



VENI AD TVAM PRAE-
STANTISSIMAM MA-
RIESTATEM MATHIA
HVNGARORVM POTETIS
SIME REX ATQVE AD TE
BEATIX OMNI VIRTVTVM
GENERE ORNATISSIA REGINA



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Matthias Rex
1458-1490

Hungary at the Dawn
of the Renaissance

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– *Cultural Faces of de Matthias Rex (1458–1490)*

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Foreword

Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest has organized an International conference „Matthias Rex 1458–1490 – Hungary at the Dawn of the Renaissance” between May 20–25, 2008. Section F was named as „Matthias Remembered by Tradition”, under my guidance, dealing with several topics concerning the Hungarian King during the centuries. We publish here the full texts of the papers – if the authors have sent us them in time. We did not publish here the short summaries. Originally the publication was scheduled just after the conference and by the organizers – but because of various reasons only now we were able to print them. We apologize for the delay. We did not update the texts, and homogenized the system of notes and bibliography only to some extent.

We thank the contributors and the editors and Kata Zsófia Vincze (Eötvös Loránd University, Chair of Folklore) for helping the publication. Our issue is the first comparative volume of the King Matthias lore.

20 December, 2011.

Vilmos Voigt

The Names in the Family of King Matthias Corvinus – From Old Sources to Contemporary Historiography

The family of King Matthias Corvinus (1458–1590) has long been the subject of complex investigations, but also of historiographical and even political-national disputes. The main reason behind these disputes is the scarcity, the ambiguity and the distortion – deliberate or not and operated since the Middle Ages – of the data regarding this issue. Another reason is the occasional interpretation of the data in question from the vantage point of modern and contemporary mentalities, of the national perspectives that dominated the investigation of the past and other fields of spiritual creation starting chiefly with the 18th century.

The debate was structured on several levels, focusing on the ethnic origin of the family, on its place of origin, on the denomination embraced by its members, on the precise identity of the paternal grandmother of Matthias, on other relatives of the Hunyadis, and even on the names they bore. No serious historian would question the Romanian origin of the family today, even if many rightfully discuss the importance played by this ethnic origin at that time. Still, beyond the significance of the medieval nation,¹ since this ethnic origin was mentioned even in the 15th century – in a neutral fashion, with admiration, or with contempt – it is the duty of the historian to take note and interpret it. Also, it is almost certain that nearly all of the known family members were born in Transylvania and in Hungary, but it is difficult to say whether the more distant paternal ancestors of Matthias were themselves local Transylvanian Romanians or came from the lands south of the Carpathians. As for their religious affiliation, we can only assume that – the paternal grandfather of the king (*Vojk/Voicu*) and some of his relatives having Slavic-Romanian names not present in the Catholic calendar (*Sorb/Şerb* or *Şerban*, *Radol/Radul*, *Magos/Mogoş*, another *Radul*) – it had initially been of the Byzantine rite, like most Romanians at that time. Elisabeth of Marsina (*Margina?* *Muşina?*), *Vojk's* wife – probably coming

¹ Pop 1998; Brezeanu 2002.

from the Marginea district or from the Land of Hațeg (a member of the Mușină family of Densuș) – may have been a Catholic, in light of her given name, but she may just as well belonged to another denomination. Apart from two certain marital alliances with two Hungarian families belonging to the middle nobility – Dengeleg and Rozgonyi – the other known paternal relatives of Matthias are families of knezes, voivodes, and small Romanian nobles from the region of Hunedoara-Hațeg.² Here, in the Land of Hațeg, the father of King Matthias had “co-owning brothers,” with whom he shared certain lands.

In what follows, we shall focus our attention on certain names used in the family of the Hunyadis, especially in light of recent allusions to “a true strategy concerning the use of onomastic errors”³ in Romanian historiography, as if a conspiracy well prepared by occult communist forces had caused deliberate distortions of some 14th century names. We shall begin with the very name of the illustrious king of Hungary, born in Transylvania. Any Westerner, or anyone familiar with Catholicism and even with the Protestant doctrines, knows that the name Matthias or Matthias or Mathia (with several variants) comes from the homonymous apostle and was given to boys in Western Europe quite frequently in the past and sometimes even today. The feast of Matthias the Apostle was celebrated in the Catholic calendar of medieval Hungary on February 24 (in normal years) or on February 25 (in leap years). As the future king was born in the Mech House (later known as Matthias House) of Cluj (Klausenburg, Kolozsvár), in the voivodate of Transylvania, probably on February 23, 1443, he was given the name of Matthias, in celebration of the apostle whose feast was the following day, on February 24.⁴ It is also possible that the future king was actually born on February 24, 1443, as suggested by a document issued by John Corvin of Hunyadi (*Ioannes Corvinus de Huniad*) on February 24, 1495 (*in*

² We shall not discuss here the family of Nicolaus Olahus (1493–1568) – archbishop primate and regent of Habsburg Hungary – related through marriage with the Corvins: it seems that a sister of John Hunyadi – Marina – married a paternal uncle of the illustrious humanist and clergyman. This kinship is irrelevant for the purposes of the present study. The same applies to the alleged kinship between John Hunyadi and the Moldavian ruling family (also through one of Vojk’s daughters, married to Voivode Peter III, who ruled, intermittently, in 1447–1448). See Rezachevici 2001: 98, 192, 505.

³ Rusu 1999: 22.

⁴ Quite symptomatic is the fact that a boy named Matia/Matthias, the son of a Transylvanian voivode of Romanian origin and who would become an illustrious king of Hungary, was born in a town that *intra muros* was still dominantly German (as was the case with Cluj around 1440).

festo beati Matthiae apostoli) in memory of his father and confirming a paternal donation to Jozsa of Som, deputy *comes* of Timiș.⁵ Besides, Nicholas Bethlen ordered that a sermon be delivered in memory of Matthias every year, precisely on the feast of Matthias the Apostle.⁶

In the Romanian environment, however, the name Matia, Matthias, or Matthias is not used and was never a given name. This might seem strange, since the Byzantine calendar does include the day of the saint in question. Thus, in the Romanian Orthodox calendar, the name of the saint – *Sfântul Apostol Matia* – is mentioned twice, once directly, on August 9, and once indirectly, on June 30, the feast of the 12 apostles. Of course, these were not major feasts and enjoyed little attention. They were merely names of saints in the calendar, and there were some for every day. At any rate, Romanians do not use the name Matthias. One name they do use, however, is that of Matthew the Evangelist (*Matei*), as the gospels and their authors were always mentioned by priests in front of the congregation. When later Romanian chroniclers (in the 17th century) began writing in the Romanian language, they rendered the name of the Hungarian king as *Matiaș* or *Mateiaș*, starting from the Hungarian name *Mátyás*.⁷ Quite possibly, in those days the name was pronounced not in the customary Romanian but in the Hungarian fashion, with the stress on the first syllable (*Màtiaș*). Interestingly enough, Slavonic documents from Moldavia mention a deacon named *Matiaș*, who lived at the time of Stephen the Great, but this is an isolated case.⁸ Romanian historians from Transylvania operated in the same fashion. For instance, in the late 18th century, Gheorghe Șincai constantly referred to “*Matiaș*, King of Hungary.”⁹ Even Nicolae Iorga – the greatest Romanian historian – systematically used the form *Matiaș*/*Mateiaș*. *Matiaș* gradually changed into *Mateiaș*, used in Romanian as a diminutive for *Matei*; the immediate consequence was that the king was renamed *Matei*. Consequently, modern Romanian historiography rendered the name Matthias as *Matei*. A. D. Xenopol, the author of the first critical synthesis of Romanian history (13 volumes published between 1896 and 1912 and relevant as a model even

⁵ Erdödy Archiv (kept at the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv), Vienna, no. 970 (old classification: Ladula 94, fasc. 4, no. 5(6)).

⁶ Mako 2002: 172, note 44, 180, note 85.

⁷ Ureche 1967: 63–78.

⁸ Văcaru 2003: 93–106. We may be dealing with a Catholic deacon bearing the name of Matthias, a member of the Moldavian Catholic community of Hungarian extraction.

⁹ Gheorghe 1978: 154–194.

nowadays), systematically used the form *Matei Corvin*.¹⁰ The form *Matei* was thus adopted in Romanian historiography and by the Romanian public.¹¹ Still, this was no occult “strategy,” but rather a particular case concerning the use of a proper name. Such situations are common in all historiographies, as proper names are adapted to the specificity of certain languages and become “invented,” adapted names, used by virtue of custom and of tradition, and in such cases no one even suspects a conspiracy or an occult strategy. During the communist era, through the voice of Francisc Pall, the Cluj school of history pointed out the error generated by the confusion between the name of Matthias the Apostle – the actual name of the Hungarian king – and the name of Matthew the Evangelist, given to the sovereign by Romanian historians. Today, historians and especially those specializing in the Middle Ages use the correct Romanian form *Matia*, but the name *Matei* is still solidly rooted in popular consciousness. It is used strictly by virtue of tradition, custom, and sometimes ignorance, but not because of a “strategic” pressure or because of the “immaturity of our medievalists,” as it has been tentatively claimed.¹² It is absurd to draw such dramatic and catastrophic conclusions starting from trivial, minor, and fully explained matters. We shall only mention here the fact that even a contemporary Italian chronicle (predating the death of the sovereign) mentioned the Hungarian king not as *Mattia*, as it would have been proper in the Italian language and as the name appears in other Italian documents, but as *Matteo*, the equivalent of the same *Matei*/Matthew.¹³ This Milanese example foreshadowed the onomastic diversification of the modern era and which began with the Late Middle Ages.

Equally problematic is the cognomen *Corvinus*, *Corvin*, or *Corvinul*. Several things are certain in this respect.¹⁴ Albeit a famous sovereign, Matthias

¹⁰ Xenopol 1986: 252 ssq.

¹¹ Mureșanu 1996: 131–136. He did not feel the need to explain why the name *Matia* is the correct one, but simply used it as such. An important role in the circulation of the name *Matia* in the 20th century could have been played by Vasile Pârvan, who was extremely interested in the history of the Middle Ages, especially around the year 1900. However, the great historian, who invariably used the form *Matthias*, quickly abandoned these pursuits and turned his attention to ancient history and to archaeology. See Vasile 1990: 129–206, 1905: 869–927, 1009–1080. In the long run, the form most widely known in Romania was that of *Matei Corvin*.

¹² Rusu 1999: 22.

¹³ *Cronica gestarum in partibus Lombardie et regionis Italie* [A.A. 1476–1482] (=“*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*”, Nuova Serie, XXII, 3), edited by Giuliano Bonnanza 1904: 88.

¹⁴ We shall not discuss here the idea initiated by Petrus Ransanus and then taken up by Antonius Bonfinius, according to which Matthias’ father was born in the village of *Corvinus* (recently embraced by Péter Kulcsár, *op. cit.*), because it lacks credibility and has been seen as a deliberate distortion related to the propaganda meant to strengthen the descent of the family from the old

was still the target of ironic and sarcastic jabs because of his modest “Wallachian” origins, because of the fact that he was related to his “schismatic” subjects. Therefore, he took a number of measures. *Valachorum regulus* is the customary title used by Bonfini (to whom we shall return later) for both Matthias and for Stephen the Great. A deliberate offense against the Corvin – accused by the “pure blooded” Hungarian elite of being just a “Romanian princeling” – the title is quite flattering in the case of Stephen the Great, who, in 1492, had gained the admiration of the dead king’s chronicler for having protected Hungary by preventing the Tartars and the Ottomans from attacking Transylvania by way of Moldavia.¹⁵ *D’origine humile de progenie de Valacchia* was the formula (taken up by Stefano Magno) used by the Venetian bureaucracy to describe Matthias upon his coronation,¹⁶ drawing on the rumors circulating in Hungary. Also, Emperor Frederic III contemptuously declared that *Matthias was natus a Valacho patre*.¹⁷ It is true that the Romanian origin of the king was sometimes mentioned in a positive context in foreign sources (thus, in 1475–1476 Venetian envoy Sebastiano Baduario praised the Romanians whom he described as being the people of the “most serene king” Matthias, for their constant bravery in the battles against the Turks, “alongside his father and alongside his majesty”¹⁸), but this did not change the negative perception within the kingdom. It seems that the king himself did not always make secret of this embarrassing origin: according to the late 16th century testimony of Polish author Varsevicius (Krzysztof Warszawski), who drew on the work of authors from the time of Matthias, the Hungarian king received some Moldavian envoys (whom the Polish author called “Wallachians”¹⁹) dispatched by Stephen the Great.²⁰ When they began their message with the Romanian words “*Spune domnului*

Corvins. Contemporary Hungarian and Transylvanian sources make no mention of this fact. It is hard to believe that two foreigners, two Italians who resided in Hungary only for a limited period of time and much later, knew more about the birthplace of the king’s father and about the origin of his family than the local people.

¹⁵ Antonius de Bonfinis, *Rerum Ungaricarum decades*, see Fögel – Juhász – Iványi 1936: 224, 243; IV/1, 1941: 212. On a previous occasion, the Italian secretary had criticized Stephen.

¹⁶ Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, Codices, 6215, Ad annum 1457 [MV 1458], f. 6r.

¹⁷ Armbruster 1993: 67–68.

¹⁸ Iorga n.d.: 101; Drăgan 2000: 380.

¹⁹ In Polish medieval sources, Moldavia is often called “Wallachia” and its inhabitants “Wallachians.” In order to make the necessary distinction, Wallachia proper was referred to by the Poles as “Multana,” maybe a distorted form of the Romanian “Muntenia.” Just like the Hungarians, the Poles designated the Romanians using a name very similar to the one they gave to Italians, implicitly alluding to the kinship between the two peoples.

²⁰ For an interesting and original comparative analysis of the two leaders, see Simon 2005: 663.

nostru” [Tell our lord], he told them that if that was their language, then he did not need an interpreter.²¹ Nicolae Iorga believed that Matthias’ refusal to use an interpreter after hearing the three Romanian words in question may have been “a way of showing that he understood that language of his ancestors, so similar to Latin.”²² It is unclear whether the king could understand Romanian just because it was so close to Latin, or because it was the language of his ancestors and of some of his subjects. However, beyond any doubt, the episode confirms the similarity between Romanian and Latin. Still, by declaring in front of the entire court that he did not need an interpreter, after hearing a few words in Romanian, the great politician fueled and confirmed the rumors concerning his Romanian ascent. Generally speaking, the Hungarian elites knew that the king was “of humble Wallachian origin” and that his alleged descent from Sigismund of Luxemburg was more of an invention, just like the idea of his kinship with the Basarab princes of Wallachia. At any rate, princes or not, kinship with a “schismatic” Romanian dynasty, whose members were vassals to the Hungarian kings, did not automatically bring with it the prestige desired by the sovereign of a Catholic country like Hungary. Still, the obvious connection between the king and the Romanians (rumors about it were circulating all over the place!), as well as the presence of the raven holding a ring in its beak on the family escutcheon were two important elements that could be used in order to “ennoble” the sovereign. The one entrusted with this task was the Ascoli-born Italian secretary and lecturer of Queen Beatrice, Antonio Bonfini (Antonius Bonfinius in Latin), who wrote (precisely in order to demonstrate the Roman origin of the king) so expressively about the Latin origin of the Romanians: “For the Romanians are descended from Romans, as indicated until today by their language which, even if they were surrounded by various barbarian peoples, did not perish... Swollen by the barbarian wave, they [the Roman colonies and legions in Dacia, our note] still exulted the Roman language and, in order to keep it at all cost, fought more fiercely to preserve their language than they did in order to preserve their life.”²³ For many foreigners, someone’s descent from the Romanians

²¹ *Idioma valachicum est corruptum, nec tamen latinitati admodum absimile; adeo ut rex Matthias Hungariae, cum legati valachici per interpretem apud eum verba facere sic incepissent: "Expone, inquit, domino nostro", se, si hac lingua uterentur, etiam sine interprete intelligere eos posse responderit.* Mentioned in Iorga 1935–1936: 265; also present in Armbruster 1993: 119–120.

²² Iorga 1935–1936: 265.

²³ Holban 1968: 482–483.

could only be honorable and glorious, as the Romanians in question (regardless of whether they lived in Transylvania and Hungary or in Wallachia and Moldavia) possessed two great qualities, in the context of that time: 1. they were descended from the great and noble Roman people, and 2. they were bravely fighting for Christianity in the crusade against the Turks. Bonfini knew for a fact that the Romanians were the descendants of the Romans, that they had always fought bravely to preserve their identity and keep the Ottomans at bay, and that King Matthias was of Romanian origin (on his fathers' side, the side that mattered in those days). From here there was just one small step to constructing a credible genealogy for the king, related to an illustrious Roman family. After all, if Romanians were descended from the Roman colonists and legionnaires, and Matthias was himself a Romanian, then he most likely descended from a Roman family. Since the king's father was a Romanian, and Romanians were descended from the Romans – as all humanists knew and wrote –, then one did not have to invent a Roman origin. One merely had to find a suitable illustrious Roman family. In this respect, one valuable clue was already available, namely, the raven (*corvus*, *corvinus*) holding a ring in its beak and featured on the family coat of arms. Thus, in October 1486, the king was presented with the book called *De Corvine domus origine libellus* (Book on the origin of the House of Corvin), in which it was “proved” that the illustrious King Matthias was descended from the family of Valerius Volusus²⁴ (*Corvinus*), a Roman nobleman whose ascent actually predated Rome itself and whose illustrious descendants had reached the area of the Danube and of the Carpathians, where the Romanian people was born.²⁵ Of course, the occasional ironies concerning the modest and uncertain Wallachian origin of the king continued to circulate, but, by finding an ancestry in the Roman Valerius, Bonfini immensely pleased his

²⁴ Kovács 2000: 12–13. The idea whereby the name *Corvinus* and the Roman origin of the king were embraced only in 1484, strictly in connection with the planned marriage of Matthias' son to Bianca Sforza, is not supported by any evidence (Kulcsár 1993: 1. 15–17; www.adatbank.transindex.ro). The fuss around the name *Corvinus* and of the illustrious ascent of the Hunyadis may have helped to perfect this matrimonial alliance, but the raven featured on the coat of arms (the source of the name), as well as the idea of the Roman origin of the king, born to a Romanian (= *Olab*) father, descended from the noble and ancient Romans, are much older than that. If the year 1484 was so important, if it was of utmost importance to the king, then how come that Bonfinius' opusculum was written only in 1486? It is therefore inaccurate to claim that “King Matthias assumed a Roman ascent only for the sake of his son.” However, it is obvious that the sovereign did use his “Roman kinship” to the advantage of his son, in order to provide him with a glorious life and a throne, and in order to establish a solid dynasty.

²⁵ Armbruster 1993: 69–70.

royal patron and came up with a name that remained in historiography. In a later hypothesis, the same Bonfini spoke about the possible descent of Matthias from King Sigismund, also starting from the presence of the raven on the family escutcheon. Thus, in the history dedicated to the Hungarians and completed after the death of Matthias (in 1496), the Italian historian included both the version of the descent from the illustrious Roman family and that of the descent from Sigismund. Bonfini and many other people knew quite well that these were merely hypothetical constructs or oral traditions, but they continued to circulate.

At any rate, the name Corvinus remained in use, but we believe it can only be used in the case of Matthias and of his descendants, namely, his only son, John (deceased in 1504), and his only male grandson, Christopher (deceased in 1505). Of course, Matthias's granddaughter, Elisabeth, Christopher's sister, was herself a Corvinus, but she also died prematurely, in 1508, leaving no heirs. Thus, to use the name Corvinus in connection with Matthias' father is a serious error and is most likely to create a lot of confusion. The name "John Corvin" or "John Corvin of Hunyadi," coined during the Romantic period and used even by some major historians²⁶ since the 19th century in relation to the name of the hero of Belgrade, a name present even today in some popular texts, only perpetuates the fallacy. The Ban of Severin, Voivode of Transylvania and *Comes* of Timiș, also called in his youth by the name of *Johannes Olah*, had no idea that his name was also Corvinus. Besides, to call this great crusader "John Corvinus of Hunyadi" can create confusion, as his grandson, the only son of Matthias, used the exact same name for himself.

Interesting issues can also be raised in relation to the other names of Matthias' paternal relatives. Most of those confirmed beyond any doubt can be found in the famous act of donation concerning the estate of Hunedoara, dated October 18, 1409, even if here they are rendered in a distorted manner, as Latin was the language of the chancellery and the notary scribe did not speak Romanian. In this document, we find the names of *Voyk* or *Woyk*, *filius Serbe* or *Serba*, with his brothers *Magas* and *Radul*, their cousin *Radul*, and the son of *Voyk*, *Iohannes*.²⁷ As they were all Romanians, we have to assume that the original Romanian names, which could not be rendered exactly in Latin, were *Voicu*, *Șerbu* or *Șerban*, *Mogoș*, *Radul*, and *Ioan* or *Iuon*. They all

²⁶ Bariț 1873: 5.

²⁷ Hurmuzaki 1890: no. CCCLXXXI, 462–463.

circulated in the Romanian community at the time, and they appear, under various forms, in Latin²⁸ and Slavonic documents, etc. In other words, the great-grandfather of King Matthias was called *Șerbu* (*Șerban*), his grandfather *Voicu*, his uncles *Mogoș* and *Radul* (two of them), and his father *Ioan* (*Iuon*). Even in the Latin document in question, the name *Radul*, given to two members of the family, includes the morpheme *-l* of the enclitical masculine definite article, specific only to the Romanian language. The uncle named *Radul* of the boy *Ioannes* was also referred to as *Ladislaus*, a name from the Catholic calendar. Whether or not it was an adaptation (and not a “translation,” as contended by some²⁹) of the original Romanian name *Radul*, through the intermediate stage *Ladul*, the name *Ladislaus* – designating the same person who called himself *Radul* – was not an exception or a unique case. Romanian Transylvanian onomastics includes many cases of people having two names, one traditionally Romanian and/or taken from the Byzantine calendar, and one Catholic, typical of the official elite of Transylvania and Hungary. In certain narrative sources (Bonfinius), *Vojk/Voicu* is also referred to as *Butbi* (and then *Buth*, *Butbo*), without any explanation. Later historians were also unable to explain this name. Indeed, in Romanian we find the forms *But*, *Bute*, or *Butea*, present in the documents of that time or in later ones, and in several regions, from Maramureș to Făgăraș. Drawing on Sebastian Munster’s *Geography*, Samuil Micu wrote: “And John Hunyadi was the son of a Romanian named But (*Fuit autem Ioannes Hunyades Butbi Valachi filius*)” and, following the argument of Iosif Benkő, he added: “John of Hunedoara or Corvin – others call him Huniadi, Laonikos calls him Honiat, the Turks, after Leunclavius, Iancu – was the son of a boyar (*Bojerü*), a certain But (*Butbi seu Butbonis*³⁰), descended from Elisabeth Paleologus of the imperial Byzantine family.”³¹ We can see that actual facts combined with the fiction of narrative sources here, too. Then, in his collection of genealogies, Sándor Mike claimed that one of the two *Raduls* was the brother of *Șerb*

²⁸ In 14th and 15th century Latin documents, these names appear as *Schereban*, *Schereb*, *Radul* (in 1383), *Mogos* (in 1404), *Moga Serban* (in 1410), *Sarban* (la 1428) etc., associated with Romanian families from the regions of Sibiu, Banat, and Beiuș. See Hurmuzaki 1890. CCXXII, 281; 1890: no. CCCLX, 437; 1890: no. CCCLXXXVII, 469; 1890: no. CCCCLXV–CCCCLXVI, 556–557, etc.

²⁹ Rusu 1999: 34.

³⁰ The two forms – purely artificial and imaginary constructs – and in the genitive singular, the first after the second declension (assuming that the nominative singular is *Buth*), and the other after the third imparisyllabic declension (assuming that the nominative singular is *Butbo*).

³¹ Micu 1995: 74.

(*Serbe*),³² while the son of *Șerb* was designated as *Vojk Butbi*; among Vojk's brothers, apart from *Radul* and *Magoss*, Mike also mentions *Iarislau Vojk Csofnakosi* (in Romanian, *Voicu Iarislau de Cinciș*),³³ because a certain Vojk of Cinciș was indeed mentioned as *frater noster* by the Governor of Transylvania, John Hunyadi, in 1448. However, the phrase in question was followed by the word *condivisionalis*, meaning "estate brother," or "co-owning brother."³⁴ This did not necessarily refer to a blood relation, but did not rule one out, either. On the contrary, there were many cases of estate brothers who were actually related, in the sense that a common ancestor once held the estate or estates in question, later divided it repeatedly (but only theoretically, without new boundaries actually being set) among the heirs. In such cases, with the passing of time, the blood ties became thinner and thinner, to the point of disappearing. As for the names in question, it is important to note that the father of this estate brother of the governor (who had the same name as the governor's father!) was called *Șerbu* or *Șerban/Șorban (Sorbe)*, just like the governor's grandfather, while a son of the same estate brother was named *Ladul* or *Ladislau*, just like uncle *Radul-Ladislau* of the same high official.³⁵ Potentially significant is the fact that the given names in the family of Cinciș – identical to those used in the Hunyadi family, namely, *Șerbu-Voicu-Ladislau* – appear exactly in the same succession as with the relatives of John Hunyadi. This similarity, combined with the estate brotherhood and with the shared heraldic elements, suggests that the family of Cinciș probably included blood relatives of the Hunyadis, living in the Land of Hațeg. All three aforementioned arguments are quite solid and cannot be easily overlooked. As they are not directly related to the topic of the present paper, we shall not discuss here the issues concerning the other relatives of the Hunyadis living in Hațeg or in Hunedoara, the confirmations, the donations, and the massive ennoblements operated by John Hunyadi in the same region, or the other solid arguments that demonstrate the geographic origin of the family. In fact, Antonius Wrancius or Verancius (Verancsics), quite familiar with the history and the topography of Transylvania, argued that the Romanians from the district of the land of Hațeg (*districtum Hazak*) had been ennobled by John Hunyadi, "a native of that place (*inde oriundi*)."³⁶ In the 17th

³² The Latin *frater patruelis* can mean both cousin and paternal uncle.

³³ Mike manuscript: catalog no. A. 421, B1, p. 320.

³⁴ Rusu 1987–1988: XXIV–XXV, 262–263.

³⁵ Rusu 1987–1988: XXIV–XXV, 262–264.

³⁶ Wrancius 1857: 143.

century, a similar statement was made by Ioannes Lucius, who wrote that John Hunyadi was descended from Transylvanian Romanians, from the Roman family called Corvina (*Ioannes quoque Huniades inter Valachos Transilvaniae natus ex Corvina Romana familia ortum ducere gloriabatur*).³⁷ Starting with Wertner M., some historians believed they had identified some distant ancestors of the Hunyadis: a document dated June 1, 1360 and issued in Hațeg speaks about a Romanian knez named *Costea (Koztha)* with grandchildren named *Balata, Bay, Surs et Nan*, lords of Răchitova and Lunca.³⁸ Taking into account the bizarre rendering of names in the document in question, it was assumed that *Surs* was identical to *Surb, Serb, or Serbe*, Vojk's father, mentioned in the 1409 donation of the Hunedoara estate.³⁹ While this filiation is chronologically possible, the data is too vague to allow for a valid conclusion. In 1890, drawing on the writings of G. Fejér (*Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis*, X/8, Buda, 1844, p. 492; idem, *Genus, incunabula et virtus Joannis Corvini de Huniad, regni Hungariae gubernatoris*, Buda, 1844, p. 33), who had himself taken the information from Joseph Nalaczi, Nicolae Densușianu wrote that Louis I, King of Hungary, had himself made a donation to Vojk in 1378, but the document in question had been burned by accident.⁴⁰

Getting back to the issue of names, we know that in 1409 Vojk, *aule nostrae militis* (a knight at our court) and his relatives (the family's place of origin is not indicated) were rewarded by the king with the estate of Hunedoara (which included an old fortress, probably in ruins) and the surrounding villages. The most important family member is the boy John, the future high official and anti-Ottoman fighter. Latin documents written in Hungary or Transylvania mention him as *Ioannes* or *Iohannes*. When he was still young, before he became the Governor of Transylvania, his name was accompanied by the nickname *Olab*, clearly indicating his ethnic origin. Quite possibly, his peers in the court, the other sons of noblemen alongside whom he was learning combat techniques, called him by this name, John the Romanian (*Olab János*). However, the nickname *Olab* was quickly dropped once the

³⁷ Lucius-Lučić 1966: 274; Armbruster 1993: 180. In the same context (concerning the Romanian origin of John Hunyadi), Lucius mentioned another important thing regarding the Romanians, namely, the fact that they never called themselves Wallachians, using instead the name *Rumenos* (=rumâni), because they were proud of their Roman language and origin.

³⁸ *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, C. Transilvania, vol. XI (Bucharest, 1981), 506–508.

³⁹ Pascu 1989: 445.

⁴⁰ Hurmuzaki 1890: 463, note 2.

character in question began to rise in the hierarchy, maybe as a deliberate move on the part of John himself, embarrassed by his humble origins and by the pejorative connotation of the term, and eager to become fully integrated in the community of “true nobles of the realm.”

However, the story of the name given to this illustrious character does not end here. Not only is it because of the various circles in which he moved, his many relatives and acquaintances, his diverse ethnic origin and various denominations, the soldiers under his command belonging to so many peoples, the friends and enemies coming from so many places, and either praising or criticizing him, but also because of a rather particular coincidence: he had a homonymous blood brother,⁴¹ a younger brother who was also called *Ioannes*! We can logically assume that when the two brothers were children and lived together in the family home, they were not called by the same name. Besides, their name could not have been *Iohannes* or *Ioannes*, forms used in Latin chancellery documents and not so much in everyday life. They were used as such only when necessary and only within certain elite circles, chiefly among clergymen. We shall return to this aspect later.

For the time being, we shall investigate the other names (or forms of the same name) given to our hero by his contemporaries, that is, during his lifetime or shortly after his death. As we have already seen, even since the 18th century, historians such as Samuil Micu have been aware of this diversity of names. It is obvious that in official Latin documents (especially since the homonymous brother died early, in 1441, fighting the Turks in the vicinity of Belgrade⁴²), the man who became Voivode of Transylvania in 1441, Governor of Hungary after 1446, and held many high positions in the realm was called *Iohannes* or *Ioannes*, as indicated above. Generally speaking, these forms were also used in the Latin documents written in the neighboring countries, in Germany, Poland, Italy, and even at the Holy See. The same happened in the case of the narrative sources in Latin. In the neighboring countries, also familiar with the everyday Hungarian equivalent of the name *János*, we also find forms such as *Ianăș*, *Janusch*, etc. The situation changes dramatically when we speak of contemporary Greek sources and we shall give some examples in this respect. An anonymous poem written shortly after 1453 in Greek vernacular and called *The Fall of Constantinople*, includes an exhortation to the pope, to the emperor, and to the “armies of

⁴¹ Another younger brother, Voicu, died quite early, sometime after 1419.

⁴² Today the capital of Serbia, at that time a fortress on the territory of Hungary (Nándorfehérvár).

Ianco,” accidentally misspelled as “Pianco” (Πιάγκω) and later called “the wise Ianco (Pianco), pillar of the Romanians (Πιάγκω φρονιμώτατε, καί στυλὴ τῆς Βλαχίας).”⁴³ In a poem written after 1456, Zotikos Paraspondylos, an eyewitness to the 1444 battle of Varna, called John Hunyadi “emperor” (βασιλεύς), described him as “wise,” “great,” “wonderful,” and called him by the name of “Iango” (Ίάγγο), “Iangou” (Ίάγγου), or “Iangoula” (Ίάγγουλα).⁴⁴ The great writer Dukas (ca. 1400–1470) called him “prostrator Iangou” (Ίάγγου).⁴⁵ His contemporary, the refined and educated Georgios Phrantzes (1401–ca. 1477), a servant to three emperors and enjoying access to official documents, also called the great Christian leader “Iancou” (Ίάγκου).⁴⁶ A 16th century Phrantzes imitator, a certain Makarios Melissenos, used the very same name as his model.⁴⁷ The great historian Laonikos Chalcocondyles (ca. 1423–ca. 1490), quite familiar with the realities of South-Eastern Europe, even used the name “Iancu de Hunedoara,” that is “Iango de Choniates” (Ίάγγος δὲ ὁ Χωνιάτης),⁴⁸ calling him “a man of great repute,” but he alternated between this name and the official one of *Ioannes* (Ίωάννης), or simply “Choniates” meaning Hunyadi.⁴⁹ Chalcocondyles wrote about the fight of the allied Christian forces, Hungarians and Romanians among them, against the Turks, under the command of John Hunyadi. Critobulos of Imbros (1410–ca. 1470) only mentions our hero as “Ioannes” (Ίωάννης), but he writes that “John the Romanian” (“John the Getae”) led into battle “the Hungarians and his Romanians,” the former designated as “Peons” and the latter as “Dacians,” in keeping with the contemporary custom of using archaic forms for the names of peoples and countries.⁵⁰ We believe that, satisfying the same desire to use only classical Greek or Latin names, Critobulos avoided the “vulgar” contemporary name of *Iancu* and only used the form John. In fact, this author also called Matthias Corvinus “King of the Peons and of the Dacians,” never actually calling him by name, as such a name had not existed in the classical antiquity.⁵¹ The *Ecthesis Chronica*,

⁴³ Mihăescu – Lăzărescu – Tanașoca – Toteoi 1982: 384–387.

⁴⁴ Mihăescu – Lăzărescu – Tanașoca – Toteoi 1982: 394–413.

⁴⁵ Mihăescu – Lăzărescu – Tanașoca – Toteoi 1982: 428–430.

⁴⁶ Mihăescu – Lăzărescu – Tanașoca – Toteoi 1982: 440–441.

⁴⁷ Mihăescu – Lăzărescu – Tanașoca – Toteoi 1982: 444–445.

⁴⁸ The Hungarian name *Hunyad* appears in Greek under the distorted form “Choniat.”

⁴⁹ Mihăescu – Lăzărescu – Tanașoca – Toteoi 1982: 451–499.

⁵⁰ Mihăescu – Lăzărescu – Tanașoca – Toteoi 1982: 520–533.

