

# The Genesis of the Legend of Saint Ladislas in the Light of Historical Revisionism

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses the historiography regarding the origin of visual narratives dedicated to the legend of Saint Ladislas, aiming to identify shifts in interpretative paradigms within Hungarian and Romanian scholarly traditions. By situating these paradigms within their political and social contexts, the study examines how changing interpretations reflect broader cultural phenomena. The argument is organised chronologically, incorporating both traditional and revisionist perspectives, to provide a clearer understanding of the motivations behind these hypotheses in their historical context.

**Keywords:** visual narratives; St Ladislas; Revisionism; Turanism; historiography.

**Rezumat:** Lucrarea analizează istoriografia referitoare la originea narațiunilor vizuale dedicate legendei Sfântului Ladislau, cu scopul de a identifica schimbările în paradigmile interpretative din tradițiile academice maghiare și române. Prin situarea acestor paradigmă în contextul lor politic și social, studiul examinează modul în care interpretările în schimbare reflectă fenomene culturale mai ample. Argumentul este organizat cronologic, incorporând atât perspective tradiționale, cât și revizioniste, pentru a oferi o înțelegere mai clară a motivațiilor din spatele acestor ipoteze în contextul lor istoric.

**Cuvinte cheie:** istoriografie; narațiuni vizuale; revizionism; Sf. Ladislau; turanism.

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*SUBB Historia, Volume 70, Special Issue 1, November 2025*

doi: 10.24193/subbhist.2025.sp.iss.1.08

The mural paintings dedicated to the legend of Saint Ladislas are regarded as some of the most significant contributions of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary to the cultural and artistic heritage of Central Europe. These narrative cycles, which depict the tumultuous battle of Kerlés, can be found in numerous churches across the Hungarian kingdom. The visual narratives documented within the territory of this former medieval kingdom were painted between the fourteenth century and the second half of the fifteenth century. They were composed in two main forms: extensive cycles featuring six or more episodes, and more concise representations consisting of three central episodes. This artistic manifestation was widely promoted by the Angevine dynasty, reaching its peak in quantity during the reign of King Sigismund of Luxembourg.

A comprehensive examination of the historiography surrounding the narrative cycles dedicated to the legend of Saint Ladislas reveals two noteworthy observations: firstly, these depictions have been the focal point of scholarly scrutiny within both Hungarian and Romanian historiographical traditions, attracting the collective interest of art historians, historians, archaeologists and ethnologists; secondly, they have been essential in fostering paradigm shifts and their interpretation.

This analysis commences with a remarkable commonality: both historiographical traditions exhibit a pronounced interest in one predominant theme: the origin of these visual narratives. Based on the hypotheses proposed by Hungarian and Romanian researchers, this study aims to situate these paradigms within the political and social context of the era in which they were formulated. Given the limited scope of the analysis, which focuses solely on the genesis of the legend of Saint Ladislas,<sup>1</sup> the argument will be structured chronologically, considering both traditional and revisionist perspectives identified within the two historiographies. This historiographical approach is deemed beneficial, as it facilitates a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of both the paradigms and the political and social phenomena that influenced them.

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<sup>1</sup> Over time, these frescoes have been studied by both historians interested in the evolution of the cult of Saint Ladislaus and art historians. Their focus has primarily been on the morphology, style, and dating of the compositions, as well as the significance of the narrative cycle and the depicted costumes. However, this analysis will be limited to discussions regarding the genesis of the paintings, as this aspect provides the richest insights for the purpose of the study.

Regarding the origin of visual narratives dedicated to the legend of Saint Ladislas, scholarly interest in this specific topic can be traced back to the early twentieth century when the traditional point of view was formulated. The period spanning the late nineteenth to early twentieth century was marked by an intellectual crisis, prompting a search for origins.<sup>2</sup> In Hungarian historiography, this gave birth to a Central European phenomenon known as Hungarian Turanism.<sup>3</sup> This nationalistic movement sought to orient Hungarian culture towards Central Asia, aiming to identify the original, ideal homeland and unite the Ural-Altaic and Finno-Ugric peoples.<sup>4</sup> Traditional perspectives on the genesis of the fresco cycles in Hungarian historiography are deeply rooted in this ideology, thus influencing historical writing throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The first hypothesis regarding the origin of this narrative sequence, dating back to the early twentieth century, affirms that the *historia* of the knightly king originated in the Eurasian steppes. This hypothesis was first proposed by Nagy Géza, a supporter of Hungarian Turanism<sup>5</sup> and also a student of Ármin Vámbéry, a founding figure of Hungarian Turkology and a key influence on the development of Turanism.<sup>6</sup> In 1913, Nagy analysed a range of material evidence from the Migration Period and earlier eras. Notably, he conducted an in-depth study of a Scythian gold plaque featuring a funerary motif. The artwork depicts two horsemen dismounted from their horses: one lies on the ground, resting his head on a woman's lap. The woman sits beneath a weeping willow, accompanied by a servant and two small, broad-headed horses. From this archaeological evidence, the author argued that the scene closely resembles episodes depicted in medieval

