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# The Cult of Saint László (Saint Ladislaus) in the Hungarian Army

Szent László kultikus tisztelete a magyar  
„haderőben”

## Abstract

*Every July, in Letkés and Ipolyszalka (Slovakia), the St. László Division of the Comrade Union of Hungarian Parachutists commemorates – related to the King St. László festivals – Hungarian soldiers who served in the Division in the last months of WWII. The Division had nothing to do with the Waffen-SS nor with the armed corps of the Hungarist Movement.<sup>3</sup> It was a part of the Royal Hungarian Defence Forces, which still kept some elements of old traditions. King László, compared to other supporter or branch patron saints, was a decisive hero to Hungarian soldiers until WWII and the establishment of the Soviet type bolshevik regime in Hungary. Although after the regime change, St. László was again recognised as 'the patron saint of riflemen', and from time to time he is commemorated with a mass or a concert,<sup>4</sup> his influence remains far behind the period before WWII. In this study we are trying to get answers, why the cult of St. László – and other branch patron saints – has not developed in the Hungarian Defence*

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<sup>3</sup> Szent László hadosztály, in: Diós István (ed.), Magyar Katolikus Lexikon, Budapest, Szent István Társulat, 2007, XII, 887; Martin Kornél – Ugron István: Fejezetek a Szent László hadosztály történetéből, *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, 109 (1996/4) 56–132.

<sup>4</sup> Sárkány Beáta: Szent László előtt tisztelegtek a katonák, 2016. [https://honvedelem.hu/cikk/57946\\_szent\\_laszlo\\_elott\\_tisztelegtek\\_a\\_katonak](https://honvedelem.hu/cikk/57946_szent_laszlo_elott_tisztelegtek_a_katonak) (Downloaded: 09.07.2018.)

*Forces since the change of the political system, although the legislative environment makes it possible. We would like to reveal those deeper historical and intellectual historical reasons that prove that not only leftist ideology, and its extreme Bolshevik form, but also the ideology of liberal democracy cannot identify with St. László's – and other patron saints' – figure. We are pointing out that in the current ideological milieu, there are insufficient grounds for the branch patron saints, besides ceremonial activities, to become an awareness-raising power. It is not a judgement, but a hypothesis which is formulated so that we can reflect on the phenomenon authentically. We can say that the democratic legislation has reached its maximum with allowing religious freedom in the Hungarian Defence Forces. As numerous works have been written about St. László's life and cult, his role in tradition and arts, we touch upon this when it serves to prove the assumption.*

**Keywords:** St. László, ideology, liberalism, branch patron saints

## Absztrakt

*Minden év júliusában, Szent László király ünnepéhez kapcsolódóan emlékeznek a Magyar Ejtőernyős Bajtársi Szövetség Szent László Hadosztály baráti köre Letkésen és a szlovákiai Ipolyszalkán azokra a magyar katonákra, akik a második világháború utolsó hónapjaiban a hadosztályban szolgáltak. A hadosztálynak sem a Waffen-SS-hez, sem a Hungarista Mozgalom fegyveres alakulataihoz nem volt köze. Részét képezte a tradicionalitást még nyomokban őrző Magyar Királyi Honvédségnek. László király a többi segítő vagy fegyvernemi védőszenttel való összehasonlításban is, a második világháborúig és a szovjet típusú bolsevik diktatúra magyarországi kiépítéséig meghatározó példakép volt a magyar katonák számára. Bár a rendszerváltás után Szent Lászlóra ismét mint a „lövészek védőszentjére” tekintenek, időnként szentmisével, ünnepi hangversennyel emlékeznek rá, hatása messze elmarad a második világháborút megelőző időszaktól. Ebben a tanulmányban arra keressük a választ, hogy mi az oka, hogy bár a jogszabályi környezet lehetővé tenné a komoly Szent László – és más fegyvernemi védőszent – kultusz kialakulását a Magyar Honvédségben, ez mégsem történt meg a rendszerváltás óta. Szeretnénk feltárni azokat a mélyebb történelmi és eszmetörténeti összefüggéseket, amelyek alátámasztják, hogy nemcsak a baloldali ideológia és annak szélsőséges bolsevik formája, hanem a liberális „demokrácia” ideológiája sem tud azonosulni Szent László – és a többi fegyvernemi védőszent – alakjával. Rámutatunk, hogy a jelenlegi „ideológiai” miliőben nincs realitása, hogy a fegyvernemi védőszentek a protokolláris túl valódi tudatformáló erővé váljanak.*

**Kulcsszavak:** Szent László, ideológia, liberalizmus, fegyvernemi védőszentek

## How Saint László's Historic Figure Lives on in the Light of Christian Belief

The above mentioned St. László Division was established by the then minister of defence, Lajos Csataj on 12 October 1944 with the following statement: "In the life-and-death battle of our country against the Eastern Evil: Soviet Bolshevism, I establish a new elite division, St. László Division, from the best of the available manpower."<sup>5</sup> The minister's words suggest that the elite division, established in the last period of the war, was named after St. László for deeper considerations. In the person of St. László, as Zoltán Magyar points out in his monographic work, "the civilised warrior appeared in the land of Hungary".<sup>6</sup> It is understandable that such an emblematic historic figure was chosen to represent the war between barbarism and civilisation – get it right: Christian Europe and Bolshevism. His personality was perfect to express: the real war, over the horizon of history, is between the powers of evil and justice.

The spiritual dimension of wars is accepted by nearly every religion. Therefore, some elements of paganism, which can be found in a number of Eastern people's beliefs<sup>7</sup> from the pre-Hungarian conquest era could get into the cult of St. László. These stories raise awareness only in societies in which people believe in supernatural powers, and also believe that these powers can influence our wars. Since faith in spiritual beings has fallen back into a crisis, it is not surprising that St. László's cult is not a determining factor either in the Hungarian society or in the army.

