin. One of them may be found in Petrus Natalis's *Catalogus Sanctorum*, the second one in Antoninus Florentinus's *Chronicon* and the third text is Jacobus Montanus's *Elisabeth-vita*. The role and significance of these hagiographies are attributed to them by the later citations and by their function as mediators, making available Elisabeth's medieval legend in the early modern period.

The authors and their work are not completely unknown to the literature, but a similar study of the Elisabeth-hagiographies has not been done yet. I studied the development of the early modern veneration of the Hungarian saint by two means. First, I was looking for literal transmission of certain motifs and miracles, and secondly, I traced back references stated in the hagiography. By organizing and analysing these references, which have not yet been examined in Hungarian literature, I made roughly visible the changes resulted in the veneration of the saint. In addition, by collecting these data, the employment of these specific early modern legends became measurable in the Iberian Peninsula as well.

Besides the Latin legends, I narrowed down the resources to early modern printed sources, chiefly collections of Legends of Saints,

which contained both hagiographies of the two female saints. This was an essential aspect because their legends this way can be interpreted within the same framing context. Furthermore, I was also able to study the authors approach towards the two saints, whether he is trying to connect or detach the two legends whether remains completely neutral in the question.

The other group of sources includes lives of saints written on the Iberian Peninsula. Their research not only contains valuable and new information of the Hungarian and the Portuguese saint's legend but also brings new ideas by presenting the Portuguese authors and their work.

One of the earliest printed collections which contains both the Hungarian and the Portuguese saint's legends is the *Chronica da Ordem dos Frades Menores* (1557–1562), a three-part chronicle written by the Portuguese Franciscan, Marcos de Lisboa (1511–1591). In addition, I have also analysed the hagiographies presented in *Flos Sanctorum* by Diogo do Rosário. This last one represents the tradition of the *Legenda Aurea* on the Iberian Peninsula.

The last group of legendaries were written in Hungary and were mostly published from the end of the 17th century. Their authors are in some way connected to the Jesuit order. I studied *A keresztyeni életnek példája, vagy tüköre az az: a szentek élete [...] V. A' szent szüzekről,*

és özvegyekről, (Nagyszombat, 1682; 1707)² written by András Illyés (1637–1712), and *Ungariae Sanctitatis Indicia/ Régi magyar szentség...* (Nagyszombat, 1692; 1695; 1737.)³ written by Gábor Hevenesi (1656 -1715). Based on the results it became evident that, after the canonization of Saint Elisabeth of Portugal, she was classified as a Hungarian saint due to her lineage of the Árpád dynasty, and to her connection with Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. It also appears that the Legend Aurea was still an important source of the Hungarian saint's current legend.

The illustrations or engravings that accompany the hagiographies in certain books have been collected and I have connected them to the contents of the legends. Because of the biographical and hagiographical similarities, there were overlaps also in the iconography of the two saints.

In relation to this, the last chapter of the dissertation deals with the early modern iconography of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, in which I present, among other things, a collection that has not yet been published. These illustrations are presented in the 15–16th-century Flemish books of Hours. The results confirmed my assumption that the iconic feature of Elisabeth's in this period was indeed the three crowns. In contrast, the motifs of the miracle of the roses which was

² *An example or mirror of Christian life: the life of the saints [...], Part V. About the holy virgins and widows* (Trnava, 1682; 1707).

³ *Ungariae Sanctitatis Indicia / Early Hungarian Sanctity...* (Trnava, 1692; 1695; 1737)

her popular symbol in the Middle Ages have been increasingly used to portray Saint Elizabeth of Portugal from the 16th century.

Reflecting on the enlisted visual material, I examined three written sources as well, in which the same three crown motif is reinforced by descriptions. In addition to the images, this material sensitively conveys the iconography of the Hungarian saint in the early modern period.