<sup>2</sup> Eric Storm, 'Art History,' in (ed.) Diana Miskhova and Balázs Trencsényi, *European Regions and Boundaries: A Conceptual History*, (New York and Oxford, Berghahn, 2017), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Michał Kowalczyk, 'Hungarian Turanism. From the Birth of the Ideology to Modernity – an Outline of the Problem,' in *Historia I Polityka*, 20/27 (2017), p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Attila Gökhun Dayioğlu, 'Hungarian Nationalism and Hungarian Pan-Turanism until the Beginning of the Second World War,' in *Politics in Central Europe*, 18/2 (2022), p. 230.

<sup>5</sup> Mykola Melnyk, 'From Admiring the Nomads to Moving Away from the Steppenfixierung: Paradoxes of the Hungarian Historiography in the Study of Pechenegs, Uzes, and Cumans,' in ed. L. V. Voytovych, *Українсько-Угорські Етюди* [The Ukrainian-Hungarian Studies) (Lviv, 2019), p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Balázs Albonczy, *Go East! A History of Hungarian Turanism* (Indiana University Press, 2021), p. 23.

church frescoes, particularly the rest of Saint Ladislas, in which the knightly king, after rescuing the maiden, ties his horse to a tree and rests on her lap. Nagy concluded that the pictorial representations of the Legend of Saint Ladislas have pagan origins, traceable to the 4t-5th centuries BC, as evidenced by the Scythian plaque. His study, published in a leading Hungarian scientific journal of the time, introduced a hypothesis that Hungarian historians have embraced in subsequent years.<sup>7</sup>

It is not at all surprising that this paradigm, suggesting the Eurasian origin of the narrative cycles, was adopted and embraced by these scholars in the following decades, as the motivation can be traced to the political context of the era. Shortly after the publication of the study as mentioned earlier, World War I broke out, marking the golden age of the Turanist movement.<sup>8</sup> This period would turn out to be the calm before the storm, as the aftermath of the war would profoundly alter the country's geopolitical landscape, leading to severe reactions within society. The experiences that followed after the disintegration of 'The Great Hungary' after the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, were often seen as a result of "betrayal" by the Western Powers and the "ungrateful Europe".<sup>9</sup> This led to boundless feelings of loneliness and general pessimism, which, in turn, fuelled the emphasis on a self-orientalising ideological tradition<sup>10</sup> and also the desire to seek friends and allies in the East as a means to escape self-imposed isolation.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the tendency to associate with Eurasian populations remained constant during World War II, as evidenced by the study published

<sup>7</sup> Munkácsy Mihály, Nagy Géza, Orosz műemlékek és régiségek, *Archaeológiai Értesítő* 33, (Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1913), p. 255-261.

<sup>8</sup> Péter Balogh, 'Clashing geopolitical self-image? The strange co-existence of Christian bulwark and Eurasianism (Turanism) in Hungary,' in (ed) Croig Young et al, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 63/6 (2020), p. 736-737. During World War I, Hungarian Turanism gained significant importance, increasing public awareness of the East. In these years, Hungarian expeditions to Anatolia and the Balkans were funded, Hungarian businesses accessed markets in the so-called "Turanian States", a Hungarian Institute was opened in Istanbul and several streets in Hungary were renamed.

<sup>9</sup> Balázs Trencsényi, 'Turanism, Eurasianism, and the Hungarian Radical Right,' in (ed.) Mark Bassin, Gonzalo Pozo, *The Politics of Eurasianism. Identity, Popular Culture and Russia's foreign policy*, (London and New York, Rowan Littlefield International, 2017), p. 243.