## St. László's Historic and Mythical Battles in History and Legends

St. László's 'biography' – *Vita* – was composed from two different 'biographies'<sup>8</sup> during the canonisation (under Pope Celestine III, 1192).<sup>9</sup> Its conception reflects the canonisation and the period after it.<sup>10</sup> The collections, the Minor Legend (after 1192) – *Legenda Sancti Ladislai regis minor* – and the Major Legend (13<sup>th</sup> century) – *Legenda Sancti Ladislai regis maior* – cannot be compared to modern biographies. In his analytic work about the cult of St. László, Zoltán Magyar points out that the saint unifies 'the contemporary male ideal', the European knight and the ideal king in one person,<sup>11</sup> the respect towards him is uniquely connected to the church's cult of saints and to folk traditions; and so did he become the most respected

<sup>5</sup> Historical background. <http://attilavedvonai.hu/tortenelmi-hatter/> (Downloaded: 09.07.2018.)

<sup>6</sup> Magyar Zoltán: Keresztény lovagoknak oszlopa, Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest, 1996, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Magyar Zoltán: Szent László a magyar művelődéstörténetben, *Korunk*, (2016/8) 35–36.

<sup>8</sup> Török József: Magyar szentek földjén, Tulipán, Budapest, 1999, 96.

<sup>9</sup> Klaniczay Gábor: A Szent László-kultusz kialakulása, in: Klaniczay Gábor (ed.), Nagyvárad és Bihar a korai középkorban, Nagyvárad, Varadinum Kulturális Alapítvány, 2014, 18–19.

<sup>10</sup> Nemeskürty István: Mi magyarok, Dovin Művészeti Kiadó Kft., Budapest, 1989, 56.

<sup>11</sup> Magyar Zoltán: Szent László a magyar néphagyományban, Osiris, Budapest, 1998.

king of the Árpád dynasty.<sup>12</sup> The Christian Hungarian king and the Hungarian nation with him take part in the eternal war of good and evil. These stories cannot be studied with the tools of modern history, but this does not mean that we should exile them to the world of fantasy. What is more, they raise more serious questions than mere historical analyses: they are looking for answers regarding the place of humanity, the battles of good and evil, and of the spirit world including the role of each person.<sup>13</sup> The then forming canonisation process, in which the Holy See started to take central role, played a role in the development of St. László's universal respect. The process is not only a technical question, but it is the appearance of church universalism in a new area which strengthens the development of respect to each national saint over the borders.<sup>14</sup>

In each forum, László – either in legends or in the arts – appears as the warrior of good principles contrary to his enemies – either his political opponents or foreign military forces –, who are the earthly representatives of evil. The development of this image was greatly supported by László's relation to the Church, the earthly representative of the supreme good announced by Christ. He was a significant Church organiser, he managed the Church, including papacy supporting activities, which could not be overshadowed by the conflict of interest between the Papal States and the Hungarian Kingdom that originated from László's occupying the Croatian throne (1091). In addition, later the idealised version of this event was born, which showed the military action to have been led by Christian virtues and which served the interests of the Church.<sup>15</sup> What is more, later László struggled to gain Pope Urban II's (1088–1099) grace, as he had churches and monasteries built in Croatian territory.<sup>16</sup>

With canonising King Stephen, Prince Imre, Bishop Gellért, András and Benedek (the two hermits) László played a key role in strengthening the respect to Hungarian saints. The new saints' 'biographies', their liturgical respect, and the guarding of their relics were born. Hungarian saints – as later László himself – became the symbols of national togetherness and of belonging to a universal Church at the same time. Zoltán Magyar adds that László's "kingly greatness and intellect in particular" is shown by the fact that he canonised "Stephen, who blinded his grandfather".<sup>17</sup> This was accompanied by the recognition that László could not have counted on a firm basis and long rule against King Stephen's spiritual and religious heritage. Gábor Klaniczay points out that, most importantly, László needed the king's cult to reinforce his reign.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Magyar (2016): *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Weisbender Joseph: *Szentek élete, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 1984.*

<sup>14</sup> Ujházi Lóránd: A csoda szerepe és jogi bizonyítása a boldoggá és a szentté avatási eljárásokban, in: Nagypál Szabolcs – Bányai Ferenc – Bakos Gergely (eds.), *A vallási tapasztalat megértése: Jog, bölcsélet, teológia, L'Harmattan Kiadó, Budapest; Pannonhalma; Békés Gellért Ökumenikus Intézet, 2010, 168–169.*

<sup>15</sup> Bánlaky József: Horvátország meghódítása 1091-ben, in: Bánlaky József (ed.), *A Magyar nemzet hadtörténelme, digital edition: Arcanum Adatbázis Kft., 2001. <http://mek.oszk.hu/09400/09477/html/0004/199.html>* (Downloaded: 18.07.2018.)

<sup>16</sup> Magyar (2016): *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> Magyar (2016): *op. cit.* 14.

<sup>18</sup> Klaniczay (2014): *op. cit.* 9.

Establishing the Diocese of Zagreb, the construction of cathedrals in Nagyvárad (Oradea), Vác, Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), increasing the number of Church holidays, refining the borders of the dioceses, giving the Church significant land grant, establishing abbeys and monasteries were all considered to be significant steps in his church policy. In addition, he summoned the Council in Szabolcs (1092) to strengthen the status of the Church, and he strictly forbade and punished sacrifices at wells or trees. There is a reason for György Győrffy's note: the priesthood regarded him as the second Hungarian founder of the Church.<sup>19</sup> Researchers leave no doubt that the sovereign's actions, supporting the Latin Church, did not lack a political background, as László wanted the support of the more and more influential Church.<sup>20</sup> János Bollók adds that the existing pagan traditions were continuous threats, as Christian monarchs – referring to this – felt entitled to intervene in the internal affairs of the country.<sup>21</sup> Political aspects are totally insignificant regarding the fact that László remarkably contributed to strengthening those values and universalism that were absolutely strange in the intellectual trends of the French Revolution and afterwards, and in the state and social structures based on them.