⁵¹ Mihăescu – Lăzărescu – Tanașoca – Toteoi 1982: 536–537.

written in the 16th century, systematically uses the form “Iancos” (Ἰάγγος),⁵² while certain minor chronicles, starting with the 15th century and continuing after 1500, once again mention the Hungarian-Romanian alliance against the Turks and the leader “Ghiangou” (Γιάγγου), who led the Hungarians at Varna,⁵³ or “Iangos” (Ἰάγγος), who crossed the Danube followed by Romanians (Βλάχων), in 1448.⁵⁴ There is only one possible conclusion: the medieval chroniclers who wrote in the Greek language, the contemporaries of John Hunyadi, systematically referred to him as *Iancu*, even if sometimes their versions of the name are slightly corrupted by the nature of their language, by the lack of precision or by superficial borrowings from other sources, etc. In these contemporary Greek sources, John Hunyadi is often associated with the Romanians, either because of his ethnic origin, or because he led Romanians in battle and was their “lord.” In fact, in a document issued south of the Carpathians in 1447, John called himself “Voivode of Wallachia.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Hungarian and Transylvanian Latin sources and Western ones also mention the many Transylvanian Romanians who fought under John’s command⁵⁶ as well as the fact that he often sought the alliance of the Romanian princes controlling territories south and east of the Carpathians. The repeated references found in Greek sources to John’s Romanian extraction and to the Romanian nature of his armies is a clear indication of the origin of the name *Ianco* or *Iango*.

We believe that the corrupt forms “Pianco” and “Ghianco” used by some of the aforementioned Greek authors – clearly derived from “Ianco” – illustrate the manner in which the Western versions “Bianco,” “Blanco,” or “Blanc” came to be used. The *Epistola ad Petri (sic) de Jacomiccio de Tagliacoccho brevissima, de la vita del Beato Jobanni de Capistrano et de la victoria che lui ebe de Turchi et suo felicissimo et beatissimo fine*, written September 15, 1457, mentions the hero of Belgrade under the name of *Jobanni Biancho*⁵⁷ and indicates that he had died of the plague (*morio de peste*). Some French chronicles also called him “le chevalier Blanc,” the prototype of the later cultural archetype of “The White Knight.” In Genoa, geographically and spiritually close to the

⁵² Mihăescu – Lăzărescu – Tanașoca – Toteoi 1982: 540–543.

⁵³ Mihăescu – Lăzărescu – Tanașoca – Toteoi 1982: 556–557.

⁵⁴ Mihăescu – Lăzărescu – Tanașoca – Toteoi 1982: 562–563.

⁵⁵ *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, series D. *Relații între Țările Române*, [The Relationships between the Romanian Countries] I (Bucharest, 1977), 394–395.

⁵⁶ Pascu 1957: 1–4, 25–64. See also Drăgan 2000: 382–401.

⁵⁷ Iorga 1915: no. LXXXVII. 158–163.

French environment, Hungary of the 1450s was seen as a *dominium Blanchum*, as it was led and controlled by *dominus Blanchus*.⁵⁸ Even a chivalric romance was written about the great deeds of John Hunyadi. Entitled *Tirant lo Blanc*, the romance was the work of a certain Joanot Martorell, born in 1413 in Gandia, the original home town of the Borgias. *Tirant lo Blanc* has been preserved as an incunabulum, printed in Valencia in the year 1490. Joanot Martorell, himself a skilled warrior and a contemporary of John Hunyadi, Vlad Dragul, and of Vlad Drăgulea (later turned into *Dracula!*), never actually became acquainted with his hero, the real “lo Blanc” knight.⁵⁹ The Romance enjoyed tremendous success, and was even appreciated by Miguel de Cervantes: “... curious to know whose it was, and found it said, *History of the Famous Knight, Tirante el Blanco*. / – “God bless me!” said the curate with a shout, “*Tirante el Blanco* here! Hand it over, gossip, for in it I reckon I have found a treasury of enjoyment and a mine of recreation.”⁶⁰ Most authors associated the forms Bianco, Blanco, Blanc related to the name of John Hunyadi with the name Valachus, Vlachus, Blachus, Balacus, etc. given by foreigners to Romanians. As in many foreign sources John is referred to as the Wallachian or the Blach, the derivation might seem obvious. However, if we relate the aforementioned forms – especially the Italian ones of Bianco or Bianco – to those of Pianco/Piango or Ghianco/Ghianco found in Byzantine narratives; we see that they actually stem from the popular name of Ianco or Jancho given to John Hunyadi. If Piango or Ghianco come from Ianco, than why should Bianco be any different? In other words, the French “Blanc” was not necessarily a copyist’s distortion of the supposedly original “le Blac” (=the Romanian) – as it is usually assumed – but rather a translation of the Italian form Bianco/Biancho. Therefore, we believe that Bianco actually derived from Ianco/Iancho, and not from Valacho/Balacho. As Ianco/Iancho meant nothing to the Italians, while Bianco/Biancho meant “white,” the latter form was adopted and then translated into other languages using the respective equivalents of the word “white.”

⁵⁸ Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that Genoa, quite familiar with the situation on the Lower Danube, but also open to various influences, cosmopolitan tendencies, and rumors, mentioned John Hunyadi under the name of *Gio* – according to some late archival testimonies – and described him as the *Prince of Transylvania* (Archivio di Stato di Genova, Archivio Segreto, *Diversorum*, 3041 (F 21), nn; later annotation on a document dated February 24, 1454).

⁵⁹ Filipaş: www.asymetria.org.

⁶⁰ Filipaş: www.asymetria.org.

No particular examples are needed to illustrate the well-known fact that in my Croat, Serb, Turkish sources, and in Balkan folklore, the hero of Belgrade is called “Janko,” “Janko voivode,” “Jankula voivode,” “Iancu Sibiianul/Sibinianul,” with certain variations. But, even if we look only at the two major languages of culture used in the Middle Ages, Latin and Byzantine Greek, we see that our Christian hero is basically known by two names, John and Iancu, or rather *Ioannes/Iobannes* and *Iancu/Iango*. Of course, when it comes to the vernacular languages used in the regions where John-Iancu resided, as a rule, we can only make educated guesses, because texts in these languages only appeared in greater numbers as of the 16th century. Still, it would be natural to believe that the Hungarians called him *János*, the Saxons (Germans) called him *Johannes*, and the Romanians *Ioan*. However, these are the official, cultured forms of the name in question. It is difficult to say how the people – especially the common people – normally referred to the great general. This is quite a significant aspect indeed, as John Hunyadi was a great popular hero, worshipped by the masses. There are some clues in this respect. For instance, Petrus Ransanus (1420–1492), a contemporary of our hero, clearly states that the common people and the Italians called John Hunyadi by the name of Iancu: *Ioanne Huniate, Ianco vulgo cognominato, or Ioannes, qui Ianco apud Italos est cognomen*.⁶¹ In 1488, Ransanus was sent by his king, Ferdinand I of Naples, to the court of Matthias Corvinus,⁶² thus becoming directly acquainted with the realities of Hungary. There, he must have learned that the people, the commoners – including the Romanians – called the king’s father by the name of Iancu. Otherwise, it would have made no sense for him to write that John Hunyadi was called *Ianco* by the people. Ransanus’ references to the name Iancu are all the more important as they appear in a text written as part of the “modernization” of the quasi-hagiographic representation of Matthias’ father.⁶³ Still, many authors were skeptical about Ransanus’ statement concerning the use of the form *Ianco* in the Italian environment. However, two documents found in the Milan archives by the young and talented researcher Alexandru Simon seem to confirm the statements made by the 15th century humanist. Both documents were written in Ragusa (modern Dubrovnik, Croatia) on October

⁶¹ *Epitome rerum Hungaricarum velut per indices descripta, auctore Petro Ransano, apud Mathiam regem olim triennium legato. Nunc primum edita, una cum appendice quam opera Joan Sambuci* (Vienna, 1558). See also Ransanus 1977: 29, 34. Also mentioned in Rusu 1993: 15.

⁶² Holban 1968: 435.

⁶³ Szabó 2007: 383–393.

10, 1454, in the Italian language, and they are meant to inform officials in Milan and Venice, respectively, of the fact that “Governor Iancu crossed the Danube with a large army on the 24th (29th) of last month” (*el governatore Iancho passò el Danubio cum gran copia di gente adi 24/29 del passato*).⁶⁴ The first document is signed by the “great and mighty men,” the rector of Ragusa and his council, the patricians and the merchants of the city, and is addressed to the Duke of Milan and to the other “great and mighty men” leading that city. The second document, also signed by the authorities of Ragusa, “informs your magnificence” (*notifichemo ala vostra magnificenza*) on certain developments, being addressed to an unspecified nobleman of Venice; this letter, or a copy thereof, was also meant to reach the patriarch, who had become an official resident of the Cathedral of San Pietro di Castello in 1451 (*Predicta littera fuit scripta Veneciis, cuidam nobili, a quo illam seu eius copiam reverendum dominum patriarcha habuit*). In both documents, written by different scribes, the name of the “Governor” of Hungary is spelled in the same manner, as *Iancho*. This is quite symptomatic, because Ragusa, Milan, and Venice belong to the Catholic, Italian-speaking environment. This suggests that the name of John Hunyadi was known in the Italian environment (at least in the northern part of the Italian peninsula) also under the popular form of Iancu.⁶⁵ Had the name Iancu been meaningless to the people of Milan (these documents, including the one addressed to the Venetians, were found in the Milan archive of the Sforza dukes), the people of Ragusa would not have used it. It would have been a lot easier for them to call the high Hungarian official by the name of John. The presence of the name Iancu in the environment of Milan and of Lombardy may be explained either by the old Italian “sojourn” of the young John-Iancu (1431–1433), spent in Milan in the house of Filippo Visconti, or as an import from the regions south of the Danube. During the two years of his stay in Milan, the local people might have heard (maybe even from John’s companions) that in the familiar language John was referred to as Iancu. Even if this is not the case, and the

⁶⁴ Archivio di Stato di Milano, Archivio Ducale Sforzesco, Potenze Estere, Turchia-Levante, cart. 647, fasc. [1], Albania, nn, of 10 October 1454.

⁶⁵ In the Latin documents of Venice, our hero is usually called *Iobannes*, while in the narrative sources, some of them in Latin, the name also appears under the form *Juan* (and not *Zuan*, *Zan*, or *Zani*, as it was to be expected in the Venetian dialect), pronounced in the same fashion as the Romanian *Iuan*. See, for instance, the form *Juan* (*Juan Uniad/Uniade* or *Juan de Uniad vaivoda dicto Janus*) used in Stefano Magno, *Annali veneti et del mondo*, vol. I–III, 1443–1478, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Viena, Codices, Cod. 6215 [I. 1443–1457], *Ad annum 1444*, f. 23v, 27r. *Ianus* seems a transcription of the Hungarian *János*.

traditional name became popular later, it is certain that in Italian circles the governor was known by the name Iancu, precisely as indicated by Petrus Ransanus.

Even today, *Ioan* (John) is the most frequent name given by Romanians.⁶⁶ However, the form *Ioan* is the cultured one, taken as such from certain old texts and adapted to the written Romanian language after the 16th century. The name *Ioan* – in the literary form of today, set as a standard in the modern era – has dozens of versions, many of them derived by way of diminutive or augmentative suffixation. Still, with or without suffixes, the popular forms going back to the 15th–16th centuries are *Ion*, *Iuon*, *Iuan*, *Oană*, *Ioancea*, *Oancea*, *Ioanea*, *Ioaneș*, *Ianeș*, *Iuonaș*, *Ioanichie*, etc. Linguists have long established that, in Romanian, the form *Iancu/Iancul* is also derived from *Ioan*. It would be important to know how old the Romanian form *Iancu* is, but this is impossible to ascertain. The only thing we could do was to see whether the name *Iancu* was used by Romanians in the 15th and 16th centuries. Thus, we learned that in the oldest Romanian documents still in existence, the name in question appears in connection to individuals living in several regions. For example, in 1579–1580, in a bill of sale written in Oltenia, we read about a certain Iancul, with his brothers, Preda, Jâte, and Radul, the buyers of some land. Among the witnesses to the transaction we also find a “Iancul al lu Neche.”⁶⁷ A Moldavian document drawn up sometime in 1587–1591 in which ruler Peter the Lame recorded the money and the horses sent to Constantinople as part of the due tribute, also mentions 5000 thalers representing the debt of Iancul (“Ianancul”) the Saxon.⁶⁸ In an inventory drawn up by the same ruler Peter the Lame, this time in the South Tyrolean city of Bolzano (Bozen) and listing the assets left to his son, the predecessor of this ruler is mentioned as “Voivode Iancu.”⁶⁹ As for the individual in question, an illegitimate son of Peter Rareș and of a Saxon woman from Brașov, several testimonies indicate that at his birth the future prince was given the names John/Ioan (*dominus Ioannes, filius olim piae memoriae Petri Palatini Moldaviae*) – customarily used under the form Iancul, also rendered in Latin as *Iancula*, *Petrus Iankul* – and Carol (*Carlo Iangulă*).⁷⁰ After staying in the

⁶⁶ Constantinescu 1963: 80.

⁶⁷ *Documente și însemnări românești din secolul al XVI-lea [Romanian Documents and Notes from the 16th century]*, edited with an index by Chivu – Georgescu – Ioniță – Mareș – Roman-Moraru 1979: 99.

⁶⁸ by Chivu – Georgescu – Ioniță – Mareș – Roman-Moraru 1979: 161.

by Chivu – Georgescu – Ioniță – Mareș – Roman-Moraru 1979: 193.

⁷⁰ Rezachevici 2001: 728–729.

court of his father and then of his brothers, he arrived in Braşov and was recorded in the city registry on March 10, 1554 under the name of *Petrus Iankul*.⁷¹ It must be said that this John-Carol, the son of Peter Rareş, had not spent his childhood among the Balkan Slavs, but only among Saxons and Romanians. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that during his lifetime Moldavians called John Hunyadi by the name of Iancu. We can assume that the boyar elite called him *Ianăş*, as indicated by official Slavonic documents, for instance, in those issued at the time of Bogdan II.⁷² This ruler was familiar with Hungarian politics and had contacts with nobles who most certainly called the high official by the name *János*.

As no 15th century document written in the Romanian language has been preserved (although some are known to have existed), we shall concentrate our attention on the Latin documents of that time which speak about the Hunyadis, in order to find out whether the Romanians used the name *Iancu*. The Maramureş diplomas are quite illustrative in this respect:

– on June 19, 1415, the convent of Lelesz recognized “Ioancu and Giula, the sons of Dragomir, and Gheorghe, the son of Ioancu” (*Iuanka et Gyula filiorum Dragomer ac Georgii filii Iuanka*) as owners of the estates of Crăceşti and Hărniceşti (now in the Ukraine)⁷³;

– on June 2, 1425, the convent of Lelesz informed that, on the order of King Sigismund, Iancu (*Ianko*), the son of Pop (or of *popa*, meaning the priest) of Giuleşti, and his sons (Giula and Tătar), had been granted certain estates in Maramureş⁷⁴;

– on March 30, 1450, one of John Hunyadi’s men, a certain Iancu (*Ianko*) of Domneşti (*Urmezen*), was granted an estate, also in Maramureş⁷⁵; a few years later (on May 2, 1465), the same individual, now a royal witness in the service of King Matthias, was mentioned as John of Domneşti (*Ioannes de Urmezen*)⁷⁶;

– on October 6, 1462, during the gathering of “many of the prelates, the barons, and the nobles of our kingdom,” held in Transylvania, at Rupea, in the presence of King Matthias, among the plaintiffs we find a certain “John

⁷¹ Hurmuzaki 1900: 790.

⁷² Costăchescu 1932: no. 220, 749–752; no. 222–225, 755–769.

⁷³ Mihalyi de Apşa 1900: 198–199; Popa 1997: 74, 83.

⁷⁴ Mihalyi de Apşa 1900: 264.

⁷⁵ Mihalyi de Apşa 1900: 344.

⁷⁶ Mihalyi de Apşa 1900: 470.

also known as Giula, the son of the late Nan, also known by the name of Iancu (*Ianko*) or Pop (or Popa) of Giulești.”⁷⁷

Every time the name *Iancu* appeared in the Maramureș documents published in 1900 by Ioan Mihalyi of Apșa, the editor indicated the equivalence with the name *Ioan*. In fact, this equivalence is indicated even in historical documents, where the same individual is called both ways: Ioan of Domnești, initially mentioned as Iancu of Domnești, upon reaching a high position as a member of the royal household and deputy *comes* of Maramureș, no longer used his local Romanian name (Iancu), or at least was no longer mentioned in documents by this name. It is impossible to claim that the name of *Iancu* – which, as we have just seen, is found in Maramureș documents written in 1415–1425 – had been adopted by the Romanian stating from the nickname given to John Hunyadi by the Serbs of the Balkans, at a time when the character in question was but an anonymous teenager who had not even visited the respective region.

Furthermore, the name *Iancu* is also common in the region of Hunedoara-Hațeg. Thus, in a 1439 document, we read about Dănilă, Iancu, and Laicul (*Danila, Ianc et Laycul*), the sons of Neacșu of Totești and of his wife Stana.⁷⁸ Similarly, in 1464, the deed concerning a part of the Livadia estate mentions a certain Iancul (*Iankwl*), a native of Hațeg, as witness for the king.⁷⁹ In the genealogies of some Hațeg families drawn up by Sándor Mike, we find a certain “Iancul of Șerel” (*Iankul de Serel*).⁸⁰ In the documents published by Joseph Pataki and concerning the estate of Hunedoara in the 16th century, we find: *Jankwl, puero domini Andree și Janchi, iterum parvulo eiusdem domini Andree* (in the expenditures ledger of the Hunedoara fortress of 1530)⁸¹ and *Janko* of Ohaba (in the list of the serfs living on more remote lands but which were still part of the estate, probably in the first decade of the 16th century).⁸²

These testimonies clearly indicate that the name *Iancu*, by which John Hunyadi was known in certain circles, was commonly used by Romanians in the 15th and the 16th centuries, and that this name appears in documents north of the Danube before the hero of Belgrade became famous in the

⁷⁷ Mihalyi de Apșa 1900: 445.

⁷⁸ Rusu – Pop – Drăgan 1989: 103–104.

⁷⁹ Rusu – Pop – Drăgan 1989: 272.

⁸⁰ Mike manuscript: 662.

⁸¹ Pataki 1963: 57.

⁸² Pataki 1963: 147.

Balkans. But fairly little is known about the name of John's homonymous brother, who died early, probably in 1441. Approximately a decade ago, together with my colleague Iacob Mârza, we commented on a significant note written by hand on a page from Enea Silvio Piccolomini's book called *Epistolae familiares*, the 1481 edition, kept at the Batthyaneum library of Alba Iulia: *Iohannes Huniadi et frater eius, Ivachko nomine, et Iohannes; amborum monumentum Albae Iuliae conspicitur, in templo Divo Michaeli Archangeli sacro, intra muros.*⁸³ We can see, therefore – this time on the basis of the direct testimony coming from the Transylvanian environment –, that even the homonymous younger brother of John Hunyadi had the familiar name *Ivaşcu* alongside the official one. Numerous documents of that time ascertain the frequent presence of this name with the Romanians, and it is itself obviously derived from the same *Ioan*, as indicated by Mihalyi of Apşa in 1900 and by the Romanian dictionaries of names. Consequently, the brothers of John Hunyadi were called by the names *Iancu* and *Ivaşcu* in the family, in the Romanian environment, and generally in the Greek and South-Slavic environments. In fact, as a coincidence, in another 15th century document related to the region of Maramureş, we find the same duo, *Iancu* and *Ivaşcu*: on June 29, 1498, the convent of Lelesz issued a document confirming that a “noble lady” from the village of Leordina offered three plots of land as collateral to nobles Mircea, *Ivaşcum*, and *Ioancu* (*Myrche, Ivasko et Iuanko*), the sons of David Pop of Leordina and of Caterina Urda (sister to the aforementioned “noble lady”), in exchange for the sum of 50 florins of pure gold.⁸⁴

All of the aforementioned testimonies agree when it comes to certain aspects. The name of the hero of Belgrade, as well as the environments he visited, came in various forms. It is very hard to say which version of the name *Ioannes* was given to John by his parents at his birth. The name usually given by Latin sources is the official one, but this is not necessarily the name he was usually called by. Besides, it is natural to assume that in the various stages of his life and according to the ethnic, denominational, and geographic environments in which he found himself, the father of King Matthias bore different names. According to the aforementioned data, we believe that in their native Transylvania, in the region of Hunedoara-Haţeg, during their childhood the three sons of Vojk were called *Iancu*, *Ivaşcu*, and *Voicu*. The

⁸³ Pop – Mârza 1999: 53.

⁸⁴ Mihalyi 1990: 621–622.

two who reached maturity were Iancu and Ivaşcu, both officially called John, as their names were both derived from the same *Ioan*. If, while Ivaşcu was alive, there were enough reasons to call his brother Iancu, in order to distinguish between the two, after his untimely death (in 1441) the name John Hunyadi became widely used in official circles. Other reasons for this may have had to do with prestige and with the common Latin-Hungarian use, which favored the cultured form of John.

The Romanians, who fought in many battles under John's command and whom he rewarded in so many ways—especially those of Hunedoara-Haţeg—continued, however, to call him *Iancu* which, as we have seen, was another form of *Ioan* (John). Etymologically speaking, *Iancu* derives from the Romanian name *Ioan*, which gained the Slavic suffix *-co*, changed by Romanians into *-cu*. In fact, several Latin documents indicate the presence in Transylvania and Maramureş of the form *Ioanco*, shortened to *Ianco*. There is also sufficient evidence to suggest that another form of the name found in all documents, namely, *Iancula*, was pronounced *Ianculea* in Romanian and came from the same *Iancu*, completed with the Romanian masculine article—*lea*. No direct testimony indicated that the name Iancu was given to the hero of Belgrade exclusively by the Balkan Slavs or by the Greeks. On the contrary, it is very clear that the Balkan peoples took the form *Ianco* and its other versions from the Transylvanian soldiers who had always accompanied the man whose *cursus honorum* saw him become Ban of Severin, *Comes* of Timiş, Voivode of Transylvania, Governor of Hungary, and captain-general of the kingdom. The presence of the name *Iancu* in Transylvania and Hungary at that time is clear evidence in this respect, and so is the fact that the character himself sometimes used the name of Iancu.⁸⁵ Equally compelling is the testimony of his contemporary, Ransanus, who clearly stated that in the language of common folk John Hunyadi was called *Ianco*. The same writer—as discussed above—also added that the Italians themselves also called him *Ianco*. Besides, John Hunyadi's predecessors and contemporaries whom the sources mention as bearing the name Iancu—as shown by the previously mentioned testimonies—had never visited the Balkans, the lands of the Serbs, and therefore had not received their names there. Beyond the fact that the name *Iancu/Iancul/Ioancu* might have originally had a Slavic sound to it, it did circulate in Romanian and among the Romanians of Transylvania well before the time of John Hunyadi,

⁸⁵ Gündisch 1975: 25.

probably dating back to the period of Romanian-Slavic cohabitation, as is the case with so many other Romanian names.

Of course, we can assume that many Romanians, especially those of the social elite, also called our hero by the name of *Ioan* (John), just like the Hungarians called him *János*, and the Saxons *Jobann*. It seems that the cultured form *Ioan* was not actually used as such by 15th century Romanians, as the documents of that time only mention the Latin versions *Ioannes* or *Iohannes*. On the other hand, as we have seen, the form *Iancu* appears quite frequently. Edifying in this respect are the texts belonging to many Byzantine authors, who copiously use the form *Ianco* (*Iango*), and only seldom that of *Ioannes*. This is the clearest proof of the fact that the great anti-Ottoman fighter bore an official name, John, with its derivatives, and a popular, familiar one, given to him by his own people (just like his brother bore the separate name *Ivaşcu*), namely, *Iancu*. The mechanism whereby – as it has been recently claimed⁸⁶ – an “onomastic transfer” of the form *Iancu* occurred with the Serbs, the Greeks, and the Turks, with an intermediate stage in the Hungarian *János*, defies all comprehension. No matter how limited our “linguistic knowledge,” it makes a lot more sense to consider that the popular form of *Iancu* or *Ianco*, whose presence in the Hungary of that time is mentioned by Petrus Ransanus, was actually the model for the nearly identical Balkan forms, rather than the Hungarian form *János*. Furthermore, even if John Hunyadi had never called himself *Iancu*, the use of this name is perfectly justified, since collective memory also remembers him by this name. King Matthias himself never called himself, in any document, by the name “Corvinus,” but this is no reason not to call him that way.

Therefore, we can only conclude that the master of the Hunedoara estate, called John in official and in Catholic circles, was called *Iancu* by the people, especially in the local Romanian and Balkan Orthodox environments. Of course, this form was also used in non-Orthodox circles (see the Italian example discussed earlier), as the form *Iancu* (alongside that of *Ioan-János*) also appears in Croat and Turkish documents. The use of the name *Iancu* by the Osmanli and the Byzantine Turks,⁸⁷ as well as the legend found in Ottoman sources from the second half of the 15th century, which presents John Hunyadi as a founder of Byzantium,⁸⁸ have a relevance of their own in

⁸⁶ Rusu 1999: 15.

⁸⁷ Mureşan 2008: 341–342.

⁸⁸ Yerasimos 1992: 213–217.

this respect, especially when it comes to the alleged “kinship” between Matthias Corvinus, Mehmed II, and Djem.⁸⁹

Of course, in this case both forms are equally legitimate and can be used in keeping with the tradition of each culture, nation, or denomination. Especially since the name *Iancu* is but a version of John. It is unrealistic, counterproductive, and confusing to issue modern “directives” concerning the name of a historical character. Besides, the insinuation that Romanian historiography adopted the name *Iancu* under pressure from the communist-nationalist regime, or using alleged “instruments” of the same regime, such as historians David Prodan, Francisc Pall, Mihail P. Dan, Ștefan Pascu, or Camil Mureșanu is malicious, defamatory, and completely unfounded. According to factors such as time, place, and historiographical trend, Romanian historiography has used both forms, *Ioan* and *Iancu*. The best example in this respect is that of Nicolae Densușianu, who, in 1890, called the father of King Matthias *Ionu* or *Iancu*,⁹⁰ at a time when the communist regime was still in the remote future. The name *Iancu* naturally became dominant within the collective memory rooted in the popular mentality of the Middle Ages, of an era when the hero was known as such to the people.⁹¹ It was natural for the Romanians, an Orthodox people living in the Byzantine-Slavic cultural sphere, to call him in the same manner as the other peoples of the Byzantine denomination and of Greek or Slavonic culture. Over nearly a century of historiography, the great Romanian authors, from A. D. Xenopol to Francisc Pall and Camil Mureșanu, alternately called our character *Iancu* or

⁸⁹ In a report to Pope Innocent VIII dated January 30, 1489, papal legate Angelo Pecchinoli quoted a speech by king Matthias, who allegedly said: the sultan himself *ad me sua manu ad hic scripsisset, tum quod mater sua per suos oratores hoc idem a me postulasset, tum etiam quia ille mihi iure sanguinis est coniunctus, nam soror avie mee casu a Turchis rapta nupsit avo sitius Turchi, ex qua postea isti nati sunt* (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, Cod. Lat. X-175 (=3622), f. 133r). We know that Bonfini (Antonius de Bonfinis, 1936: 94–95, 243–244) spoke about the alleged Greek imperial origin of Matthias’ grandmother, Iancu’s mother: *imperatorio sanguine promansasse credita est*. The alleged blood ties between the Hunyadis and the family of the Ottoman sultans, in the context of the political relations between the king and these sovereigns, are alluded to in the direct correspondence of 1480–1484 between Matthias and the Sublime Porte (see Fraknói 1893: 259, 381, 263, 387, vol. II. 1895 II: 43, 68, 48–49, 76–82, 247, 388).

⁹⁰ Hurmuzaki 1890: I/2, 463.

⁹¹ Sources indicate that John Hunyadi actually became a popular hero, leading large Christian forces in battle. He was actually called “the last great European crusader,” precisely because of the Christian fervor animating the masses under his command. Therefore, the name given to him by the people accompanying him – far from being an ironic jab – was quite significant, even if we avoid the exaggerations regarding the “role of the masses” and the “role of personalities” in history associated with most communist regimes.

Ioan, believing in the legitimacy of both names. We are fully aware of the fact that the names of historical characters are hardly a “game.”⁹² They are to be treated as a very serious historical issue. This issue, however, must be approached in the light of various sources, free from bias and in no way seeking to minimize and condemn the work of our predecessors. Quite often, irony comes to be presented as a “critical analysis” and goes rather well with the general public, especially when performed in a declamatory, superficial, and emphatic manner. Also, criticizing the forerunners – some of them of exceptional scholars, of unparalleled intellectual honesty and thoroughness – has become for some people a way of making a name for themselves. Fortunately enough, such schemes cannot go on forever.

Therefore, we believe that the conclusion offered by David Prodan in 1956 is still valid: “We know for a fact only that his name was first mentioned in 1409. That year, ‘for dedicated service at the right time and at the right place,’ King Sigismund gave the royal fortress of Hunedoara and the surrounding estate to his courtier (knight) Voicu, the son of Serba (Șerb or Șerban), to his brothers Mogoș and Radul, to his cousin Radul, and to his son Ioan, who is none other than John Hunyadi, whose popular name, kept in folk poetry and in chronicles, was Iancu. According to contemporary Latin documents, Voicu had two sons by the name Ioan (in Latin *Joannes*), which would make little sense in the absence of some way of distinguishing between the two. Even the authors of historical documents felt the need to do that: they called the younger brother *Joannes Junior*. The same distinction had to be made by their soldiers and by those who knew them, for the two brothers always fought together. Of course, one was called Iancu, as tradition shows, and the other was called Ioan. In Latin, however, both translate as *Joannes*.”⁹³ Nothing could be clearer than this and nothing could be farther removed from gratuitous nationalism or from the “communist social command.” In fact, in 1956 it would have been rather difficult to express Romanian nationalist views, as that was the time of the proleto-cult, when only the values of the “great brother in the East” were promoted, when the names of Stalin and of the Soviet Union were still chanted in the streets. There could be absolutely no talk of “communist nationalism” in 1956, when Romanian names and the names of some voivodes were only

⁹² Rusu 1999: 22.

⁹³ Prodan 1991: 259.

just beginning to be timidly whispered, after the “invasion” of Soviet and Russian internationalism.

All of the testimonies investigated so far indicate that the two *Ioannes*, with identical names only in the Latin chancellery documents or official chronicles, bore the distinct names of *Iancu* and *Ivaşcu* in the local Transylvanian environment and among their soldiers. Consequently, the Romanian form *Iancu de Hunedoara* is not made up, being instead absolutely legitimate and in full agreement with the sources of that time.

Şerbu (Şerban), Voicu, Mogoş, Radul or Ladislau, another Radul, Ioan or Iancu, another Ioan or Ivaşcu, Matia Corvin, Ioan Corvin are some of the names used in a family that gained fame in the history of Central and South-Eastern Europe, indicating the multiple identities embraced by these individuals. To call them by several different names based on solid evidence (as the sources suggest we should do) is an act of honesty, a recognition of the ethnic and denominational diversity of their time, as well as an obligation to a world that sought to defend the values of European civilization by preserving its own identities.

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Matthias Rex of Hungary, Stephen the Great of Moldavia, and Vlad the Impaler of Walachia – History and Legend

The three feudal rulers mentioned in the title of my paper reigned at approximately the same time, had close relationships, be these friendly or not, confronted the same enemy (chiefly the Ottoman Empire, as they ruled immediately after the fall of Constantinople in 1453), and faced the same dangers. All three entered history either as valiant defenders of their countries' freedom, or as merciless punishers of their enemies.

Probably the most famous, in this last respect, was Vlad III the Impaler, also known as (Count) Dracula, although his contemporaries were no less cruel or sanguinary. A recent study on Stephen the Great, who, in official history, is regarded as a symbol of the Moldavians' (Romanians') struggle for freedom and independence, and who was later even canonised, depicts the feudal ruler as a "Dracula the Westerners missed".

All three are doubly reflected in official history and in popular (folk) tradition, mainly in folk-legends and historical anecdotes, but also in folk-ballads and songs. Remembering them now offers an opportunity to revisit some old topics in folkloric studies, such as the relationship between historical truth and fictive truth, or the treatment of a historical character in various genres of folklore.

In many cases, the historical facts have been coined according to the mythical logic that leads to a general model, multiplied in time and space according to the vision of the local creators and to their position regarding the historical personages about whom they narrate.

In terms of their biographies, the oldest was Vlad III, who was born in November or December of 1431, in Sighisoara, Transylvania, where his father, Vlad II (Vlad Dracul), acted as the military governor of the province, having been assigned to this post by King Sigismund. The house where he was born still stands. It was located in a prosperous neighbourhood, surrounded by the dwellings of Saxon and Magyar merchants and the townhouses of the nobility. The second oldest was the Moldavian Prince, Stephen the Great, born in Borzesti, Moldavia, in 1433 (or 1434 – the exact

date of his birth is still controversial). And the youngest was King Matthias, born in Cluj, Transylvania, in 1443. Some biographers stress the idea that King Matthias' grandmother, Erzsébet Morzsinai, was the daughter of a Walachian voivod (kenéz), which means that some Romanian blood flowed in his veins. Not only were they closely related by their deeds, but also by kinship, given that, according to some historians¹, "Vlad the Impaler was, on his mother's side, the nephew of Bogdan II, and the cousin of Stephen the Great." On the other hand, as some historians argue, the wife of Vlad III, later Vlad the Impaler, was a relative, if not even the sister of Matthias Corvin. This network of alliances governed relationships between the feudal states, established on the general rule of exogamy, the limits (ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc.) of which were sometimes transgressed in the name of prevailing political factors.

All three belonged to the royal families of the feudal states of that time. Vlad III, who was to become "the Impaler", was the son of Vlad Dracul, voivod of Walachia, from whom he inherited the nickname "Dracul" or "Draculea", i.e. a Dragon Knight, given that the word for dragon in Romanian is "drac", from the Greek "drakô"; from this to "Dracula", Count Dracula, the main character of Bram Stoker's novel, was just a short step. Vlad Dracul, Vlad the Impaler's father, was not content to serve as mere governor, and so gathered supporters for his plan to seize the throne of Walachia from its then occupant, Alexandru I, a Danesti prince. In 1436, he succeeded in his plan by killing Alexandru and becoming Vlad II. In 1443, Vlad regained the Walachian throne with Turkish support, but on condition that he would send yearly a contingent of Wallachian boys to join the Sultan's Janissaries. In 1444, to further assure the Sultan of his good faith, Vlad sent his two younger sons – Vlad III and Radu the Fair – to Adrianopolis as hostages. Vlad III remained a hostage in Adrianopolis until 1448, a detail we shall look at below.

Matthias Corvinus (*Matthias the Just*; February 23, 1443 – April 6, 1490; King of Hungary 1458–1490; King of Croatia 1458–1490; King of Bohemia, 1469–1490), the second son of John Hunyadi, was born in the house currently known as the "Matthias Corvinus House", in Kolozsvár/Klausenburg (present-day Cluj-Napoca), Transylvania. He was King of Hungary, reigning between 1458 and 1490. He was also crowned King of Bohemia in 1469 and ruled Moravia, Silesia, and Lusatia; from 1486,

¹ See, for instance, Giurescu 1971, apud Ștefan Andreescu 1999: 85, note 12.