<sup>10</sup> Umut Korkut, 'Resentment and Reorganisation: Anti-Western Discourse and Making of Eurasianism in Hungary,' in *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 38 (2017), p. 71-72.

<sup>11</sup> Balogh, Clashing geopolitical self-images?..., p. 737

by archaeologist Fettich Nándor in 1939. The author aims to analyse the material culture and cultural heritage of the steppe peoples, starting with the Cumans but extending to related groups, including the Hungarians. Like the researcher Nagy Géza, Fettich also believes there are similarities between the gold plaque and the resting scene. Moreover, he seeks to persuade us that this latter episode of the visual narrative is absent from the textual narrative. In this context, the author argues that the episode in which King Ladislas rests in the lap of a young woman is represented in churches both in the Szeklerland region and across the Danube, attributing this depiction to the influence of the Eurasian cultural heritage of the Magyars. Although the paradigms dominating the two studies are similar, we find that their methodologies differ. While Nagy's conclusion stems from an analogy based on the comparison of object and image, Fettich expands on this method by comparing the object with the image and text.<sup>12</sup> In 1944, in the very last years of World War II, László Gyula also noted the similarities between Eurasian manifestations. He believes that the Hungarians took over the old oriental legend depicting the struggle between good and evil at the time of their arrival in Europe, and later transposed it into the story of King Ladislas.<sup>13</sup> He also agrees and supports Nagy Geza's hypothesis that the representations of the *Historia Sancti Ladislai* find their analogies in the art of the Steppes, returning to the same primary source – the Scythian Golden plaque.<sup>14</sup> We can thus observe that Eurasianist paradigms remained deeply ingrained in the narratives of historians even at the end of World War II.

World War II dealt another blow to Hungarian Turanists. After the Arrow Cross Party's brief rule, Hungary became a Soviet-occupied communist state, making any official Turanist activity nearly impossible until 1989.<sup>15</sup> One might expect that, with the war's conclusion, the nationalist and self-

<sup>12</sup> Fettich Nándor, 'A Kunok és rokonnépek kultúrájáról,' in ed (Blaskovich Lajos), *A kunok 700 éves betelepedésének emlékrendezett Jász Kun Kongresszus*, (Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun vármegye közönsége 1939), p. 28-30.

<sup>13</sup> László Gyula, *A honfoglaló nép élete. Második kiadás*, (Magyar Élet Kiadása, Budapest, 1944), p. 415.

<sup>14</sup> In the late 1970s, Gyula László proposed the hypothesis of the "double conquest," arguing that when the Hungarians entered the Carpathian Basin in the ninth century, they did not arrive in unfamiliar territory but encountered their kinsfolk who had settled there centuries earlier, alongside the Huns. See Trencsényi, 'Turanism. Eurasianism,' p. 247.

<sup>15</sup> Kowalczyk, *Hungarian Turanism*, p. 55.

orientalizing discourse of various scholars would fade from the historiographical landscape. However, the Iron Curtain only served to isolate Hungarian historical writing from Western trends further.<sup>16</sup> Trencsényi argues that Hungary's realignment toward the Soviet Union led to an "eastern turn" in historiography, enabling scholars to access both significant territories tied to Hungarian ethnogenesis and specialised literature on these topics. As a result, discussions surrounding the Eastern origins of visual narratives related to the legend of Saint Ladislas remained constant in Communist Hungary.<sup>17</sup>

In this context, it is essential to acknowledge the comprehensive research conducted by the Hungarian ethnologist Vargyas Lajos in 1960.<sup>18</sup> From a methodological point of view, the author primarily analyses textual (folkloric) sources, such as *The Ballad of Molnár Anna* and various Eurasian traditions, which are corroborated with material documents, like the Scythian gold plaque, and visual testimonies, including the legend of Saint Ladislas. Vargyas also acknowledges the stylistic and formal similarities between the Scythian ornament, the resting episode from the knight king's story, and the same scene depicted in *The Ballad of Molnár Anna*.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the author identifies significant parallels between the heroic epics of Inner Asia, such as the Manas Epic, and the fresco cycles dedicated to the knightly king. The initial congruence is evident in the combat scenes, wherein the protagonists initially engage in armed conflict but transition to close-quarters combat. Furthermore, the author highlights another similarity in the depiction of resting scenes, which finds numerous analogies in the heroic poems of the Altaj-Sajan region, where the tree that shelters the protagonists who seek respite is symbolically linked to the tree of life, and the entire sequence bears a striking resemblance to the resting scene.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Borsody, 'Modern Hungarian Historiography,' in *The Journal of Modern History*, (24/4, 1952), p. 405.