## The Influence of the Struggle between the Papacy and the Empire in the Development of the Cult

Not only did László reinforce the Hungarian statehood in chaotic situations, struggling for the crown and fighting rebellions, but he was also involved in the first high-powered struggle of the Papacy and the Empire. This has an aspect in the history of ideas beyond the event itself. The desperate struggle between Pope Gregory VII (1073–1085) and Henry IV (1056–1106), known as Investiture Controversy in history, was not only about appointing church officials, but it envisaged a deeper, philosophical question of the relation between "the state and the church". The state theory work edited by Szilárd Tattay and Péter Takács, offers a more nuanced view when it analyses the relation of the Empire, as a political power, and the Papacy, as a spiritual-religious 'excellence'. Namely, Tattay, contrary to other authors, does not speak about the struggle between the Empire and the Papacy, but "about the relation between *regnum* (or empire) and *sacerdotium*".<sup>22</sup> Indeed true, that the relation between the two entities cannot be narrowed merely to the 'war', though school history teaching, and especially Marxist history writing, likes emphasising

<sup>19</sup> Győrffy György: Szent László, in: Kurucz Ágnes (ed.), *László király emlékezete*, Magyar Helikon, Budapest, 1977, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Koszta László: Válság és megerősödés: Pogányházadások és konszolidáció (1038–1196), Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Bollók János: Szent László korának magyar értelmisége, *Vigilia*, 65 (2000/11) 842.

<sup>22</sup> Tattay Szilárd: *Regnum és sacerdotium*, in: Takács Péter (ed.), *Államelmélet. A modern állam elméletének előzményei és történeti alapvonalai*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 2009, 59.

the latter aspect. Tattay's study reveals that the relation between 'the church and the state' is influenced by deeper philosophical and theological questions than appointments of church officials. The relation between the Hungarian king, László and the Papacy, Pope Gregory VII, later Pope Urban II – as almost all questions about László – is ambivalent. However, in this case the most important thing is not the pro–contra evaluation of the historic facts, but the subsequent outcome of the events, which helped the reinforcement of the idea that László was the defender of Christianity and the Church. János Bollók's study deals with the political claims of the Papal States and their background namely those of Gregory VII's, with which he aimed at broadening his political power over the Hungarian Kingdom.<sup>23</sup> The author leaves no doubt that Pope Gregory VII – as his predecessors – wanted to strengthen Papal and feudal rights, and that the country was torn between the Empire and the Papacy. The state of László was reinforced by the above mentioned foreign policy affairs,<sup>24</sup> especially the struggle between the Papacy and the Empire. The researchers who study the changes after Pope Gregory VII often overemphasise the letter of Pope Gelasius to Emperor Antanasius, written in 494. It is true that the aim of the letter was to shape a balanced relation between the secular power and the Church, as a spiritual excellence, but it does not deny the primacy of the Church, regarding its supernatural mission. Furthermore, there were lots of theorists before the letter from the 5<sup>th</sup> century – Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine – who studied the relation between the state power and the Church thoroughly. Hardly any of them left any doubt about the primacy of the Church power on the ground that its mission is in connection with the supernatural *salus animarum*, leading souls to salvation. However, the Gelasian text suggests that – in some sense of the Church – the Church, because of being a spiritual power, comes before the state. In the chrestomathy of the Middle Ages, edited by Ilona Sz. Jónás, the sources on the question reveal that – though not in that vigorous form as between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry II – there were irregularities in understanding "the relation of the two powers" in the period between the Gelasian letter and Pope Gregory VII.<sup>25</sup>

Pope Gregory VII did not modify essentially Gelasius's conception of the state–church relation, as its nature and the theological approach to the ultimate purpose of mankind have always professed the primacy of the spiritual power. If the Church believed that the secular power was threatening the ultimate value, "the salvation of souls", it intervened according to its room for manoeuvre. Pope Gregory VII was elected on 22 April 1073. A year later he banned married and Simonian priests from service, then in 1075 he ordered not to give church offices to laymen, and he forbade the Emperor to practice investiture. Henry IV, who had been reigning since 1056, filled up church offices with his own men before Gregory VII was elected. Moreover, after the Papal provisions, he appointed the Archbishops of Cologne and Milan according to his old practice. During the Imperial Diet of Worms, German bishops, whose appointment took place according to the above

<sup>23</sup> Bollók (2000): *op. cit.* 841–849.

<sup>24</sup> Makk Ferenc: Megjegyzések a Szent László korabeli magyar–bizánci kapcsolatok történetéhez, *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis Sectio Historica* (1957–1959), 96 (1992) 13–24.

<sup>25</sup> Sz. Jónás Ilona (ed.): *Középkori egyetemes történeti szöveggyűjtemény*, Osiris, Budapest, 1999.

mentioned imperial practice of decades, left Pope Gregory VII. In spite of the Road to Canossa, in 1081 Henry started to besiege Rome, and elected the Antipope Clement III, Pope Gregory VII died in exile. The relation between the Church and the state took a turn in their personal capacity, which influenced the Hungarian Kingdom and reinforced its statehood.