Matthias was Duke of Austria. The epithet *Corvinus* was coined by Matthias' biographer, the Italian Antonio Bonfini, who claimed that the Hunyadi family (whose coat of arms depicts a raven—*corvus* in Latin) descended from the ancient Roman *gens* of the *Corvini*. The bird depicted on the coat of arms of the Hunyadies is supported by a widespread legend. In his turn, Stephen (the Great) was the son of a voivod of Moldavia and the grandson of Alexander the Good, from a famous Moldavian ruling family.

This means that the model followed in establishing the ruler (be he king, voivod/prince, or head of state) was the hereditary one, in accordance with German, Roman and Byzantine traditions, although none of these offered a true and reliable example. The Germans “were drawn to the hereditary right, but they could not escape the elective system, often utilized for designating the king within a single family;” the Roman traditions “provide a great example of a monarchic continuity, expressed by a constant discontinuity;” and Constantinople offers the unique image of a monarchy that was firmly anchored, stable, and perfectly legitimate, but in which violence, assassinations and coups would be the major and sometimes sole cause whereby ephemeral princes or dynasties were elevated to the throne.²”

This was the case with Vlad III who, at the age of seventeen, after the death of his father and supported by the Turks, seized, for a short time, the Walachian throne. However, within two months, Hunyadi forced him to abdicate the throne and flee to his cousin, the Prince of Moldavia. Nevertheless, in different historical circumstances, after the fall of Constantinople (1453), it was the same Hunyadi that supported Vlad III, who succeeded in killing Vladislav II and taking back the throne of Walachia (1456–1462). His rather short reign was accompanied by a series of contemporary accounts, created and spread by printed materials that circulated throughout Europe in Slavonic and German versions of Byzantine and Turkish sources. Some of these anecdotes or legends – in fact, given that they were written and circulated during or shortly after the facts they recount, they might be named *contemporary legends* of the period – mention the relationship of Vlad III the Impaler with his protector, brother-in-law and, at the same time, enemy, King Matthias.

Real, historical facts and legendary, one might say fictional, deeds intermingle in stories, anecdotes and historical accounts concerning the

² Roux 1998: 337–340; English version mine – N. C.

lives of these three feudal rulers. On more than one occasion, they are found together as actors, as personages in a drama or comedy, as may actually have happened or merely have been imagined by storytellers, firstly in the oral narratives that were taken for granted by later chroniclers and writers.

Analysing a large number of legends about Vlad the Impaler which circulated in the Byzantine and Ottoman world, Stefan Andreescu comes to the conclusion that the oral tradition about Vlad the Impaler depicted him, if not in glowing, then at least in light colours, whereas the official Ottoman written sources constantly “blacken the image of the Walachian voivod to the best of their ability.”³ The favourable or unfavourable points of view depend upon the position of the chronicler in relation to the real characters he depicts. Antonio Bonfini, who was a resident chronicler at the Court of Matthias Corvin, retold an episode which occurred at the Hungarian court in 1468 and which was circulated in the Ottoman world. I quote from Stefan Andreescu’s book: “An Ottoman embassy came to King Matthias Corvinus to negotiate an armistice with Sultan Mehmed II. The latter was actually consolidating his position in Europe, while preparations were under way for a campaign in Asia Minor. But Matthias Corvinus, says Bonfinus, would only receive Turkish messengers ‘in the presence of his prisoner, Dracula, the deadly and awe-inspiring foe of the Turks. The former voivod who had caused them such great and terrible suffering, and who had so often defeated and routed them, was viewed by the Turks with fear, and they became all the more determined in their resolve to sign the armistice’.”⁴ The court chronicler hit two birds with one stone because he placed in a better light not only the capacity of the Hungarian king to negotiate with his enemies, but also the “diplomatic” weapon he wielded in order to frighten the Ottoman soldiers.

It is obvious that in many cases the written sources remain closer to the historical facts, and are, in this respect, a species of “contemporary legend” from the period, as I have stated above, while the oral tradition, collected and published much later, belongs to the “classic” forms of folk-prose, be they legends or even fairy-tales. Although the story collected and published by Arthur Schott in the German review *Hausblätter* in 1858⁵ and entitled *The*

³ Andreescu 1999: 194.

⁴ Andreescu 1999: 194–195.

⁵ Schott 1858: 4, 367–371.

History/Story of Emperor Matthias Corvin, is placed by the editors in the “legends” section, the text also contains many fairy-tale episodes. It is defined as “a “bariolate” (=combined, mixed) narrative that combines funambulesque episodes of fairy-tale with legendary motifs and personages.”⁶ In fact, “The story of Emperor Matthias Corvinus” begins with the ‘interdiction’ the chemist imposes upon the young Matei (the Romanian name for Matthias), his adopted son and apprentice, to drink a special potion which enables the master to comprehend the tongues of beasts and birds. As usual in fairy tales, the apprentice disobeys the interdiction, drinks the potion, and is dismissed by his master. He is hired by a farmer and, while ploughing, listens to two ravens that reveal that he must go to the assembly where the new emperor is to be elected and crowned. The young man tells his master of his decision, but the farmer derides him saying that Matei will become an emperor when the wooden part of the ploughshare will turn green. Soon afterwards, the farmer allows him to go to town. After three attempts, the crown is bestowed upon young Matthias, who becomes the king (“emperor”) in Buda. All three sequences in the first part of the story clearly belong to the fairy-tale scenery. This leads us to the conclusion that the story belongs to the AT 517 type, “The Boy who Learned Many Things”. This is true of the first episode of the tale, in which the following universal motifs appear: “B215.1 – Bird language; B216 – Knowledge of animal language; B143 – Prophetic bird; N451 – Secret overheard from an animal (demon) conversation; and M312.0.2 – Prophecy of future greatness given by animals. Not a single Romanian version is given in Aarne-Thompson, *The Types of Folktale* (1964), although the story of Emperor Matei Corvin might have been known to the editors, given that it was published by Arthur Schott in *Hausblätter*, 1858, vol. 4, p. 367-371⁷, while the Arthur and Albert Schott collection was published in German, in 1845.⁸

The first part of this Romanian tale from 19th-century Transylvania confirms the *pattern* elaborated by Ildikó Kríza on the basis of historical songs and legends which portray Matthias Corvinus as a “sacral king” and her conclusion that “folklore regarding the selection of a king, thought to be a Southern Slav, can characteristically be found among all the ethnic

⁶ Niscov 2003: 416.

⁷ Niscov 2003: 416.

⁸ Schott 1845.

groups of the Carpathian Basin,”⁹ which would thus include the Romanians, although they are not mentioned in the article.

As for the motif of election of the king (“the crown tossed into the air falls on the chosen head by divine decision”), Arthur Schott provides an interesting account of the way in which the outlaws of Banat (in the south-western part of today’s Romania), near the Danube River, used to select their leader. It was, in fact, the same procedure, but the crown, made of hazelnut branches, was tossed by the youngest and purest member of the band, while the chief of the group became the one closest to whom the crown landed.¹⁰

The second part of the story introduces young Matei established as king (“emperor”) in Buda, where he performs his duties by resorting to his magic powers, for, as the story goes, he had learned, besides the language of birds, “powerful witchcraft”. He travels by magic to Tsarigrad (the old Slavic name for Constantinople, the Tsar/Emperor’s Town), to see his “neighbour”, Tsar Constantine. Having disguised himself as a fiddler, he is easily recognised by Tsar Constantine, a powerful wizard in his own right. Matthias escapes from prison by magic, in the guise of a fly, returns to his palace, and brings Tsar Constantine and his family, including the Tsarina Elena and their children (!!!), “in an hour, by night ... in their beds, and without them noticing,” to Buda. In the end, the two leaders become friends and are given as an example of a good relationship between two great rulers and heads of states. The second part of the Transylvanian story about King Matthias can be taken as a medieval *exemplum*, in which two historical personages meet and interact, despite the relatively long time which separates their real biographies.

We can only assume, for the collector gives not the slightest shred of information about his informant, that the story comes from a written source, as the story-teller ends his account by saying, “You have certainly *read* about that wonderful procession (whereby Tsar Constantine was returned home) *in books*, but it was precisely this that was the real event that produced it (the story told in books).”¹¹

The folk-narratives, collected at a much later date than the story published by Saxon folklorist Arthur Schott, belong largely to the legend

⁹ Kríza 2002: 339.

¹⁰ Niscov 2003: 414, note 14.

¹¹ Schott 2003: 416; English version mine – N. C.

genre. Tony Brill registers in his *Typology ...*, under the entry V. Matei Corvin, seven types (14632-14637) and ten variants, all from Transylvania.¹² Most of them, collected, as we assume, from lower class people, shed a favourable light on the King, who is seen as a folk hero, defending the rights of the poor and punishing the noblemen who oppressed them. A common motif in this type of legend is that of the king travelling in disguise to different towns, entering the houses of the rich and the poor, rewarding those who treat him well and punishing the injustices and the misdeeds of the others.

The plot of type 14633 in *Matei Corvin și primarul din Cluj (Matthias Corvinus and the Mayor of Cluj)¹³* can be easily found, with very few changes, in legends about his contemporaries, Vlad the Impaler and Stephan the Great. Close to this story can be placed those about Vlad who, seeing a ploughman/peasant with a torn and dirty shirt, orders that the man's wife be impaled, and gives him a new wife, who, of course, will work hard in order to please her master. Similarly, a legend recorded several hundred years after the death of the voivod, recounts that one Sunday morning, while going to the church to attend the mass, Stephen the Great hears a man (again a ploughman) yelling at his oxen. When he asks him "in a terrible voice" why he is ploughing on a Sunday, the man answers that he has no beasts of burden and that these are his brother's oxen. The voivod takes the plough away from the rich brother and gives it to the poor brother.

It is not the real facts that might stand at the foundation of these stories that are important here, but rather the model of a good ruler whose deeds satisfy the poor and give them the hope that someone up there is protecting them. Where this attitude comes from is also less important, although some historians of mentalities think that the folk attitude towards Vlad the Impaler corresponds to the position of the Byzantine chroniclers. One of the two Catholic monks, interrogated by the Prince/Voivoda of Walachia, answers, in a Slavonic version of the anecdote, in these terms: "You, lord, have been assigned by God as a ruler to punish those who commit crimes and to reward those who do good." "Such an attitude might be traced back to the imperial Byzantine tradition, in whose name Vlad the Impaler was the first Romanian voivod to rise up in arms after the conquest of

¹² Brill 2006 II: 295–298.

¹³ Brill 2006 II: 295.

Constantinople in 1453.”¹⁴ In not such a different context, King Matthias is seen as “the chosen ruler” who “is expected to defend the interests of the poor against the nobility and at the same time to represent an idealised patriarchal society,”¹⁵ while Stephen the Great, in spite of his crimes, has been canonised by the Romanian Orthodox Church. Adopted by common folk, this attitude places all three feudal rulers in the same category, treating them as “righteous kings/voivods, brave defenders of the country and of the people”, a formula that later had a career in the political discourse of national communism.

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¹⁴ Andreescu 1999: 262.

¹⁵ Kríza 2002: 340.

SCHOTT, Arthur and Albert

- 1845 *Wallachische Märchen* herausgegeben von Arthur und Albert Schott. Mit einer Einleitung über das Volk Anhang der Walachen und einem anhang zur Erklärung der Märchen, Stuttgart and Tübingen, J. G. Cotta'scher Verlag.
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Le dialogue entre le souverain et le vassal: Mathias et Vlad l'Empaleur

1. Bref tableau historique

A partir du XV^e siècle les rapports entre les rois hongrois (Sigismond de Luxembourg ou Mathias) et les voïvodes roumains ou serbes ont subi des changements considérables à cause de la présence d'un nouvel empire menaçant: les Turcs avaient vaincu les Serbes (au Champ de Merles en 1389), les Bulgares en 1393 à Tarnovo et ils atteignirent le Danube. Suite à la défaite de proportions internationales de Nicopole, en 1396, la Péninsule Balkanique suivra un destin politique et historique sous l'égide de la «maison de l'islam». Les Roumains auront la possibilité de recourir à l'aide du Royaume Hongrois et c'est ainsi que commence une longue histoire de politique de «balançoire» des voïvodes roumains et serbes entre les grandes puissances politiques de l'époque, au nord-ouest le Royaume de Hongrie, à l'est l'Empire turc et au nord la Russie des Tsars.

Il ne faut pas oublier que l'expansion des Ottomans en Europe avait eu comme support idéologique la doctrine de la «guerre sainte» (*djihad*) contre les *giaours* («mécristes»). Le régime des vaincus, donc celui des Roumains, Serbes, Bulgares, a été réglementé également dans les Balkans en conformité avec le *droit musulman*, qui accordait la faveur de choisir: soit se convertir à l'islam, soit rester dans l'ancienne croyance, la conversion forcée étant réservée aux païens. Cela signifie que le statut politique et économique des principautés roumaines a été particulièrement précaire à cause d'un certain nombre de dépendances simultanées et à cause des *haraci* à payer aux Turcs.

L'héritage de Sigismond de Luxembourg en Hongrie en tant que roi de Hongrie (1387–1437) et roi d'Allemagne (à partir de 1410), ensuite Empereur germanique (depuis 1433) avait réussi à créer une diplomatie européenne, dont Mathias lui-même a été un représentant de marque. À cette époque les changements historiques, comme la montée de l'Empire turc, a complètement changé les rapports entre les rois de Hongrie et les vassaux des petites formations étatiques aux alentours. Le roi Sigismond a vite compris qu'il devait créer de nouveaux rapports de vassalité entre le roi-

souverain et les voïvodes des pays voisins. Dès 1390 Sigimond fit venir dans sa cour les descendants des dynasties régnantes des petits voïévodats, comme Brankovic, et Vlad, le futur Vlad Dracul. Vlad Dracul par exemple, se trouvait à la Cour de Sigismond à partir de 1395, «en otage» selon l'avis de Matei Cazacu¹ et de la majeure partie des historiens roumains. Mais le sens diplomatique du roi Sigismond visait plus haut, puisque tous les enfants «en otage» auprès du roi étaient censés devenir des vassaux plus ou moins loyaux aux rois hongrois. Par exemple Vlad Dracul, père de Dracula, allait monter sur le trône de la Valachie en 1436.

L'autorité centrale de Sigismond de Luxembourg devint insuffisante pour protéger le pays, surtout aux confins de l'empire, contre les attaques des Turcs, de plus en plus menaçants.

Par conséquent, Sigismond avait fondé en 1408 l'*Ordre du Dragon* (*Societas Draconistarum*) à caractère international, un ordre de nobles élus, d'après le modèle de l'*Ordre de Saint-Georges* de Bourgogne. L'Ordre avait comme but la défense de la Croix face à ses ennemis, et surtout face aux Ottomans. Les 24 membres fondateurs furent intronisés en 1408, parmi ceux-ci: Sigismond de Luxembourg, Stefan Lazarević de Serbie, Alphonse d'Aragon et de Naples, Ladislaus II de Pologne, Vitovd de Lithuanie, Ernst d'Autriche, Christophe III de Danemark. En 1431, Sigismond décida d'étendre l'ordre, et il invita de nombreux vassaux et nobles politiquement et militairement influents à en faire partie. Le rôle des vassaux, comme les Brankovics ou Vlad Dracul (le père de Vlad l'Empaleur) était d'assurer la surveillance du territoire du Royaume de Hongrie. Ils obéissaient directement au roi ou à un représentant royal. Le bénéfice des vassaux consistait dans la garantie de sécurité donnée par le roi face aux ennemis. Vlad Dracul, grâce à ses relations avec la Cour de Hongrie, devint «commandant de frontière» entre la Transylvanie et la Valachie, disposant d'une petite armée.

Les liens entre Jean de Hunyadi et son fils Mathias et Vlad Țepeș-Dracula ont été étroits pour plusieurs raisons. N'oublions pas que le père Vlad Dracul, membre de l'*Ordre du Dragon* avait été assassiné sur l'ordre de Jean de Hunyadi qui prit par la suite le jeune Vlad, devenu orphelin; d'ailleurs, la mère de Vlad (Țepeș) était de toute probabilité hongroise, appartenant à la haute noblesse. Même sa grand-mère, la femme de Mircea le Vieux, était hongroise. Par conséquent, Vlad – le futur Dracula – a été catholique. Il vécut une grande partie de sa vie en Hongrie et en Transylvanie. De cette

¹ Cazacu 1988: 2.

manière, Vlad était un des proches de la famille de Hunyadi, et toute l'histoire créée autour du complot hongrois, donc du roi Mathias contre ce pauvre Dracula, en le noircissant devant l'Histoire, nous paraît tout à fait ridicule. Selon cette théorie, Mathias aurait inventé de toutes pièces les méfaits et les atrocités de Vlad Țepeș, en menant une campagne dénigrante par la publication de libelles en plusieurs langues, qui auraient falsifié de manière malveillante l'image de cet enfant de chœur qui s'appelle Vlad Țepeș-Dracula. Des chercheurs américains démontrent, preuves à l'appui, qu'une telle interprétation, donnée par l'historiographie nationaliste roumaine de l'époque de Ceausescu, avait le but de «blanchir» cette figure emblématique de l'histoire roumaine qui était Vlad Țepeș. C'est la fameuse théorie du «*hungarian plot*» (la conspiration hongroise), selon laquelle l'action diplomatique entreprise par le roi Mathias dans les années 1462–1463 aurait été destinée à justifier l'arrestation du prince valaque devant les puissances chrétiennes de l'époque, qui le considéraient comme un champion de la croisade anti-ottomane (voir Matei Cazacu). Il est curieux de constater que la même idée est largement reprise par Ambrus Miskolczy qui renchérit bien ridiculement sur la «ruse diplomatique» de Mathias². Il faut dire que les liens entre les rois hongrois et la branche des Drăculești (princes régnants en Valachie et adversaires du groupe des Dănești, plus turcophile et indigène), sont plus étroits qu'on ne le pense.

Ce n'est pas un hasard que juste avant la bataille décisive contre les Turcs à Belgrade, Jean de Hunyadi installe, en 1456, sur le trône de la Valachie un de ses proches, le jeune Vlad, le futur Dracula. Mais après la mort du protecteur, le jeune prince régnant va transgresser le traité d'alliance conclu en septembre 1456 avec le roi de Hongrie, Ladislas le Posthume, et les représentants des Saxons de Transylvanie; le traité stipulait l'allégeance au roi et l'alliance avec les Hongrois contre les Turcs, la liberté du commerce pour les Saxons, enfin, le droit d'asile en Transylvanie pour lui-même en cas de nécessité.

Mais Vlad avait entrepris des campagnes de pillage dans les riches régions habitées par des Saxons, faisant des victimes et des destructions. La réaction de Ladislas Hunyadi, le fils aîné de Jean de Hunyadi, ne se fit pas attendre: en décembre 1456, celui-ci demanda aux Saxons de Kronstadt (Brasov, Brassó) et de Burzenland de fournir de l'aide à Dan III contre Vlad Țepeș, qui avait trahi le serment fait au roi de Hongrie:

² Miskolczy 1993/1994.

Après avoir occupé le trône de son pays, comme nous le savons de source certaine, dans ces contrées [au sud de la Transylvanie] il a fait de grands dégâts et préjudices, et on craint qu'il pût faire d'avantage.³

Par la suite, le roi Mathias le fera capturer en 1462 et l'emmènera à Buda et à Visegrad. Ici Dracula épousera une cousine de Mathias et il aura deux enfants. C'est à partir de 1463, donc du vivant de notre personnage, que Vlad l'Empaleur-Dracula, devient le héros des histoires sanglantes diffusées dans toute l'Europe.

2. Oralité et spectaculaire dans les narrations sur Dracula

Notre hypothèse de travail est que l'histoire des relations entre les rois hongrois du XV^e siècle (Sigismond de Luxembourg et Mathias) et leurs vassaux comme Vlad Dracul ou son fils Vlad l'Empaleur, ainsi que les différentes narrations sur les méfaits de Dracula-Vlad l'Empaleur sont largement dominées par des *aspects oraux* et *spectaculaires*. Tout ce qui est lié au pouvoir du souverain: couronnement, serment, cérémonies de la Cour, guerres, punitions de toute sorte revêt un profond caractère spectaculaire où l'oralité joue un rôle de premier ordre.

Au Moyen-Âge, le principal objectif de toute cérémonie était de créer et de consacrer l'image de «celui qui est au-dessus de tous les autres», accentuant «le pouvoir divin» et «la justesse et la vérité» de l'autorité du roi ou du prince-vassal. Les documents écrits reflètent sans doute l'intention orale (communicative) et spectaculaire de toute action royale.

La majeure partie des documents parle des engagements (promesses, donations, condamnations, etc.) ou des désengagements, et nous disons «parlent» puisque ce sont en principe des engagements verbaux des souverains (consignés ensuite par écrit). Dès le moment qu'une autorité royale ou impériale prononce ces engagements, nous pouvons les considérer comme des *actes de paroles* qui se chargent d'une signification sociale et politique toute particulière. L'intentionnalité de l'émetteur (du discours ou du document écrit) porte sur la perception, l'action, la causalité, le sens et la référence. Le discours du souverain contient des éléments de feinte avec

³ Gündisch 1975: 555.

l'intention d'exagérer tel ou tel trait de caractère, avec l'intention de faire accepter telle ou telle autorité. Le roi, ou celui qui émet ces serments en son nom, feignent la règle essentielle l'engagement du locuteur. Le serment est essentiellement un discours sérieux, bien construit, en accentuant le position, l'intention, le support officiel de la démarche, les formes de l'engagement. C'est ainsi qu'on trouve une formation discursive appropriée, s'organisant autour d'un genre qui peut être le serment, la lettre, le rapport etc. Les documents mettent en œuvre une stratégie véridictionnelle: il faut garantir les droits des parties, proclamer la lutte contre l'ennemi commun, rassurer l'impétrant contre des adversaires ou des rivaux.

Ces intentions sont transmises par différents mécanismes discursifs, parmi lesquels nous pouvons distinguer: la dissimulation, la feinte, l'exagération des traits de caractère (tant positifs que négatifs, selon qu'il s'agit d'un allié ou d'un adversaire), l'hyperbole de la vaillance, la dramatisation des combats contre les Turcs, l'accentuation des liens de parenté ou d'amitié. Le dialogue entre le roi et son vassal contient tous ces éléments de ces mécanismes.

3. *Le dialogue à distance entre le souverain et le vassal*

Voilà un seul exemple: en 1431 à Nuremberg, le roi hongrois Sigismond a invité des vassaux et des nobles influents des pays voisins à faire partie de l'*Ordre du Dragon*. Parmi eux se trouvait Vlad Dracul. Celui-ci était au courant du projet du roi hongrois et, avant de partir de Transylvanie pour prêter serment à Nuremberg devant le roi Sigismond de Luxembourg, il écrivit aux conseillers municipaux de Brasov en sa qualité de «commandant de frontière»:

Vous le savez bien, vous-mêmes, que sa Majesté l'Empereur [Sigismond de Luxembourg] en personne m'avait chargé de garder ces contrées, puisque vous n'êtes pas obligés de garder ni les monts, ni les vallées...⁴

Voilà comment la parole du roi Sigismond recevait *une signification particulière, une efficacité rituelle* pour les conseillers communaux saxons de

⁴ Baltag 2004: 50.

Kronstadt (Brasov, Brassó), qui savaient bien que la parole royale pourrait signifier l'aide accordée à Vlad Dracul contre son rival lié aux Turcs.

Ce Vlad Dracul reçut à Nuremberg le titre de chevalier de l'*Ordre du Dragon* et fut couronné «prince de la Valachie et des terres de Omlas et de Fogaras»:

Johannes Wlad, Dei gratia, Walachiae Transalpinæ Dominus et terrarum de Omlasch et Fogaras Dux.

Certainement ces mots ont été prononcés par un représentant du roi ou par le roi lui-même; mais ces mots se transforment en *actes de langage*, c'est-à-dire en *action humaine*. Cette action traduit l'intention du roi Sigismond de raffermir ses relations avec les voïvodes roumains ou serbes dans la perspective d'une résistance contre les Turcs. D'une part nous avons l'engagement du roi auprès de son favori Vlad Dracul, le futur voïvode de la Valachie: celui-ci devient *Dominus* par la grâce de Dieu; pour sa part, Vlad s'engage à défendre les intérêts politiques et religieux du Royaume hongrois, y compris ses intentions de propager le catholicisme en Valachie. Au Moyen-Âge, un tel serment, une telle adhésion à l'*Ordre du Dragon* menait à reconnaître le statut de la *vassalité*, (*subordination, soumission*) face au roi Sigismond de Luxembourg.

Considérons un autre exemple d'acte de langage qui dissimule (atténue pour des raisons supérieures) une position très nette dans une question politique épineuse. Dans un discours qui proclame l'intention de défendre Vlad-Dracula, le gouverneur (de Transylvanie) simule l'engagement. Le locuteur, Michel Szilágyi, ne connaît que trop bien la vérité sur les méfaits de Vlad l'Empaleur, mais à ce moment-là le jeune voïvode de la Valachie est plus important pour le gouverneur et pour la Hongrie que les citoyens de Brasov. Prince de Valachie depuis deux ans, Vlad, fils de Vlad Dracul, avait pillé à maintes reprises les régions de Brasov. Le gouverneur Szilágyi Mihály répond aux plaintes des Saxons par une lettre datée du 6 mars 1458. Il dit aux conseillers de Brasov:

Nous avons entendu que vous avez provoqué l'illustre Wlad, le voïvode de la Valachie, en l'irritant beaucoup et qui vous a barcelés, en vous faisant du mal et de grands dégâts, dont seuls vous êtes les responsables. (Intelleximus, quod vos pluribus incitationibus causam movendi contra vos illustri principi Wlad, wayuode partium

*Transalpinarum dedissetis, unde vobis plurima mala et dampna evenissent de quibus vobis non mediocriter imputamus.)*⁵

Dans un document daté de 1458, Vlad l'Empaleur fait acte de donation pareil aux souverains européens, avec un discours d'engagement qui a le rôle de signifier (montrer, exhiber) l'autorité royale ou princière:

*Moi, Vlad, voïvode et propriétaire de tout le pays de Ungrovlabia [Hongrovalachie]; fils du grand voïvode, nommé Vlad, par cet ordre je lègue mon domaine de Tismana pour y faire ériger un monastère etc.*⁶

Dans sa lettre adressée a Mathias datée du 11 février 1462, sur ses hostilités contre les Ottomans au sud du Danube, Vlad l'Empaleur réitère son discours de fidélité envers le roi: «*Serenissime princeps et domine noster gratiose*» dit-il dans la lettre qui relate les manœuvres des Turcs qui voulait le détourner son plan d'épouser une proche parente de Mathias:

*Quia in prioribus nostris litteris scripseramus eidem serenitati vestrae, quomodo Truci, saevissimi crucis Christi inimici, nuncios ipsorum solennes, eo quod pacem et unionem inter vestram serenitatem et nos initam et confederatum non tenere nuptiasque sperneremus celebrare, transmiserunt, sed ipsis solum adhaerere ad portamque ipsius caesaris Turcorum quae curia dicitur transiremus; quod si pacem unionemque et nuptias vestrae serenitatis non derelinqueremus, extunc pacem nobiscum ipsi Turci nolent tenere;*⁷

Le lien fort entre lui, la couronne et la chrétienté est affirmé selon les formules en usage à l'époque:

*Igitur sciat e vestra serenitatis, quod nos pacem cum ipsis non propter nos, sed propter honorem et serenitatis vestrae eiusque sacre corone totiusque christianitatis conservationem fideique catholicae roboracionem violavimus.*⁸

Une lettre de Florius Roverella, datée du juillet 1475 et adressée au prince de Ferrare, sur les relations turco-hongroises, parle des faveurs accordées au prince valaque:

⁵ Hunfalvy 1894: 132.

⁶ Bogdan 1896: 75.

⁷ Bogdan 1896: 79.

⁸ Bogdan 1896: 78.

... preterea essa Maesta ha restituo Ladizlao Dragula alla porotine sue dignita, in Valachia factolo Vajvoda et restutuito al suo Stato, datoli gente d'arme, dinari et bone lettere, siche se especta el dicto Dragula, fara gran facto contra li Turchi, come altrevolta fece, dandoli piu rotte circa la parte Valachia. Avanti che fosse pìrgione della Maesta de questo Signore Re, et per dargli maggiore favore, ha mandati epsa Majesta Commissari in Transilvania a disporre el paese in favore del dicto Dragula...⁹

Le roi Mathias écrivit en 1475 au maire de Hermannstadt (Sibiu, Nagy-szeben) une lettre pour donner 200 florins à Dracula: «*fideli nostra Drakwlyae ducentos florens pro subsidio dare debeas*». Une autre lettre de Mathias – du 15 novembre 1476 – atteste l'intention du roi hongrois d'exprimer et de faire respecter le lien existant entre le souverain et son vassal Dracula, en exagérant les traits du voïvode roumain:

*Imperatore itaque in fugam converso, jussimus capitaneos nostros regnum Transalpinum ingredi, infidelem Bozorad excludi, et Draguliam, virum ramorum et Turcis infestissimus, in waywodam erigi, quod favente altissimo jam effectum est.*¹⁰

4. Le dialogue dans l'imaginaire

Ces intentions politiques seront fortement exagérées selon qu'il s'agit de sources allemandes, russes ou autres. Les narrations russes reflètent le jeu de pouvoir du souverain Dracula, nommé «grand souverain» dans *Skazanie o Drakule voevod* (Histoire du voïevode Dracula, 1486), par exemple. Dans ce cas-là Dracula prend la place du souverain (soit Mathias, soit un Sultan) et décide du sort de ses victimes. Dans l'imaginaire russe Dracula devient ni plus ni moins que le symbole d'un monarque juste et rationnel. Ces fragments de la littérature dite «populaire» peuvent être considérés comme l'expression d'un dialogue entre le souverain et son vassal avec une intéressante inversion des rôles, puisque Dracula est hissé sur le trône du roi occidental. Voilà une partie d'un récit russe du XV^e siècle, *Le dit sur le voïvode Dracula*, dont on connaît 22 copies, pour la plupart de date ultérieure, des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. L'auteur de ce récit est Fedor Kuricyn qui avait

⁹ Nagy – Nyáry 1875 I: 273.

¹⁰ Fraknói 1893: 355.

visité la cour de Mathias en 1485 et qui connaissait les légendes sur le compte de Vlad l'Empaleur-Dracula:

11. Une autre fois il reçut la visite d'un envoyé du roi de Hongrie, Mathias. L'ambassadeur était un grand noble d'origine polonaise. Dracula lui donna l'ordre de rester avec lui à table au milieu des cadavres, et, préparé devant eux, se trouvait un très gros pal, haut et entièrement doré? Et Dracula demanda à l'ambassadeur:

– „Dis-moi, pourquoi ai-je fait placer ce pieu ici?”

Et l'ambassadeur, qui avait très peur, lui répondit:

– „Sire, il me semble qu'un grand aurait commis un crime à ton égard et que tu désires lui réserver une mort plus honorable qu'aux autres”.

Et Dracula lui dit:

– „Tu as bien parlé. En effet, tu es l'ambassadeur royal d'un grand souverain et j'ai fait faire ce pal pour toi.”

Et l'ambassadeur lui répondit:

„Sire, si je commis un crime qui mérite la mort, fais ce que bon te semble, car tu es un juge impartial et ce n'est point toi qui serais coupable de ma mort, mais moi seul.”

Dracula éclata de rire et lui dit:

– „Si tu n'avais pas répondu ainsi, en vérité, tu serais sur ce pieu.”

Et il l'honora fort, lui fit beaucoup de présents et le laissa partir en lui disant:

– „Tu peux vraiment être ambassadeur de grands souverains auprès d'autres grands souverains, car on t'a appris l'art de parler aux grands souverains. Mais que d'autres n'osent point le faire avant d'avoir appris à parler à de grands souverains”.¹¹

Selon les contemporains, Ivan III («le Terrible») aimait beaucoup ces histoires et contribua lui-même à répandre cette image de monarque valaque. Quand il recevait en 1476 les ambassadeurs tartares il les menaçait avec ces méthodes.

En Europe Occidentale la deuxième partie du XV^e siècle est largement dominée par la tradition orale, et toutefois c'est l'époque de la formation des contes allemands et des contes français recueillis plus tard par Charles Perrault et les frères Grimm. On se demande pourquoi il y a tant d'horreurs dans ces contes. Tout simplement parce que ces contes sont nés à une époque où l'horreur, les guerres, des pillages, des incendies, des épidémies étaient des réalités du quotidien. Voilà, à titre d'exemple, un fragment du

¹¹ Cazacu 1988.

Geschichte Dracole Waida (1496); il s'agit de l'équivalent allemand de l'histoire ci-dessus:

Item plusieurs Italiens lui furent envoyés. Lorsqu'ils vinrent à lui, ils le saluèrent et retirèrent leurs chapeaux sous lequel ils portaient un bérêt ou une calotte marron et rouge qu'ils n'ôtèrent pas. Il leur demanda pourquoi ils ne l'avaient pas enlevé et ils lui répondirent:

– „Seigneur, telle est notre coutume et nous ne les retirons (même) pas devant l'Empereur”. Il dit:

– „Eh bien, je veux vous raffermir dans votre coutume.” Et eux de le remercier dans la grâce. Alors il fit prendre de bons clous en fer et leur fit clouer les calottes sur la tête de façon qu'elles ne tombassent pas; c'est ainsi qu'il raffermi dans leur coutume...

La légitimité de l'autorité est due au Pouvoir, qui est mesure d'inspirer le respect et la confiance auprès des sujets. Il s'agit donc d'une autorité symbolique exprimée dans notre cas par un voïvode qui par une extension virtuelle de son pouvoir jusqu'à l'infini croit agir comme un vrai souverain à l'occidentale. Les documents historiques parlent du comportement bizarre de Dracula, de ses excès et de ses paradoxes, autant d'éléments qui vont nourrir abondamment différentes narrations de l'époque et des siècles suivants.