<sup>17</sup> Balázs Trencsényi, 'Politics of History' and Authoritarian Regime-Building in Hungary,' in *National History and New Nationalism in the Twenty-First Century: A Global Comparison* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2021), p. 172.

<sup>18</sup> Vargyas Lajos, 'Kutatások a népballada középkori történetében,' in *Etnographia. Magyar Néprajzi társaság folyoirata*, (71/4 Budapest, 1960, p. 479-523.

<sup>19</sup> Vargyas, p. 501.

<sup>20</sup> Vargyas, p. 502-503.

The above-mentioned patterns of interpretation regarding the origin of the narrative cycle are embraced by the research of Bálint Sandor. In his study on the iconography of the mural paintings dedicated to the legend of Saint Ladislas, published in 1977, the author adopts a similar interpretative approach, drawing on the same primary sources: the Scythian gold plaque housed at the Hermitage Museum (Figure 1), *The Ballad of Molnár Anna*, and the murals depicting the legend of Saint Ladislas (Figure 2). Ultimately, Bálint argues for the Eurasian and pagan origins of these murals.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 1.** The Scythian Gold plaque in the Ermitage Museum. Source: <https://english.archive.aawsat.com/theaawsat/lifestyle-culture/london-holds-exhibition-highlight-scythian-culture/attachment/scythians-with-horses-under-a-tree-gold-belt-plaque-siberia-4th-3rd-century-bc-the-state-hermitage-museum-st-petersburg-2017> .

<sup>21</sup> Bálint Sándor, *A cserhalmi ütközet ikonográfiája. Szekvencia Szent László királyról* (Csanád Béla fordítása), in *Vigilia*, (1977, 42/6), p. 379-382.



*Figure 2. The rest scene in the church of Poniky, ca. 1478. Photo: The author*

These traditional perspectives on the genesis of the visual narratives surrounding the knight-king continued to persist in historical discourse even after the fall of the communist regime in 1989. While the collapse of the Iron Curtain was seen as a “return to the West”,<sup>22</sup> it also allowed for the re-emergence of the Turanist movement due to the right, and far-right political parties like FIDESZ and Jobbik.<sup>23</sup>

One of the first post-communist researchers worth mentioning is László Gyula. In his comprehensive 1993 work, which catalogues the narrative cycles dedicated to the Legend of Saint Ladislas, he reinforces the claims made by earlier-mentioned researchers, further supporting the hypothesis of

<sup>22</sup> Trencsényi, *Turanism, Eurasianism*, p. 249.

<sup>23</sup> Zakir Rzazade, *Jobbik's Neo-Turanism and Eurasianism: contradictions and the problem of coexistence*, draft paper from 2021, p. 4-5. The source can be consulted at the following link: [https://www.academia.edu/45068065/Jobbiks\\_Neo\\_Turanism\\_and\\_Eurasianism\\_Contradictions\\_and\\_the\\_Problem\\_of\\_Coexistence](https://www.academia.edu/45068065/Jobbiks_Neo_Turanism_and_Eurasianism_Contradictions_and_the_Problem_of_Coexistence). Accessed at 22/10/2024, 19:2-0.

the legend's pagan origins.<sup>24</sup> Although Gyula acknowledges other plausible influences, such as Western (manuscript painting) and Byzantine traditions, notably through the frontier hero *Digenis Akritas*, he remains constant in the paradigm he originally expressed in 1944.<sup>25</sup>

The last historian worth mentioning in this discussion, who embraces Turanist tendencies and shows a strong interest in the origins of the knight-king legend, is Tamás Sashalmi Fekete, a researcher at the Magyarságkutató Intézet.<sup>26</sup> In a study published in 2020, he dedicates a subsection to explore the connections between the visual narrative of the knightly king and the Caucasus region. Sashalmi Fekete argues that the narrative cycle of Saint Ladislas exhibits specific traits that suggest links with the Caucasus and Iran, drawing an analogy with the Batraz cycle, an ancient heroic saga from these regions.<sup>27</sup>