St. László's decision, with which he committed himself to Pope Gregory VII, obviously had political aspects. In 1079, László married Adelheid, the daughter of Rudolf of Rheinfelden, who was the anti-king against Henry IV. However political László's decision was, it contributed to his spiritual assessment later, and was significant regarding the formation of his cult.<sup>26</sup>

Regarding László's cult, this is significant, as Pope Gregory VII became an emblematic figure of the protectors of the Church – later, figuratively of the whole Christianity –, whilst Henry IV of the suppressor powers of the Church. Even more, the relation between the two entities is well characterised by the fact that even the Church questioned whether a king – as he had to fight, lead his people in wars, and had to return some strict verdicts, in some cases death penalties – could be compatible with the Christian saint's Early Christian idea.<sup>27</sup> In László's case, it was a struggle to justify his aptitudes regarding the ethos of Christian kings. It is not legality that was emphasised as, according to historians, it would not come through against Salomon, the legal king.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, such processes started to develop in Europe that made theoreticians and emperors stand on the side or against the suppressor of the Church. In this László joins the saints of the Church, whose honouring is beyond state borders.<sup>29</sup> Not only did saints appear as protectors of their home countries but protectors of that universalism and values that confronted the subsequent anti-church movements, such as leftism and liberalism. People who respect a military saint cannot speak seriously even about one of them without accepting the universal message, which is the teaching and the values of the Church.<sup>30</sup>

## St. László's Cult in the Light of Historic Events and Legends

László's chivalrous king cult was later strengthened by the fact<sup>31</sup> that king Lajos the Great (1342–1382) regarded himself as a 'chivalrous king' and St. László as his idol. According to some views, the fact that there was no western type knighthood in Hungary, so people could join the knightly notion through ideas,<sup>32</sup> also contributed

<sup>26</sup> Szovák Kornél: *Potestas papae potestas regia. Politikai viták a 14. század elején, Vigília*, 64 (1999/2) 93–99.

<sup>27</sup> Klaniczay (2014): *op. cit.* 9.

<sup>28</sup> Bollók (2000): *op. cit.* 848.

<sup>29</sup> Madas Edit: *A magyar „szent királyok” közép-európai kultusza liturgikus és hagiográfiai források tükrében*, 2013. [http://real.mtak.hu/9736/1/AH\\_2013\\_1\\_2\\_Madas\\_Edit.pdf](http://real.mtak.hu/9736/1/AH_2013_1_2_Madas_Edit.pdf) (Downloaded: 08.07.2018.); Madas Edit – Horváth Zoltán György: *Középkori prédikációk és falképek Szent László királyról. San Ladislao d'Ungheria nella predicazione e nei dipinti murali*, Romanika Kiadó, Budapest, 2008, 464.

<sup>30</sup> Guoth Kálmán: *Eszmény és valóság Árpád-kori királylegendáinkban, Erdélyi Tudományos Füzetek*, 187 (1944) Kolozsvár.

<sup>31</sup> Harai Dénes: *Az archaikus népi gondolkodás*, Kató Zsolt, Kaposvár, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Veszprémy László – Szabó Péter: *Szent László a gyalogság védőszentje, Magyar Honvédség, Oktatási és Kulturális Anyag-ellátó Központ*, 1993, 19; Veszprémy László: *Magyar király a Szentföldön: II. András kereszties hadjárata, 1217–1218. Figyelő*, 31 (2009/4) 3–9.

to the development of László's knight idol picture. There is no consensus among the experts of St. László research about the exact time of emergence of the stories containing supernatural elements. This problem, regarding the influence of the discussed history of ideas, is irrelevant.<sup>33</sup> Intervening supernatural powers appeared in the rivalry between Salomon and László. The establishment of the Vác Cathedral, combined with the vision of the 'wonder-boy-deer', is connected to angelic apparition. Before the Battle of Mogyoród, in his vision László saw two angels descending from the sky and putting a crown on Géza's head, foretelling the outcome of the battle.<sup>34</sup> After the victorious Battle of Mogyoród (1074), László received heavenly help to seize Salomon's position at Pozsony (Bratislava).<sup>35</sup> "You should know I wouldn't have feared from humans, but it's not human, it's protected by angels with fiery swords", confessed Salomon to his court after the battle of Pozsony, about which the legend says: "The angels were flying above László's head with fiery swords, and they were threatening the prince's enemies."<sup>36</sup> Angels, as God's 'army', appear as positive powers both in the Old Testament,<sup>37</sup> and in the Old Testament Apocrypha,<sup>38</sup> as well as in the New Testament.<sup>39</sup> Angels, as God's warriors, gain significant emphasis in apocalyptic literature, as the 'apocalyptic genre' reveals the great battle of the end of times, light and darkness, evil and justice, in which supernatural powers play important roles.<sup>40</sup> Angels, as the power that helps the just, lived on in the theological, today social theory works of 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian authors, who fundamentally determined Christian culture.<sup>41</sup> László's battle against the Cumans shows a similar symbolism, and the story of the battle goes beyond the fight between the two armies. The Christian king's victory over the pagans symbolises the victory of Christianity over Paganism.<sup>42</sup> Naturally, there is no agreement on the origin and the formation period of the story, which – regarding the basic message, the fight of the supernatural powers – has no significance.

The legend in connection with St. László well involves the elements of supernatural intervention. According to a legend (in the collection of Old Hungarian Legends), during St. László's reign "the Russians invaded Hungary, devastated a lot of villages and cities, and later they left for home with their military prize". The king followed them with his army, but they ran out of food. They did not find food in the desert

<sup>33</sup> Klaniczay (2014): *op. cit.* 13.

<sup>34</sup> Váczy Péter: Az angyal hozta korona, *Életünk*, 19 (1982/1–2) 456–466.