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The Age of Matthias Corvinus – A Crucial Period in Rusyn History

For the modern generation of Subcarpathian Rusyns (Ruthenians), King Matthias Corvinus – rex Hungariae (1440–1458–1490) – is known as a beloved folklore character of numerous legends rather than a historical figure. Nevertheless, these legends teem with local toponyms and often reflect real historical events and facts. Along with his late successors, Ferenc Rákóczi II (1676–1735) and Maria Theresa (1717–1780), he was a prominent representative of grand rulers who left indelible traces in common Rusyn people's memories. While we have plenty of historical evidence from the 18th century, it is mainly King Matthias' 500-year presence in Rusyn folklore that we can rely on to validate such an assertion. This presence is undoubtedly an indirect reflection of the fact that he brought the country to the European standard with regard to economy, culture, welfare as well as external security. At the same time, he preserved a non-nation state, satisfying all the peoples inhabiting his kingdom. In tales, legends, and folk ballads, the fair ruler delivers justice which is to common people's liking. The Rusyn popular saying "за крале Матяша" means "in days of yore" which, sadly, will never come back.¹ National variations of King Matthias folklore show quite distinctly which aspect of his multifaceted career has been recognized as most relevant to the destiny of the given nation. In Rusyn folklore, King Matthias and his military leader Pál Kinizsi are acting as Rusyns; the tales of King Matthias come forth with local national and historical coloration. In this way, people unintentionally allude to King Matthias' great services in refining the legislative definition of Rusyns' privileges and rights, which exerted real influence upon the development of their national identity.

It is certainly true that Rusyns did not arise in a vacuum. King Matthias entered the historical scene along with a legitimate Subcarpathian Rusyn people. After the Tatar-Mongolian invasion of 1241–1242, an active colo-

¹ Вархол, Івченко 1990: 82.

nization of Subcarpathia started with the purpose of turning the province into the front line of the country's defense against further aggression; the colonists were mainly Rusyns along with Hungarians, Germans, and Vlachs. Antal Hodinka (1864–1946), member of the Hungarian Academy, pioneer of Slavistic studies in Hungary, and a native of Subcarpathia, investigated this colonization in depth in his book titled *A kárpátaljai rutének lakóhelye, gazdaságuk és múltjük* (The Place of Living, Economy, and Past of the Subcarpathian Rusyns).² Hodinka wrote this book primarily in Rusyn and published it under the name of “An Orphan from Sokyrnitsa” most probably in 1921, and a reprint was brought out in 2000.³ The historian gave details about King Matthias' legal system, approved by the diet in Hungary in 1484, wherein Rusyns had been mentioned for the first time as a legitimate Subcarpathian people and certain privileges were granted to them. He also comprehensively portrayed the forthcoming 200-year struggle of Rusyns to retain their rights, in the course of which they consistently relied on Matthias' laws.⁴ During 260 peaceful and successful years of pre-Matthias colonization, in other words for 13 generations, having been united by the common mission and destiny, Rusyns had formed a mature community aware of its self-reliance. When King Matthias strengthened their awareness by promulgating laws on Rusyns' privileges and rights and mentioned the Rusyn diocese of Munkács (today: Mukačevo) in his charter, he performed deeds of historic magnitude. Shortly after King Matthias died, in the middle of the 16th century and at the height of the Reformation, the *Postilla of Nyagovo*⁵ appeared. This great achievement of Subcarpathian Rusyn literature established the Rusyn language, which has survived almost unchanged up to the present. This is further evidence of the great importance the Age of Matthias had in shaping Rusyn national consolidation and culture. Even 200 years after King Matthias' death his laws continued to serve as a shield protecting Rusyns' relative independence and well-being.

Quite naturally, King Matthias also ranked as an outstanding figure of medieval history in the works of many other pre-Soviet authors of Rusyn, Russian, or Ukrainian nationality. Among others, mention must be made of

² Hodinka 1923.

³ Hodinka 2000.

⁴ Hodinka 2000: 55–68.

⁵ Postilla 2006. The manuscript of an unknown author, it was originally published by Alexey Petrov in St. Petersburg in 1914 and 1921 (2nd edition). The book is now a rarity, therefore a new facsimile edition has recently been brought out by Slavists in Nyíregyháza.

Irén Kontratovics, Peter Sova, Eugen Perfeckij, and Zenon Kuzelia. Kontratovics refers to King Matthias' deed, brought out in 1458 and nominating Presbyter Lucas (Lukács) as head of the cloister of Munkács "with his own habitual authority", as de facto foundation of the diocese of Munkács. It is supported by the fact that in 1491, Ioann, Lucas' successor, was mentioned as bishop.⁶ In his history of Ungvár (Uzhgorod), Sova portrays the process of uncontrollable decay which started in the country after King Matthias' death and finally culminated in a peasant uprising and the gradual deterioration of the situation of common folk.⁷ Perfeckij, the Russian historian, emigrated to Czechoslovakia and studied Rusyn history during the reign of Matthias Corvinus in depth.⁸ Like Hodinka, he based his work on a meticulous analysis of the social situation and economy of the Rusyn people in Subcarpathian Rus. He also studied Rusyn folklore about King Matthias and he came to an unambiguous conclusion: "The Rusyn people struggled for their social and economic status and were supported in this fight by their defender – King Matthias Corvinus – even if they did not always become aware of the basic fact, that this way they also fought for their national self-dependency and that their greatest ally in the struggle for the preservation of Rusyn identity at that time was Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus himself."⁹ Kuzelia had a similar opinion arguing that the decisive factors in forming people's attitude to and appreciation for Matthias Corvinus were their social and economic status, peaceful life and respect for national culture and traditions.¹⁰

After the Subcarpathia had been annexed to the Soviet Union it was predetermined that Rusyns were to disappear (they were forced to become Ukrainians), and King Matthias was also doomed to disappear from their history. From then on, Rusyns were exclusively found in museums displaying them as ancient relatives of Ukrainians oppressed by Magyars, and King Matthias was supposed to remain only a folklore hero. The fact that he was a real and highly influential figure in Rusyn history was to be blotted out in every possible way. Under totalitarian rule, no school of thinking is allowed to deviate from the official line.

⁶ Кондратович 1924: 44.

⁷ Сова 1937: 85–88.

⁸ Perfeckij 1995: 35–40.

⁹ Perfeckij 1926: 8.

¹⁰ Кузеля 1906: LXX, 104–105.

Soviet prejudices concerning Rusyns and King Matthias did not perish with the Soviet Union. They have been adopted and become official in independent Ukraine. In a comprehensive history of the Subcarpathia published by the State University of Uzhgorod in 1993 (among its authors are well-known Rusyn historians I. Hrachak and I. Pop), no mention is made of King Matthias and his Rusyn connections.¹¹ Unfortunately, this neglect has had an influence on serious overseas authors, too: neither in the bulky *Encyclopaedia of Rusyn History and Culture*¹² nor in the latest and widely-distributed Illustrated History of Carpatho-Rusyns dubbed “The People From Nowhere”,¹³ can one find a single record of King Matthias or his laws related to Rusyns. However, authors who try to get rid of the habitual, ideological and political approaches can also meet with approval. H. Pavlenko, for instance, the author of a short encyclopedic dictionary titled *Public Persons of Subcarpathian History, Science and Culture*¹⁴, not only mentions King Matthias, but highly appreciates his attitude towards Rusyns. Also, reprints of works by Kontratovics¹⁵ and Sova¹⁶ have been published (in 1991 and 1992, respectively), in which one can read about King Matthias. It is now possible to upset the status quo and justly interpret the facts of Rusyn history and culture. Ukrainians are eager to take a similar opportunity when they look back to the Age of Cossacks and polish it to make it presentable to the general public. Exactly what the Age of Cossacks means to Ukrainians, King Matthias’ reign means to Rusyns. It is worthy of being interpreted in an honest and just way.

¹¹ Гранчак 1993.

¹² Magosci – Pop 2002.

¹³ Magosci 2006.

¹⁴ Павленко 1999: 115–116.

¹⁵ Кондратович 1924.

¹⁶ Сова 1937.

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Slovenian "Good Stories" about King Matthias Corvinus

I.

The most colourful and mysterious figure of Slovenian folk tradition is King Matthias.¹ First, he is a positive hero of folk tales and folk songs, a savior of Slovenians. Ágoston Pável was the first to discuss King Matthias in Slovenian folk tradition and literature, his aim being to publish a comprehensive monograph, but he failed.² Later, Slovenian folklorists Ivan Grafenauer and Milko Matičetov took up the topic.³ A conference, held at Maribor in 1990 on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of King Matthias's death, gave impetus to further research.⁴

Starting from the period of Romanticism, folk tales and folk songs about King Matthias represented an important inspiration for Slovenian literature. Slovenian poets and writers using the rich folk tradition and literature gave their own interpretation and actualization of the stories about the King, trying to find the answers both to the urgent existential questions of Slovenians as well as of their own doubts. Thus, King Matthias became one of the mythical heroes of the Slovenian people.

My monograph written in Hungarian and devoted to this topic summarizes everything that has been written in Slovenian and Hungarian scholarly literature of 20th the century on folk tales and folk songs about King Matthias. This was the first time that a comprehensive picture of the perception of the Matthias-phenomenon in Slovenian literature had been given.⁵ Now I would like to present my latest findings in the field. The study aims at the following new questions, themes and problems: newly found historical facts; a new perspective of relations between Matthias Corvinus Hunyadi and the Slovenian provinces; a new interpretation of traditional folk texts about King Matthias Corvinus as texts of collective memory,

¹ In Slovenian: Kralj Matjaž

² Pável 1976.

³ Grafenauer 1951; Matičetov 1958.

⁴ Varga – Molnár 1991.

⁵ Lukács 2001.

collective narrative, and collective identity; and a comparative study of historical data concerning the most interesting mythological elements, motives of collective narratives, and literary adaptations about King Matthias.

II.

The Cillei family played a decisive role in controlling the destiny of the territories inhabited by Slovenians, in the period before King Matthias's reign. This family, relatives of many European royal families, influenced the political life as from the Balkans to the frontiers of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. It is a well known fact, that Hunyadi played the most important role in the decline of this omnipotent family. In 1448, after the defeat at Kósovsko polje, János Hunyadi promised that his son Matthias would marry Elizabeth, Ulrich Cillei's daughter. Their marriage was contracted in 1455. But Elizabeth Cillei died very soon afterwards. Following János Hunyadi's death on 11th August, 1456, the king appointed Ulrich Cillei to be his lieutenant in Hungary. This intensified the hatred of Hunyadis' henchmen. They assassinated Ulrich Cillei in Belgrad on 9th November, 1456. Since he was the last one in the line, with him the Cillei family died out. A fierce struggle started for the distribution of their property, and finally Emperor Ferdinand was the winner in 1457. As a result of bloody battles, he managed to snatch a significant part of the property. After Władysław Warneńczyk III's (King of Poland) death, a new situation arose. Podiebrad became King of Bohemia and Matthias Hunyadi became King of Hungary in 1458. Ferdinand and Albrecht started a war of inheritance in the Habsburg provinces. The Slovenian lands were devastated by mercenaries of both parties almost for a decade. Dispatched from Bosnia and Serbia, marauding Turks marched en masse from the direction of Istria and Zagreb to Slovenian territories from 1469 to 1483. They ruined and pillaged these lands preparing for a bigger campaign. Protective measures of Frederic III were not efficient enough. The new taxes imposed upon the villeinage just worsened the situation and triggered social discontentment. The cruel Turkish attacks stopped in 1483 only as a result of the peace treaty between King Matthias and Sultan Bayazid II. It was an important event that brought popularity to King Matthias among the Slovenians.

The motif of Matthias' Turkish confinement is prevalent in Slovenian folk songs and folk tales as well as in literary pieces about King Matthias. In

connection with this, let us recall an interesting and puzzling biographical circumstance. In a letter to Sultan Mehmed II, King Matthias calls the sultan his own flesh and blood and later on he does the same in connection with the younger brother of Bayazid II, the pretender Prince Jem (Djem), whom he wanted to become his prisoner not the Pope's. He informs the envoy of the Pope that prince Jem was son of the sister of Janos Hunyadi's mother, who was taken into prison by the Turks, and later became wife of Sultan Bayazid II. In the peace treaty of 1488, Bayazid II also calls Matthias "his brother and relative".⁶ There are no reliable historical data in this respect, but consanguinity stressed by the king was well-known.

A war broke out between Frederic III and Matthias Corvinus Rex in 1480. Hungarians occupied Radkersburg, a bit later Fürstenfeld, and the next year Maribor was besieged. In 1483, they marched to Ljubljana. The political intentions of the King became clearer and clearer: driving out the Habsburgs from territories stretching from Vienna to the sea and build up a strong defense line against the Turks there. Despite Frederic's efforts, Matthias occupied more and more Slovenian territories. Peace talks started at the end of 1489, but after King Matthias's death in 1490, Hungarian supremacy on Slovenian territories ceased to exist. The Habsburgs regained Slovenian territories. King Matthias represented the type of ruler who could have protected the Slovenians against the Turkish invasion and taken over sovereignty of Slovenian territories from Frederic III.⁷

Several questions recur concerning King Matthias of the Slovenian folk tradition in Slovenian literature: Who could this hero be identified with? Could he be identified with Hungarian King Matthias? There are scarce written resources and documents proving the influence of this Hungarian Renaissance king on the Slovenians. Still Matthias Hunyadi's influence in the region was essential, thus the Slovenians could not ignore it, either.

III.

The notion of individual redemption and redemption of the community (nation) is present in almost each and every story about King Matthias. So we are entitled to ask a question: Where does the concept of King Matthias

⁶ Kubinyi 2001: 9.

⁷ Kos 1955; Rázsó – V. Molnár 1990; Štih – Simoniti 1996; Kubinyi 2001.

the savior come from? Is there any concrete historical basis for this important motif in Slovenian works about King Matthias?

Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), an outstanding figure of Florentine humanism, Neo-Platonist and theologian, devoted the third book of his *De triplicia vita* to King Matthias. He wrote in his letter of recommendation to Matthias in 1480 that philosophers, poets, orators and historians of the Greek era were forced to suffer under Turkish yoke. This is how he went on: “As the saints of old times in the limbo called the Messiah, so these miserable philosophers loudly called for Matthias, *Matthias the Redeemer*⁸, to take them out of the limbo or out of the hell, back to the light and life.”⁹ In this case, it is not the usual polite humanist formula, but the sincere admiration coming from the most outstanding Italian humanist. As Ficino’s is a European opinion about King Matthias, there is no doubt that it was well-known. The redeemer motif is a logical connection between the European and Slovenian Matthias.

IV.

Group narratives play an important role in contemporary historiography. Their development has a special dynamics – certain stories appear in quite different versions until “the good story” has been created.¹⁰ Two factors play a decisive role in the development of narratives: collective memory and national identity. Maurice Halbwachs, father of the collective-memory theory, argues that human memory is not of individual character, but is determined by the social interaction, that is, we can only remember things which were communicated by different social groups, which, due to this, could be placed into various social schemes or social contexts.¹¹ Memory can be communicative or cultural. According to Jan Assmann, communicative memory contains recent events of the past and present common to contemporaries. In contrast, the cultural memory dates back to the origin of the given community. Culture objectifies all important experiences and memories of the community and saves them in the form of encoded stories.¹²

⁸ Italics mine I. L.

⁹ Klaniczay 1976: 166.

¹⁰ Pataki 2003.

¹¹ Gyáni 2003.

¹² Assman 1999.

Group narratives are extremely important for embalming the past. As Pierre Nora stresses, if the continuity of memory breaks, we will diverge from our past. We can remember only if the places of memory exist: establishments, topographical points, cultural constructs, social customs, rituals, and narratives. The most important task of the places of memory is strengthening and transmitting national identity¹³. E. White says that encoded events in the places of memory are real not because they have happened, but because they have found their place in the chronological order of events¹⁴. Certain episodes in the chain of events become extremely meaningful from time to time, so the community stylizes them. The collective story generated this way saves the community in a physical sense and guarantees its continuity, which results in the development and organization of the individual's self-consciousness. Those narratives constantly change: renewed and reorganized, their meaning is being replenished. This is a close system of meanings, as far as certain ideas are understandable only to the members of the community.¹⁵

V.

Among the numerous folk tales, folk songs and literary pieces about King Matthias there are three outstanding "good stories". Some of them have already been analyzed from a myth-historical point of view.¹⁶ One of them is titled *Voznik pri kralju Matjažu* (Haulier at King Matthias), the second is the folk song *Godec pred peklom* (Fiddler at the Gate of Hell), and the third is modernist Slovenian writer, Ivan Cankar's short story called *Potepuh Marko in kralj Matjaž* (Scallywag Marco and King Matthias).

Voznik pri Kralju Matjažu

Neki Slovenec (pravijo) je iz Ugarske vina doma vozil. Nekega dne pride po svojem potu skoz veliko dobrovo, nameri se pod visoko goro, na kterej opazi hišico, ktera stoji na pol v skalo zazidana, tako da se kumej streha iz zemlje vidila. Pred vratami zagleda verlega junaka, s sabljo opasanega. Kadar se Slovenec s vozam približa, začne junak govoriti in pitati: »Prijetelj! Ti si iz

¹³ Gyáni 2003: 12.

¹⁴ White 1997: 134.

¹⁵ Pataki 2003.

¹⁶ Pável 1976: 7–29; Nartnik 1996: 150–156.

gornjih naših stran. Povej mi, ali še lazijo mravlice na te tri verhe: na Šent-Krištofov, na Šent-Helenin in na Šent-Urihov verh?

Slovenec je odgovoril: »Še lazijo, pa ves čas le redje.«

»Povej doma: kadar bode vera toliko oslabela, da ne bode nikdo več hodil na te tri verhe, tedaj bodem jaz ustal in prišel s svojo černo vojsko.«

»Kdo si pa ti?« ga upraša Slovenec.

»Jaz sim kralj Matjaž! Stopi bliže in pojdi za menoj v to hišico, da se sam s svojimi očmi prepričaš.«

Slovenec gre z njim v hišico in kralj Matjaž mu ukaže: »Stopi tu za me in poglej meni čez desno ramo skoz tot okno.«

Človek stori, kakor mu je ukazano in vidi ravno polje, dolgo in široko. Po celim polju čez in čez vse sami vojaki v orožji s konji. Pa vse mirno in tiho. Nič se ne gane, kakor da bi spali konji in vojaki.

»Vidiš, to je črna vojska!« reče kralj Matjaž začudjenemu Slovencu. – »Poglej spet skoz okno.« - Človek spet pogleda, kralj pak prime rahlo za svojo sabljo in jo malo iz nožnice povleče. Sdaj glej! Cela vojska oživi! Vojaki se vzdvignejo, konji začnejo s glavami majati, herzati in s kopitami kopati.

»Vidiš!« reče kralj Matjaž, »ne bode več dolgo, in jaz bom ustal in potegnil svojo sabljo. Bode mlačen veter potegnil, vsem ljudem jedno misel dal. Moji vojaki bodo poskakali na konje. Tedaj bode črna vojska za sveto staro vero in pravico.« (Tako je dejal Kralj Matjaž..)¹⁷

The “good story” quoted above contains quite an amount of interesting and important mythological, philosophical, and concrete historical layers. Reviewing and disentangling of these layers will prove everything that has been said about the development of group narratives.

There are three small churches on the top of three hills north-east of Klagenfurt – the one named after Saint Ulrich is ruined now. These churches were endpoints of the so called “flying pilgrimage” (leteče procesije) of Slovenians. They used to visit all three churches on the same day.¹⁸ King Matthias’s question in the Slovenian folk tale, “Tell me, do people still go up to the three hills: to Saint Cristof, to Saint Magdalen and to Saint Ulrich?” obviously refers to this pilgrimage.

¹⁷ Grafenauer 1951: 210–211.

¹⁸ Nartnik 1989: 64–70.

The story begins in a huge forest, atop of a high mountain and in a "bower partly carved in the cliff, the roof of which could hardly be seen." Let us recall Erazem Predjamski, contemporary of King Matthias, whose world famous castle Predjama is not far from the Postojna dripstone cave and is partly built in the cave. At the end of the 14th century, the castle became the property of the German Lueger family, whom Slovenians consider to be identical to the Predjamskis. Most relevant legends are connected to Erasmus Predjamski, who asked for the help of King Matthias against Frederic III and later became a robber baron. He was assassinated in his own castle in 1484¹⁹. He was a fearsome outlaw who often attacked aristocrats and merchants on their way to sea, or back to the heart of the country²⁰. The strange location of his castle is very similar to Matthias's bower in the folk tale ("partly built in the cliff").

In connection with the story mentioned above, we have to recall two other events which happened in King Matthias's time not far from Slovenian territories in 1485 and 1487, respectively.

Matthias occupied Kronenburg on 18th March, 1485, before the conquest of Vienna. As Antonio Bonfini, historiographer of King Matthias wrote, "So the king occupied Kronenburg, the bastion of Vienna... It was a day of such a solar eclipse, that a lot of stars could be seen. Lots of people have prophesied that the solar eclipse meant a misfortune for the emperor."²¹ The actual solar eclipse happened on 16th March, 1485, in the geographical line of Linz, Kőszeg, and Esztergom. In Vienna and in Buda, it was almost a total eclipse. Mercury, Venus, Mars, and Jupiter could be seen as bright stars along with the Sun. It was well-known that the king was afraid of celestial phenomena. The second important event happened on 17th August, 1487, after Wiener Neustadt had been seized. It was a magnificent maneuver in the field of Sollenau, described meticulously by Bonfini. Let me quote just a small part from this rather lengthy text: "He had aligned, deployed all the legions near Wiener Neustadt on a huge meadow... The army, which had left the camp and deployed on the meadow in order to occupy the Noricum narrows and jaws, consisted of eight thousand foot-soldiers, twenty thousand equestrians, and nine thousand chariots (without pages, batboys, victuallers). The King decided to deploy all the combat co-

¹⁹ Šumi 1992: 146.

²⁰ Stopar 1987: 331.

²¹ Bonfini 1959.

lums himself, to assign all the war-tasks according to merits... Obedience was so big, fear and respect to the ruler was combined with such a big love that all his commands were fulfilled quicker than his word left his mouth, a desire to comply with his instruction made it possible to everybody even to sacrifice his life. Silence was so big that neither human voice nor neighing of horses were heard, only commands. Then, the combat columns moved a bit and to a given sign started maneuvers in front of the King to form lines in the shapes of a wedge, circle, triangle and quadrangle, then in the shape of a saw and scissors.”²² In *Haulier at King Matthias* the mythical King Matthias preps the soldiers of his “Black Army” just as historical Matthias in Bonfini’s description during the maneuvers on the Sollenau meadows. There are two states in both the “good story” about King Matthias preserved in Slovenian folk tradition and in Bonfini’s historical description: a stationary, dead state and a vital, dynamic one. Transition from one state to the other happens when the mythical king unsheathes his sword and so does the historical king giving a signal. On the long and broad mythical/mystical “plain” – Bonfini also wrote about a “broad meadow” – the Slovenian man notices the motionless “Black Army” that he has not seen before. The two states of the “Black Army” – existence/non-existence – can be compared to the solar eclipse when the real world disappears irregularly for a short time and then it comes back. These two events – one natural (a solar eclipse), the other historical (military maneuvers) – left a long-lasting mark in the collective memory of Slovenians. The latter took place three years before the historical king’s death. He had led his multinational army, Slovenians within its ranks, very near to Slovenian territories, and the possibility of western expansion towards Noricum became real. We can find the most different layers of collective memory in the polyvalent “good story” *Haulier at King Matthias*, which changed from time to time starting from a mystical layer, to mythological and historical ones.

VI.

The figure of Orpheus in Greek mythology is still puzzling. His memory was enshrined by orphics: They alleged that they got the books containing Orpheus’s teachings, his narrative about the netherworld describing the

²² <http://www.hik.hu/tankonyvtar/site/books/b85/ch39.html>.

knowledge he gained and spread in the world.²³ Two main characteristics of his myth are essential: the wonderful power of his song enchanting the whole world, and his trip to the netherworld. Orpheus descends to the netherworld in vain as he is unable to bring back Euridice. At the same time, another mythical hero, who used to be compared to Orpheus in ancient times, Dionysos, managed to rescue his mother Semele from Hades.²⁴ Hungarian readers might be familiar with a Slovenian song of perfect orphic origin about King Matthias, courtesy of Ágoston Pável. This song is only one of this kind among others in Slovenian folk tradition.²⁵

Godec pred peklom

Stoji mi pole široko,
Po poli steza vglajena.
Po stezi pride kral Matjaš
No se močno hudo drži.
Jega pa sreje potnik star,
Potnik star, sam večni Bog:
»Pa kaj je tebi kralj Matjaš
kaj se ti tak hudo držiš?«
»Bog vam plati na pitanje!
Koj se ja nebi hudo držâ,
Ki že meni za dougo let
Moja luba mrtva leži,
Moja luba mrtva leži,
No duša joj v pekli gori.«
»Oj nikaj, nikaj, kral Matjaš!
Le idi ti na senjem lep,
Si kupi žouête goslice,
No pred peklom zaigraj.
Da boš igrâ minote tri.
De tebe pitâ šatan vrag:
Čuješ, ti igre, kral Matjaš.
Kaj pa bom ti za plačo dâ?

²³ Kerényi 1977: 365.

²⁴ Kerényi 1977: 368.

²⁵ Pável 1976: 7–29.

Ti pa mu (ta) odgovor daj,
 Kaj boš si plačo jemâ sam.«
 Kral Matjaš grè na senjem lép
 No si kupi žouête goslice,
 Te on ide pred pekel,
 No pred peklom zaigrâ.
 Da je že igrâ minote tri,
 Ga je pitâ šatan vrag:
 »Čuješ, ti igre, kral Matjaš!
 Kaj pa bom ti za plačo dâ?«
 »Čuješ, ti šatan, peklenski kral!
 Jaz bom si plačo sam jemâ.«
 On prime lubo za belo rokó
 No jo pela z pekla žerečega.
 Kak hitro jo perpela vun,
 Tak hitro luba pregoûči:
 »Nesrečen bodi, pekel ti,
 kaj bóš zdaj mogâ prazen bit!«

Kak hitro luba pregoûči,
 Tak hitro nazaj v pekel zleti.
 »Nesrečen bodi, jezik ti,
 Kaj nesi mogâ tiho bit!
 Zdaj pa na veke goriâ boš,
 Zdaj pa na veke trpiâ bóš!«!²⁶

The basic difference between the ancient myth and the one quoted above lies in the existence of Christian elements. It is well-known that Orpheus played an outstanding role in Christian mythology. His figure as a good shepherd can often be seen on the walls of catacombs. We do not know how the Orpheus-legend got embedded into Slovenian folk tradition, nor do we know if Matthias took the role of Orpheus or some other mythical figure.²⁷

In ancient times, there were two religions of mystery, part of which were later incorporated into Christianity: the first one was the cult of Mythras, the

²⁶ Pável 1976: 23–24.

²⁷ Pável 1976: 7–29.

Persian sun-god, the second the Greek cult of Dionysos. In both religions, intense yearning for spiritual life was substituted by Orpheus, whom the early Christian Church considered to be the prefiguration of Jesus Christ. An Orpheus-memorial from the 2nd century can be seen at Ptuj even today. It is not by mere chance that it was a whipping post in the Middle Ages.²⁸

It is a special Slovenian feature of the ancient Dionysos-Orpheus parallel that another version of the poem exists. It was recorded by illustrious Slovenian-Croat poet, Stanko Vraz, near Ljutomer, not far from the Hungarian border in the 19th century. In this text, King Matthias descends to hell not to reunite with his lover but his mother.²⁹ We do know of an event of both political and personal nature in King Matthias's biography which was connected to Ptuj in Slovenia. The King's mother and her future daughter-in-law first met at Ptuj. King Matthias married Beatrix, daughter of King Ferdinand I of Naples in 1476. Among the members of the populous Hungarian delegation on their visit to Naples, were 20 Turkish slaves, too.³⁰ Because of the Turkish threat the queen's journey across Carniola and Styria proved to be quite risky. Marauding Turkish groups ambushed the delegation on its way. They arrived at Ptuj in the first days of December and the widow of János Hunyadi was waiting for them. From Ptuj, they proceeded to Székesfehérvár.³¹

Mythological and historical layers of collective memory can be found in both the folk song *Fiddler at the Gate of Hell* and in the story titled *Haulier at King Matthias*. Ptuj is the memory-place, a mythological and historical junction. King Matthias of Slovenian folk tales and folk songs is, in fact, an „archetypical symbol”.³² It is present in Slovenians' collective subconscious, past as well as future. This influences their historical and cultural development, in a modified, slightly misshapen, and actualized form³³: Past, because these texts stand sentinel over the spiritual essence of all the civilizations Slovenians were geographically in contact with during their history; and future, as long as Slovenians still safeguard King Matthias's tradition.

²⁸ Kmecl 1979: 31.

²⁹ Novak 1967: 180.

³⁰ There are plenty of folk songs about King Matthias and the Turks.

³¹ Prém 1902.

³² Frye 1998: 440–448.

³³ Jung 1993: 30–37.

VII.

In Slovenia wooden panels of beehives were decorated by paintings. The oldest panel comes from the middle of the 18th century, but most of them date back to the 19th century³⁴. Paintings of the beehives are like the folk tradition itself: full of psychological, sociological and historical content.³⁵ I will only touch upon those two of the many beehives that are important from the point of view of our topic. Their similar composition can be connected to modernist Slovenian writer, Ivan Cankar's short story titled *Potepuh Marko in kralj Matjaž* (Scallywag Marco and King Matthias). One of the central figures is Christ with the *glory*, who is being undressed by two Roman soldiers. The composition is surrounded by trees on both sides. On the second one, the crowned King Matthias is in the centre, his long beard being divided into two parts on the stone table.³⁶ It is definitely anachronistic that Matthias is being guarded by five Roman soldiers with spears. A leading expert in this field, Gorazd Makarovič considers this to be quite a strange thing: "The king is not sleeping, but sitting under the trees. Soldiers dressed in attire, unusual but very much following Roman fashion, are surrounding him."³⁷ Again, there are two trees on both sides of the panel. The painter of the panel wanted to stress that it is King Matthias as he inscribed *Kral Matias* on the panel. This is rather unusual in this "genre". Soldiers in Roman clothes around him prove that this is an actualization in both cases: Christ with the *glory* and the historical persona of King Matthias can be easily interchanged.

The ritual and mythological system of symbols has proved to be an inexhaustible resource, a sort of "archetypical grammar" for literature.³⁸ This is generally true, and I am going to prove it by the Slovenian example, that literature is genetically connected to mythology through folklore.³⁹ As István Fried puts it, the method of myth criticism "can help in disclosing, interpreting, and deforming the character of biblical and ancient elements in literary works of the 20th century..., it may point out... those hidden –

³⁴ Berk – Bogataj – Pukšič 1993.

³⁵ Gnilšak 1992: 11.

³⁶ This is a well-known legend in which King Matthias is sleeping in the cave of Mount Peca near the stone table. When his beard whips the table three times, the King is resurrected to save the Slovenian people.

³⁷ Makarovič 1962: 115.

³⁸ Meletyinszkij 1985: 152.

³⁹ Meletyinszkij 1985: 357.

mythological – references turning to the Bible, antiquities and – psychological – archetypes.”⁴⁰ Melding fine (folk) art, unwritten tradition, and literature and disentangling the existing archetypical contacts between them may bring us nearer to a better understanding of historical and intellectual layers as well as to a better interpretation of intentions and works of different authors using these layers.

Written in 1905, Ivan Cankar's *Sallywag Marco and King Matthias*⁴¹ is an interesting précis of the Matthias-myth's several-hundred-year-old presence in literature. In one of the key episodes of the literary work, the central hero, Marco, falls asleep and sets out on a "wonderful trip" in his dream. In the middle of the forest, he enters a cave which is like a sepulchral vault. The picture he sees on the wall of the cave is almost the same we have seen on the beehive: "Two warriors were standing at the entrance. Their heads were bowed onto their chests, their hands on the long spear handles. They were the spitting images of the Roman soldiers whom Marco had seen in front of God's tomb in the church. Their faces were grim and covered with their beards."⁴² The images of Matthias and that of Christ on the beehive panels are the same. Given that these beehive pictures were "individual creations", it is not likely that Cankar could have seen the Matthias's image described above. It is identical to the scene in Cankar's literary work. There is no "philological" answer to this coincidence.

The motto of *Sallywag Marco and King Matthias* – "If Matthias's age comes back, peasants will be glad" – helps us identify the Slovenian folk tale, which was Cankar's resource. It could be found in Ivan Grafenauer's book titled *The Drunken Man at King Matthias*.⁴³ From a literary and "ideological" point of view, Cankar found exciting only one element of the folk tale: the figure of the drunken main hero, whom he modeled to be a really ambiguous figure according to modernist aesthetic principles. Marco, embodiment of Slovenians' long search for truth, is a real dionysian figure. He is an artist, a beggar, a drunken man, a tragic and a comic figure all in one. Sallywag Marco, among other "nomadic" heroes, is an exceptionally complicated character, inasmuch as he is apparently in dialog with concrete folk tradition. This is why he had to take certain restrictions into consideration. Since he is a symbolic hero, his life has no traditional line of development, only a

⁴⁰ Fried 1997: 3.

⁴¹ Cankar 1973: 7–96.

⁴² Cankar 1973: 227.

⁴³ Grafenauer 1951: 227–228.

biography with natural cycles, always bringing him back to the transcended system of values.⁴⁴

One of the most archaic, stable and very popular element of Slovenian folk tradition, Matthias's myth appeared to suit Cankar in answering a lot of problems concerning the destiny of the Slovenian people, and the actual dilemmas of individuals, too.

Why did the Matthias-myth become such an important part of Cankar's work? At the end of 1890s, Cankar encountered questions which he had to answer in his literary works. One of these questions concerned the serious accusation of lacking a national identity, i.e. a relation to Slovenian national tradition. The Matthias-myth, as a vivid and mandatory part of this tradition, seems to have been embedded in the writer's thoughts. It is a suitable vehicle to pose those questions of fate which are permanently present in Slovenian history: the defencelessness of the Slovenian people through the centuries; the tragic fate of Slovenian national history; the permanent presence of occupying foreign powers; the lack of opportunities to flourish as a nation accompanied with social inequality. A constant presence in Cankar's works, the Matthias-myth proves that the writer did not want to reckon with the myth.⁴⁵ He wanted to actualize and interpret it at the intersection of collectivism and individualism.

In Slovenian literature, and especially in Cankar's works, modernist literary sensitivity and the literary aesthetical approach (which originate from secession, a response to the European and national folk traditions) have found answers to the final questions of a world beyond our everyday experiences. Heroes of mythology and national folklore – Dionysos, Orpheus, King Matthias, Kurent, and so on – are present in literature directly or indirectly in a veiled manner, which gives direct, oblique, and, at the same time enigmatic answers to both the hot questions of a historical era and to the momentary individual problems of the writer. First deliberately and then spectacularly, Slovenian literature used folk tradition because it had to prove its national orientation. Later, it blurred it to become like palimpsest, trying to make the reader even more insecure by the ambiguous content.