We can conclude that traditional views on the origins of visual narratives related to the legend of Saint Ladislas in Hungarian historiography have been shaped by Turanist ideology, which emerged in the early twentieth century. This perspective gained strength after World War I and the Treaty of Trianon, as scholars looked for a sense of identity amid significant upheaval. Even though challenges arose during and after World War II, including the suppression of Turanist ideas under Soviet occupation until 1989, the core concepts about the knight-king's visual narratives remained unchanged. The fall of communism sparked renewed interest in these themes, prompting further exploration of the legend's connection to Eurasian and Caucasian cultures. As a result, the interpretation of the origins of the knight-king's visual narratives continues to be influenced by a combination of

<sup>24</sup> László Gyula, *A Szent László-legenda középkori falképei*, (Tájak Korok Múzeumok Könyvtára, Budapest, 1993), p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Gyula, p. 188, 194.

<sup>26</sup> The Magyarságkutató Intézet (Hungarian Research Institute) is a government-funded research institution in Hungary, established in 2019, and it aligns with nationalistic and Turanist ideologies. The institute's main goal is to research Hungarian national history, culture, ethnogenesis, and identity, with a particular focus on Hungary's ancient and medieval past, including the origins of the Magyars). The institute is part of the broader cultural and political project of the ruling Fidesz party, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, which seeks to promote a more traditional, nationalist interpretation of Hungary's past. Accessed at 22/10/2024, 19:41.

<sup>27</sup> Tamás Sashalmi Fekete, 'Újabb kutatási eredmények a Szent László-legenda falképeiről,' in *Székelyek a keleti végeken. Harckészültségen minden időben*, (Molioris-Arany Griff Rend-Székelyderzsi Unitárius Egyház, Székelyudvarhely-Székelyderzs, 2020), p. 38-39.

historical, cultural, and ideological factors that have shaped Hungarian historiography over the past century.

The first revisionist tendencies, in historiographical terms, emerged at a time when Turanism was reaching its peak. The first researcher to break away from this paradigm was Horváth Cyril, and considering his professional background, it is clear why he did not embrace or promote the Eurasianist ideas. Cyril was a historian, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and also a member of the Cistercian order, with a consistent Christian education, pursuing theological studies in centers like Eger, Innsbruck and Budapest.<sup>28</sup> His education, grounded in both scientific and theological environments, profoundly influenced his research methods on the one hand, and the sources he considered and relied upon for his findings on the other.

In a study published in 1928, he set out to identify the literary origin of the narrative cycle, drawing on many sources from the Byzantine world, which he analysed chronologically.<sup>29</sup> These include: *The life of Saint Mercurius*, as set out in the *Vitae Patrum* (fourth-seventh centuries), *The account of Saint Dimitrios by Anastasius Bibliothecarus* (ninth century), *The Miracles of St. Emmeramus*, where the bravery of his namesake on the battlefield against the pagans is shown (ninth century), *the account of the miracle of Saint Olaf*, appearing on the battlefield to save the Christian army (ninth century), *the battlefield appearance of Saint Albinus during a Norman siege of Guerranda* (twelfth century), *testimony to the military conflicts of Henry II* against the Dutch, Czechs and Moravians, where he was also aided on the battlefield by Saint George, Saint Lawrence and Saint Adrian (twelfth century), *the testimony of Caesarius Heisterbachius* that the Crusader armies were aided in the fight against the Saracens by Saint James and Saint Vincent of Saragossa (thirteenth century).

The author distinguishes common thematic elements within these textual narratives, particularly evident in their collective endorsement of military saints who actively safeguard and collaborate with Christian forces in their encounters with various encroaching entities. For instance, the narrative

<sup>28</sup> Kenyeres Ágnes, *Magyar életrajzi lexikon A Z*, accessed on Arcanum at the following link: <https://www.arcanum.com/en/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-magyar-eletrajzi-lexikon-7428D/h-75B54/horvath-cyrill-75E63/?list=eyJxdWVyeSI6ICJob3J2YXRoIGN5cmI5cmlsbCJ9.22/10/2024>

<sup>29</sup> Horváth Cyril, 'Középkori László-legendáink eredetéről' [On the origin of our medieval Ladislas-legends], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* (38/22–56), 1928, 161–181.