<sup>35</sup> Salomon's fall, King Géza I. [www.arcanum.hu/hu/online-kiadvanyok/MagyarNemzetTortenete-a-magyar-nemzet-tortenete-9A23/szilagyi-sandor-a-magyar-nemzet-tortenete-21F2/magyarorszag-tortenete-az-arpadok-koraban-10381301-2B1F/elso-konyv-kuzdelem-a-nemzeti-fuggetlensegert-2B32/v-fejezet-salomon-bukasa-i-geza-kiraly-2C42/](http://www.arcanum.hu/hu/online-kiadvanyok/MagyarNemzetTortenete-a-magyar-nemzet-tortenete-9A23/szilagyi-sandor-a-magyar-nemzet-tortenete-21F2/magyarorszag-tortenete-az-arpadok-koraban-10381301-2B1F/elso-konyv-kuzdelem-a-nemzeti-fuggetlensegert-2B32/v-fejezet-salomon-bukasa-i-geza-kiraly-2C42/) (Downloaded: 11.07.2018.)

<sup>36</sup> Thuróczy János: A Magyarok Krónikája, Augsburg, 1486. Translated by János Horváth, 1918, 187. <http://nemzeti.net/contents/library/01-MAGYARKR.pdf> (Downloaded: 11.07.2018.)

<sup>37</sup> Gen. 32: 1–2; Jos. 5: 13–14.

<sup>38</sup> 1Hen 61: 10; 71: 7.

<sup>39</sup> John 1: 47–51.

<sup>40</sup> Hartman, F. Louis – Lella, A. Alexander: Daniel, in: Brown, E. Raymond – Fitzmayer, A. Joseph – Murphy, E. Roland (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Burns and Oates, New Jersey, 1990, 406–420; Bauckham, Richard: Revelation, in: Barton, John – Muddiman, John (eds.), *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, University Press, Oxford, 2001, 1287–1316.

<sup>41</sup> Babcock, S. William: Angels, in: Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, Garland Publishing, New York – London, 1998, 54–55.

<sup>42</sup> Karácsonyi János: Szent László király élete, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 1926, 20.

land. László “silently moved aside, fell onto his knees, and begged God: Good Lord, as you fed the people of Israel with heavenly bread, don't let your poor Christian people die of hunger!” After the prayer, deers, roe deers and a buffalo were moving in front of his eyes towards the camp.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, in the narrative, the stories of other subsequently sanctified kings and the desert wandering of the Old Testament nation can be found. The description of the desert wandering and manna is the story of divine providence, and the story of the battles with different “Canaanite people”. The essence of the Old Testament message is that “the final victory” is only gained by the people, with the supernatural help of the merciful God. Modern religious historical research also confirms that Middle-Eastern Yahwism was unique compared to other Canaanite religions, which was emphasised with a radical yes–no contrast.<sup>44</sup> This element lived on in the cult of Christian saints, in this case in St. László's cult.

The story in which St. László's soldiers – who were marching against the Tartars –, were suffering from thirst can be interpreted as a story parallel with the Old Testament exodus. Before the fight, László begged God, who heard his begging, and a rich spring bubbled up in the footstep of László's horse. Apart from its reality content, the story is highly significant regarding the history of ideas, as St. László appears as Moses, who struck a rock and got water from it, and prepared the chosen people for the fight against the Canaanite. However, we can find parallels in the legends of European kings. Anyway, the message behind history is the significant point: those chosen by God and Godless people are in constant fight, and God helps the chosen ones in the battle between good and evil.

Not only does St. László represent the contemporary military and royal idol, but later, in battles he protects those who committed themselves to the same true principles with supernatural power. There is a story, based on a real historic event but combined with legendary elements, in which “King St. László appears in the battle of Moldva, in 1345”. The historic element of the event is when King Lajos the Great sends Endre Lackfi, the later Voivode of Transylvania, to the Tartar land with Székely armies, as Tartar military penetration was threatening the security of the Hungarian Kingdom. The Székelys had a fight on this side of the Dniester, and in a three-day long battle they defeated the manifold superior force. However, regarding the ‘idealised’ St. László, the legend which is retained in the *Buda Chronicle* and in János Por's *Minorite Chronicle Fragment* is more significant. When everything seemed to be lost, a miraculous phenomenon appeared in the sky, and the chivalrous king returned to help the soldiers in trouble. This was associated with the belief that the Saint's head relic disappeared from the cathedral during the battle, and it turned up on the third day, “being sweaty from the battle”.<sup>45</sup> Possibly, the story might have some reality content about the relic of the “warrior chivalrous king, the military saint”, as references can be found in case of other European military saints e.g. St. Martin, whose relic was carried up ahead, so that it could give supernatural help.

<sup>43</sup> Lengyel Dénes: Régi magyar mondák, Móra Ferenc Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1972, 155.

<sup>44</sup> Rózsa Huba: Az ószövetség keletkezése, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 1986.

<sup>45</sup> László I, in: Diós István (ed.), Magyar Katolikus Lexikon, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 2002, VII, 663.

The battle with the Tartars is not merely a fight between 'two armed forces': the powers of Christianity – as brightness – and darkness clashed. It was usual among European Christian peoples that the security of their country was connected to 'a military saint'. This happened during the reign of Edward III (1327–1377), who dedicated the country to St. George, or in North Hispania, where the country was dedicated to St. James's protection. The latter, as László in this battle, appeared in the battle of Clavijo against the Moors, in 844.<sup>46</sup> Similar stories are mentioned in case of St. Olaf II (1016–1030). Parallel stories can be found in the legends of Byzantine military saints: St. George, St. Demetrios and St. Theodore.<sup>47</sup> Especially, the legends of St. Demetrios show similarities with the legends of St. László.<sup>48</sup> There is no agreement among researchers how the Byzantine legends affected the development of St. László legends and cult, but it is not significant from our viewpoint.<sup>49</sup> As the essence of these stories is that the honour of military saints has similar, cross-cultural and cross-border elements which strengthen Christian values and universalism. Not only do the common elements of Christian legends connect the given saints, but they connect people, honouring the same saints, into a mutual belief system, whose integral part is the fight between good and evil, and the supernatural goals of mankind. Over space and time, they convey the basis of teachings and world order that involve the conception of leftism and liberalism. The Hungarian St. László joins the cult of those 'helper in battles' saints who help the people of God in the eternal battle between good and evil principles. The battle itself, in which the saints appears, is secondary.