The persona of King Matthias of Slovenian folk tradition and literature reveals a multifaceted figure, mythological past and historical reality stuck to his mantle sometimes in recognizable and understandable, but more often in

⁴⁴ Juvan 1989: 479.

⁴⁵ Cankar 1959: 435–439; Zadavec 1980: 153–165.

fathomless layers. The three "good stories" regarded as a sound narrative of Slovenian collective memory proved to be an everlasting place of memory.

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Hungarian King Matthias Cult in the 18th Century

King Matthias is the most popular hero in Hungarian folklore. Matthias Hunyadi is known as a folklore hero by all the people of the Carpathian Basin. There is a very extensive body of literature on Matthias, mainly based on research by historians.¹ Oral tradition linked to his name has been widely collected, mainly by folklorists. The data of folklore is very far from historical facts. The king's figure appears in many different ways: above all in prose genres, tales, anecdotes, legends, and aitiological stories. There are also proverbs, songs, ballads, historical songs, children's rhymes and popular plays associated with his name. Over the centuries, he has been the main hero of a variety of genres.²

In the light of historical development, we know that in the 15th century (his own period) his name was preserved in songs of praise, anecdotes and chronicles, and his deeds were recorded, mainly in Latin.³ In the following century chronicles (in verse and prose) were written about him in Hungarian, supplemented by anecdotes drawn from oral tradition that cannot be linked to historical events.⁴ The written records refer to the folkloric elements.⁵ We find very little data referring to folklore in manuscript and printed records dating from the 17th century. Typically, the importance of his deeds and the significance of his figure were compared to Attila, victorious leader of the Hun, inasmuch as he was regarded as a descendant and successor of Attila. According to 17th century songs, King Matthias inherited Attila's sword, and the invincible leader conquered and defeated his enemies with this weapon.

The 18th century, the Age of Enlightenment, saw a great increase in stories about the idealised king, the wise and just ruler who liked jokes and wandered about his country helping others. The data that has survived in

¹ Kubinyi 2008.

² Kríza 2007.

³ Bonfini 1995:1011.

⁴ Jankovics – Klaniczay 1994.

⁵ Benczédi Székely 1960.

writing or spread through performance and oral tradition shows that this popularising, idealising picture of King Matthias prevailed in Hungarian culture. On this occasion, I will outline the main characteristics of that period, showing that the veneration of the national king – which became one of the representative themes of 19th century folklore – kept alive the tradition of earlier periods.⁶

1. In his rich oeuvre, the versatile 18th century writer András Dugonics strove to shape and spread the cult of Matthias. His drama *Toldi* featured the figures of two characteristic folklore heroes. One was the strong, brave, loyal soldier and the other the just king; they achieved their successes by helping and strengthening each other, and became defenceless without each other. Toldi is thus King Matthias's loyal servant and unconditional helper. The just, good-hearted, wise ruler who helps the poor but is not free of errors, is King Matthias.⁷ The drama is based on a little-known play described by the author as an "intrigue play": Karl Christmann: *Der Statthalter von Corfu*.⁸ The translation is relatively free and only the main threads of the plot are similar. In the notes Dugonics gives his reasons for changing the names of the protagonists. He placed the historical heroes in the drama so that he could once again focus attention on their figures and rescue them from oblivion. He stressed that every means should be used to arouse interest in Hungarian historical figures, and by recalling their deeds turn the spotlight on the values of the historical past. He linked the demand for use of the native tongue with praise of the historical past. It should be noted that, independently of this particular play, writers of that period often turned to works of literature from earlier centuries. They reviewed, rewrote and republished forgotten works. The anecdotes of Solomon and Markalf are an example.⁹ It was in this period that the 16th century Hungarian translation came to be included in collections of anecdotes, with the important difference that the hero was no longer Solomon but King Matthias and Markalf became a simple peasant. Pieces from the collections of jests in mediaeval literature also became known in this period as adventures of King Matthias.

⁶ Kríza 1999/a.

⁷ Dugonics 1794.

⁸ Christmann 1782.

⁹ Salamon királynak 1782.

András Dugonics compiled an important collection of sayings, *Példabeszédek* [Proverbs]. The merit of the collection is that it explains the proverbs.¹⁰ It attempts to determine the story, anecdote or event from which the given saying was derived. He linked 28 sayings to the name of King Matthias. He took a number of these from Galeotto Marzio (a contemporary of the Corvin king). Dugonics himself lists the source in his notes. It can be said that the writer, in the Age of Enlightenment, consciously turned to the 300-year-old source when he revived anecdotes praising King Matthias.¹¹ In spite of this, he did not publish a simple translation because he presented all of them in an enjoyable form and strove to record the context of the saying. We also know that Dugonics wrote down and published a few of the texts he had borrowed from Galeotto Marzio in the *Győri Kalendárium* between 1756–1790 again. Those texts that had become popular.¹² He probably recorded for us the version that had been passed down orally because the language is simple and easily understood. He added his own explanations in footnotes. For example, commenting on the proverb: “only the pike from Csór has no liver”, Dugonics notes that King Matthias was, in fact, very fond of fish liver, but he must have heard the anecdote circulating in oral tradition about the pike liver stolen in an inn, that became the basis of the saying. In another communication he notes that the anecdote given without the king’s name very soon became associated with Matthias and became a popular story. The still popular saying “There was a dog fair in Buda only once” first appeared in 1792 in the newspaper *Magyar Hírmondó*. Dugonics, following exactly the source he knew, wrote down the affair as “A dog fair is held only once in Buda”. A comparison of the two texts shows both the evolution of oral tradition and the spread of the cult of Matthias. Dugonics published not only proverbs in his collection titled *Példabeszédek*. In his notes, on the set phrases he gave details on the antecedents of the saying. He liked to link the given expressions to deeds of King Matthias. All this demonstrates how the Matthias cult was spread consciously in the Age of Enlightenment.

One of the oldest and still one of the best known sayings – “King Matthias is dead, justice is lost” – is not included in Dugonics’s collection, although it appeared in the writings of his contemporaries in a number of

¹⁰ Dugonics 1820.

¹¹ Kríza 2005: 128.

¹² Galeotto 1593.

variants, either in verse, summing up lessons or as a paraphrase. However rich the *Példabeszédek* collection of sayings may be in folklore creations associated with King Matthias, it is far from complete. We now know that the generally anonymous writers of almanacs linked a number of anecdotes known from the international literature to the name of King Matthias.¹³ Gedeon Ráday – an author of that age – for example, does this in his poem about the participants in a competition for laziness when he speaks about the lazy people of jesting King Matthias. We know today, that the antecedents can be linked to Persian sources.

2. The school dramas played an important part in shaping the culture of the Age of Enlightenment. Besides the students and participants, many people must have seen the performances and been familiar with their themes. The most popular historical hero of these performances was King Mathias and with him, the entire Hunyadi house.¹⁴ In recent decades research on the school dramas has contributed to our knowledge of this important branch of 18th century culture with the publication of source material. The themes and heroes of the school plays were far removed from the historical events, including those related to the Hunyadi family. The performances with historical themes followed the genre requirements of school dramas. The heroes generally appeared as allegorical figures and emphasised the moral message as the lesson of the play.¹⁵ In dealing with their themes they ignored the real events of the past. The famous ruler, the just king and a historical figure serving as an example for the whole of Europe proved to be an excellent hero for the anonymous authors of school dramas. Attention was already focused on the figure of King Mathias in a 17th century drama staged in Nagyszombat (Tyrnau, Tirnava). This portrayal probably served as a model for later plays. Very few complete dramas have survived, but the documents listing the scenes and actors give some idea of the actual performances. We know from such sources, for example, that a Jesuit school drama performed in Kolozsvár (Klausenburg, Cluj) in 1702 presented the splendid wedding of King Matthias and Catherine Podjebrad. The marriage was the culmination of a happy love. The trust and affection that finally led to marriage arose between them during the king's im-

¹³ Kríza 1993.

¹⁴ Staud 1996.

¹⁵ Varga 1992.

prisonment in Prague. The intercession of the princess did more for the release of Mátyás Hunyadi than the ransom, not mentioned at all on the playbill. The young girl's role before the marriage and the intrigues against the relationship between Matthias and Catherine that the young couple had to overcome, added to the significance of the sumptuous wedding. The narrative unit of the "girl freeing a slave" known from folklore appeared in the Baroque school drama. Folk poetry can help to throw light on the theme.¹⁶ We know a number of Southern Slav ballads and heroic songs about how King Matthias was freed from captivity with the help of the daughter of the emperor or the sultan. When choosing secular themes the school dramas drew on elements from popular poetry. As a result, when the two young people meet, folklore elements can be found in all the scenes showing the course of their love and marriage. According to the drama, external factors raise obstacles to their relationship and by overcoming them they become heroes, their wedding is a veritable triumphal procession. The Jesuit school drama on the marriage of King Matthias was probably influenced by the romance of an unknown author of Szendrő telling the story of Szilágyi and Hajmási, or by the Slovene ballad about the flight of Matthias.¹⁷ The idealised relationship between King Matthias and Catherine Podjebrad also figures in other contemporary works. While the 15th century sources barely mention this marriage, two hundred years later Catherine appears as an ideal wife, as the play by László Szentjóni Szabó proves.¹⁸

3. The popular works, such as the drama by Szentjóni Szabó, mentioned above, also appeared in cheap editions. However, most of these writings were intended for listeners rather than for readers. The texts were shorter, the sentences less flamboyantly Baroque, they followed the pattern of natural speech, and the narration of the story proceeded towards a climax. Stories about King Matthias were included in the literary pieces in the almanacs published annually. Between 1741–1752, the *Győri Kalendárium* [Győr Almanac] published 28 anecdotes under the title *Hunyad Mátyás M.O. 37-dik Királyának bölts és tréfás beszédiről és tselekedeteiről szolló fel-téteinek continuatioja* [Continuation of the account of the wise and humorous words and deeds of Matthias Hunyad, 37th king of Hungary]. The title appears to

¹⁶ Kríza 1999/b.

¹⁷ Kríza 2007: 101.

¹⁸ Szentjóni Szabó 1792.

suggest that these were the sayings of Galeotto Marzio, but the surviving data indicates otherwise, because the unknown author drew on the *Gesta Romanorum*, the stories about Solomon and Markalf, and other sources unknown to us. In the 18th century many different collections of anecdotes appeared in the neighbouring countries, and Hungarian writers drew on these, indeed the same publisher issued compilations in both Hungarian and German. It was here that Matthias the jest-loving student first appeared as the hero of anecdotes that became a popular literary topos in the following century.

In 1749, the *Győri Kalendárium* published an anecdote about the sweet-smelling coachman. It was set in Prague, in the time of George Podjebrad. The story goes like this: On a particular feast day, the court coachman wants to kiss the queen's hand, and so he would like to make himself sweet-smelling because the queen detests the smell of the stables. After long preparations, the coachman reaches the young Matthias who recommends an apothecary's product with caraway and a pleasant perfume. The long-awaited moment arrives when the queen gets on his coach, but after a while the product begins to cause an "intestinal storm" and he "emits clouds of smoke like an old woman." The queen gets very indignant. Of course, he is unable to kiss her hand and the young man in his shame is forced to leave not only his work but also the town. The whole story is marked by informal, outspoken jest. The text is not vulgar or coarse, but it pokes fun simultaneously at foppishness, vain aspiration and simple-mindedness. The antecedent to this popular style of jesting anecdote can be found in the chronicle of Thuróczy, but it also fits the image of King Matthias later recorded by folklorists.¹⁹ Folk tradition includes the figure of the womanising king, the hero with a big appetite for good food, cheerful adventures and practical jokes, as well as the just and wise ruler. The constructed figure of Matthias as a young man, the prince who never was, is found not only in oral tradition: in the following century the jesting young Matthias figured prominently in literature.

In 1784, the *Győri Kalendárium* printed the story of the peasant budgeting his pennies, linking it to King Matthias. The tale, which figures in the *Catalogue of Hungarian Folktale Types*²⁰ with an enormous international pool for comparative analysis, is told in a good performing style. The brief intro-

¹⁹ Thuróczy 1978.

²⁰ MNK 921.

duction, the metaphors used there, the formulas of address and the short, clear replies are all signs of a routine performer. The popularity of the almanac was almost certainly enhanced by the enjoyable stories it contained. It is quite clear that this series in the *Győri Kalendárium* was produced with literary intentions. Although we have no proof, it is quite possible that the series was used as a source a few years later by József Péczely, who diligently awakened the memory of King Matthias and János Hunyadi with his verse. In the literary works, not only by Péczely but also by Gedeon Ráday, the Matthias legends are full of moral lessons adapted to suit the taste of the age. As a result, they are less effective than folklore creations, but the names of these authors are known in the literature on the subject.

The Matthias anecdotes published in the 1792 issue of *Magyar Hírmondó*, the first Hungarian magazine, are known to have been popular. This can be seen in the fact that the same texts were used a few years later at the beginning of János Kis's collection of anecdotes that was published twice. Then, just a few years later, the writer Ádám Pálóczi Horváth used them as the basis for a play, spiced up with his imagination.²¹ The adventures and jests of the clever girl – known to folkloristics as type number MNK 875 – were probably the frame the writer used for his work. The tale of the clever girl – which is actually of Persian origin and became widely known in the Middle Ages through the story of Pontianus – has been recorded in many variants in the Hungarian-speaking territory. We know of its variants linked to King Matthias from the 18th century; they were related to the spread of popular poetry about the king.

In the Age of Enlightenment, attention turned to earlier historical events, and to the classification of the results. The publication of sources began. Among them were the decrees and correspondence of King Matthias and the relevant literature on him. Antonio Bonfini's compilation on the history of the Hungarians saw four editions. It was never published so much in any other period. The Hungarian translation of Bonfini's work, Heltai's *Magyarok krónikája* [Chronicle of the Hungarians] was brought out by the same publisher who had earlier published the 28 Matthias anecdotes in the *Győri Kalendárium*. A new edition of Thuróczy's chronicle was published in 1769, as was a monograph on the literature of King Matthias's age.²² More and

²¹ Pálóczi Horváth 1816.

²² Thuróczy 1978.

more aspects of the spread and strengthening of the cult of King Matthias can be observed.

4. Besides satisfying the demands of the literate, popularising works also appeared in cheap editions for the lower social strata. The historical writings of Heltai were published in serial form at this time in Buda and Pozsony. The section on King Matthias was also published separately under the title of *História...* in a small format octavo booklet by the Landerer press. The original text was simplified, eliminating old-style expressions and adopting modern usage and speech style. Such popularising publications satisfied the interest in Hungarian history. The Landerer press operated in Buda and in 1776 published a compilation on János Hunyadi's battles against the Turks and the glorious deeds of King Matthias. The long, Baroque-style title, *História...*, states the content of the work, the publication's aim of popularising history, and the reading public it targeted. It was intended for people of modest means with an interest in history.²³

The chronicle as a genre was no longer in fashion in the 18th century. It has been shown that the antecedents and source of the *História...* of 1776 were from two centuries earlier, the 16th century Hungarian chronicles and chronicle songs. The verses presenting János Hunyadi are almost word-for-word equivalents of the poems of Mátyás Nagybáncsai, but the author has treated his source very freely in the description of the battles, combining several events, and stressing the significance of feats of arms even if they end in defeat.

The reports circulating about the descent of Hunyadi are presented in a fabulous form, mainly on the basis of Heltai's work.²⁴ The compiler took care to preserve credibility. Painting realistic pictures, he tells how the woman from Marsina came with her young son to the king, to offer the child to him. The woman shows him a gold ring to remind him of an old, amorous adventure. The king blushes but takes the child and calls him János Hunyadi. In the following century this became the most popular story about the origin of the family.

It is almost impossible to identify the authors of popular literature if they wished to conceal the writer's identity. This is the situation in the case of the Matthias chronicle too. It can be determined that the Landerer press tried to issue works of quality and undertook an important task with the publication

²³ Kríza 1993.

²⁴ Heltai 1981.

of popular books. The name of the author was not important in the latter cases. The *Historia* was one of those publications. The aim set out on the title-page as “a compilation for those who delight in the chronicles of Hungary” avoids mentioning the name of the author. The *História...* is thus a short, general outline for readers interested in past events. Research has shown that the writer of the chronicle drew on the writings of Heltai, Görcsöni and Nagybáncai for both the prose and verse passages. The only exception is the part about King Matthias’s battle of Hainburg.²⁵

5. The battle of Hainburg was given an insignificant role in the chronicles on the deeds of King Matthias, although it was very protracted and involved considerable losses. The reality did not fit into the idealised picture of the invincible king. The compiler of the *História...* in the late 18th century, a time of growing anti-Habsburg sentiments, wrote a new chronicle featuring a song on the battle preceding the capture of Vienna. A new chronicle and in part a verse-chronicle were created at the end of the 18th century. The author adopted the style of earlier periods, using an archaic form to describe an important event, the victory over the Germans. He went to great lengths to depict the merciless fighting by using exaggerations and listing gods of the ancient world. King Matthias called the entire population of the country to join battle. Hungarians, Croatians, Romanians, Slovaks, Serbs and Szeklers came running. Paid soldiers, dignitaries from the royal court, townsmen and nobles stood beside him, in other words the whole population was represented in all its diversity. The king led them into battle on his mount Pegasus, the hope of victory in his heart. The army, representing the single, common will, “crushed the enemy”.

The 86-line verse-chronicle is actually a historical vision of the victory of the national king, the combined efforts of the people of the country and the victory over the enemy. This very conscious formulation must be the work of a cultured and well-informed person. This is also confirmed by the inclusion of the ancient gods and the faultless versification. Hidden among the lines, we find the confession: the author of the verse was Antal Veszelszki. The author of the verse-chronicle is not known to literary historians. My research shows that he was probably born around 1730 (perhaps in the vicinity of Sopron) and died around 1800, probably in Vác. He was a medical doctor and botanist who wrote a number of popular

²⁵ Kríza 2007: 117.

science works. Wishing to advance the culture of the age, he turned to the historical past to strengthen national consciousness. What he really undertook was the transmission of a source; he simplified the chronicles he knew, made them more colourful, and rewrote them for people with little education but a desire to learn. Veszelszki displays the same conscious aspiration embraced by Dugonics to bring forgotten history to people's attention. He wrote: "I strove to make the histories of our country the subject of my writing, and especially the histories of those people in our country who, in their lifetime, enjoyed great fame and respect: but after their death they fell into oblivion, so that after such great deeds their names are not known either in modest little writings or in the mouths of peasants, because our writers left nothing written about them and they are forgotten for good."

Conclusion

18th century written sources contain a wide body of evidence testifying that the cult of King Matthias was very much part of the culture of the age. Facts living in oral tradition were recorded by literate persons, and when writing prose or plays in Hungarian, authors consciously turned to historical heroes, especially King Matthias. For this reason, when popularising national history and literature, they devoted special attention to the 15th and 16th century antecedents as well as various sources in Latin and Hungarian. They coloured the historical facts with elements drawn from folklore. History, literature, and oral tradition were intertwined. The figure of King Matthias became far removed from the real historical person and his name linked to all the anecdotes, tales, and works of any genre in the international sources featuring a wise, just, jest-loving national king. In various folkloric sources, the hero can be typified in differing, seemingly contradictory ways. Nevertheless, it can be said in very general terms that King Matthias is characterised by the social role he plays. He is the one who helps peasants in trouble, scolds lords abusing their power, gives money to the poor, helps the bold and punishes the wealthy. King Matthias is in direct contact with his people, he meets them personally in towns and villages, fields and forests. They fight, eat or even till the soil together. Explanations of place-names are linked to King Matthias with stories characteristic of folk tales; according to folklorists, these explanations represent a genre of its own right which

emerged in recent times. All these characteristics made it possible for the person of King Matthias and the folklore related to him to be independent of the different ethnic groups. King Matthias is a hero of Slovene, Ruthenian, Slovak, Serb and Croatian as well as Hungarian folk poetry. It was in this way that the Matthias tradition became part of popular culture in the 18th century.

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Divagazioni sul mito di Mattia Corvino nella letteratura Ungherese (secc. XV-XVII)

L'argomento è vasto e limito pertanto le mie riflessioni sostanzialmente a quattro domini letterari: 1) l'agiografia in qualche modo legata alla vicenda storica degli Hunyadi; 2) la ricostruzione dell'età corviniana operata nell'*históriás ének* (canto storico) di Ambrus Göröcsöni; 3) il culto del re Mattia in Miklós Bogáti Fazakas; 4) la trattatistica e il pensiero politico di Miklós Zrínyi (1620-1664).

1. San Giacomo della Marca e gli hunyadi

A parer mio, il mito europeo di Mattia Corvino e la sua diffusione affondano le radici nell'agiografia dell'Osservanza francescana. I biografi di San Giacomo della Marca, ad esempio, dimostrano di essere ben informati delle cose d'Ungheria e segnalano già numerosi elementi fondanti lo stereotipo del sovrano ideale. Basterà per ora un solo esempio: la *virtus*, su cui tanto si discettava allora, doveva consistere essenzialmente in un'arte del buon governo che non poteva prescindere dalla dovuta attenzione per i problemi religiosi. Come si può osservare, già qui si scorge l'avvio di quel processo di mitizzazione che subito dopo diverrà inerrabile. Ciò si spiega però, almeno agli inizi, con il ruolo svolto dai francescani nell'Ungheria del XV secolo e con il rapporto instauratosi fra essi e i sovrani ungheresi: e sono fattori, questi, che rivestono grande importanza nel processo storico-culturale di quella nazione. Nessuna meraviglia, dunque, se quell'Ordine divenne il braccio religioso-spirituale della politica espansionistica di Mattia Corvino: già in precedenza, infatti, S. Giacomo della Marca, come anticipatore dell'attività di S. Giovanni da Capestrano, era stato un valido servitore della causa anti-turca e quindi della politica di János Hunyadi. Ed un quadro completo lo abbiamo se ai nomi dei due Santi testé citati aggiungiamo quello di Gabriele Rangone: questi tre personaggi sono importanti dal punto di vista della nascita del mito di Mattia Corvino perché

con la loro attività anche inquisitoria sul terreno confessionale contribuirono a creare l'immagine del sovrano ideale non solo per le virtù militari ma anche per quelle civili e religiose¹.

I due elementi, quindi, della lotta al turco e della lotta agli eretici servono sin d'ora a porre in evidenza i due problemi che sono al centro della situazione politica d'Ungheria nei secc. XV, XVI e XVII, cioè da re Mattia a Zrínyi. La soluzione della questione confessionale è considerata condizione indispensabile per la saldezza del regno d'Ungheria. In altre parole, si può e si vuole indicare il binomio o meglio la duplice problematica che interessò l'età degli Hunyadi e poi il pensiero politico di Zrínyi. Vi è una sorta di schema che può aiutarci a comprendere questo nesso (unione politica e unità religiosa) fondamentale per la situazione storico-politica d'Ungheria. XV secolo: francescani contro ussiti (Boemia e non solo) e patareni (Bosnia); XVI secolo: la Riforma contro il cattolicesimo considerato una falsa religione, cioè un'eresia rispetto al cristianesimo autentico; XVII secolo: Zrínyi media fra Riforma e Controriforma, cioè mira a rifondare un regno sul modello di quello di Mattia Corvino, passando però attraverso l'intero apparato ideologico che scaturiva dal cosiddetto *bűnlajstrom*, cioè dall'elenco dei presunti mali della nazione ungherese che richiedeva, perché indispensabile, una catarsi etica di un intero popolo e il riscatto morale di un'intera vicenda storica.

Sono consapevole del fatto che non pochi ed utili risultati sono stati acquisiti da quando si è affermato che „molti punti della vita di S. Giacomo restano ancora oscuri”². Ma del conseguente spazio investigativo, che ovviamente e certamente necessita di ulteriori esplorazioni, tento ora di occupare solo un pezzettino, limitatamente al tema del contributo, magari indiretto, che il Santo ha offerto al processo di mitizzazione degli Hunyadi nel più ampio contesto della sua attività svolta in Ungheria. E proprio perché „noi oggi non possediamo una biografia critica di San Giacomo perché i suoi primi biografi, cioè Venanzio da Fabriano, Giovanni Battista Petrucci e Aurelio Simmaco De Jacobiti hanno volutamente modificato i dati di cui disponevano per offrire una biografia per così dire 'ideale' del Santo, una biografia intesa come l'eroica peregrinatio' in Italia e fuori operata da un

¹ Klaniczay 1976: 166–190 [182]; Klaniczay 1985: 67–76 [75].

² A quest'affermazione contenuta in Candela han fatto seguito importanti contributi, fra i quali si vedano almeno D'Angelo 2007: 49–66.

predicatore eccezionale, allievo di San Bernardino da Siena”³; proprio perché – aggiungo ancora – “la biografia di Giacomo è ricca di elementi fantasiosi, secondo i quali egli avrebbe girato la Germania, il Baltico, la Scandinavia, la Russia”⁴; ritengo allora quanto mai opportuno riconsiderare quanto si è detto, a proposito dell’Ungheria, in ambito agiografico. Non solo: ma ridurrò qui le mie riletture al solo lavoro (1490) di Aurelio Simmaco De Jacobiti che, benché scritto “per commemorare la figura di San Giacomo che aveva guarito il biografo da una malattia”⁵, sembra voler superare – almeno per quel che qui c’interessa – i limiti dell’occasionalità:

Invano se affatiga ogni vivente
che pensa incomensare cosa alcuna
et non ricorre con tucta sua mente
ad quil che fece caelo, sole et luna
el mare conj la terra veramente
et li elementi et plancta ciascuna
con li animali, per sua gran bontate,
un Dio solo in vera eaternitate⁶.

L’afflato francescano di quest’*incipit* si estenderà all’intero poema, sino a determinarne tutta la struttura compositiva, abilmente e volutamente disegnata secondo una regressione quasi epica che scandisce sempre, ad ogni avvio di canto, la scelta di un’invocazione non di maniera ma salda e militante. Quest’ultima sembra voler indicare e dettare un’interpretazione-comprensione che – pur non rifuggendo da sagaci riferimenti alla mitologia classica – vuole gestire la scrittura secondo le istanze di un Umanesimo ancor più esigente di quello a noi più noto. Siamo in un periodo di forte crisi della cristianità. La predicazione diventa anche politica e si rivolge ai problemi sociali. Storiografia ed agiografia promuovono l’insegnamento morale⁷. „I santi dell’Osservanza sono sì dei riformatori, come sottolinea Sante Bonacore nella sua bioagiografia di Bernardino da Siena, ma sono soprattutto dei predicatori”⁸. Il pensiero filosofico si ammanta di tematiche avvincenti: il rapporto fra virtù e fortuna, la necessità di conciliare, anzi di far convergere

³ Cuozzo 2007: 1–4 [3].

⁴ Galamb 2007: 16.

⁵ Serpico 2006: 135–155 [140].

⁶ Qui e in seguito cito da De Jacobiti 1968: 7.

⁷ Kristeller 1998: 23–74 [30].

⁸ Pellegrini 2007: 265–274 [274].

impegno politico e impegno etico. In questa situazione così complessa ed anche incerta la storiografia si avvale dell'agiografia e viceversa:

Signori, stati actenti ad ascoltare
queto mio dire senza alcun fallire,
per che voglio per ordine contare
la vita et morti con molto desiri:
fra Jacobo biato, che chiamare
de la Marca fasse al volgare diri;
jn Napol jace lo suo corpo degno,
lo spirito posa nel celeste regno⁹.

La novità dell'eleganza umanistica e l'esigenza di ricorrere a sperimentate forme arcaiche della tradizione orale si sostengono a vicenda in una sorta di strategia della predicazione che vuole inculcare nobili principi e odori di santità. Ne deriva un'accattivante serie di ricostruzioni che non può non giovarci nella comprensione di una temperie storico-culturale che sembra voler accomunare ben tre secoli – il XV, il XVI e il XVII – nella ricerca di una via di fuga dinanzi ad un inarrestabile male oscuro che coinvolge e travolge ogni individuo ed ogni storia. Il nostro Santo sembra gettare un ponte tra Italia e Ungheria anche relativamente a ciò ed al come si può e si deve riferire su di lui: nei due Paesi, nei secoli sopra ricordati, persone colte, profondamente impregnate di cultura classica, non salutano malvolentieri la possibilità, la necessità e la volontà di rivolgersi ad ogni uomo con gli strumenti retorici che più sembrano adatti alla bisogna. Filologi ed amanuensi, versificatori e cantastorie si pongono al servizio di una umanità stanca che deve essere rigenerata:

Come più volte ho dicto Signor cari,
li affandi se governa con misura.
Lassarò, quinci, quisti mei cantari,
nell'altro seguirò con bona cura,
et non serrando li mei versi avari,
de recontarne com mente sicura
che fece il nostro sancto jn Ungaria
Jn Apollonia Bosna et Valachia¹⁰.

⁹ De Jacobiti 1968: 9.

¹⁰ De Jacobiti 1968: 33.

E così viene perentoriamente indicato il vero pericolo della cristianità, l'aspide che perfido e maligno s'insinuava nel suo seno sino a provocare poi il fenomeno dirompente della Riforma:

Quando ad Roma un messenger ne venne
 al gran pastor de tucti christiani
 da Pannonia et già se retenne
 dicendo: Sancto patre, ora mattenne
 ad Nicola papa jbj se presentanj
 et volta qua i toi pinzer sovrani:
 nel regno illirio et tucta la Valachia
 regna semenza de falsa heresia¹¹.

Gli avvenimenti seguenti li conosciamo, o almeno possiamo immaginarli nella fantasia narrativa del biografo. Quel che invece appare ora più importante è la disinvolta rivisitazione della vittoria di Belgrado (*Nándor-fehérvár*), che offre l'occasione di porre accanto a János Hunyadi („el vaivoda“) la triade più zelante e significativa della Gloria Francescana:

Ad respecto de can nulla era adiri
 el vaivoda et fra Johan ch'io dissi
 de Dio amico loro hebbe ad sequiri
 con frati et clero et genti qual potissi
 Jn spirtu raptu tucto hebbe ad vidiri
 confortando la plebe chel sequisse
 sperando jn Christo et la matre Maria
 che vincitor serrà de lor boria.
 Signori, questi fuoro tre compagni
 vestiti frati quasi d'un volere:
 el seraphin Francesco senza lagni
 de sequitare glie venne jn calere.
 Lochi jn diversi et tempi molto magni
 che fuoro tre colonne ad non mentere:
 san Berardino et Johanni ad Capistrano
 el nostro sancto, come qui ve sprano¹².

¹¹ De Jacobiti 1968: 35.

¹² De Jacobiti 1968: 51. Ancor più esplicitamente saranno rappresentati i tre santi a De Jacobiti 1968: 76. "Fra Jacobo, Berardino et fra Johanni, / che tucti tre foron poi de granni".

Ed ecco il momento e i luoghi in cui l'agiografia si pone apertamente al servizio della mitografia. La storia – o la sua narrazione idealizzata o, ancor meglio, la sua invenzione – ispira magie verbali e tecniche compositive semplici e fluenti. Oppure, a ben vedere, si può avvertire anche un'aggressività espositiva, un irrequieto nervosismo rappresentativo che non vuole o non riesce a frenare l'audacia dell'omaggio a chi è riuscito a cicatrizzare ferite che probabilmente non vorrebbero chiudersi:

Johan, Vayvoda dicto jn nostra lingua,
Bianco locutenente de Ungaria
che tridici anni come qui distingua,
l'Ungari resse et ancor la Valachia
jn pieno sceptro d'ogni honor se jmpingua
patre de Ladislao et de Mathia,
buon capitano jn arme et jn governo
magnanimo et gentil come ve scerno.

[...]

Or te conforta, Johan, mio valente,
che presto d'esta vita fai partita,
l'anima rendi ad Jesu omnipotente;
da quisto mondo tornj ad leta vita
el tuo Mathia cridi certamente
serrà d'alta virtute et ben complita,
qual vero re serrà de l'Ongaria
et grandi facti farà senza busia.

[...]

Et per havere favore allo suo stato
pensò Mathia voler liberare,
lo quale stava allora jnpresionato
presso tal re, ma primo de sposare
sua figlia, glie promise et poi jurato,

et cus'il fece et per tale operare
fuo facto re de tucta Ungaria,
non restando del Re altra genia¹³.

Quest'ampia ed informata esposizione delle vicende interne ungheresi rivela l'interesse mitizzante dei francescani nei confronti degli Hunyadi. Anche la biografia di San Giacomo della Marca è testimonianza di questo processo di mitizzazione avviato appunto già nel XV secolo, cioè contemporaneamente alle fortune politiche del regno d'Ungheria. Nessuna meraviglia, del resto, dal momento che la politica del papato veniva strumentalizzata dagli Hunyadi: la lotta alle eresie serviva infatti a difendere anche gli equilibri politici dell'intera regione. La severità dei francescani, nonostante il favore loro accordato dagli Hunyadi, veniva però considerata un ostacolo all'unione politica antiturca, perché il regno d'Ungheria aveva bisogno anche dell'apporto degli eretici e/o degli scismatici. Possiamo dunque pensare che anche a Zrínyi, due secoli dopo, dovette piacere questa moderazione degli Hunyadi in campo confessionale.

Napoli è come la Pompei del Grand Tour. Una spessa coltre di dimenticanza ci conserva reliquie e cimeli di un glorioso e prezioso passato. Si potrebbe dire che anche qui ogni pietra ci parla della storia degli uomini, dell'arte professata, della cultura posseduta. Il senso della solitudine – che però qui non è abbandono – è forse l'elemento che più attira il ricercatore e/o il turista non superficiale o distratto. Nessuna critica di stampo giornalistico nelle mie parole, dunque, per carità! E del resto l'eventuale abbandono è più sentito che praticato, ché scienza e coscienza della responsabilità si avvertono negli „addetti ai lavori“, e la memoria è insomma viva e presente. Eppure... Luoghi ove prima si pregava, ora, solo apparentemente ci appaiono inefficaci dal punto di vista liturgico: tuttavia ogni dipinto ed ogni affresco sono preghiere sempre attuali, ricordi sempre vivi nella coscienza di chi vede nella storia della cultura e nella bellezza delle forme artistiche uno dei beni supremi da cui l'umanità può attingere per poter continuare ad essere consapevole della propria identità culturale. È chiaro che tutto ciò è valido anche relativamente alla diffusione ed alla presenza a Napoli del culto di San Giacomo della Marca.

¹³ De Jacobiti 1968: 83–84.