devoted to Saint Ladislas, a recurring subject of depiction in numerous churches throughout the Kingdom of Hungary, exemplifies this prevailing motif. Despite the author's omission of explicit citations of the sources he utilised, a discernible thematic congruence between these written accounts and the visual *historia* of the knightly king is unmistakably highlighted, alongside a suggestion of Byzantine origins for the legend. Furthermore, Horváth Cyril introduces an innovative method by comparing textual legends from the Byzantine world with the legend of Saint Ladislas, contextualising their proliferation within the prevailing chivalric ethos that characterised the medieval world.<sup>30</sup>

Until the final years of the communist regime in Hungary, alternative interpretations of the genesis of narrative cycles were totally absent from scholarly discourse, as the historiographical scene remained dominated by traditional interpretive paradigms. However, the mid-1980s saw a relaxation of the regime, which influenced and facilitated a "Europeanization" of historical discourse, marked by a growing interest in examining various themes within a broader European context.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, the study of medieval art in the former Kingdom of Hungary was also situated within these circumstances.<sup>32</sup> Wehli Tünde, in discussing the saints of the kingdom's nobility, argues that the proliferation of visual narratives dedicated to the legend of Saint Ladislas was driven by the chivalric culture promoted by the monarchy from the fourteenth century onward. Regarding the *historia* of the holy king, she suggests that its origins lie in Western Europe, with *The Song of Roland* as a key source of inspiration.<sup>33</sup> Later, Marosi Ernő embraced this interpretive framework, arguing that the spread of the visual narrative was linked to the flourishing of chivalric culture in medieval Hungary, especially under the influence of the Anjou dynasty.

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<sup>30</sup> Horváth, 'Középkori László legendák', p. 181.

<sup>31</sup> Balázs Trencsényi, Péter Apor, 'Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past: Hungarian Historical Writing in the 1990s', in *Narratives Unbound. Historical studies in post-communist Eastern Europe*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007, p. 6-8.

<sup>32</sup> See Ernő Marosi et al, *Magyarországi Művészet 1300-1470 körül*, (Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1987).

<sup>33</sup> Wehli Tünde, 'Tematicai és ikonografiai jelenségek. A szentek ábrázolásaa a 14-15 századi művészettel', in Ernő Marosi et al, *Magyarországi Művészet 1300-1470 körül* (Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1987).

He claimed that the narrative cycle had Western origins, offering analogies primarily from contemporary manuscripts, such as the *Manesse Codex*.<sup>34</sup>

These lines of interpretation were important for the new generation of scholars, such as Iván Gérát and Zsombor Jékely, who have followed and at times expanded upon the above-mentioned paradigms. Gérát, in his analyses, does not focus heavily on the origin of the narrative cycle, but acknowledges its Western roots,<sup>35</sup> whereas Jékely takes a different approach. In examining the narrative structure of the fresco cycles, the author argues that the rapid spread of these artworks across Hungary can be attributed to the powerful patronage of the royal court, where the original narrative was shaped. He highlights artworks created in the courtly environment, such as the Angevine Legendary and the *Chronicon Pictum* as well as frescoes found in the churches of the nobility. Furthermore, he draws parallels between the *historia* of the knight-king and the artistic production within the Crusader milieu, referencing examples like the Morgan Picture Bible, the Arsenal Bible and the *Manesse Codex*.<sup>36</sup> The author also argues that this ideological and artistic convergence played an important role for the members of the Anjou dynasty, particularly in legitimizing the contested reign of Charles Robert.<sup>37</sup>

Concluding, the revisionist perspectives in Hungarian historiography began by challenging the dominant Turanist narrative. These revisionist efforts focused on reinterpreting the origins of the legend of Saint Ladislas, by examining parallels with Byzantine and Western European sources. These reinterpretations emphasised the influence of chivalric culture and military saints in shaping these fresco cycles. Over time, especially with the relaxation of political control in the 1980s, a 'Europeanization' of historical discourse

<sup>34</sup> Ernő Marosi, *Kép és hasonmás: művészet és valóság a 14-15. századi Magyarországon*, in *Művészettörténeti füzetek* (23), Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1995, p. 67, 205, 250.