The great 'cultural' connection can be observed not only in famous stories, but in other themes which complete St. László's character. The physical character is the peculiar expression of the commitment to good powers.<sup>50</sup> External and inner harmony appears in 'knightly beauty'. The one who has 'physical and psychological' positive qualities is described as 'strong armed, beautiful faced' or 'endowed with an appealing appearance'. László's physical appearance also strengthened the idea that he was blessed by God, and "he was born to be a king both spiritually and physically". According to the medieval idea "the figure, the power, the friendship, nice voice" are all very important, so contemporary people's concept of the king goes beyond itself and it leads us to the world of the Bible. "His beauty itself is worthy of kingship, no one can be bored with looking at him", says the legend about László. "The beautiful smooth face" is especially significant, which appears in case of the Biblical King David, as well. Anyway, the "Davidian character" served as a basis for

<sup>46</sup> Moser Zoltán: Szent László lándzsájának hegyéről. A magyar művelődés és a kereszténység, Nemzetközi Magyar Filológiai Társaság – Scriptum Rt., Budapest–Szeged, 1998, 558; Holik Flóris: Szent László-mondáink és Compostellai Szent Jakab, *Katolikus Szemle*, (1923/7) 65–79.

<sup>47</sup> Sántha György: A harcos szentek bizánci legendái, Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetemi Görög Filológiai Intézet, Budapest, 1943.

<sup>48</sup> Sántha (1943): *op. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> Kerny Terézia: A katonaszentek ikonográfiájának néhány sajátossága és szerepe a középkori magyar művészetben, *Ars Hungarica*, (1984/12) 161–176.

<sup>50</sup> Karácsonyi (1926): *op. cit.*

creating the medieval kingly conception,<sup>51</sup> which seems to have been used in case of László, as well. Beauty and a nice face become more dominant regarding enemies, as ugly and bizarre individuals are the earthly representations<sup>52</sup> of Satan and of evil powers.<sup>53</sup> Although stressing beauty is the most striking,<sup>54</sup> other parallels can be found as well: friendship, the differentiation of the enemy coming from their own people and the enemy invading from the outside, generousness, promises made to God in case of victory, etc.<sup>55</sup>

A special representation of commitment to good powers and Christianity is that, according to the legend, those who gathered at the Council of Clermont (1095) elected St. László to be the leader of the Crusaders. However, as some authors pointed out, this did not have much chance, as “the chivalrous king had been dead for four months”.<sup>56</sup> Other authors admit that, before the Crusades, French, Spanish and English pilgrims crossing the country asked the king to take over the leadership. László was inclined to do so, but the War of the Czech Succession and his death thwarted the initiative. Anyway, regarding the view we are discussing, the historical authenticity of the question is irrelevant, as – however it happened – the idea connected to St. László, according to which he was the defender of the Church and Christianity, strengthened during the Crusades.

## The Symbolic Description of the Struggle of Supernatural Powers

The cult of St. László appeared in legends, as well as in contemporary church painting. The images tried to express László's legitimacy: the crown, the globus cruciger, the sceptre; and his military suitability: sword, armour, chain mail,<sup>57</sup> the shield showing the patriarchal cross (which is a specific attribute of László) and especially the broadsword (which is possibly ulterior, but expresses the continuous willingness to fight and the physical power which is needed to lift a heavy weapon).<sup>58</sup> Not only do these representations process László-legends, but they also express the continuous fight of good and bad principles eloquently, in which the chivalrous king is shown on the good side. The representations are concentrated in Transylvania (Romania) and in Upper Hungary (Slovakia). The explanation, according to some views, is

<sup>51</sup> Bakalova, Elka: King David as a Model for the Christian Ruler: Some Visual Sources. in: Biliarsky, Ivan – Paun, Radu G. (ed.), *The Biblical Models of Power and Law: Papers of the International Conference*, Bucharest. New Europe College, Frankfurt am Main, 2005, 93–131; McKenzie, L. Steven: *Dávid király – életrajz*, Gold Book, Debrecen, 2000.

<sup>52</sup> Jaeger, Stephen C.: *The Origins of Courtliness, Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals, 939–1210*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1991, 115, 147–149.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, William: *David King of Israel. His Life and its Lessons*, Harper, New York, 1875, 41–58.

<sup>54</sup> Dougherty, J. Martin – Haskew, Michael E. – Jestice, Phyllis G. – Rice, Rob S.: *Bibliai csaták*, Ventus Libro Kiadó, Budapest, 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Lábán Antal: *Dávid*, in: Bangha Béla (ed.), *Katolikus Lexikon*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 1931, I, 432.

<sup>56</sup> Tarján M. Tamás: 1096. augusztus 15. | Lovagsereg indul a Szentföld felszabadítására. *Rubicon*. [www.rubicon.hu/magyar/oldalak/1096\\_augusztus\\_15\\_lovagsereg\\_indul\\_a\\_szentfold\\_felszabaditasara/](http://www.rubicon.hu/magyar/oldalak/1096_augusztus_15_lovagsereg_indul_a_szentfold_felszabaditasara/) (Downloaded: 20.07.2018.)

<sup>57</sup> Seibert, Jutta (ed.): *A keresztény művészet lexikona*, Corvina, Budapest, 1986, 202.