S. Maria La Nova è il luogo che conserva i ricordi più significativi della figura e dell'attività del nostro zelante pioniere dell'Osservanza¹⁴. A sinistra è la maestosa cappella di San Giacomo della Marca, ampliata intorno al 1504 da Consalvo di Cordova e restaurata da Cosimo Fanzago fra il 1634 e il 1646. Gli affreschi nella volta della cappella sono di Massimo Stanzione (1585 ca. – 1658 ca.) e raffigurano Scene dalla vita di san Giacomo della Marca (1644–1646); l'altare maggiore ha custodito le spoglie del Santo fino al 2000, quando queste vennero traslate a Monteprandone, presso il Santuario "Santa Maria delle Grazie". In questa stessa chiesa, in una cappella laterale, vi è un grande dipinto – opera di Luigi Rodriguez (1592–1630) – dedicato a S. Elisabetta d'Ungheria, figlia di Béla IV, patrona del III Ordine francescano. Possiamo dedurre che questa chiesa di Napoli fu un centro di irradiazione del francescanesimo. L'altare principale, il ciclo degli affreschi del soffitto dedicati a San Giacomo della Marca e il dipinto raffigurante S. Elisabetta d'Ungheria rappresentano un cliché, cioè uno stereotipo della iconografia francescana. Tutta la chiesa di S. Maria La Nova è allora un'icona del francescanesimo storico, che nel nostro caso ricorda l'Ungheria come uno dei luoghi più importanti dell'attività francescana. In altre parole, l'Ungheria è una delle icone del francescanesimo militante. Intendo dire che S. Elisabetta dovette costituire un precedente, nel senso che era quasi scontato che il francescanesimo avesse nell'Ungheria – grazie appunto all'alto valore simbolico della vita di quella Santa – un luogo privilegiato della predicazione di quell'Ordine. Per Mattia Corvino dovette risultare facile il privilegio accordato ai francescani perché il Regno d'Ungheria aveva dato persino una Santa a quell'ordine. Nel XV secolo questo stereotipo iconografico poteva essere considerato anche e soprattutto una sorta di giustificazione dell'attività anche inquisitoriale di San Giacomo della Marca e di San Giovanni da Capestrano. Era come se santa Elisabetta chiedesse ai due santi del Quattrocento di intervenire in Ungheria e nei Balcani a difesa della Cristianità contro il pericolo turco e le eresie (bogomilismo in Bosnia e ussitismo in Boemia). Questo stereotipo aveva una sua valenza sia all'interno del francescanesimo, sia all'interno del regno d'Ungheria. Che questa ipotesi interpretativa abbia una sua validità lo può confermare il fatto che l'"icona architettonica" di S. Maria La Nova (Elisabetta d'Ungheria + Giacomo della Marca e Giovanni da Capistrano) si ripete nell'icona pittorica del dipinto di

¹⁴ L'importanza del luogo non era sfuggita naturalmente a Banfi 1940–41: 102–303 [201]. In questo mio lavoro mi avvalgo – in attesa di ulteriori ricerche sulla storia e il restauro degli affreschi su episodi della vita del Santo – di Capone 1976.

Anonimo (Scuola del Solimena), del primo '700, che si trova nella Chiesa di Santa Maria Salomè, a Veroli. Questa tela ha per titolo S. Giacomo con la Vergine e Bambino nella Gloria Francescana¹⁵. La „Gloria Francescana” è costituita dai santi e sante dei tre ordini istituiti da S. Francesco d'Assisi. Dunque:

– *S. Maria La Nova come icona del francescanesimo storico e anche canonico (San Giacomo della Marca e „i massimi esponenti dell'Ordine Serafico”)*¹⁶;

– *S. Maria La Nova come icona del rapporto tra francescanesimo e Regno d'Ungheria [Gloria Francescana (da essa: Santa Elisabetta, San Giacomo della Marca, San Giovanni da Capestrano¹⁷) + San Giacomo della Marca che guarisce Ferdinando I d'Aragona¹⁸, re di Napoli e padre di Beatrice d'Aragona, che nel 1475 sposa Mattia Corvino + San Giacomo della Marca con Pio II¹⁹].*

Alta può essere la simbologia del dipinto che ha per tema la guarigione di Ferdinando I da parte del Santo. Se Giacomo guarisce il suocero di Mattia, egli guarisce anche l'Ungheria dai suoi mali (eresie e turchi). Insomma Napoli – per il tramite di San Giacomo e di re Ferdinando guarito – viene in soccorso dell'Ungheria. Per le eresie la medicina è il francescanesimo, per i turchi la medicina è Ferdinando che invia Beatrice a Buda. Se è vera questa mia interpretazione, politicamente Mattia Corvino deve molto a Ferdinando d'Aragona; ma deve molto anche al francescanesimo per la pacificazione religiosa all'interno dell'Ungheria. Di qui il mito di Mattia Corvino: politica estera antiturca + politica interna di pacificazione religiosa pensiero politico e progetto di Miklós Zrínyi.

Per quanto concerne la diffusione napoletana del culto di San Giacomo della Marca, occorre rilevare che esistono – oltre alla grandiosa icona di S. Maria La Nova – altri luoghi che in qualche modo conservano il ricordo del Santo in modo tale che non ci è difficile porlo in rapporto con la situazione storico-religiosa dell'Ungheria. Siamo a Capodimonte. Qui possiamo ammirare una tavola ad olio del XVI secolo, il cui titolo recita: S. Giacomo tra due angeli in preghiera²⁰. La figura del Santo qui rappresentata ci tramanda un ritratto molto probabilmente ispirato alla maschera che si trova

¹⁵ Capone 1976: 258–259.

¹⁶ Capone 1976: 216–217.

¹⁷ Capone 1976: 218–219.

¹⁸ Capone 1976: 156–157, 198–199.

¹⁹ Capone 1976: 148–149.

²⁰ Capone 1976: 52–53.

a S. Maria La Nova e soprattutto alla miniatura che si trova nella biografia in versi di Aurelio Simmaco De Jacobiti. Dal nostro punto di vista, cioè dal punto di vista del mito di Mattia Corvino, questa tavola è interessante per due motivi: 1) il riferimento al poema del De Jacobiti che – come abbiamo visto – è una testimonianza importante dell'aspetto religioso del mito degli Hunyadi; 2) il libro aperto che il Santo sostiene con la sinistra poggiata al petto e dove possiamo leggere: „Pater manifestavi nomen tuum omnibus gentibus qui sunt super terram“. Le genti e i territori qui evocati sono infatti – dopo aver espunto le non poche e fantasiose congetture storico-geografiche dei biografi – esclusivamente i Balcani e l'Ungheria. Quest'ultima viene implicitamente indicata come lontana e ignota periferia di un universo umano e culturale al contrario ben noto e del quale però essa Ungheria, ben presto ed anche e soprattutto attraverso i risultati ottenuti dall'attività del Santo, ne avrebbe fatto parte a pieno diritto. Siamo dinanzi ad una ulteriore prova del fatto che l'Ungheria sarebbe diventata davvero europea per opera dell'umanesimo filologico da una parte, dell'umanesimo cristiano dall'altra.

Giacomo della Marca è anche un esponente dell'Umanesimo napoletano. Egli non trova importantissimo il solo recupero erudito dell'eredità classica latina e greca, perché: 1) alcuni autori latini erano già conosciuti sin dal Medioevo; 2) nell'ambito delle nuove istanze culturali egli poneva l'accento non tanto sull'aspetto filologico, quanto piuttosto su quello etico. Il suo è quindi un umanesimo problematico, che colloca al centro dell'attenzione il mistero e il fascino dell'avventura umana. Laureatosi in giurisprudenza, si fece francescano perché convinto della bontà di quel progetto di rigenerazione morale dell'uomo. Tutto ciò ci aiuta a comprendere il vero significato della sua attività pastorale nei Balcani e in Ungheria. Certo, fu un inquisitore, ma la sua vera missione consistette non tanto e non solo nella conversione forzosa degli eretici, quanto piuttosto nell'investigazione e nella lotta al degrado morale del clero. Egli, cioè, fu un precursore della Riforma protestante perché pretese il rigore disciplinare e la correttezza morale pur all'interno dei vari ordini religiosi voluti dalla Chiesa di Roma. Sul piano dei generi letterari, importanti sono i suoi sermoni che anticipano le prediche di Girolamo Savonarola²¹ e che portano in territorio ungherese un'attitudine

²¹ Cfr. anche Pete 2002: 293–321 [297].

retorica con la quale si sarebbe confrontata la lingua ungherese. Anche da questo confronto sarebbe scaturito il processo di ammodernamento della espressività letteraria magiara. Non a caso il 12 agosto 1624 egli venne beatificato da papa Urbano VIII Barberini, che ebbe rapporti importante con Miklós Zrínyi, il maggiore poeta epico del Seicento ungherese. *L'Obsidio Szigethiana* offriva sul piano ideologico-militante il tema e la presunta soluzione della rinascita morale e politica della nazione ungherese, sul modello del mitico governo di Mattia Corvino. Questo impianto ideologico, anche se tipicamente ungherese, cioè corrispondente alle esigenze della situazione storico-politica d'Ungheria, era valido anche nel più ampio contesto europeo e certamente risentiva delle opinioni di Urbano VIII. Questo papa, infatti, del resto anch'egli poeta, ritenne opportuno utilizzare la concezione poetica della Gerusalemme liberata per finalità davvero cogenti sino ad ispirare e teorizzare l'epigonismo tassiano che nel Seicento ripropose in tutta la sua attualità la lotta concreta al Turco. Si trattava in sostanza di trasformare l'inventio poetica di matrice tassiana nella realtà concreta di una vera lotta al Turco per il tramite di una letteratura davvero e finalmente impegnata. In altre parole, l'arte doveva servire alla rigenerazione dell'uomo moderno: anzi, doveva fondare la modernità. Da tutto ciò possiamo dedurre che San Giacomo della Marca rappresentava certamente un modello di esemplarità nel contesto di questo progetto barocco di rifondazione della integrità morale e della dignità umana. In altre parole, la Controriforma mostrava di aver acquisito la lezione della Riforma, magari recuperando le figure più integre ed intransigenti di quel francescanesimo osservante che nella prima metà del XV secolo era stato una delle risorse più efficaci nella difesa della Cristianità e dell'Europa (e del regno d'Ungheria) in un momento in cui tutto faceva presagire un rapido declino della civiltà occidentale. Ma nel 1456, a Belgrado (*Nándorfehérvár*), János Hunyadi – validamente aiutato da San Giovanni da Capestrano che ebbe in San Giacomo della Marca uno stretto collaboratore e l'immediato successore – riportò una vittoria decisiva sui Turchi. E poco importa se in quello stesso anno muoiono ambedue i protagonisti di quella battaglia, dal momento che a Hunyadi sarebbe succeduto appunto il grande re Mattia (1458–1490) che riuscì a fondare – anche con l'apporto dell'ordine francescano cui egli non risparmiò privilegi adeguati – quel regno d'Ungheria che sarebbe poi stato il modello di riferimento per ogni pensatore politico successivo. La letteratura umanistica d'Ungheria, sia d'espressione latina sia d'espressione ungherese, quasi mai fu pertanto una letteratura di pura creazione artistica, laddove essa svolse soprattutto un ruolo pragmatico, ideologico e politico che non poteva

non occuparsi anche dei problemi confessionali. Volendo schematizzare, potremmo pensare alla seguente linea evolutiva: San Giacomo della Marca Mattia Corvino Riforma protestante Controriforma (Urbano VIII e Miklós Zrínyi). Lo scopo è sempre quello di difendere la Cristianità e l'Europa dal Turco, assegnando all'Ungheria la funzione di baluardo della civiltà occidentale: quell'Ungheria, però, anche nel pensiero politico di Miklós Zrínyi, doveva essere ricostruita sul modello di quel regno di Mattia Corvino al quale gli Osservanti assicurarono non poca forza e stabilità.

E non mancò l'occasione per cui il mito si trasformasse in apoteosi:

Et quemadmodum veteres illi sancti quondam in lyngo iacentes Messiam, sic et hi sapientes Mathiam, quasi Messiam Mathiam miseri perpetuo clamore vociferantur, qui eos a lyngo, vel potius ab inferis, in lucem vitamque restitua²².

L'onomatopea è al servizio del rafforzamento, anzi della esaltazione del ruolo del re ungherese nella difesa dell'Europa cristiana e anche della cultura europea, ambedue strettamente connesse. Questa "lettera" dell'ottobre 1480, inserita come proemio al terzo libro dell'epistolario di Marsilio Ficino, non era altro che una epistola esortatoria, cioè una sorta di invocazione sotto forma di trattato intitolata *Exhortatio ad bellum contra Barbaros*. E s'invoca la liberazione dal limbo per giungere alla salvezza: questo concetto religioso serve ora come metafora per rappresentare la situazione politica dell'Europa e della sua cultura. Religione e politica sono strettamente e reciprocamente connesse. Cioè il Ficino, con il suo neoplatonismo, mostra che l'umanesimo non è solo recupero "laico" o "laicista" degli autori classici, e pone il recupero dell'eredità classica al servizio di una nuova stagione culturale e politica dove l'aspetto morale non è disgiunto dall'aspetto filologico. Con perfetta simmetria, l'epistola raccoglie lo status quaestionis e lo restituisce all'enfasi retorica: per due volte, e nella stessa visione compositiva del passo, i due nomi vengono accostati: quello del Messia e quello di Mattia. Accostamento volutamente blasfemo, o cos'altro? Come fu possibile, nel XV secolo, in Italia e in Ungheria, questo intreccio di politica e religione? Il francescanesimo volle "trasformare la mistica in atto pubblico"²³; per i domenicani si trattava di portare l'uomo al livello dell'eternità attraverso la componente spirituale, cioè con una concezione religiosa più intimistica. Per i francescani osservanti, invece, la salvezza dell'umanità poteva avvenire solo

²² Citato in Klaniczay 1903: 272; ma anche in Russo 2005: 233-263 [248]. Si veda anche Di Francesco 2003; a cura di Secchi Tarugi 2005: 693-701.

²³ Santi n.d: 42.

portando l'eternità al livello dell'uomo. Ecco perché quello dei francescani fu considerato l'Ordine più adatto a sostenere e a realizzare l'idea di crociata contro i Turchi e contro gli eretici: questa era la doppia missione cui era chiamato anche il regno d'Ungheria. Ma, oltre al pericolo turco, v'era anche la coscienza di una cristianità ormai in crisi, soprattutto sul piano etico. Eresia, in Europa centro-orientale, non significava solo la devianza dall'ufficialità cattolica, ma anche il degrado della vita morale del clero e, più in generale ed anche per i laici, lo stravolgimento del modo di intendere l'osservanza della Scrittura. Vi fu un Umanesimo non solo di tipo filologico-culturale, ma anche di tipo "riformistico-morale", perché appunto si trattava di riportare l'uomo al centro dell'universo: ma quest'uomo doveva essere rigenerato nella cultura e nell'etica. Firenze e Buda. Forse lontane geograficamente, esse ospitano due centri culturali che interagiscono ora all'interno di uno dei sodalizi più efficienti d'Europa. Questa *Exhortatio* del Ficino è la fonte più importante della letteratura umanistica concepita: 1) in funzione del ruolo di baluardo della cristianità e dell'Europa di fronte al turco; 2) in funzione del riconoscimento continentale dell'importanza anche culturale della corte di Mattia Corvino; 3) in funzione della creazione del mito del sovrano ideale, capace di conciliare politica ed etica. Questi gli elementi che furono all'origine di uno degli stereotipi più duraturi nella storia del pensiero politico e dell'immaginario artistico d'Ungheria.

2. Mattia Corvino e Ambrus Görcsöni

La storiografia, l'ideologia della Riforma protestante e i canti storici dell'epopea rinascimentale sono i tre nuclei della produzione letteraria ungherese che nel XVI secolo concorsero alla mitizzazione della figura di Mattia Corvino, elevata a simbolo privilegiato della grandezza storica d'Ungheria.²⁴ Si tratta, evidentemente, di tre approcci diversi al tema della figura leggendaria del sovrano esemplare, di prove letterarie assai diverse fra loro e però accomunate dalla volontà di recuperare alla coscienza letteraria uno dei simboli più efficaci di valentia individuale e di grandezza storica

²⁴ L'analisi del mito di Mattia Corvino si limita qui – come si evince anche dal titolo del presente contributo – ad una parte della produzione letteraria ungherese del '500. Per le diverse condizioni culturali che permisero il sorgere di quel mito nel secolo precedente rimandiamo – anche per le vaste indicazioni bibliografiche ivi contenute – Klaniczay 1974: 20 (*Problemi attuali di scienza e di cultura*, 202); Graciotti, a cura di Klaniczay 1975: 51–63. Ma utili osservazioni sono anche in Kardos 1972: 9–21.

nazionale. Di un tale recupero aveva bisogno il secolo in cui vissero András Farkas e Péter Ilosvai, Ambrus Görcsöni e Gáspár Heltai, Miklós Bogáti Fazakas e Miklós Istvánffy, perché anch'esso "secolo della rovina ungherese"²⁵ cioè storicamente segnato dalla dissoluzione dell'Ungheria come entità politica e però anelante al riscatto dell'individuo e della nazione. Ognuno di quei tre approcci, concretizzatosi nelle opere degli autori appena menzionati, ha consentito una determinata forma di mitizzazione. Esaminarli tutti insieme, sia pur dal nostro particolare punto di vista, significherebbe tentare un'operazione così vasta di analisi critica che certo supererebbe i limiti imposti sin dall'inizio al nostro assunto. Andremo ad esporre, quindi, alcune riflessioni che non avranno la pretesa di riconsiderare i vari aspetti del tributo di onore e di venerazione che il Cinquecento letterario d'Ungheria rese all'età corviniana, laddove si limiteranno ad osservare taluni procedimenti poetici e stilistici che resero possibile il sorgere del "mito" di Mattia Corvino nell'ambito del cosiddetto *históriás ének*, cioè nell'ambito della poesia epico-narrativa ungherese del XVI secolo²⁶.

D'altro canto, può apparire ovvio o pretestuoso lo stesso argomentare di un mito cinquecentesco di Mattia Corvino, dal momento che non v'è periodo della storia letteraria ungherese che non abbia coltivato e gelosamente conservato la memoria di quella mirabile età corviniana, magari per trarne insegnamento dal punto di vista dell'arte della guerra o da quello del reggimento degli stati (cosa che avvenne, com'è noto, nel Seicento, con Zrínyi), oppure per recuperarne il simbolo della grandezza storica nazionale, nell'Ottocento, sotto l'istanza della visione nazional-popolare e del fenomeno del rinascimentismo.

Nondimeno, siamo convinti che quello prescelto sia un tema letterario da considerare a sé, circoscritto cronologicamente e circostanziato nelle sequenze narrative, un tema la cui investigazione prende le mosse anche dal saggio che Tibor Klaniczay volle dedicare al culto umanistico dei grandi personaggi del XV secolo:²⁷ e ciò non a caso che v'è nel nostro assunto

²⁵ L'espressione – com'è noto – è di Miklós Zrínyi, ma naturalmente anche il XVI secolo ebbe viva coscienza di quella rovina. E per alcuni essa trae origine non dalla sfortunata battaglia di Mohács (1526), ma dalla morte del re Mattia. Si veda anche, a tal proposito, Bogáti Fazakas 1979: II. 253.

²⁶ Il genere letterario dell'*históriás ének* (canto storico) comprende circa 150 componimenti di differente ampiezza e struttura metrica che, in base alla loro ripartizione tematica, si articolano in *történelmi énekek* (canti d'argomento storico), a loro volta distinti in *tudósító énekek* (cronache di avvenimenti contemporanei) e *krónikás énekek* (cronache di avvenimenti remoti); in *vallásos históriák* (storie d'argomento religioso) in *szépihistóriák* (belle storie), che indicano una novellistica in versi di diversa fonte e provenienza. Per maggiori dettagli sull'argomento si veda Varjas 1982.

²⁷ Cf. Klaniczay 1987: 41–58.

anche la speranza di poter integrare quel magistrale intervento proprio sul versante del XVI secolo e proprio in attinenza con la figura di Mattia Corvino. Siamo infatti convinti, altresì, che i canti storici dedicati nel Cinquecento al sovrano ungherese, al di là della loro connotazione formale e al di là della loro conseguente appartenenza al genere letterario dell'*históriás ének* rientrano per vari aspetti nella tradizione della poesia celebrativa. E degli elementi costitutivi di questa poesia celebrativa umanistica, europea ed ungherese, siamo informati dai punti nevralgici del lavoro di Klaniczay: e sappiamo, così, che non poca letteratura umanistica era legata al culto dei viri illustres, con i suoi miti antichi ed i suoi modelli moderni; che i motivi della gloria, della fama, della laus ispirarono anche la letteratura biografica d'Ungheria; che sui modelli antichi e sulle loro varianti umanistiche si forgiò anche l'ideale dell'uomo famoso d'Ungheria, cioè di Mattia Corvino. E l'idealizzazione delle personalità illustri della storia avrebbe interessato anche il XVI secolo, sia pur con le dovute differenze. "La moda della letteratura celebrativa – avverte infatti e giustamente il Klaniczay – naturalmente non si estinse nemmeno nel XVI secolo, cambiò però il suo carattere, e soprattutto il suo significato e la sua funzione. Nel XV secolo essa ebbe un'importanza eccezionale, perché seppe racchiudere in sé diversi aspetti, concetti ed istanze, quali la celebrazione del nuovo ideale umano e della cultura umanistica; il servizio di diverse finalità politiche o individuali; l'esigenza della rappresentazione; l'espressione di sentimenti personali; le ambizioni storiografiche, ed altro ancora. Nel periodo successivo la maggior parte di questi elementi si manifestò nelle forme espressive ad essa più adatte e la moda della erudita celebrazione umanistica gradualmente scomparve."²⁸ Si perdoni la lunga citazione, ma difficilmente si potrebbero trovare parole più adatte a delineare gli elementi costitutivi di una produzione letteraria nient'affatto secondaria, la cui particolare tematica, anzi, interessò per intero la lunga stagione dell'Umanesimo ungherese, fra XV e XVI secolo. In altri termini, sembra di poter cogliere dalle parole del Klaniczay l'invito ed il suggerimento a verificare anche nel Cinquecento lo spessore qualitativo e la diversa funzione della letteratura celebrativa: così; per quanto ci riguarda, il voler analizzare il mito di Mattia Corvino nell'epica ungherese di quel secolo pare possa rappresentare una risposta, sia pur parziale ma non per questo meno significativa, a quell'invito.

²⁸ Klaniczay 1987: 58.

Naturalmente, la mitizzazione della figura di Mattia Corvino nell'ambito della poesia epico-narrativa ungherese del Cinquecento avviene secondo talune norme stilistiche ben precise, secondo una tecnica poetica codificata dalla tradizione. Ci sembra di poter dire, cioè, che nell'ambito del rapporto fra testo letterario e contesto storico i canti storici dedicati a Mattia Corvino riescano ad esprimere la novità del loro messaggio non tanto sul piano del contenuto, che vien desunto dalle comuni e ben note fonti storiografiche, quanto piuttosto sul piano dello stile, il solo che potesse dare uno spessore epico alla figura del sovrano esemplare. In altre parole, i canti storici del Cinquecento generalmente non dicono cose nuove su Mattia Corvino, ma riferiscono in modo diverso quanto già noto. Né questo è rilievo di poco conto che in questo modo il sovrano ungherese non è più soltanto il protagonista eccezionale della storia d'Ungheria, ma diviene uno dei personaggi della nascente poesia epica ungherese, esaltato appunto nella esemplarità delle sue gesta. Com'è noto, l'*históriás ének* non celebra soltanto avvenimenti e figure della storia d'Ungheria, ma rappresenta il veicolo poetico e stilistico più adatto a rielaborare anche i miti classici. Così, e sia pur indirettamente, Mattia Corvino viene annoverato fra i viri illustres di ogni tempo; ed i precedenti accostamenti umanistici ad Attila, a Traiano, ad Alessandro Magno, son riproposti nell'ambito di un genere letterario che celebrava contemporaneamente le figure eccezionali dell'antichità e le figure irripetibili della storia ungherese.

È evidente che siamo di fronte ad un problema ermeneutico che riguarda la comprensione critica di tutto l'*históriás ének* come genere letterario: un problema che non possiamo qui affrontare, ma che ci impegna almeno per la parte concernente la memoria storica e mitizzata di Mattia Corvino. Le considerazioni che seguono si fondano sul presupposto che anche nei canti storici ungheresi si realizza la strettissima unione di contenuto e struttura formale propria di ogni opera letteraria e che nella loro lettura non ci si debba più limitare alla sola rilevanza dell'elemento storico-narrativo o cronachistico, laddove occorre prender coscienza del fatto che in essi si produce un senso più alto della vita e della storia, l'idea della dimensione epica. Naturalmente, tale dimensione non è ancora rispondente al modello canonico del poema epico classico o moderno, ma essa – com'è stato ampiamente dimostrato²⁹ – è sicuramente partecipe di quel processo evolutivo che conduce alla trasformazione, nel Seicento, del canto storico, cronachistico e popolare, in epopea culta e nazionale. Tale è infatti

²⁹ Cf. Klaniczay 1964: 82.

l'interdipendenza tra l'epos zrínyiano e l'*históriás ének* – fatto documentato, questo, soprattutto quanto alla compresenza dei temi e motivi più ricorrenti, dei topoi più significativi, delle norme tecniche del dettato formulistico³⁰ – che non pare azzardata una rilettura critica dei canti storici cinquecenteschi che tenda a rivalutarne, anche in senso lato, l'espressione epica.

Tre sono i testi in cui proveremo un tale esercizio critico: la Storia di re Mattia sino alla presa di Vienna, composta da Ambrus Görcsöni intorno al 1567, l'*Ultima Pars rerum gestarum Incliti Matthiæ Huniadis Regis Hungariæ*, composta nel 1575 da Péter Ilosvai Selymes, la Quinta parte delle gesta di re Mattia, composta da Miklós Bogáti Fazakas nel 1576³¹. Naturalmente, questi testi non esauriscono il tema della evocazione nostalgica dell'età hunyadiana; ma solo in essi, nella loro struttura formale, si coglie la tensione poetica che tende alla creazione del "mito" pertinente all'individuo unico e straordinario.

Al rilevamento della dimensione epica dei canti storici in questione può risultare utile la teoria elaborata da Michail Bachtin a proposito di epos e romanzo³². Secondo il critico russo, infatti, "l'epopea come genere letterario determinato è caratterizzata da tre aspetti costitutivi: 1) oggetto dell'epopea è il passato epico nazionale, il passato assoluto, secondo la terminologia di Goethe e di Schiller; 2) fonte dell'epopea è la tradizione nazionale (e non l'esperienza individuale e la libera invenzione che ne deriva); 3) il mondo epico è separato dal presente, cioè dal tempo del cantore (dell'autore e dei suoi ascoltatori), da una distanza epica assoluta"³³.

Per quanto concerne il primo aspetto, "il mondo dell'epopea è il passato eroico nazionale, il mondo degli inizi e delle vette della storia nazionale, il mondo dei padri e dei progenitori, il mondo dei primi e dei migliori"³⁴. È probabilmente in questa luce che va letto il proemio dell'opera di Görcsöni:

Árpád vala fű az kapitánságban,
Mikor magyar szálla be az országban,
De Künd vala bölcs az hadakozásban,
Kinek tanácsával éltek hadakban.

³⁰ Cf. Klaniczay 1964: 251–286; Di Francesco 1987–1988: 150–174.

³¹ Görcsöni 1978: 647–673. Per l'opera di M. Bogáti Fazakas si veda la nota n. 2.

³² Cf. Bachtin 1979: 445–482.

³³ Bachtin 1979: 454–455.

³⁴ Bachtin 1979: 455.

Megemlítek egynehán királyokat,
Kik bírták jámborul mi országunkat,
Kikrül szerzetek is szép krónikákat,
Emlékezetre számlálom azokat.³⁵ (vv. 1–8)

Il mito di Mattia sorge quindi dalla volontà di collocare la sua figura in una specie di panteon della storia d'Ungheria, un edificio sacro riservato a pochi: Attila, Árpád, Santo Stefano, San Ladislao, Luigi il Grande, Sigismondo e quindi Mattia Corvino. E Görcsöni non vuole dissimulare la propria meraviglia perché ciò non sia ancora avvenuto:

Imé csudám ezen nekem nagy vagyon,
Királyoknak mely krónikájok vagyon,
Énekekben hadok írván megvagyon,
Nevek, dicséretetek nálunk nagy vagyon.

Tartozunk mi annak több dicsérettel,
Kinek élünk isten után nevével,
Dicsekedünk mi jó fejedelmünkkel,
János vajdával, fiával Mátyással.

Én nem hallok oly jó ének szerzéket,
Kik elhoznák jó fejedelmünket,
Mátyás királt régi jó vezérünket,
Elfelejtjük mi jóltett emberünket.³⁶ (vv. 41–52)

In verità, il nome e le gesta di Mattia non erano stati cancellati dalla memoria del secolo in cui visse Görcsöni, laddove avevano suscitato il vasto interesse della storiografia. Ma evidentemente ciò non era ritenuto sufficiente, nel senso esposto proprio nei versi sopra citati: occorreva, cioè, anche l'elaborazione poetica ed epica delle gesta di Mattia, elaborazione

³⁵ Görcsöni 1978: 5: Árpád era capo dei Magiari, / Quand'essi entrarono nel Paese, / Ma Künd era abile nelle armi, / Ed il suo consiglio usarono nelle guerre. // Ricorderò alcuni re, / Che con prestigio ressero il Paese, / Re su cui scrissero anche belle cronache, / Re che richiamerò alla memoria.

³⁶ Görcsöni 1978: 6–7. Ecco, grande è la mia meraviglia, / Che son re che hanno una cronaca, / In canti son scritte le loro imprese, / Il nome, la gloria loro è grande fra noi. // A Mattia noi dobbiam maggior lode, / Del cui nome, dopo Dio, noi viviamo, / Vanto è per noi il nostro principe, / Giovanni il voivoda e suo figlio Mattia. // Autori di canti non sento, / Che rammentino il nostro principe, / Il re Mattia nostro duce antico, / Noi dimentichiamo i suoi benefici.

demandata non a caso all'*históriás ének* in quanto genere letterario non limitato alla resa cronachistica, ma destinato all'affabulazione letteraria del soggetto nell'ambito di una performance corredata di notevole impegno stilistico. Mattia Corvino è così collocato nel mondo dei "primi", dei "migliori", dei veri fondatori dello Stato ungherese; ed il suo mito sorge anche come valutazione inamovibile degli eventi legati alla sua persona e al suo tempo storico particolare. E ciò avviene non in aderenza al contenuto, che riguarda specificamente la cronachistica e la storiografia, ma secondo le tecniche poetiche dell'*históriás ének* come genere letterario. In questo contesto l'atteggiamento di Görcsöni, ma anche di Ilosvai e di Bogáti, è l'atteggiamento di autori che narrano vicende degne della più profonda venerazione, le più adatte, quindi, al canto storico-epico. È infatti la forma epica ereditata dalla tradizione letteraria ungherese che trasforma il fatto memorabile in mito: e di ciò erano certamente consapevoli i nostri autori che arricchivano poeticamente lo stile disadorno delle fonti storiche. Edit Lévy ha dimostrato in modo convincente la complessità del rapporto tra il canto storico di Ilosvai e la sua fonte primaria, l'opera del Bonfini.³⁷ Ilosvai, cioè, non solo non ha seguito pedissequamente la sua fonte aggiungendo qualche episodio altrimenti sconosciuto, ma ha anche arricchito poeticamente, secondo lo stile peculiare dell'*históriás ének*, momenti, vicende ed atteggiamenti già noti. Ilosvai "prende da Bonfini anche la descrizione della morte del re, cogliendo così l'occasione per riassumere l'eccezionale personalità di Mattia, la sua grandezza di uomo e di sovrano":³⁸

Termete szép vitézi vala,
magyar módra vállas és vastag vala,
arany színűő haja, piros orcája,
két szeme neki szép világos vala.

Teste neki mint Nagy Sándoré vala,
kinek éltiben követője vala,
gyors és okos, serény dolgában vala,
minden dolgot előbb meglát vala.³⁹ (vv. 713–720)

³⁷ Lévy 1978: 665.

³⁸ Lévy 1978: 671.

³⁹ Ilosvai Selymes, *Ultima Pars rerum gestarum Incliti Matthiæ Huniadis Regis Hungariæ*, in Lévy 1978: 668. Era di bell'aspetto e molto prode, / Robusto e grosso alla maniera ungherese, / I capelli dorati, vermiglie le guance, / Gli occhi avea belli e chiari. / / Nel corpo era come Alessandro Magno, / Di cui fu seguace in vita, / Lesto, intelligente e solerte, / Ogni cosa egli prevedeva.

Al di là delle concessioni al topos letterario, che pur vi sono, e al di là del confronto con la figura di Alessandro Magno, desunto dal Bonfini, sembra comunque evidente l'intenzione di Ilosvai di creare poeticamente un'aura mitica intorno alla figura del re compianto. Anche perché appare del tutto fondata l'osservazione secondo la quale Ilosvai non volle solo terminare l'opera di Görcsöni. Egli mise a confronto la triste situazione del suo tempo con la gloria antica.⁴⁰ E la stessa volontà di confronto nutre di affiato poetico anche la partecipazione di Miklós Bogáti alla morte del grande sovrano:

Ennek telék immáran harmad napja,
Nagy kedden, szinte Szent Ambrus másnapja,
Az nagy Mátyás király aznap meghala,
Kit még eddig Magyarország ohajta.

[...]

Az ő dolga énekemben sok volna,
Dicsírni eléggé ember nem tudja,
Régi jó fejedelmek mássa vala,
Kiknek örök hírek históriákba.⁴¹ (vv. 357–360; 401–404)

Un po' dovunque, nei versi dei nostri autori, si ritrovano i motivi umanistici della gloria, della fama e della laus; e son motivi che producono la collocazione epica dell'eroico sovrano nel mondo degli autentici viri illustres, dei veri fondatori dello Stato ungherese. E ciò spiega anche il significato e la presenza, in questo periodo, dei cosiddetti cataloghi nelle opere anche di altri autori, ad esempio in András Farkas.⁴² Questi aridi cataloghi di nomi accompagnati da generici epiteti esornativi sono inseriti in opere destinate non solo alla esaltazione dei valori individuali, ma anche e soprattutto alla rievocazione nostalgica delle glorie passate. E proprio nell'opera del Farkas Mattia Corvino è annoverato fra i grandi condottieri e sovrani ungheresi che, secondo l'ideologia della Riforma protestante, altro non sarebbero stati che i

⁴⁰ Lévay 1978: 671.

⁴¹ Bogáti Fazakas 1979: 266–267. Passato ormai il terzo giorno, / Il Martedì Santo, il giorno dopo Sant'Ambrogio, / Morì allora il grande re Mattia, / Che tuttora sospira l'Ungheria. [...] Avrei da cantare molte sue imprese, / Che lodar non si possono abbastanza, / Fu il ritratto dei grandi principi antichi, / Di cui eterna fama è nelle istorie.