<sup>35</sup> Iván Gérát, 'Pictorial Cycles of St. Ladislas - Some Problems of Interpretation.' In (ed.) M. Homza, J. Lukačka, *Slovakia and Croatia: Historical Parallels and Connections (Until 1780). Slowakei und Kroatien. Historische Parallelen und Beziehungen (bis zum Jahre 1780)* (Bratislava – Zagreb, 2013), p. 296.

<sup>36</sup> Zsombor Jékely, 'Narrative structure of the painted cycle of a Hungarian Holy Ruler: The legend of St. Ladislas,' in *Hortus Artium Medievalium, Journal of the International Research Center for Late Antiquity and Middle Ages*, 2015, p.72; Jékely, 'Szent László kunok elleni csatájának képciklusai a középkori falfestészetben' (The story of Saint Ladislas in medieval wall painting). In (ed) Bódvai András (ed), *Szent László emlékkönyv* (Budapest 2021), p. 147.

<sup>37</sup> Jékely, 'Transylvanian Frescoes in a New Light,' in *The Hungarian Historical Review* (2014), p. 106; Jékely, 'A Kunok...,' p. 151.; Jékely, 'Narrative structure...,' p. 63-65.

emerged, encouraging scholars to place Hungarian medieval art and history within a broader European context. This shift allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the connections between Hungarian and Western European traditions, highlighting the role of western medieval art, especially the one created in the crusader milieu.

Compared to the extensive specialised literature produced by Hungarian historiography, the Romanian field of research displays significantly less focus on the origins of the visual narratives related to the legend of Saint Ladislas. Nonetheless, the few available studies allow for the identification of both traditional and revisionist perspectives. However, revisionist views tend to be limited to brief mentions rather than detailed analyses.

The emergence of a traditional perspective on the genesis of the narrative cycle in Romanian historiography can be attributed exclusively to Valsile Drăguț.<sup>38</sup> This perspective must be seen as a *sui generis* framework because similar hypotheses about the genesis have been found in Hungarian historiography since the beginning of the last century, being introduced by Horváth Cyril and later taken over by Vlasta Dvorakova,<sup>39</sup> claiming that the narrative cycle is Byzantine in origin. To better understand the motivations behind the perspective put forward and undertaken by the Romanian art historian, we need to take a brief but closer look at the period in which the thesis was proposed, as well as the researcher's academic and professional background. Drăguț was a prominent figure in the Romanian visual arts scene, particularly during the communist era. He graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Bucharest and later from the Nicolae Grigorescu Institute of Fine Arts. However, he faced obstacles to enrollment due to his anti-communist stance. He subsequently held key positions in heritage preservation and the visual arts, serving as both editor for numerous specialised journals and authoring significant studies on medieval art in Romania and beyond.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Vasile Drăguț, 'Legenda 'eroului de frontieră' în pictura medievală din Transilvania,' in *Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor – Monumente Istorice și de Artă*, (44/1), 1975, p. 21–38.

<sup>39</sup> Vlasta Dvořáková, 'La légende de Saint Ladislas découverte dans l'église de Velká Lomnica,' in *Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice* (41/4), 1972, p. 25–42.

<sup>40</sup> Caterina Preda, 'Vasile Drăguț în dosarele Securității. Robert, Drăgan, Dragu,' in *Manuscriptum* 1 (2016), p. 351.

The study that is of significant interest to this research was published at an opportune moment, considering the historical and social context, particularly during the last two decades of the Ceaușescu regime in Romania. According to researcher Crina Preda, the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by sustained connections with foreign researchers and individuals within Romania.<sup>41</sup> It is highly likely that this 'liberalisation', which facilitated the formation of connections between foreign and local researchers, laid the groundwork for art historian Vasile Drăguț's view on the origins of the legend of Saint Ladislas. In this context, Drăguț embraced the hypothesis proposed by Vlasta Dvorakova in her 1972 study published in the *Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice*, where he also served as a member of the editorial board.<sup>42</sup> Considering the fresco discovered in the sacristy of the church in Velka Lomnica (Spis County), it is suggested that this historical tradition has its origins in the Byzantine world, finding its equivalent in the figure of the frontier hero.<sup>43</sup> Four years later, Vasile Drăguț joins the same interpretative direction. He suggests that the legitimation of the cult of Saint Ladislas required the development of a hagiographical motif, deriving from the exemplary archetype embodied in the legend of Digenis Akritas, a tale of an ideal Byzantine warrior.<sup>44</sup> Drăguț's analysis of the *historia* of Saint Ladislas suggests that the composer of the fresco cycle possessed a sympathetic understanding of the Byzantine-Arabic legends of the frontier hero. Judging from the geographical spread of these paintings, the author believes that Saint Ladislas also continued to be a hero of the kingdom's eastern borders, and that's why the fresco cycles were painted in those regions during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>45</sup>

