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FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

DOCTORAL THESIS

**THE CULT OF THE SAINTS IN LATE MEDIEVAL
TRANSYLVANIA (14TH - 16TH CENTURIES)**

Abstract

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Abstract

Key words: late medieval sainthood, universal/regional, Transylvania, multiplication of saints' cults, competing cults, the dynamic of saintly patronage, civic religion, typology of sanctity

The main objective of this analysis has been that of examining the model of sainthood cultivated on the border zone between Western and Eastern Christendom. Largely inspired by existing research that divided the European map of sanctity into zones of modernity and zones of archaism, this objective could be fulfilled only by a detailed consideration of the characteristic features of this division. As convincingly argued, the zone of modernity was particularly comprised by the Italian Peninsula, but also regions from England, France, and Germany. On the contrary, the zone of archaism consisted predominantly of the territories from Central and Eastern Europe, but also the Iberian Peninsula and Northern Europe. This distinction was made by taking into account the processes of canonizations that were initiated from these regions and were considered to reflect a modernization of sainthood.¹ Therefore, modernization of sanctity implied an increased number of new saints that were venerated by the faithful and who often benefited from official ecclesiastical support. On the other hand, those regions from where a far lesser number of canonization trials were initiated were considered to be firmly attached to an archaic model of sainthood, dominated by the long-established cults of the liturgical calendar and, to some extent, by the cults of the saints belonging to the ruling dynasties of this area.

But what could have meant the modernization of sainthood in a "cold" region of the Latin Christendom such as Transylvania? In order to find an answer to this intriguing question, I wished to assess the extent to which the concept of the modernization of sainthood can be applied to a region from where no canonization process has survived and which was considered as profoundly characterized by an archaic model of saintliness. When initiating the examination of the viability of this concept at the margins of the Latin Christendom, the inquiry has been framed by the interplay between universal cults and their local, regional

¹ André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 134-5

manifestations.² A strong incentive for establishing such a framework for analysis has been provided by the research undertaken in the last two decades, which brought profound nuances to the understanding of the model of saintliness common to Central and Eastern Europe.³ It was precisely the close and detailed examination of the local circumstances that has shed light on the attempts to modernize sainthood and on the various influences that strongly impacted on this process.

Therefore, I began the inquiry into the ways the cult of the saints was articulated in Transylvania between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. The attempt to understand the model of saintliness that emerged and became popular in this region has for the most part been defined by the nature of existing sources. The nature of Transylvanian sources, including their survival rate, offer scarce information about the saints and the cults that developed around them. The greatest majority of the source material I have dealt with is normative, as it regulates, imposes, corrects or describes cults and how they should be practiced. This characteristic feature concerns sources produced not only by ecclesiastical and lay authorities, but also by individuals, either lay persons or those filling offices in the Church hierarchy.

The analysis has been carried out according to two main parts designed to complement each other. **Part I Multiplication of Saints' Cults** was articulated by ecclesiastical institutions, such as the Transylvanian Episcopate and the Mendicant Orders. This structuring intended to reveal the role played by the highest ecclesiastics, the Bishops and the cathedral canons from Alba-Iulia, as well as the Dominican and Franciscan friars in the propagation of saints' cults in this region. In the attempt to understand this role, I have considered the extent to which the Episcopal clergy and the Mendicant Orders contributed to the increase in the number of holy helpers, as well as the extent to which this increase reflected an allegiance to a recent, modern sainthood or whether loyalty for an archaic model of saintliness can be deciphered in their initiatives. To be sure, the annexes I have compiled were predominantly based on existing research, but the information was organized according to individual saints,

² As suggested by William A. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 21-22 and pp. 152-77 and Gary Dickson, *The 115 Cults of the Saints in Later Medieval and Renaissance Perugia: a Demographic Overview of a Civic Pantheon*, *Renaissance Studies*, 12 (1998): 6-25, universal cults deserve to be approached from the point of view of the popularity they enjoyed over certain periods of time and in given territories, thus advocating in favour of a more nuanced comprehension of the development of such cults.

³ Most notably in what concerns the shaping of the dynastic cults and those of the popular *beati*, the Dominican nun Margaret and the Observant Franciscan friar, John of Capistran, that have been scrutinized in great detail by Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses. Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, translated by Eva Pálmai, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Viktória Hedwig Deák OP, *Árpád-házi szent Margit és a domonkos hagiográfia. Garinus legendája nyomában*, Budapest: Kairosz Kiadó, 2005 and Stanko Andrić, *The Miracles of St. John Capistran*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000.

the localities where churches were dedicated to them and the ecclesiastical affiliation. As such, it was easier to follow how specific cults were disseminated by clerical agency from the Episcopal See into the territories under its jurisdiction or were integrated within the Mendicant apostolate. In short, these annexes illustrate not only the localization of saints' cults in Transylvania, but also indicate those regions where some saints were more popular than others. The limits of the image of saintliness derived from parochial and Mendicant dedications were surpassed by trying to explain the circumstances under which titular dedications were chosen and to contextualize the cult of a given saint according to the social, political, cultural and even economic features of the communities where that specific cult has taken shape. Of similar importance in this contextualization has been the comparison of the cults of individual saints with similar developments taking place not only in the kingdom, but also in other parts of the Latin Christendom.

The quantitative assessment and its contextualization allowed for a refined understanding of saints' cults in late medieval Transylvania and became an excellent point of departure for the analysis undertaken in **Part II**. The analysis of the Episcopal agency and of the Mendicant one had the merit of allowing me to establish a general framework for the cult of saints in late medieval Transylvania in what concerns both the cults that were promoted and the influences which made an impact on this promotion. Furthermore, the conclusions reached in **Part I** eased the transition to the second part of my inquiry, as they highlighted the key importance of local contexts in the dissemination of saints' cults.