Among the authors I emphasize in this chapter the work of Johannes Molanus and his *De Picturis et imaginibus sacris* (Leuven, 1570.), being one of the first written sources that officially attributed this iconography to the Hungarian saint. Finally, I also analyse along with the iconographic feature, the biography of saint Elizabeth of Hungary which was written by Justus Lipsius and published in *Diva Virgo Hallensis* (Leuven, 1604).

IV. Methods of the analysis

I examine the legends primarily in a comparative manner the individual characteristics of the saints and the demonstration of similarities and differences between them. I also aspire to grasp the changes in the two saint's hagiography resulted since their medieval versions. In the early modern texts, it can be demonstrated through the transmission of the motifs and placement of references.

References and citations in the early modern life of saints' literature presuppose some critical attitude towards the topic. This attitude mainly manifests by the process of mentioning some sources and

omitting others. The used references were necessary consequences of the textual criticism and, as well as these sources helped to maintain the credibility and to prove the historical tradition of venerating saints. Although the systematic collection and critical examination of the hagiographic material only began in the mid-17th century initiated by the Jesuit Order, however the sources I have examined can be preceded as forerunners of this movement.

The Latin texts can be traced back directly to medieval sources, but the reference pointing to them is often missing. Except for one or two exceptions, both the 16th-century Portuguese and the 17th-century Hungarian Elisabeth-hagiographies report their own compilation based on specific sources. In the legends of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary discussed in my dissertation, however, with close reading and analysing the texts, it is possible to detect a certain authorial behaviour, in which the marking of references does not always or completely coincide with the actual text transmission.

List of publications concerning the subject of the thesis

1. A 16th-century Portuguese vita of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary – translation = „Szent Erzsébet 16. századi portugál nyelvű életrajza – forrásközlés”. *Verso: Irodalomtörténeti Folyóirat* 3, 1. sz. (2019): 112–127.
2. The iconography of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary and of Saint Elizabeth of Portugal represented in 16–17th-century Portuguese legendary literature = „Árpád-házi Szent Erzsébet és Portugáliai Szent Erzsébet ikonográfiája a 16–17. századi portugál legendairódlomb tükrében”, In *tév/hit: Tévedések és tévesztések a régi irodalomban*, szerkesztette ETLINGER Mihály és mtsai, 65–82. Budapest: Reciti, 2018.
3. Further aspects of the veneration of Saint Elizabeth of Portugal = „Portugáliai Szent Erzsébet kultuszának újabb emlékei”, In *Művelődéstörténeti kalászatok*, szerkesztette CZEGLÉDI László és mtsai, 9–20. Eger: Líceum Kiadó 2017.
4. The early modern iconography of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary: Johannes Molanus = „Árpád-házi Szent Erzsébet kora újkori ikonográfiája: Johannes Molanus”, In *V. Interdiszciplináris Doktorandusz Konferencia Konferenciakötet: 5th Interdisciplinary Doctoral Conference Conference Book*, szerkesztette ÁCS Kamilla és mtsai, 464–477. Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Doktorandusz Önkormányzat, 2016.

5. Contributions to the early modern iconography of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary and of Saint Elizabeth of Portugal: Johannes Molanus = „Adalékok Árpád-házi és Portugáliai Szent Erzsébet kora újkori ikonográfiájához: Johannes Molanus”, *Magyar Könyvszemle* 132, 4. sz. (2016): 385–403.

In the process of being published

1. „Saint Elizabeth of Hungary in Flemish Books of Hours”, In *Devotional Literature in the Late Middle Ages and Early modern Period, Cluj Conference May 31st - June 2nd*, Refo500 Academic Studies Series (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Publishing House) 2019.

2. Lipsius as a hagiographer? The life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary in the oeuvre of Justus Lipsius = „Lipsius mint hagiográfus? Árpád-házi Szent Erzsébet életrajza Justus Lipsius életművében”, In *Textológia és interpretáció a régi magyar irodalomban*, szerkeszti KISS Farkas Gábor, PESTI Brigitta, Budapest, ELTE, 2019.