⁴² Farkas 1538: 169–186.

veri e providenziali fondatori ed artefici del regno d'Ungheria e della sua successiva grandezza storica.

Com'è stato giustamente rilevato, per la concezione epica del mondo "inizio", "primo", "fondatore", "antenato", "precedente", ecc. sono categorie non puramente temporali, ma assiologico-temporali, sono cioè un superlativo assiologico-temporale che si realizza sia nei riguardi degli uomini sia nei riguardi di tutte le cose egli eventi del mondo epico: in questo passato tutto è bene, e tutto ciò che è sostanzialmente buono (il primo) è soltanto in questo passato. Il passato epico assoluto è l'unica fonte e principio di tutto il bene anche per i tempi successivi». ⁴³ E molto probabilmente fu una non dissimile concezione positiva del passato a spingere i nostri autori a considerare il re Mattia il soggetto ideale di narrazioni in cui non v'era posto per la critica storica modernamente intesa; e si preferì procedere allora alla elaborazione epica dell'età corviniana, secondo soluzioni di convenienza per una società sconvolta e lacerata dall'anarchia, una società che però mostrava anche l'ambizione e la necessità di essere ricondotta ad un ideale superiore. E quell'ideale, com'è noto, fu simbolicamente rappresentato in gran parte dalla figura e dal regno di Mattia Corvino.

La forma epica del passato introduce la figura e l'opera di Mattia Corvino nella tradizione nazionale. E qui il concetto di tradizione non sta a significare le fonti della storiografia e dei canti storici, ma il mondo impenetrabile ed inamovibile della mitologia nazionale, mitologia intesa come il complesso di tutte le figure mitiche e mitizzate della storia ungherese. E ciò può significare, anche nell'*históriás ének*, l'appoggio sulla tradizione impersonale incontestabile, „l'universalità della valutazione e del punto di vista che esclude ogni possibilità di un diverso modo di vedere, il profondo rispetto per l'oggetto della raffigurazione e per la stessa parola detta su di esso in quanto parola della tradizione”. ⁴⁴ Non a caso Miklós Bogáti volle subito delineare l'immagine di Mattia secondo i tratti fondamentali del perfetto sovrano ideale, quasi sganciato dalle determinazioni temporali della storia:

Ennek hadiról írtak énekeket,
Illik említénünk ily eleinket,
Megírom halálát és temetését,
Mátyás után magyar romlását, vesztét.

⁴³ Bachtin 1979: 457.

⁴⁴ Bachtin 1979: 458.

Csuda jó szokását ő eleinek,
Elfelejté régi magyar nemzetnek,
Ezt magyarok királnénak köszönjek,
Rontója lőn király jó erkölcsének.⁴⁵ (vv. 37–44)

Dalla lettura attenta di questi versi molto probabilmente traspare il fatto che anche qui “il tratto fondamentale dell'intero passaggio” – compreso naturalmente il riferimento alle presunte conseguenze negative del matrimonio con Beatrice – “è un inquieto conservatorismo, un attaccamento quasi ansioso alla legge tradizionale, ai costumes e agli usages...”⁴⁶ Mattia, che non sempre fu amato in vita, divenne, subito dopo la sua morte, oggetto di venerazione, proprio perché collocato nella dimensione della tradizione nazionale. E Bogáti non esita a mettere in versi, in un distico efficace, il noto detto proverbiale sull'altrettanto proverbiale, anche se postuma, giustizia del re:

Mátyás király miota megholt volna,
Az igazság megholt Magyarországba.⁴⁷ (vv. 35–36)

Se qui il concetto di giustizia appare collegato con la tradizione del diritto consuetudinario medievale,⁴⁸ più evidente è subito dopo l'evocazione dei tratti cavallereschi del sovrano ideale in relazione al ritratto morale di Mattia Corvino:

Nem kímélé soha semmi jószágát,
Urakat, udvarát, kicsinyét, nagyját,
Ajándékozá sokkal tisztartókat,
Már minden szereti vala királyát.

Emberséges, jó erkölce királnak,
Néki jeles, ékes tréfái vannak,

⁴⁵ Bogáti Fazakas 1979: 254. Han cantato le sue gesta, / Giusto è il ricordo di tali antenati, / Di Mattia io narrerò la morte e la sepoltura, / E ciò che ne seguì: la rovina e il crollo d'Ungheria. / / Come dimenticò le usanze / Degli antenati, dell'antica nazione magiara, / Di ciò sian grati gli Ungheresi alla regina, / Che del re corruppe i costumi.

⁴⁶ Köhler 1985: 15. Naturalmente l'osservazione si riferisce ad un contesto culturale alquanto diverso da quello che qui stiamo analizzando: ma essa riuscirà a sembrare meno ingiustificata se riusciremo a mostrare che nella mitizzazione della figura di Mattia Corvino confluirono anche elementi provenienti dalla tradizione dei valori cavallereschi.

⁴⁷ Bogáti Fazakas 1979: 254. La giustizia morì in Ungheria, / Da quando sarebbe morto il re Mattia.

⁴⁸ Cf. Köhler 1985: 15.

Sokféle nemzet udvarában vannak,
De nála mind egy tisztességben vannak.⁴⁹ (vv. 49–56)

Pare indubbio, infatti, che i concetti e termini di jó szokás, régi jó erkölcs, ajándékozás, igazság, vitézség, tisztesség non siano qui indicazioni generiche di un'altrettanto generica nozione di regalità, quanto piuttosto il riferimento preciso ai concetti di chevalerie, leauté, justise, honer, usage, foi, coustume, don, largesce, concetti che determinarono il mito anche di ogni corte ideale del Medio Evo secondo la nota definizione medievale del regere iuxta morem patrum.⁵⁰ E ciò è valido – secondo quanto giustamente rilevato – anche in attinenza alla regalità ungherese di stampo cavalleresco, ridefinita anche dal punto di vista dell'efficace binomio concettuale di értékrendszer és propaganda (propaganda e sistema di valori).⁵¹ Sembra, in altre parole, che in questi testi ungheresi del XVI secolo l'idealizzazione della regalità di Mattia Corvino avvenga anche per mezzo di un recupero del sistema di valori cavalleresco, magari in stretto rapporto con l'esigenza propagandistica di ridisegnare il quadro politico-sociale della società ungherese secondo i lineamenti tradizionali dell'antica nazione ungherese (*régi magyar nemzet*) nostalgicamente evocata anche nell'opera di Bogáti. E ciò poté accadere tanto sul piano delle esigenze formali della poesia epico-narrativa ungherese, quanto sul piano concreto del pensiero politico del XVI secolo.

La cosiddetta distanza epica – che per Bachtin rappresenta il terzo aspetto costitutivo dell'epopea come genere letterario – permise che nel Cinquecento ungherese la figura di Mattia Corvino assumesse la necessaria estraneità alla crisi ed all'anarchia del tempo presente, alla conflittualità contemporanea, e fece sì che si accentuasse quindi la dicotomia fra due mondi distanziati nella poesia e nell'ideologia, l'uno nostalgicamente cantato e l'altro drammaticamente vissuto. Da questo dissidio profondo radicatosi nell'individuo e nella società nacque il culto del re Mattia: un culto che necessariamente collocava la sua memoria storica nella lontananza della distante tradizione patria. Naturalmente il culto di Mattia Corvino esisteva già nella storiografia del XV e XVI secolo, ma fu proprio l'avvertita necessità di farne un personaggio del mondo eroico ungherese, di rappresentarlo come una figura

⁴⁹ Bogáti Fazakas 1979: 255. Mai non risparmiò i suoi beni, / Gratificò i signori e i dignitari, / La corte, i grandi e i piccoli, / Tutti amavano il loro re. / Il re ha umanità e buoni costumi, / Motti egregi ed eloquenti, / Genti di vario lignaggio sono alla sua corte, / Ma tutti son per lui di pari onore.

⁵⁰ Cf. Köhler 1985: 15.

⁵¹ Cf. Kurcz 1988: 163–219.

ieratica del panteon nazionale, che determinò l'istanza di un suo ritratto stilisticamente diverso, anche in contrasto con i plastici ritratti delineati su di lui dagli umanisti suoi contemporanei. Il salto qualitativo che certamente si avverte, per esempio, fra l'opera di un Galeotto Marzio e quelle di Göröcsöni o di Bogáti e che fa perdere vigore e vitalità, in quest'ultime, alla figura del re, certamente spinge noi moderni a confermare la nostra simpatia per l'efficacia dei tratti descrittivi dell'umanista italiano dinanzi all'apparente freddezza delle descrizioni epiche ungheresi: quel salto qualitativo, però, si spiega non con una perdita di efficacia poetica, ma al contrario con l'istanza propria dell'*históriás ének* di suggellare in modo definitivo, secondo le norme dell'epica, la validità di quel culto che si trasforma in mito. Insomma, se la storiografia aveva creato il culto di Mattia, l'*históriás ének* ne creò il mito definitivo, assoluto, gelosamente custodito nella lontananza epica.

3. Mattia Corvino, Scanderbeg e Miklós Bogáti Fazakas

Il processo di mitizzazione della figura di Mattia Corvino diverrà ancor più incisivo nel 1579, quando nella *Castriot György históriája* (Storia di Giorgio Castriota)⁵² di Miklós Bogáti Fazakas (1548–1591 ca.)⁵³ il retaggio di quella

⁵² Di questa cronaca – o canto storico, nell'accezione ungherese del genere letterario di cui alla nota 9 – non abbiamo un'edizione moderna. Il titolo sopra riportato è convenzionale e si riferisce all'indicazione generica di questo interessante lavoro di traduzione e/o rielaborazione. I titoli per esteso delle due edizioni cinquecentesche da noi conosciute sono: Miklós Bogáti Fazakas, *Az nagy Székender béknek, kit Castriot György hercegnek hittak, Epirusnak, Nagy Albaniának és Macedoniának urának csudálatos, jeles vitézi dolgairól, két török eszárról, ki Görögország veszte után, csak egyedül állotta meg az törökök ellen Európában, Hunyadi János idejében* [Sulle meravigliose e valorose inclite gesta compiute contro due sultani turchi dal grande Scanderbeg, chiamato principe Giorgio Castriota, signore dell'Epiro, della Grande Albania e di Macedonia, che dopo la caduta della Grecia da solo in Europa si erse contro i Turchi, al tempo di János Hunyadi], Typ. Hoffhalter Rudolf, Debrecen, Anno XXXXVII, [recte: 1587]; Miklós Bogáti Fazakas, *Az nagy Castriot Györgynek, kit az török Székender bégnek hívott, ki Hunyadi Jánossal két felől vitt az törökre, külön-külön csoda szerencsével, vitézi dolgainak históriája hat részben* [La storia in sei parti delle imprese valorose del grande Giorgio Castriota, che i turchi chiamavano Scanderbeg e che con János Hunyadi da due lati combatté il turco con distinta prodigiosa fortuna], Typ. Heltai, Kolozsvár 1592. Della prima ci è rimasto un esemplare nella Biblioteca dell'Accademia Ungherese delle Scienze, della seconda si conservano due copie: una nella Biblioteca Nazionale Széchényi, un'altra nella Biblioteca Ráday. Cfr. anche *Régi Magyarországi Nyomtatványok 1473–1600* [Antiche stampe d'Ungheria 1473–1600], nn. 593 e 683, *Régi Magyarországi Nyomtatványok 1971*: 526–527, 589; Horváth 1992: I. 743, 335–336. In questo mio lavoro citerò dal dattiloscritto di un'edizione critica del testo di Bogáti Fazakas pubblicato nel 1592 (6 parti per 1812 versi con struttura strofica a_{11(6,5)}, a_{11(6,5)}, a_{11(6,5)}, a_{11(6,5)}, non sempre omogenea) che l'amico e collega Géza Szentmártoni Szabó sta approntando con il necessario rigore filologico e che qui ringrazio per aver messo a mia disposizione il relativo testo.

memoria storica supera il mero livello divulgativo per farsi messaggio ideologico e religioso i cui toni sono quasi da epopea biblica. Il nostro pastore unitariano compose questo canto storico (o cronaca in versi) fra l'11 e il 17 ottobre 1579 a Tötör, in Transilvania, riscrivendo secondo le esigenze dell'oralità secondaria⁵⁴ dell'epica ungherese – cioè riducendo e omettendo in funzione della concinnità dello stile formulare⁵⁵ – l'edizione del 1537 del noto lavoro di Marino Barlezio (1450–1512), che egli acquistò da János Gyulai nel 1577 e che ora si trova nella miscellanea 54979–54981 della Biblioteca dell'Accademia di Kolozsvár⁵⁶. A quanto sostiene l'autore, la sua opera è stata realizzata “per offrire un esempio ai valorosi guerrieri”: essa conserva pertanto quell'empito epico e quella mescolanza di divulgazione e mistificazione ereditati dal testo-fonte. La necessaria concisione del racconto, tuttavia, non diviene mai approssimazione storica, poiché l'abilità compositiva e la scioltezza narrativa richieste dal particolare genere letterario dell'*históriás ének* (canto storico)⁵⁷ aiutano ad invitare la committenza e/o il pubblico a far proprie alcune nuove coordinate di pensiero e di riflessione sulle quali fondare un progetto di rinnovamento morale e politico. Sarebbe tuttavia riduttivo vedere in questa riscrittura il solo interesse documentario o il solo procedimento mitizzante. Qui i *töpoi* servono ad evocare immagini

⁵³ Di questo pastore protestante transilvano particolarmente attratto dalle idee dell'unitarianesimo conosciamo undici lavori in versi di cui otto sono di argomento profano e tre di argomento religioso. Notevole anche la sua composizione di canti storici: fra questi – oltre a quello ora in esame – ricordiamo in particolare *Az ötödik része Mátyás király dolgainak mind haláláig* [1576, La quinta parte delle imprese di re Mattia fino alla sua morte], perché si tratta di una integrazione della biografia di Mattia Corvino, avviata in precedenza da Ambrus Göröcsöni intorno al 1567, che è strettamente connessa nell'operazione mitopoietica che accomunò Scanderbeg agli Hunyadi. Di grande rilievo fu anche la sua attività di traduttore di salmi.

⁵⁴ In merito a questa nozione seguo le indicazioni fornite in Zumthor 1987.

⁵⁵ In altre sedi ho avuto modo di rilevare anche nella poesia epico-narrativa ungherese del Cinquecento la presenza delle tecniche compositive attinenti a questo stile, già ampiamente rilevate in altri domini dalla letteratura critica internazionale. Si veda pertanto, per un recente sguardo d'insieme ed anche per le notizie bibliografiche ivi contenute, Di Francesco 2004: 7–25.

⁵⁶ I testi in essa contenuti sono Herodotos, *Libri novem, Musarum nominibus inscripti*, Coloniae 1537; Diodoros Siculos, *Liber de gestis Philippi regis Macedoniae*, Basileae 1521; Marinus Barletius Scodrensis, *De vita, moribus ac rebus praecipue adversus Turcas gestis Georgii Castrioti, clarissimi Epirotarum principis, qui propter celeberrima facinora, Scanderbegus, hoc est, Alexander Magnus, cognominatus fuit, libri Tredecim, per Marinum Barletium Scodrensem conscripti, ac nunc primum in Germania castigatissime aediti*, apud Cratonem Milium, Argentonati 1537.

⁵⁷ Il genere letterario dell'*históriás ének* (canto storico) comprende circa 150 componimenti di differente ampiezza e struttura metrica che, in base alla loro ripartizione tematica, si articolano in *történeti énekek* (canti d'argomento storico), a loro volta distinti in *tudósító énekek* (cronache di avvenimenti contemporanei) e *krónikás énekek* (cronache di avvenimenti remoti); in *vallásos históriák* (storie d'argomento religioso) in *szeptihistóriák* (belle storie), che indicano una novellistica in versi di diversa fonte e provenienza. Per una sua analisi sistematica si veda Varjas 1982.

nient'affatto sbiadite di un recente e fulgido passato storico che dovrebbero aiutare almeno a conservare l'identità culturale e storica della nazione. E sono versi inquieti e inquietanti questi, dal momento che in essi – restituiti per intero e in profondità al loro tempo di appartenenza – risuona l'eco di una nostalgia di un'età gloriosa che viene rivissuta anche come inascoltata premonizione della tormentata vicenda della storia politica del Cinquecento ungherese. L'omogeneità dello stile formulare e di una tecnica compositiva già nota nasconde solo in parte la partecipazione dolorosissima all'inedia di una nazione che in sostanza era ingiustamente ritenuta immeritevole di aiuto.

Non priva di valore documentario è la dedica dell'opera all'unitariano László Szalánczy, ricco possidente di Branyicska, nella contea di Hunyad. Essa infatti suggerisce la costruzione di un acrostico che – diluito lungo l'intero percorso delle 453 quartine sino a farsi acrostrofe⁵⁸ – avvalora la tesi secondo la quale talora quell'artificio è al servizio di una tecnica compositiva „che mira all'ostentazione oltre misura del rappresentato“⁵⁹:

ARGUMENTUM ET DEDICATIO
in capitibus versuum est haec.

Clarus vt Epeiri dux fortibus ille triumphis
Alter Alexander Magnus, et ipse Driops,
Imperium patrium prudente, Georgius ausu
Castriotus, Dominus, Croia superba, tuus,
Restituatq; suis, libertatemq; reponat
Sxpius et Turcam Marte fauente premat.
Inclyte Peleides tibi Ladislæ Szalanci
Nicolcos patrio carmine facta refert.
Amurathé toties fugat is, Machometis et arma
Aequaevi Hunniadae proxima, fama ducis.
Tum Venetos armis Gallosq; vt vincit vrtoq;
Mosem, Amesamq;, armis et pietate suos.
Bogathius condebat.

⁵⁸ Si veda, per questo procedimento, Pozzi 1984: 63–65.

⁵⁹ Pozzi 1996²: 300.

Ma chi era in realtà il destinatario dell'opera che assicurò ad essa ed alla figura di Scanderbeg una diffusione e un forte rilievo politico anche in area danubiana? "László Szalánczy nel 1560 sposò una dama di corte della regina Isabella, Dorotya Nisowska, figlia di Stanisław Nisowski, influente notevole polacco della corte reale, e di Zamfira, figlia di Moise, voivoda di Valacchia (1529–1530). In base a questo matrimonio László Szalánczy si imparentò con le personalità più importanti di Polonia e Valacchia. Partendo da tale posizione László Szalánczy già da giovane entrò nella sfera dei dirigenti politici più potenti del principato. Dal 1568 prefetto del comitato di Fehér, dal 1591 lo fu anche del comitato di Zaránd; come ambasciatore plenipotenziario, a partire dal 1575 venne inviato più volte presso la Porta e a Buda. Insieme al fratello György si oppose decisamente alla politica di Zsigmond Báthory, che voleva allontanare la Transilvania dalla Porta e farla entrare nella Lega Cristiana sorta al fine di cacciare il Turco. Quando il 28 agosto 1594 e nei giorni seguenti il principe volle liquidare i suoi oppositori politici, anche László Szalánczy si ritrovò fra i condannati a morte. Quest'ultimo però si oppose con le armi ai soldati inviati dalla corte per catturarlo, che si videro costretti ad assediare il castello di Branyicska in una sanguinosa battaglia nel corso della quale morì anche lo stesso Szalánczy"⁶⁰.

Ci troviamo quindi al centro di idee e personaggi, contatti diplomatici e visioni geo-politiche, di non secondaria importanza. Non solo, ma si trattava di materiale storico elaborato e rappresentato secondo una poetica ed un'estetica consone alle aspettative dei destinatari. Ed allora come non dissentire dalla visione pur comprensibile e giustificata del Romanticismo ungherese che definì di natura giornalistica l'insieme dei canti storici composti nel XVI secolo per ricordare gli episodi più significativi della lotta antiturca? Quel giudizio è certamente riduttivo, anche se è vero, tuttavia, che nell'Ungheria del Cinquecento si aveva ancora una concezione pragmatica della letteratura: in altre parole, quelle scritture erano destinate alla diffusione e alla divulgazione di episodi, avvenimenti ed eventi la cui rilevanza doveva servire a delineare un quadro comportamentale in cui venivano rappresentate le virtù del singolo condottiero e/o dell'intera nazione ungherese. Lo scopo di questa letteratura era quindi didascalico ma, attraverso l'insegnamento, si giungeva alla mitizzazione dei personaggi che "fecero" la storia ungherese di questo periodo. Questo processo di mitizzazione utilizzava modelli dell'antichità, secondo una prassi già consolidatasi all'epoca

⁶⁰ Jakó 1999: 199–210.

dell'Umanesimo. Nel cosiddetto “secolo della rovina ungherese” – che non fu solo il XVII, come pensava Miklós Zrínyi (1620–1664), ma anche quello che lo precedette – si aveva il bisogno di evocare i tempi gloriosi della storia d'Ungheria. È naturale che in questo contesto di forte connotazione ideologica, politica e religiosa, si venisse a creare soprattutto il mito del regno di Mattia Corvino (1458–1490) e, più in generale, della dinastia degli Hunyadi, che nel Quattrocento si era distinta appunto nella resistenza quasi sempre vittoriosa all'invasione ottomana. Il messaggio di questi canti storici consisteva dunque nella riproposizione di una unità della nazione ungherese fondata sul superamento delle dispute religiose e dei personalismi di stampo feudale. Si tentava cioè di combattere il frazionamento confessionale e l'anarchia politica. Il compito non era facile: questo progetto, anzi, era quasi sempre destinato al fallimento. Vi era però una sorta di “isola felice” rappresentata dalla Transilvania, costituitasi in principato più o meno indipendente dagli Asburgo e dai Turchi. Qui fu possibile, non senza grandi difficoltà e con il ricorso a vere e proprie alchimie politiche, conservare in misura non disprezzabile l'identità storica e culturale degli Ungheresi.

Perché tutto ciò avvenisse, fu necessario ricorrere al recupero di quei viri illustres che potevano essere di esempio anche per il riscatto morale e civile dell'Ungheria moderna⁶¹. La letteratura fece ricorso ai tòpoi più frequentati o ne creò altri assolutamente nuovi: fra questi, quelli che ebbero maggior successo furono l'identificazione del re Mattia con la figura mitica di Attila (Mattia stesso veniva chiamato *secundus Attila*) e il riferimento continuo ad Alessandro Magno che divenne pertanto il vero modello di ogni condottiero. Ed in questo contesto maturò anche il recupero delle gesta leggendarie di Scanderbeg, che Bogáti Fazakas definì “imprese del secondo Alessandro” sin dalle formule d'esordio:

Ki hallott Sándornál hatalmasb urat,
Jó szerencsénének nem tudjuk mását,
Az vitézlő népnek hagyja nagy példát,
Minden erre néz már, ki bírja magát.

Lőnek után is nagy Fejedelmek,
Kik kicsinből nagyra emelkedének,

⁶¹ Cfr. Klaniczay 1987: 41–58.

Második Sándornak dolgit értsétek,
Kik Törökek hitták jó Szkender Begnek⁶².

Si realizzò pertanto una sorta di sincretismo fra eredità classica e tradizione magiara non limitato alle sole scelte tematiche ma esteso alle tecniche compositive. Questi canti storici, infatti, avevano tutti una struttura strofica fissata dalla tradizione orale che faceva uso di versi sillabo-tonici cantati. Si era perciò alle origini di una poesia epica che ancora non conosceva l'ampio disegno architettonico dell'epos: importante fu però l'ampia utilizzazione dell'exemplum narrativo che veniva contestualmente indirizzato alla soluzione di una "questione morale" che era ritenuta – soprattutto in ambito protestante – la causa maggiore della dissoluzione del regno d'Ungheria. Ci si potrebbe quasi meravigliare della vasta produzione di questi canti storici, se non fossimo a conoscenza del fatto che in un'Ungheria pur dilaniata e tormentata era riuscita in qualche modo a sopravvivere una cultura di corte che aveva ancora accesso alle varie tendenze letterarie europee, accanto ad una struttura educativa fortemente stabile perché riccamente e costantemente alimentata dalle idee più agguerrite delle varie correnti del protestantesimo. Umanesimo e Riforma vanno a braccetto nell'Ungheria del XVI secolo e senza avere la dovuta cognizione di questa osmosi di idee e di ideali risulterebbe incomprensibile l'intero processo evolutivo del Cinquecento letterario ungherese. Secolo non isolato questo, né chiuso in sé stesso da inesistenti iati cronologici, perché anche il Seicento sarà investito sostanzialmente dalla medesima situazione geo-politica. Possiamo anzi dire che le tesi ideologiche formulate nel '500 troveranno uno sviluppo ed una attuazione proprio nel secolo successivo, sino a riuscire a destare un vero e rinnovato interesse dell'Europa occidentale per quella che potremmo chiamare "la questione ungherese".

Tutto ciò ci aiuta a comprendere le componenti culturali e ideologiche che sono alla base del messaggio politico dei canti storici ungheresi: a) la ricerca di adeguati modelli comportamentali antichi e moderni corrispondenti alla volontà di mitizzazione dei protagonisti della storia ungherese; b) una concezione della storia, promossa e sostenuta dalla Riforma, che

⁶² Bogáti Fazakas: *Az nagy Castriot Györgynek, kit az török Szkender bégnek hívott, ki Hunyadi Jánossal két felől vitt az törökre, különb-különb csoda szerencsével, vitézi dolgainak históriája bat részben*, Bogáti Fazakas 1979: I. 1–2, Bogáti Fazakas 1979: I. 1. "Chi mai ha udito d'Alessandro più potente signor, / Del favor della sua sorte non v'è paragone, / Ai guerrieri egli diede grand'esempio / Che seguon tutti color che ne son capaci. // Anche dopo vi furono Principi grandi, / Che da piccoli si fecero grandi, / Del secondo Alessandro apprendete le gesta, / Che i Turchi chiamarono Scanderbeg".

prevedeva fra l'altro l'identificazione delle vicende del popolo ungherese con quelle del popolo ebraico; c) la stretta connessione fra le tesi della Riforma e il progetto di una rifondazione di un regno d'Ungheria sul modello di quello di Mattia Corvino. In altre parole, e soprattutto nella pluriconfessionale e tollerante Transilvania, si svilupparono un pensiero ed una vera e propria teoria del riscatto morale e politico della nazione ungherese che prevedeva una forte interazione fra etica e politica. Sulle orme della riscoperta delle Sacre Scritture, anche in Transilvania si cercava un nuovo Mosè. E non deve meravigliare se un convinto unitariano come Bogáti Fazakas recupera il modello di Scanderbeg: questi, infatti, avendo abbandonato l'Islam sino a diventare uno dei più accaniti avversari dei Turchi e un vero e proprio simbolo della difesa della Cristianità, corrispondeva anche ad un'altra tesi fondamentale della Riforma, cioè alla necessità della conversione. Il protestantesimo, infatti, si aspettava una catarsi morale dell'Europa cristiana dall'abbandono del cattolicesimo considerato ormai come una confessione decisamente allontanata dalla Verità. Anche gli Ungheresi, quindi, dovevano convertirsi alla vera religione, cioè a una delle forme di protestantesimo, abiurando l'autorità del papa romano. Scanderbeg veniva quindi considerato modello esemplare anche per questa sua convinta ed accertata disponibilità a mettere in discussione le proprie idee religiose. Queste tesi così radicali della Riforma sarebbero poi state in parte attenuate nel Seicento, quando l'esasperazione e la recrudescenza delle guerre di religione costrinsero un po' tutti ad un ravvedimento, ad una moderazione che altro non poteva significare se non tolleranza. A Scanderbeg si faceva riferimento perché nella sua persona convivevano il condottiero ideale e il perfetto uomo di fede in quanto convertito. Ecco perché egli divenne un modello anche per Miklós Zrínyi. In altre parole, il processo di mitizzazione degli Hunyadi e di Scanderbeg fu opera prevalentemente di parte protestante, perché quest'ultima pretese di essere l'unica depositaria non solo delle verità teologiche ma anche di quelle teorie politiche ritenute le più valide per la ricostruzione del regno d'Ungheria. Bogáti e in generale le varie correnti della Riforma anticiparono e prevedero le condizioni storico-politiche in cui si sarebbe trovata l'Ungheria se quest'ultima fosse pervenuta nella sua totalità sotto il dominio degli Asburgo. Il vero pericolo, cioè, non era più rappresentato da un Impero ottomano ormai in lento ma progressivo e inarrestabile declino, ma dalla sempre più forte ingerenza degli Asburgo nella situazione geo-politica del bacino carpatico-danubiano.

Il canto storico di Bogáti Fazakas non è però sola mitografia del personaggio. Il progetto è più ambizioso e viene esposto con una disinvoltura affatto insolita nella prassi cronachistica dell'epoca. Il mito diviene sfida aperta e schiaffeggia sonoramente non solo gli aderenti al partito filoasburgico ma anche gli immancabili fautori dell'inerzia e/o dell'indecisione. Ed allora viene pronunciata una sorta di parola inaudita con la proposta solo apparentemente provocatoria di una Transilvania che dovrebbe rinnovarsi sull'esempio del lontano Epiro:

Nem tudéc iobbat en régi dolgokban,
Magyar nemzetnec irom eszt példában,
Epirus lenne az Erdély országban,
Szü, kéz kellene az Török torkában⁶³.

Questa strofa è decisiva, perentoria, categorica. Anche l'Epiro viene ricompreso in un processo di mitizzazione che accomuna idee e ideali, che avvicina uomini e imprese, che coinvolge storia e geografia: si tratta della sintesi energica di una sorta di manifesto politico che proclama il riconoscimento esplicito di una Transilvania che ha preso definitivamente le distanze dall'Ungheria asburgica e da chi la rappresenta. L'idea che si vuole trasmettere esclude per sempre la possibilità del compromesso, nella consapevolezza che solo la realizzazione di un nuovo Epiro nel bacino carpatico-danubiano può mostrarsi risolutivo delle sorti della regione. Ma quali sono i presupposti che consentono di sostenere questa tesi? Forse non si è lontani dal vero se si ipotizza che Bogáti Fazakas è semplicemente un idealista che crede nella fondatezza del retaggio politico di István Báthory; che crede – come altri – che la sua Transilvania sia il vero baluardo della cristianità⁶⁴ e la nuova terra promessa ove ospitare l'avvento di una sorta di nuova età dell'oro⁶⁵; che crede nella riorganizzazione del regno d'Ungheria sulla base di una radicale metanoia e di una generalizzata palingenesi morale.

⁶³ Bogáti Fazakas 1979: VI. 66. “Non potrei conoscer di meglio nelle antiche imprese, / Degli Ungheresi scrivo questo a modello, / Un Epiro ci vorrebbe in Transilvania, / Cuore e braccia ci vogliono ne le fauci del Turco”.

⁶⁴ Facendo riferimento ai lavori segnalati nella nota 2, va segnalato fra l'altro che in Jászay 143, viene citata una lettera di János Hunyadi che in sostanza ripropone la visione mitica di Scanderbeg difensore della Cristianità esposta già in Fraknoi 44. Ciò significa che i due condottieri sono posti sullo stesso piano nella storiografia e nella mitografia.

⁶⁵ Cfr. Di Francesco 2001; a cura di Secchi Tarugi 2003: 629–637.

4. Mattia Corvino e Miklós Zrínyi

Le tesi cinquecentesche crearono le condizioni per la nascita nel Seicento di una trattatistica politico-militare che non poteva non coinvolgere il problema delle lotte religiose: di qui l'interesse europeo per la formulazione teorica ungherese di possibili soluzioni che potevano risultare utili all'intero assetto europeo. Dicendo questo, è evidente che ci si vuole riferire alla figura emblematica di Miklós Zrínyi, poeta, condottiero e uomo politico ungaro-croato, anch'egli fautore della rifondazione di un forte regno ungherese sul modello corviniano, magari arricchito dalle più recenti e vincenti idee dell'assolutismo francese. L'interazione fra Ungheria e il resto d'Europa si fa ora quanto mai efficace e proficua: se la visione politica ungherese si nutrive delle contemporanee acquisizioni europee, quest'ultime si mostravano particolarmente sensibili nei confronti di quanto avveniva e di quanto si pensava in area balcanico-danubiana. I Turchi sostanzialmente non rappresentavano più una minaccia credibile, ma il riferimento costante al loro dominio era uno strumento che consentiva di sperimentare possibilità di aggregazione sino ad allora impensabili. Il disegno di Zrínyi era quanto mai chiaro sino a risultargli fatale: la mal celata avversione per le sempre più pressanti ingerenze asburgiche non produsse i risultati sperati, ma riuscì tuttavia ad elevare la nazione ungherese al rango dei Paesi più importanti d'Europa.

Zrínyi era infatti anche un *maître à penser* particolarmente documentato. La sua biblioteca, giustamente famosa, riserva continue sorprese e – nel nostro caso – ci dice cose significative anche relativamente alla fortuna della notorietà della figura e delle imprese di Scanderbeg. La meritoria e meticolosa ricostruzione di quella preziosa eredità (mi riferisco a Klaniczay 1991) consente infatti di affermare che Zrínyi poté avere un vero e proprio culto per Scanderbeg non solo per il tramite di Bogáti Fazakas: egli poteva infatti attingere informazioni anche da due testi in suo possesso e che avevano conosciuto un'ampia diffusione europea⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ Mi riferisco a [Marini Barletti], *Historia del magnanimo et valoroso signor Georgio Castrioto, detto Scanderbego, dignissimo principe de gli albanì. Dal latino in lingua italiana, per Pietro Rocca nuovamente tradotta*, Francesco Rocca, in Venetia 1568; e Philippus Lonicerus et alii, *Chronicorum Turcicorum [...]. Tomus III. Georgii Castrioti, Epirotarum principis (qui propter egregiam belli virtutem Scanderbegus, hoc est Alexander Magnus, cognominatus fuit) vitam, mores, res gestas, tum Scodrae, quoque urbis expugnationem habet. Autore Marino Barletio. [...]*, Georgius Corvinus, Francofurti ad Moenum 1578. Cfr. *A Bibliotheca Zriniana története és állománya – History and Stock of the Bibliotheca Zriniana*, a cura di Klaniczay 1991: 110 (BZ 18b), 111

Ma per il nostro autore la documentazione non è mai passiva, né diventa sola citazione erudita. Penso alla sua trattatistica, in particolare al *Vitéz badnagy* (1650–1653, Il capitano virtuoso) che ospita con grande disinvoltura alcune importanti, libere manipolazioni delle fonti. Ne è testimonianza questo passaggio dedicato al concetto di *szorgalmatosság* (zelo, diligenza, sollecitudine), che a noi qui interessa anche dal punto di vista del nostro principale assunto:

“De lássuk meg példából a szorgalmatosságnak hasznát és szorgalmatlanságnak kárát. Székander bég mit nem fáradott, mit nem cselekedett a maga hazájának megmaradásáért! Egy ember önálánál soha nem aludt kevesebbet, mikor dolga volt, ő maga járt, ahol kellett, maga istrázsált, ahol szükséges volt, ő tizenötezer ember erejével százezereket megvert, hatalmas császárokat megfutamtatott, és egyszóval a nagy szorgalmatossággal pórázra kötötte a szerencsét, és amennyire bátor szívével, annyira szorgalmatosságának köszönheti szerencséjét, hírét-nevét”⁶⁷.