Part II The dynamic of saintly patronage intended to discuss the emergence and functioning of saints' cults within what has been defined as civic religion. As detailed by existing research, the cult of saints was an important factor that shaped civic religion, as the support provided to emerging cults, most notably in the city-states of northern Italy, allowed for a growing initiative of urban authorities in supervising and controlling religious life.⁴ At the same time, it has been observed that not only the cults of the *novi sancti* were organized by the towns' government, but also those of the traditional patrons, the most important one being without any doubt, the Virgin Mary.⁵ It should also be mentioned that the civic

⁴ Of key importance in this regard were Vauchez's studies, such as *La religione civica*, in *Esperienze religiose nel Medioevo*, Roma: Viella, 2003, 247-51; *Patronage des saints et religion civique dans l'Italie communale à la fin du Moyen Age*, *Patronage and Public in the Trecento*, St. Lambrecht symposium, Abtei St. Lambrecht, Styria, 16-19 July, 1984, sous la direction de V. Moleta, Florence, Leo S. Olschki, 1986, pp. 59-80 and *La commune de Sienne, les Ordres mendiants et le culte des saints. Histoire et enseignements d'une crise (novembre 1328-avril 1329)*, *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen Age-Temps Modernes*, 89 (1977): 757-767.

⁵ Mary Bergstein, *Marian Politics in Quattrocento Florence: the Renewed Dedication of Santa Maria del Fiore in 1412*, *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 44, 4 (1991): 673-719; Dickson, *The 115 Cults...*, pp. 6 - 25

celebration of saints' cults has increasingly become a matter of concern for the city councils of northern Europe in the course of the fifteenth century, where the same tendency of the urban leadership in becoming involved in the public display of veneration of saintly patrons has been noticed.⁶

Therefore, I decided to analyze the relationship between the cults of the parish patron saints and the shaping of civic religion in the most important Transylvanian towns, Sibiu, Braşov, Bistriţa, and Cluj. The four case studies have allowed for a deeper understanding of the dynamic of saintly patronage at parish level and brought to light the important role played by the urban leadership in this process. Significantly enough, the acquiring of urban autonomy that implied the free election of the parish priests by the city councils strengthened communal solidarity as it was revealed by the four analyzed towns. Considering that they had a mono-parochial profile for the most part of the Middle Ages, the most important parish church of the town and its patron saint became key ingredients in the display of urban liberties and privileges. Furthermore, this development has been prompted by the civic authorities that supported, even by spending civic funds, the cults of the parish patron saints. By the late Middle Ages, the importance of the patron saints was further suggested by the appropriation of their cults by the urban leadership, which identified in the protectors of the parish churches a valuable source of prestige and authority. To be sure, however, this transformation also benefited from the involvement of ecclesiastical superiors, the Archbishops of Esztergom, the Transylvanian Bishops, but also the Papacy, which not only supported the cults of the parish patron saints, but also promoted recent developments associated with these cults, as highlighted by the feast of the Visitation of the Virgin or belief in her Bodily Assumption.

Much has been accomplished as a result of this analysis and yet, there is plenty that remains to be done by future studies. At this point, I would like to suggest further avenues for investigation that could exploit, on the one hand, the research findings achieved, whereas, on the other, could broaden our comprehension of saints' cults in the late Middle Ages. The image of sainthood cultivated in Transylvania between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries is a composite one and, as such, it would be worth attempting to explain, for example, the interesting strategy that modernized sainthood by combining, conflating and connecting cults to various ecclesiastical institutions.

⁶ Andrew Brown, Perception of Relics: Civic Religion in Late Medieval Bruges, *Visualizing the Middle Ages*, vol. I: *Images of Medieval Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson*, Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007, pp. 186-199

Of similar interest would be the examination of the relationship between civic religion and the cults of the parish patron saints in other Transylvanian towns, such as Sighișoara, Mediaș, Orăștie, Sebeș, Dej or Turda, which were urban privileged communities and largely mono-parochial. In fact, an even closer approach of local situations could help illuminate not only the institutional promoters of saints' cults, as this has predominantly been pursued in my enterprise, but also the degree to which the laity became engaged in the domain of saints' cults.

Finally, I should also refer to a more general context, as throughout this analysis I have constantly taken into account the history of saints' cults not only in the kingdom of Hungary, but also more generally in the Latin Christendom. Perhaps one of the most striking observations I could formulate and suggest to be further investigated is that of church patronage. I sought to demonstrate that in the late Middle Ages church patronage and support for various cults were used in order to enhance one's chance for salvation, but also to strengthen social and political authority. When mapping out directions for future research, one could consider that, despite its inherent limitations, the analysis I have undertaken should be refined and improved by, on the one hand, similar investigations carried out in other regions and, on the other, by comparison of the research findings thus obtained.

The redrawing of the map of European sanctity has shown that on the border zone between the Western and the Eastern Christendom, the prevailing model of saintliness was an archaic one. At the same time, when using criteria other than that of canonized sainthood, one can conclude that traditional cults were also modernized in the late Middle Ages. First and above all, this modernization meant their accommodation to the particular needs and ideals of various social and cultural groups and communities. The agents of this modernization were the representatives of the Church hierarchy, the Mendicant Orders and, for sure, the civic authorities. The Holy See's strategy for achieving a uniform model of saintliness through canonization trials failed in the core regions of the Latin Christendom. Interestingly enough, this ideal became possible in one of the marginal territories, through the renewal of traditional cults.