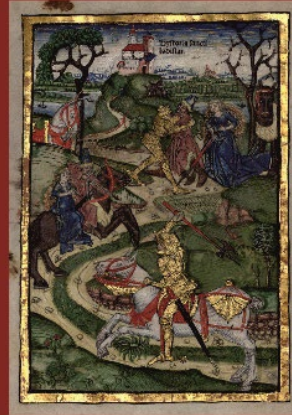


New Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Saint Ladislaus

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Athleta Christi–Athleta Transylvaniae: reprezentări ale Sfântului Ladislau în artă și în literatură/ Athleta Christi–Athleta Transylvaniae: Representations of Saint Ladislaus in Art and Literature, ed. by Susana-Monica Tapodi and Valentin Trifescu, Editura Muzeului Național Brukenthal, Sibiu, 2024, 100 pages



Athleta Christi - Athleta Transylvaniae

Reprezentări ale Sfântului Ladislau
în artă și în literatură

Ediție îngrijită de
Susana-Monica Tapodi și Valentin Trifescu
Editura Muzeului Național Brukenthal

The present volume contains two main studies on Saint Ladislaus and a Romanian translation from Hungarian of a poem on his legend, with an enlightening preface, a comprehensive bibliography and a rich list of illustrations.

According to the prefacer, art historian Valentin Trifescu, the book contributes to a better communion between Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania; he argues that openness towards alterity is required in the context, along with mutual knowledge which needs constant maintaining through a series of translations from a language into another. V. Trifescu was astonished that besides few specialists¹, Romanians were unaware of Ladislaus I (1040-1095), king of Hungary and saint of the Catholic Church, buried in

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¹ For more details, see Vasile Drăguț: „Legenda «eroului de frontieră» în pictura medievală din Transilvania”/ “The Legend of the ‘Border Hero’ in Medieval Painting from Transylvania”, in *Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor*, series *Monumente istorice și de artă*, tom 2, 1974, pp. 21-38. Other more recent studies were authored by Dragoș-Gheorghe Năstăsioiu, Elena Dana Prioteasa, Doina Elena Crăciun, Anca Gogăltan and Vladimir Agrișoroiu.

Oradea, who fought for the defense of the inter Carpathian territory and Christianity against migrating pagans. This is the motivation that led to the current research, for Romanian readers to become acquainted with the saint in his literary and artistic Hungarian/ Szekely dimensions. The saint was present in the daily lives of Romanians living in the old Hungarian kingdom as certain elite members gave their children his name and ordered paintings depicting him; this is the case of the churches in Ribița and Crișcior, Hunedoara county where the monarch is portrayed at the beginning of the 15th century along St. Stephen and St. Emeric in the scene of the Three Hungarian Saints. He was also mentioned by our Moldavian chroniclers as 'Laslău' and several Hungarian localities bear his name (pp. 5-6).

V. Trifescu also capitalizes on the importance of the studies in the volume, the text of professor Susana-Monica Tapodi from Sapientia University of Miercurea Ciuc, distinguishing itself through the overview of the life and posterity of the saint and analysing, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the medieval legends, chronicles and artistic representations. The reputed Hungarian art historian Mihály János managed to accomplish an inventory of murals showing St. Ladislaus from the Szekely land which, according to the prefacer, is useful for both researchers and tourism. A poem on the legend of the saint by 19th century Hungarian author János Arany was also published in the Romanian translation of Elena Dumitru, Hungarian literature professor. This is part of a translation project at Sapientia University of Miercurea Ciuc in which Lenke-Tímea Timár researched translation problems in studies of art history, focusing on the murals of St Ladislaus in the Szekely land (pp. 6-7), a topic of interest to all Translation Studies scholars aiming at a deeper understanding of R. Jakobson's intersemiotic translation that allows the transposition of language from an art such as literature, for instance, into another one, like painting (in our case, murals).