<sup>58</sup> Kristó (1974) 585–621.

that on territories that were not invaded by the Turks early religious works of art survived more broadly. According to another view, László's cult developed the most powerfully on border areas, as the king's military decision was to reinforce the fort-system and to protect border areas.

In most cases the names of those churches where László-frescos can be found are meaningful (St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. Michael the Archangel, St. Martin, St. Margaret of Antioch, St. Andrew.) There is a long list of those churches where St. László images can be found, in each case careful attention was paid when choosing such a patron saint for the church who was a righteous warrior of faith, whether it be a physical fight or a battle against pagan state leaders or evil powers.

These examples show clearly that the patron saints of the above mentioned churches are involved in the same great wars, they are brothers-in-arms over space and time against evil principles. St. László joins this supernatural war. Regarding the pictures – as we have already mentioned in connection with the legends – it turns up that in the battle against evil principles King László gets 'transpersonalised'. It means that we can find similar representations regarding other saints. This is not the falsification of the stories, but represents the eternity, independent from historical eras, of the eternal war between good and bad. It is not a negligible point that with this war St. László becomes the comrade of the most important saints, Apostles and of Christ himself. According to the Bible, Jesus casts out devils, and tells the Apostles in missionary orders to "cast out devils".<sup>59</sup> In Mark's missionary order, where Jesus determined the war against evils as a basic duty for the Apostles, he lists a number of restrictions. Jesus lists those tools that cannot be used by the Apostles during their missionary travel: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts."<sup>60</sup> It is not clear why the staff is an exception, unless the meaning of the (shepherd's) staff is placed into a broader context. The original pontifical crosier – as in nowadays Eastern Churches – ended in the form of a snake, or even two snakes. The snake is not only a Biblical symbol, it also symbolises the evil itself.<sup>61</sup> In this context the staff does not belong to the material world, but it represents the spiritual and religious power with which the Church defeats evil powers.

The frescoes themselves have theological significance. In some places the story of "Cuman abductors of maidens" was shown, in which "the figure of the horseman warrior, the wrestling of two unarmed men, and the beheading of the Cuman warrior" refer to the battle between the principles of good and evil.<sup>62</sup> The wrestling with bare hands is "a cosmic fight in mythical dimensions",<sup>63</sup> which cannot be fought with earthly weapons. At the same time, the failure of earthly tools is

<sup>59</sup> Mark 6: 6–13.

<sup>60</sup> Mark 6: 9.

<sup>61</sup> Hoppál Mihály – Jankovics Marcell – Nagy András – Szemadám György (ed.), *Jelképtár*, Helikon Kiadó, Budapest, 2010, 162–163.

<sup>62</sup> Tornay Krisztina: A Szent László-legenda, mint a szakrális beavatás helye – A felvidéki Szent László-ciklusok (2.) – A Jó és a Rossz harca, 2012. [www.rovart.com/hu/a-szent-laszlo-legenda-mint-a-szakrális-beavatás-helye-a-felvidéki-szent-laszlo-ciklusok-2\\_2695](http://www.rovart.com/hu/a-szent-laszlo-legenda-mint-a-szakrális-beavatás-helye-a-felvidéki-szent-laszlo-ciklusok-2_2695) (Downloaded: 13.07.2018.)

<sup>63</sup> Stanczik-Starecz Ervin: A Szent László-legenda sámánisztikus elemei, 2001. [www.kutyahon.de/erdelyi.templomok/ge-lence/samanisztikai.elemek.htm](http://www.kutyahon.de/erdelyi.templomok/ge-lence/samanisztikai.elemek.htm) (Downloaded: 13.07.2018.)

represented in the scene of the abduction of the maiden, when St. László's spear is piercing the Cuman warrior's chest, whose mouth is letting out smoke or fire, but the wound does not stop him stretching his bow with a powerful move.<sup>64</sup> This represents the supernatural, demonic power. The pictures idealise László's figure, what is more, they show him as an "alter Christus", as his face takes after Christ's face. In theology the "alter Christus" concept mainly referred to priests who act in the name of Christ. László's spiritual highness is sometimes represented with the description that "he is a bit taller, he bends his head down, his face is rather sad and gentle than angry". In most pictures the colours of the horses represent the supernatural character of the fight between the battling parties. The king is riding a white, the Cuman warrior a dark horse. In some cases, the horses themselves are biting each other, which dramatises the battle of the universally opposing principles.<sup>65</sup> The dark horse belongs to the khan of darkness, while the white horse was associated with "the victorious sun, Christos Cosmocratos" as early as in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>66</sup> In other places the colours of the clothes of the opposing parties, or the left-handedness of the Cumans represent the opposition of good and bad powers.<sup>67</sup> According to Gyula László, these pictures are in connection with the early roots of the Christian St. László legend, the mythical hero legends from the nomad worlds of the steppes.<sup>68</sup> This proves that the real difference is between the societies that believe in spiritual powers and those that deny their existence, and not between different religions, which faithfully believe in the existence of supernatural powers.

Finally, it is worth pointing out the idyllic state which appears only seldom, where László is resting his head on the knee of the maiden whom he saved from the Cumans. The sword is on the ground, in the background there is the impaled head of a Cuman. The battle between the principle of good and evil is over, paradise and peace regained. Fight does not continue forever, evil forces are destroyed. This proves that these pictures – with László's wars – represent more than a fight between two soldiers.<sup>69</sup>

## Summary

In the years after the communist dictatorship, the protection of constitutional institutions had a prominent place in legislation. Besides forming the fundamental rights for the freedom of religion and conscience, some practical actions – which helped the free practice of religion and cult in different situations and institutions – were needed, as well. The legislation process that laid down the guarantees of freedom and conscience for the personnel of the Hungarian Defence Forces fitted this legislation process. Act IV of 1990 on the Freedom of Conscience and Religion,

<sup>64</sup> Klaniczay (2014): *op. cit.* 35.