Regarding the revisionist points of view expressed by Romanian historians are relatively limited and primarily articulated through brief statements that clarify their positions on the origins of the narrative cycle. For example, Dragoș Gheorghe Năstăsoiu, in his undergraduate thesis, aligns with Hungarian revisionist perspectives by proposing a Western

<sup>41</sup> Preda, 'Forms of collaboration of visual artists in communist Romania of the 70s and 80s,' in *Hungarian Historical Review*, (4/1, 2015), p. 177.

<sup>42</sup> Iozeifina Postăvaru, Vasile Drăguț, 'Repere Biografice. Opera,' in *BCMASI*, (12-16/1, 2005), p. 170.

<sup>43</sup> Dvorakova, 'La légende de Saint Ladislas,' p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> Drăguț, 'Legenda Eroului de frontieră,' p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> Drăguț, 'Legenda Eroului de Frontieră,' p. 24, 28.

origin for the narrative.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, Dana Jenei claims that the legend of Saint Ladislas developed within the theological environment of the Oradea Cathedral, supported by the Angevin kings, where the king's relics were housed. However, she provides no further supporting evidence for her assertion.<sup>47</sup>

In examining the origins of the visual narratives dedicated to the legend of Saint Ladislas, it becomes clear that Hungarian historiography has been significantly influenced by Turanist ideology since the early twentieth century. This ideological framework emerged during a period of intellectual crisis in Hungary, prompting historians to search for roots that would reinforce national identity. Figures such as Nagy Géza and Fettich Nándor proposed the hypothesis that the narrative cycles find pertinent analogies in the Eurasian steppes, aligning their interpretations with the broader nationalist and self-orientalizing sentiments prevalent during and after World War I. These early interpretations laid the groundwork for a persistent paradigm in Hungarian art history that continues to resonate in contemporary scholarship.

As the political landscape shifted throughout World War II and into the Soviet occupation, the narrative around Saint Ladislas did not change. Instead, the discourse surrounding the knight-king remained dominated by Turanist perspectives, as scholars like Vargyas Lajos and László Gyula reinforced the idea of Eurasian influences on the visual narratives. Even as Hungary faced isolation under communist rule, these interpretations endured, showing resilience in the face of changing political ideologies. The 1980s relaxation of political control sparked a renewed interest in reevaluating these narratives, leading to a 'Europeanization' of historical discourse that emphasized the connections between Hungarian medieval art and Western traditions. The post-1989 era marked a significant turning point, as the fall of communism allowed for the re-emergence of Turanist themes alongside new scholarly explorations. Researchers like László Gyula and Tamás Sashalmi Fekete continued to draw connections between the visual narratives of Saint Ladislas and Eurasian cultural heritage, while also exploring the influence of Caucasian and Iranian traditions. This dual focus on both the historical roots

<sup>46</sup> Dragoș Gheorghe Năstăsoiu, *Reprezentări ale Sfântului Ladislau în pictura murală din Transilvania*, Bachelor thesis defended at the National University of Arts in Bucharest, (Bucharest, 2007-2008), p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Dana Jenei, *Pictura murală gotică din Transilvania*, (Noi Media Print, București, 2007), p. 49.

of the legend and its potential connections to broader cultural narratives illustrates the complex interplay between national identity, ideology, and historical interpretation in Hungarian historiography.

In contrast, Romanian historiography presents a more limited exploration of the origins of the visual narratives related to Saint Ladislaus. While Vasile Drăguț initiated a traditional perspective echoing earlier Hungarian scholarship, revisionist viewpoints in Romania are sparse and often lack comprehensive analysis. This disparity underscores the need for further research in the Romanian context, as well as a more thorough examination of the influences and connections that have shaped both Hungarian and Romanian narratives of the holy-king. As historiographical discourse evolves, it is essential to consider how historical, cultural, and ideological factors continue to influence the interpretation of Saint Ladislaus's legacy in both countries.