Susana-Monica Tapodi labels St. Ladislaus as the most popular Hungarian saint, a medieval *Athleta Christi*, summarizing his life and heroic deeds (pp. 9-11), stressing that after his death, he became an instrument of divine justice (p. 12). His figure is depicted by medieval chronicles and in approximately 60 churches from the Carpathian area (p. 13). He is also portrayed in a duel in 20th century paintings (Pál Molnár C., 1942) and in Romantic literature (Mihály Vörösmarty's epic poem, *Cserhalom*, 1825) (p. 14). Then several chronicles and legends are overviewed, underlining that the legends on St. Ladislaus are the richest in Hungarian folklore (p. 17). Then the church representations are discussed, the saint leaving from the citadel, his blessing by the bishop, the duel, the colors of horses overtly symbolizing the fight between good and evil. Moreover, professor Tapodi informs us that murals showing St. Ladislaus are carried out in the present, giving the instance of a fresco by Márton Barabás in Sâncrăieni, Harghita county which was

completed in 2017 showing the king surrounded by Hungarian saints and martyrs of the 20th cent. (p. 21). All illustrations are included at the end of the book. Reliquaries, coins and statues also bear the figure of St. Ladislaus, the author expressing her regret that the golden statue of the king by Martin and Gheorghe from Cluj, also depicted by the 15th cent. poet Janus Pannonius in his *Abiens valere iubet sanctos rege, Waradini*, was destroyed by the Turks in 1660 when they occupied the land; raised in 1380 at Oradea, it must have been a masterpiece of European art (p. 23). There is also a European project which gave birth to 'The Road of St. Ladislaus'² crossing 49 Transylvanian, Hungarian, Slovakian, Croatian, and Serbian localities linked by the personality of the knightly king that strengthens these ethnical communities and leads to the reinstatement of cultural heritage (p. 24).

Mihály Jánó's study on the murals showing the legend of St. Ladislaus in the churches of the Szekely land accounts for the presence of the king in battle; these representations portray the famous duel between him and the enemy, kidnapper of a beautiful Hungarian girl, possibly the daughter of the bishop of Oradea (p. 27). The author notes that the saint's presence in the churches here has been studied since the 19th cent. (p. 28). Unfortunately, what we can admire nowadays, also testified thanks to the illustrations included in the volume, are remains of the murals from the past that suffered the wear and tear of time (p. 30). Luckily, archeological exploits afford the partial recovery of works from the past, as in the case of the reformed church of Pădureni/ Sepsibesenyő (p. 31); this also holds true for the medieval murals from Ghelintă/ Gelence severely damaged by the 1802 earthquake (p. 32). Other murals discussed are those from Dârjiu/ Székelyderzs, Moacșa/ Maksa, Mugeni/ Bögöz, Mártiniș/ Homoródszentmárton, Filia/ Erdőfüle, Chileni/ Sepsikilyén, Dârjiu/ Székelyderzs, Misentea/ Csíkmindszent, Mihăileni/ Csíkszentmihály, Ghidfalău/ Gidófalva, Crăciunel/ Homoródkarácsonyfalva, Chichiș/ Kőkös, Târgu Mureș/ Marosvásárhely, Ocland/ Homoródoklánd, Saciova/ Szacsva and Daia/ Székelydália mostly white coated in the 17th century and uncovered in the 19th century by the art teacher József Huszka, this leading to further research. It is worth noting that sequences of paintings showing St. Ladislaus culminate with his triumph over the pagans and the kidnapped girl's rescue, as Christ is crucified to save the world (p. 45). Regarding Daia/ Székelydália, it is mentioned that the 19th century research contributed to an interest from the specialists and the larger public in the beauty of the paintings on the cupola and the church sanctuary. József Huszka made excellent watercolor copies of the cupola embellished with flower motives and the coats of arms of Hungarian and Transylvanian towns which have been preserved (p. 65).

² For more details, see <https://regelecavaler.org/ro/regele-cavaler/>.

Thus, we recommend this volume to all those interested in the language of art and literature in their interdisciplinary dimensions, specialists in visual arts, old book history and legends, Translation Studies or cultural tourism. It is our belief that such studies as the ones included in the volume are needed for a deeper understanding of past mechanisms leading to present and future admiration of literature and the arts.

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