<sup>65</sup> Magyar Zoltán: Táltosló motívum a Szent László-hagyományban, *Ethnográfia*, 108 (1997/1–2) 112.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 111–122.

<sup>67</sup> Based on Magyar (1997): *op. cit.* 112.

<sup>68</sup> László Gyula: Szent László-legenda falképei, *Életünk*, 23 (1985/4) 324–352.

<sup>69</sup> Magyar (2016): *op. cit.* 31.

and on the Churches states that soldiers have the right to practice their religion freely, which is allowed inside the institution, but only individually (§ 7, par. 1). The act differentiates the soldiers' practice of religion inside and outside the military institution. It does not restrict the religious practice of the person performing military service at all (§ 7, par. 2). It was a significant step, as during the communist dictatorship state employees – especially military personnel – were expected to have an “atheist attitude”.

After the regime change, the legislator allowed religious practice along a narrow path, as they did not guarantee the experience of community religious practice. Religion is never merely private, it always has community dimensions. Armies with Catholic dominancy had the tradition of military saints and branch patron saints. It had religious and cultural dimensions, whose edges usually faded. Act LXXIII of 1993 on the Freedom of Conscience and Religion and the modification of Act IV of 1990 on the Freedom of Conscience and Religion, and on Churches, were approaching international norms. The latter changed the above mentioned § 7 par. 1, and stated that the “personnel performing military service can practice their religion freely in accordance with the operating procedure of the military organisation and with performing compulsory military service”. Thus the legislator abolished the restriction so that the personnel performing military service could practice their religion individually in the army.<sup>70</sup> So the institutional presence of each denomination could be organised in the army.<sup>71</sup> However, apart from ceremonial honouring,<sup>72</sup> isolated pilgrimage<sup>73</sup> and shallow knowledge, no St. László – or other branch patron saint – cult which had a deeper awareness raising effect developed. In the light of the described theological, philosophical and intellectual historical context, this cannot happen in another way. After WWII, there was a discontinuity that gradually confronted the society that had religious communities, faith in supernatural powers and spiritual values. After the regime change, not only did the society not get over it, but liberal ideas deepened religion sceptic behaviour further.

Liberal legislation did its best when it made possible to experience the freedom of religion in the army, but we must accept that it cannot be filled with serious messages on the level of implementation. To achieve this, there should be a change in attitude. A significant traditional change would be essential to the development of an effective St. László cult, a change which breaks up with liberal views and accepts the teaching of the Church about the goal of mankind, about the spiritual war between evil and good, about the universalism of holiness, goodness, and about the roles of saints – especially military and branch patron saints. This is very unlikely to happen in these days.

<sup>70</sup> Schanda Balázs: Magyar állami egyházjog, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 2003, 153.

<sup>71</sup> Ujházi Lóránd: A katolikus katonai ordinariátus struktúrája és szabályozása, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Szent László nevét vette fel a Ludovika Kápolnája, 2017. [www.magyarKurir.hu/hirek/szent-laszlo-nevet-vette-fel-ludovika-kapolnaja](http://www.magyarKurir.hu/hirek/szent-laszlo-nevet-vette-fel-ludovika-kapolnaja) (Downloaded: 19.07.2018.)

<sup>73</sup> Kálmánfi Gábor: A kegyes király emlékezete, 2017. <https://honvedelem.hu/galeriak/a-kegyes-kiraly-emlekezete/> (Downloaded: 19.07.2018.)

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# Tartalom

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BÁTFAI NORBERT – CSUKONYI CSILLA – PAPP DÁVID – SZABÓ JÓZSEF –  
TÓTH LÁSZLÓ SZILÁRD – KOVÁCS FERENC: *HKK-Hackers:  
a halálos robotfegyverek és az asimovi három törvény* 5

DÓRA DÉVAI: *An Overview of the Development of the Russian  
Information Warfare Concept Part 1* 27

FARKAS TIBOR: *Védelmi infokommunikációs hálózatok  
és rendszerek – szakmai felkészítés* 37

KOMJÁTHY LAJOS – KOMJÁTHY LÁSZLÓ: *A gyűjtőeszközök  
és -fegyverek fejlődése, az ellenük való védekezés  
a fegyveres harcok (láadások) történetében* 49

## BIZTONSÁGPOLITIKA

FÜZESI KITTI: *Nukleáris energia Brazíliában. A történelmi  
háttértől a gazdasági és külpolitikai kérdésekig* 63

KACZIBA PÉTER: *Az amerikai és a brit diplomácia szerepe  
az 1974-es ciprusi konfliktusban* 77

KIRÁLY ISTVÁN MIHÁLY: *Moszd-műveletek a technológiai fölény  
megtartásáért* 91

## TÁRSADALOMTUDOMÁNY

HARKA ÖDÖN: *A gépesített háború elméletének nyugat-európai  
teoretikusai a két világháború között 1. rész* 103

KOCZKA FERENC – NÉGYESI IMRE: *Az információbiztonság  
fejlesztésének lehetőségei az akadémiai szférában* 113

TAKÁCS LILI: *Ius soli: Vezet-e út Rómába?* 131

## ÁLTALÁNOS

BEZERÉDI IMRE: *Biztos út..., avagy gondolatok az egyes  
rendészeti feladatot ellátók tevékenységéről* 147

PRINCZ ADRIENN: *Civilben a munkahelyi egészségért* 159

SZABOLCS SÁRI: *Military History, Selection, Competencies* 181

LÓRÁND UJHÁZI – TIBOR HORVÁTH: *The Cult of Saint László  
(Saint Ladislaus) in the Hungarian Army* 193