Come è stato giustamente rilevato⁶⁸, qui le argomentazioni sulla esemplarità di Giulio Cesare sono state omesse o trasferite sui modelli più vicini e più pertinenti di Scanderbeg e di Hunyadi. E non appare priva di fondamento l'ipotesi che vuol far risalire al Machiavelli la formulazione delle caratteristiche più autentiche delle virtù (fra esse appunto la *szorgalmatosság*) del condottiero ideale⁶⁹. Né di minore importanza è il fatto che queste doti siano considerate indispensabili anche per tenere a bada il gioco instabile della fortuna, come aveva appunto dimostrato ed insegnato Scanderbeg districandosi nelle fitte trame della buona e della cattiva sorte. E ben sappiamo quanto quest'attitudine sia stata ritenuta indispensabile in tutta la produzione letteraria di Zrínyi. Ed allora non desta meraviglia la fondata certezza che la figura dell'eroe albanese dovette piacere così tanto all'uomo politico ungherese da indurre l'agostiniano irlandese Marc Forstall (Marcus

(BZ 90); Klaniczay 1991: 161–162. L'importanza della traduzione di Rocha relativamente alla mitizzazione zrínyiana di Scanderbeg è stata evidenziata anche in Klaniczay 1964: 59.

⁶⁷ Zrínyi 2003: 266: “Ma vediamo ad esempio l'utilità dello zelo e i danni causati dalla pigrizia. Scanderbeg quanto non si adoperò, quanto non fece per la sopravvivenza della sua patria! Nelle imprese nessun dormiva meno di lui; presente egli stesso quando occorreva, vigilava dove il bisogno lo richiedeva; con la forza di quindici mila uomini riusciva a vincerne centomila; mise in fuga potenti imperatori e con il suo grande zelo tenne a guinzaglio la fortuna: insomma, al coraggio e allo zelo egli deve fama e fortuna.” Zrínyi menziona Scanderbeg ancora a p. 301 e nelle *Mátyás-elmélkedések* (Riflessioni su Mattia): Zrínyi 2003: 385.

⁶⁸ Cfr. Klaniczay 1964: 414–415.

⁶⁹ Cfr. Klaniczay 1964: 462.

Forestal, +1685) a ricostruire su commissione anche una linea di parentela fra i due personaggi⁷⁰. Se poi Zrínyi fa esplicito riferimento alla patria del Castriota e non alla più generale nozione di cristianità, ciò può significare che il poeta ungherese voglia esprimere e confermare la tesi della identificazione della funzione politico-militare dell'Albania e dell'Ungheria accogliendo la visione mitizzante già verificata nel canto storico di Bogáti Fazakas. Pare cioè che si voglia enfatizzare una sorta di laica (antiasburgica) visione politica accanto alla pur inevitabile e insostituibile giustificazione religiosa della guerra al Turco.

Siamo arrivati, dunque, al nucleo centrale delle motivazioni profonde che portarono alla creazione del mito ungherese di Scanderbeg per opera della triade Bonfini – Bogáti Fazakas – Zrínyi: l'eroe di stampo plutarchiano, recuperato secondo le esigenze dell'immaginario umanistico, lasciò il posto prima all'iroso guerriero-profeta della Riforma, poi al risoluto *homo novus* partecipe del pensiero politico europeo. Questo processo fu così dinamico che ben presto superò i limiti pur non angusti del bacino carpato-danubiano per investire nella sua totalità l'idea stessa di un nuovo assetto continentale.

La strumentalizzazione del fattore confessionale all'interno di una nuova progettualità organizzativa e fors'anche un pizzico di spregiudicata laicità furono quindi le componenti basilari di una sorta di ideologica gravidanza gemellare che portò inaspettatamente ad accomunare – fuori d'Ungheria, nella lontana Inghilterra – le figure di Scanderbeg e di Zrínyi. Mi riferisco naturalmente alla misteriosa paternità (o maternità, volendo insistere sulla precedente metafora) che produsse l'importante trilogia il cui titolo mi permetto qui di riportare per esteso: O. C., *The Conduct and Character of Count Nicholas Serini, Protestant Generalissimo of the Auxiliaries in Hungary, The most Prudent and resolved Champion of Christendom. With his Parallels Scanderbeg & Tamberlain. Interwoven with the principal Passages of the Christians and Turks Discipline and Success, since the Infidels first Invasion of Europe, in the year 1313*, London 1664⁷¹. Non si tratta di un volume collettaneo, ma della rappresentazione unitaria di un disegno politico che passa attraverso la rivisitazione mitizzante di tre grandi protagonisti della storia. In attinenza al nostro

⁷⁰ Cfr. Klaniczay 1964: 629.

⁷¹ Una versione anastatica è in *Angol életrajz Zrínyi Miklósról* [Una biografia inglese di Miklós Zrínyi], a cura di Kovács 1987: 155–336. Questi, rispettivamente, i titoli delle tre biografie: *The Conduct and Character of Count Nicholas Serini* (Kovács 1987: 1–111); *The Life and Actions of George Castriot surnamed Scanderbeg, the other Champion of Christendome* (Kovács 1987: 112–146); *Tamberlain, the great Scourge of the Turks* (Kovács 1987: 147–168).

assunto possiamo dire che la pubblicazione congiunta delle biografie di Zrínyi e di Scanderbeg ha certamente anche un risvolto religioso, almeno dal punto di vista della possibile conversione dei Turchi al cristianesimo⁷². E però va anche detto che la produzione di questa pubblicistica mirava soprattutto al rafforzamento di una strategia che aveva mire ben più ambiziose di quelle apertamente espresse dalla mera guerra di religione. Non si spiegherebbe altrimenti la contemporaneità di un interesse anche francese che porta alla luce, fra il 1663 e il 1664 e forse ad opera di Giovanni Sagredo, *Le Mars à la mode de ce temps*, Liège 1672⁷³.

Nella biografia inglese vi è un vero e proprio parallelismo dei due condottieri:

This is [Zrínyi] he who doth wonders, and is one whose actions strein the belief of the present age, and will be impossible among Posterity; whom alla admire, and the generous may imitate, as he doth Scanderbeg, if he imitates any, or be not rather his own great rule, his own great example being sufficient to himself⁷⁴.

Questa biografia è anche un trattato storico-politico, poiché contiene argomentazioni e tesi che riguardano il futuro assetto dell'Europa dopo l'eliminazione del pericolo turco. Il concetto fondamentale consiste nella progettazione di una rinnovata difesa della Cristianità nonostante le divisioni confessionali che avevano caratterizzato soprattutto l'area balcanico-danubiana: quest'ultima – agli occhi dello sconosciuto biografo inglese – aveva dimostrato la capacità di essere il vero baluardo dell'Occidente, anche perché in essa si erano distinti personaggi esemplari come appunto Scanderbeg e Zrínyi. Si tratta quindi di una visione geopolitica certamente moderna, che non vedeva più le sorti dell'Europa separate o distinte da quelle dell'intera area mediterranea e medio-orientale. A Londra si celebra la percezione politica di Zrínyi perché le idee dell'uomo politico ungaro-croato erano ritenute le più confacenti ad un efficace tentativo di risistemazione dell'Europa intera dopo l'immane tragedia della Guerra dei Trent'anni. In altre parole, si riconosce anche e soprattutto fuori d'Ungheria che la situazione del bacino carpato-danubiano è strettamente

⁷² Cfr. Nagy 2003: 117–118.

⁷³ Cfr. Toulouze – Hanus 2002: 52; Nagy 2003: 119; *Hungarica. Ungarn betreffende im Auslande gedruckte Bücher und Flugschriften*. Gesammelt und beschrieben von Graf Alexander Apponyi, I–III. Neubearbeitet von Vekerdi 2004 I: 971, 569–571.

⁷⁴ O. C., Vekerdi 2004: 111. Il corsivo è dell'Autore. Un'efficace interpretazione è in Klaniczay 1964: 777.

connessa con il generale assetto politico d'Europa. Indirettamente, tutto ciò vale come riconoscimento anche della particolare funzione civile di quanto la letteratura ungherese aveva sino ad allora prodotto anche nel campo della filosofia della storia. Di qui anche il recupero della figura di Tamerlano che contribuisce anch'esso al robusto consolidamento del mito di Scanberbeg:

To raise the drooping thoughts of Christendom, with seasonable discourses of those several Champions who have in every age checkt the growing power of the Turk, though as threatenng & terrible as at this time, we have at large expressed the admired Carriage and Conduct of Count Serini, and in brief recounted the known actions of Scanderbeg: and to make the number compleat, added here the exact account of great Tamberlain, who weakned the Grand Seignior as much Eastward, as those brave persons have done Northward: a Triumviri these, that are no to be parallel'd, three Heroes that have outgone Antiquity, and out-reached Posterity. The first an Heathen born, to punish Infidelity; the second a Papist, born to vindicate Christianity; the third a Protestant, born as some think to reform the World. The first informs us how Turkie may be perplexed by Divisions and Invasions: the other two have taught us how it may be lessened by resolved Defeats and Oppositions. Here we may see what may be done in Asia; there what may be done in Europe. Serini hath instructed the world what resolution and prudence; Scanderbeg, what correspondences and activity; and Tamberlain, what number and cruelty may be exercised against that overflowing power and people⁷⁵.

V'è del vero nell'argomentazione di chi sostiene che il presunto protestantesimo di Zrínyi viene qui additato strumentalmente a modello della comunità inglese⁷⁶. E però appare riduttiva l'opinione⁷⁷ secondo la quale la figura di Scanderbeg risulterebbe estranea alla ricerca sul pensiero politico di Zrínyi, anche perché i riscontri filologici avvalorano l'ipotesi di un'origine lontana delle biografie di Scanderbeg e Tamerlano⁷⁸ sino a permetterci di pensare che non era allora di sola ascendenza danubiana l'esigenza di procedere ad uno sguardo meno provinciale delle cose d'Ungheria. A questo punto, invece, bisognerebbe mettersi a controllare storie e documenti, resoconti cronachistici e imbellettamenti letterari, andando a ricercare ancor

⁷⁵ O. C., Vekerdi 2004: 147–148. I corsivi sono dell'Autore.

⁷⁶ Cfr. Kovács 1987: 7–26 [16].

⁷⁷ Cfr. Kovács 1987: 25.

⁷⁸ Cfr. Katalin Péter, *Zrínyi Miklós angol rajongói* [Gli ammiratori inglesi di Miklós Zrínyi], in Kovács 1987: 27–63 [44–45].

meglio le condizioni di partenza di un pensiero politico che, attraverso un uso forse ancor troppo pragmatico della letteratura, si fa riflessione filosofica e vera e propria filosofia della storia. Lo slogan della discordia ungherese e lo stereotipo della „Querela Hungariae“⁷⁹ sembrano quasi incontrarsi con una sospensione della storia che vorrebbe che il processo evolutivo delle vicende europee volgesse in una direzione più rassicurante. Ma così non fu e il panegirico venne presto sostituito dall'epitaffio:

*In Illustrissimi D. Nicolai Comitibus
Zerenyi tumulum.*

Pompa *Tamerlani* nullo reticebitur ævo,
Dum *Bajazethis* colla superba domat.
Scanderbeg magnus moriente hoc natus *Epiri*,
Agmine collecto maximus ense fuit.
Hungarus Hunniades, quoque Marte potente *Joannes*,
Afflictæ patriæ firma columna fuit.
Nuper *Turcarum* crudelius affluit agmen,
Hungariam sperans iam sine Duce suam!
Surrexit validus patria de gente *Zerenyi*,
Qui *Turcas* tumidos vicerat ense potens.
Et venit, vidit, vicit, simul ipse Tyrannum,
Nomine mox solo terror & ipse fuit.
Heu mirum! Vah triste novum! Cadit ipse *Zerenyi*!
Nunc tantum lugent agmina sparsa Ducem.
Sic fuit in Fatis: caput insuperabile bello,
Venandi ludo mittitur ad tumulum.
Sed tumulum dignum si quæras forte viator,
Pro magno hoc animo non satis Orbis habet.

JOHANNES MEGALINUS S.⁸⁰

Ma, come si vede, anche la nostalgia di una memoria dolente non tralascia la comunanza di ideali attribuita ai nostri due personaggi. Essi hanno agito nella storia come funamboli di un podio fattosi sempre più infido e fu grazie anche ad essi che la previsione ideale divenne anticipazione scientifica. E il

⁷⁹ Per una documentata analisi di questo tòpos si veda Imre 1995.

⁸⁰ In *Lacrymæ Hungaricæ*, London 1665. Cfr. Bene in Kovács 1987: 355–368. I corsivi sono dell'Autore.

retaggio non fu magro né misero, poiché non se ne sarebbe occupata solo la storiografia, ma anche una letteratura che non avrebbe ancora trovato le giuste motivazioni per provare ad ostentare indifferenza verso simili questioni. A ben vedere, anche la vicenda esemplare di Scanderbeg insegna che la storia d'Ungheria è un continuo ed incompiuto romanzo di formazione i cui protagonisti sembrano sfuggire al presunto rigore delle categorie critiche. Ed allora, ed al di là dei pur importanti risultati sinora acquisiti e sulla base di nuove prove documentarie⁸¹, non ci resta che condividere l'umiltà di chi riesce ad ammettere che la ricerca sull'argomento affrontato è solo agli inizi: „potremmo ancora continuare nelle congetture, ma risultati meritori si possono ottenere solo con fondate ricerche sistematiche“⁸². Si tratta di una sfida che va raccolta, se vogliamo essere in grado di trovare le *mot juste* che ci consenta di comprendere sempre meglio questo intrigante ed allettante capitolo della storia anche letteraria dell'Europa centro-orientale.

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⁸¹ Cfr. Gömöri in 1999: 210-228.

⁸² Péter in Kovács 1987: 59.

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King Matthias in Hungarian and European Folklore

Kralj Matjaž King Matthias of the Slovenes, successor to Kresnik, and legendary conqueror of the Turks. Like Kresnik, Matjaž too was married to his sister, Alenčica, whom, in legend, he rescued from the Turks, or in Slovenian traditional ballad, from the underworld. Matjaž is also a king in the mountain, sleeping till the day of Slovenia's utter need, when he will emerge and save everything...

It is said that during World War II the peasants thought King Matjaž would ride again and save Slovenia.

(Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend. Editor: Maria Leach. New York, 1950. vol. I. p. 589–590. – This is the only entry in the until today most famous Folklore Dictionary, where King Matthias appears.)

In Hungary and the bordering countries, it is a well-known fact that the deeds of King Mátyás (Matthias) Corvin (original family name: Hunyadi) are of interest to this day not only to historians and cultural historians, but also to folklorists. This is due quite simply to the fact that tales, legends, myths, proverbs, etc. in which the king figured have been recorded not only in Hungarian folklore, but also in the Slovenian, Slovak, and Ruthenian folklore of the past several centuries (practically speaking up to the present day). A succession of prominent Hungarian and non-Hungarian researchers of folklore have examined these themes. While the folklore phenomena of the Carpathian Basin or the northern and western areas of the Balkans are interrelated in thousands of other respects, the figure of the Hungarian king, who perished more than half a millennium ago, is possibly the most recognized common subject in this region, which itself can only be truly assessed within the framework of international research.¹

The fact that, for a long time, innumerable stories have surrounded the Romanian origins of the father of King Matthias, János Hunyadi (? 1407/1409–1456, the famous military leader who defeated the Turks) and the possible lineage of the Hungarian king (1387–1437) Sigismund of Luxembourg (later [1410–1437] also the Holy Roman Emperor) is part of

¹ In this review, I refer to well known facts, thus I do not have to list general works on the mentioned historic events here.

this international perspective. Numerous Hungarian heroes (among them the young János Hunyadi, as Jankula, Matthias' uncle Mihály Szilágyi, and even King Matthias and his captains) regularly figure in Southern Slav heroic epic poetry. And even these broader relationships cannot be comprehended entirely if we fail to take into consideration further and more remote historical and folklore data and interpretations of these data, including material also from Albanian, Moravian, Czech, Austrian and Italian sources.

The imagology of King Matthias is a highly illuminating topic in European comparative folklore, a topic to which we can recently add further parallels, even those of a typological (i.e. not-genetical) nature. Here we can list only some motifs, e.g. the boy born amidst miraculous premonitions, the Christian ruler fighting the pagans, the king who protected the people and was the scourge of the lords, the ruthless yet just ruler, the sovereign who is not only of not-aristocratic lineage but is of outright peasant origin and who explores the country in disguise, and finally the figure of the immortal returning hero – these all constitute models that could have been concocted in the folklore of many peoples.

The arrival and a certain blossoming of humanism and the Renaissance in 15th century Hungary, the influx of Italians and from other nations, the splendor until then unheard of in Hungary, the spread of court culture, the carefully tailored political and military propaganda, the breaking of the ideological monopoly of the Church, and eventually the final disbanding of the much feared professional soldiery (the king's so-called Black Army) into a gang of robbers represented new phenomena that could easily be transformed into motifs in local or comparative folklore.

Neither was the private life of King Matthias short of novelistic twists and turns. The execution of László (his elder brother), the captivity in Prague, the betrothal of the daughter of the Czech ruler Jiří (George) Poděbrad, the election of the very young Matthias as king of Hungary by common people on the "frozen waters of the Danube," the decision of the king to turn soon on his earliest supporters, the averting of several conspiracies (in which the majority of his favored Hungarian humanists in fact took active part), his ceaseless and endless military campaigns, his second marriage to a princess of Naples, his long and multifarious relationship with the historical Dracula (Vlad Țepeș)², the capture of Vienna, his ambitions to become King of Bohemia, prince of Silesia and, indeed, prince-

² See the details in another paper by Farkas in this volume.

elector of the Holy Roman Empire, and ultimately his unexpected and peculiar death and the fate of the illegitimate son, János Corvin (1473–1504), chosen as his successor – all seemed almost to have been recorded not simply as history but as fiction. And indeed his contemporaries themselves must have often conversed and debated or invented explanations concerning such events. Seeing as how within the span of only a few decades after his death the greatest peasant rebellion in Hungary took place (1514), the Hungarian kingdom itself ceased to exist following the defeat at Mohács in 1526, the southern and central regions of the country were conquered in the coming 150 years by the Ottoman Empire, and then the century of Reformation and religious struggles began – the period of Matthias Heyday’s rule can seem soon by the coming generations something of an irretrievable “golden age”, and to some in Hungary does seem so even to this day.

Folklorists have known for some time that an idealized image of the king emerged invariably in the folklore of the above mentioned peoples. Ever since these texts were recorded in the folklore of these nations (essentially as of the 19th century) the question has arisen: Where do the origins of this international agglomeration of multi-genre texts mentioning King Matthias lie? In the case of Hungarians (Croatians and Slovaks), one could suppose that by this time (in the 19th century) the already long and official historical consciousness in Hungary had become part of the broader consciousness of the people (presumably through intermediaries), though in the case of Slovenian and Ruthenian, Romanian (etc.) folklore such an explanation is by no means self-evident.³

As early as 1842–1843 Matija Majar Ziljski published (in German) Slovenian songs about King Matthias. The first comparative scholar of folklore concerning king Matthias was the Galician philologist Zenon Kuzelja, a student of Vatroslav Jagić, the famous Slavist in Vienna. In a monograph (Kuzelja, 1906), he summarized these traditions of Slavic peoples (and Hungarians). Kuzelja is a representative of the comparative study of Slavonic languages and literatures of his time, most notably accepting the views on the migration of themes and motifs held by the eminent Russian philologist, A. N. Veselovsky. While we may be familiar today with a far broader array of information and texts, the methods and conclusions of Kuzelja (and of

³ In the following parts of my paper I do not give full references of all the works mentioned, because in the summarizing sources – included in my bibliography – there are detailed further references.

his teachers) nevertheless still deserve of our attention. A monograph published half a century later by Slovak folklore scholar Ján Komorovský (1957) essentially adopts this approach, only adding more historical and cautionary Marxist social commentary, if anything. In Slovenian philology several generations of outstanding scholars examined this subject. Ivan Grafenauer first surveyed the legends⁴ and later the songs.⁵ He also gave scholarly consideration to the hypothesis that in Slovenian folklore Matthias could be considered a substitute for an almost mythical figure of earlier texts. The possibility of an “ancient, mythical” interpretation arose in particular in the case of Slovenian narrative or epical-lyrical songs, an interpretation that was also maintained by scholars of novels and novelists to the extent that they substituted Matthias not for the figure of the Hungarian king, but for outlaw barons and rebels from among the people. Fortunately, distinguished Slovenian scholars such as Milko Matičetov, Vilko Novak, Vlado Nartnik, and others took a fairly cautious stance on this question. They and their colleagues drew attention to the fact that the themes of the texts mentioning Matthias also contain well known international motifs (which can nearly all be analyzed individually and which point into various and divergent directions). Of these, the most notable is the Orpheus-motif known from antiquity, and later the so-called Kyffhäuser motif of the hero waiting in a cave and returning with his army.⁶ Igor Kercha links⁷ the duration of the Ruthenian Matthias tradition to the present day with the historical consciousness of the local population of the north-easternmost part of historical Hungary, which has existed for as long as folk texts have been collected in this Sub-Carpathian region.

As far as Hungarian researchers of folklore are concerned, although from the end of the 18th century to the turn of the 19th the theoreticians of this field (Mátyás Rát, Miklós Révai, István Kultsár, Ferenc Kölcsey, János Erdélyi, or even János Kriza, Arnold Ipolyi, Pál Gyulai, etc.) considered contemporary Hungarian folklore as the depository of the historical past, it was precisely the figure of King Matthias that they did not place in the foreground. While they published narratives containing the figure of Matthias, they neglected to emphasize their “historical” importance. The Hungarian

⁴ Grafenauer 1951a.

⁵ Grafenauer 1951b.

⁶ See Lukács 2001.

⁷ Kercha 2001.

national poet Sándor Petőfi reveals why he advises that no (modern) heroic epic should be written about Matthias: "Just don't take a king as your hero, not even Matthias. He too was a king, and one is a dog and the other is another dog (as bad as the other)."⁸ After some hesitant initiatives of Lajos Abafi, in fact, Elek Benedek was the first (in 1902, in other words, fairly late) to place Matthias in the spotlight in Hungarian publications for the general public on folk poetry. The "anecdotes" related to the king were published by Béla Tóth in a six-volume series of common anecdotes in Hungary in a scattered way (*Magyar anekdotakincs* from 1898 onwards). It constitutes a work of unique importance for Hungarian national and historical identity, but it is not a collection of proper folklore texts. It is also from here that Hungarian belletrists borrowed their stories of Matthias once inspired by folklore. Writers and the folklorists in Hungary at first were unaware, however, that the role of Matthias in oral tradition was not unique to Hungarian culture.

Needles to say, this is not applicable any more to the scholarly study of folklore in Hungary. Ágoston Pável was the first⁹ who had connected the Slovenian "Orpheus theme" with Hungarian texts. As a matter of fact, up until the end of his life he endeavored to provide a monographic survey of Slovenian and Hungarian King Matthias lore, which he was not able to complete, the lectures he gave at the beginning of the 1940s at the University of Szeged notwithstanding. István Szémán reviewed¹⁰ Kuzelja's book, Rezső Szegedy (1916) examined the role of the Hunyadi family in Southern Slavic epic poetry, and in various writings József Ernyey called for the importance of the Czech Matthias tradition.¹¹ On numerous occasions various scholars in Hungary expounded on the wealth of Southern Slavic folklore. It is therefore all the more surprising that in the most prestigious ethnographic reference work (*A Magyarság Néprajza*), published during the interwar years, professor Sándor Solymossy¹², then the leading Hungarian folklorist, basically fails to recognize the majority of outstanding international connections of Hungarian folklore concerning King Matthias. As early as the 1940s, however, his student Gyula Ortutay accentuated precisely this international context in articles and university lectures, urging the

⁸ See his letter to the famous Hungarian fellow poet, János Arany, February 23, 1847.

⁹ Pável 1909.

¹⁰ Szémán 1912.

¹¹ Ernyey 1921.

¹² Solymossy 1935: 218–227, 253–254.

completion of a comparative monograph.¹³ His efforts, unfortunately, were not entirely successful and he himself failed to write the so much heralded summarizing essay. János Horváth, the most notable positivist literary historian of the interwar years (who incidentally took an interest in Hungarian folklore, at least that of the nineteenth century), does not discuss the stories pertaining to King Matthias in his writings. Another literary historian, Béla Zolnai¹⁴, also concerned himself exclusively with the literary history of the official Matthias tradition.

Fortunately the situation today is quite different. Imre Ferenczi, Zoltán Ujváry, and in recent decades Ildikó Kríza¹⁵, Zoltán Magyar and others have discussed the Matthias tradition on innumerable occasions as it has figured in historiography and folklore, to mention only the most outstanding, well-known scholars. István Lukács provided an overview of Slovenian material and András Dávid and recently Károly Jung examined Southern Slavic folklore connections.¹⁶ Among literary historians, Tibor Kardos attempted in a manner sometimes hardly credible but always ingenious to assemble the information from the Matthias era into a unified whole. István Fried reviewed the results of comparative Hungarian philology. One may hope with good reason that the current anniversary (2008) of the rule of King Matthias will bring further scholarly achievements.

After this introductory survey, two questions remain to be answered: What are the historical layers of this inter-ethnic Matthias folklore? How can this be characterized from a social-historical perspective? Regardless of the task and the limits of the scope provided, I will attempt to reach some conclusions.

“Matthias folklore” before King Matthias?

Given that the international parallels of several texts have old records (examples include e.g. the heroic first strata of *Solomon and Markolf* texts), the possibility arises that the name of the king was inserted in these later. This is

¹³ Ortutay 1942.

¹⁴ Zolnai 1921.

¹⁵ Kríza 2007.

¹⁶ Lukács 2001; Dávid 1978; Jung 2008.

conceivable but hard to prove. And there are no such examples dating back this far in Hungarian, despite the parallels in motifs.

About the Orpheus and Kyffhäuser motifs' stratification, I have already repeated above the common opinion in comparative folklore¹⁷.

New, emerging genre(s) in the age of King Matthias

It was Tibor Kardos¹⁸ who thought of the *trufa* (*jest, fabliaux, Schwank*) genre in Hungarian as of Italian origin and a genre to which there are references dating from the time of King Sigismund of Luxembourg. This is somewhat conceivable, although no one has come across such texts from Hungary. The only information available concerning *trufa* even from the era of King Matthias is of a philological plausibility. At this historical point, the references to *practical joke* appears in Hungary. (Examples include the story of the "traveling showman throwing peas through a keyhole", who is rewarded by King Matthias with a basket of peas so that he can practice, or the story "there was once a dog-market in Buda," which might be rendered in an English tale as, "once it came to pass, but only once.") With respect to the first occurrences of these and their later transformations as part of tradition little more than conjecture has been made. On the other hand, the propaganda value of such stories is clear: the (hidden) message is that the King has unique and modern technology in his castle, including doors with key-holes (a novelty in Europe then), or he has constantly been developing markets with surprising new wares to sell and buy.

The kinds and genres of royal propaganda

It is commonly known that Italian Renaissance marked the beginning of a new era in the thousand-year-old "ruler's propaganda" in Europe. Hungary

¹⁷ For the broader context of the Orpheus motif (unsuccessful return by the power of music from the other world), see the entry *Orpheus* in the international encyclopaedia of folk narratives (Ranke 2000) vol. 10, issue 1, p. 373–376. For the broader context of the Kyffhäuser motif (immortal hero and his troops are sleeping in a cave, and will return if there is a great crisis to deal with), see the paragraph 7 of the entry *Entrückung* in the same encyclopaedia (Ranke 1984) vol 4. issue 1, p. 53–54. See also the motto of my paper.

¹⁸ Kardos 1955.

and especially King Matthias followed the new trend: bringing specialists to his kingdom educated specifically for this task. One of them, Antonio Bonfini, not only created a family genealogy (*De Corvinianae domus origine libellus*) but also wrote the ambitious complete “Hungarian history” (*Rerum ungaricarum decades*), a work that took into consideration the writings of Hungarian historians. Janus Pannonius (1434–1472), an extremely talented poet from “Hungarian Croatia” educated to become a minion of the king, was charged with, among other tasks, the provision of a heroic epistle collection from the battlefield or a similarly magnifying poetic description of the king’s battles (*Annales*). Instead, the haughty and individualistic poet wrote reflective elegies about the too long time he spent with the royal army fighting the Turks (speaking almost exclusively about his own health, dreams and astrologic speculations). The Latin verses written by Janus Pannonius remained familiar to European humanist poets, but no folklore concerning King Matthias originated with him. Bonfini, on the other hand, remained an inexhaustible source for Hungarian historians for centuries.

One of the most interesting example of these Corvinian propagandistic works is the small collection of reports entitled *De egregie, sapienter, iocose dictis ac factis regis Matthiae / ad ducem Johannem, eius filium liber/* (“the excellent, clever and witty sayings and deeds of King Matthias” /dedicated to his son/) by Galeotto Marzio (cca. 1427–1497), from which dozens of anecdotes could be borrowed any times. Galeotto became a friend of Janus Pannonius while studying in Verona. It was on Janus’ invitation that he made a short visit to Hungary in 1461. The Italian humanist came for a longer stay in 1465 only to return home in 1472 at the time of the conspiracy against the Corvin king. Because of his heretical work (*De incognitis vulgo* – 1477) Galeotto was imprisoned in Venice during the Inquisition and was only set free thanks to the intervention of (among others) King Matthias. Following this, he came to Hungary on many occasions to meet with Matthias, though he wrote the above mentioned collection of anecdotes not in Hungary but in Italy in 1485, dedicating it to the King’s son, János Corvin. It is not likely that Galeotto ever returned to Hungary after this year. We know little of the last years of his life (he was already dead in 1497). The typical “itinerant humanist” with a life full of twists and turns was therefore first the hiring of King Matthias and later became a member of the opposition against him, only to find himself in his debt in the end. In the small collection of stories (*De ... dictis ac factis...*) depicting life in the Hungarian court (which one

might refer to as brief sketches in contemporary journalism) he proved to be a clever PR-specialist and staunch adherent of the modern and cultured king. The Italian author ascribes to the Hungarian King some proverbs (with more or less credibility), which might be a good topic of further research. (E.g. in a later written vernacular document the well known quotation from Cicero (*Pro Mil.* IV. 10): *Silent leges inter arma* was referred to as one of the favorite sayings of Matthias in an innovative form: “*Inter arma silent Musae*”, which is, in fact, not only registered in international paremiology, but also well-known also in modern Hungarian.¹⁹) We do not know how well Galeotto’s Latin work was known in Hungary at the time of his contemporaries and afterwards. And although a few people looked for signs of what we might call “heretical” ideologies in this work, none were found.

Ultimately, apart from generalities, we have little idea of how the Hungarian king made practical use of the propagandistic works that he himself commissioned.

On the trail of the “political officers” of the Black Army

In Hungarian-language literature, in addition to texts adapted by official historians we can read “popular” stories about the era of King Matthias first in the chronicle by István Bencédi Székely entitled *Cronica ez világnak jeles dolgairól*²⁰ and in the work of Heltai entitled *Krónika az magyaroknak dolgairól* (‘Chronicle about the Affairs of the Hungarians’). The latter was published posthumously by his widow in 1575. He makes mention of the popular stories as texts that he heard from the “former soldiers of the Black Army.”

Székely, born in Bencéd (Bențid in Romanian), in the region of Udvarhelyszék (Transylvania) sometime after 1500, studied first as a Franciscan monk and then as a student at the university in Cracow. From 1538 on, he was an evangelical (Lutheran) pastor (and later in the church he belonged to a so-called sacramentarian movement). We know of printed works dated by him that were written with the intention of addressing all strata of Hungarian society. These included calendars, hymnals, catechisms, and translations of psalms. He even embarked on a Hungarian translation of the Bible. The Transylvanian Saxon Kaspar Helth (Gáspár Heltai) was a decade

¹⁹ I thank for this reference to my colleagues László Szörényi and Gyula Paczolay.

²⁰ ‘Chronicle about Notable Affairs of this World’, 1559.

younger than Székely. Born around 1510 in Heltau, today Cisnădie (Nagydisznód in Hungarian), he began as a Catholic priest. He learned Hungarian only around 1536 and became a Lutheran (later he also became a Sacramentarian and, indeed, at the end of his life, an outright Antitrinitarian). He joined hands with another Saxonian in Transylvania, the printer Georg Hoffgreff of Kolozsvár (Klausenburg, today Cluj/Napoca) in 1550. Heltau's remarkably diverse printing activities led to the widespread publication of popular and educational materials in Hungarian. It is not easy to determine whether in the 1530's István the "Székely" and the Saxon from Heltau in fact met with the discharged soldiers of the Black Army who allegedly recounted the Matthias stories. It was with the help of this army that the seventeen-year-old János Corvin attempted (unsuccessfully) to seize power at the time of the death of King Matthias in 1490. In 1492, Pál Kinizsi, once the commander-in-chief of the king's army, and a very cruel soldier, routed the Black Army. Kinizsi died only a few years later (1494). János Corvin moved to the side of the Jagellonian King Wladislaw (Ulászló) II of Hungary, and as Viceroy (*banus*) of Croatia and Slavonia oversaw the defense of the country's south-western territories against the Turks. He died in 1504 just after his thirtieth birthday. This constituted the point in time up to which the former soldiers of King Matthias' army, or at least small contingents of it, might have stayed together, sharing some "common folklore". By 1530 the former soldiers of the Black Army would have been around 70 years old. It is conceivable that people listened with greater interest to their recountings in Transylvania, which, in contrast with the rest of the country, the Ottoman armies had largely avoided. We know little more, however, of exactly how and where István Székely or Heltau might have come into contact with this oral tradition. Nevertheless, both of their works are distinguished by knowledge of contemporary public opinion, the knowledge of common folk. We have no reason to doubt that the soldiers of the Black Army were "ideologically" instructed by "political officers." There is no doubt that one of the main themes was that the professional and mercenary army, not only well trained and successful but also forceful and ruthless, was waging war in the name of "righteous and noble" goals in lands that were usually located far from Buda. As for the "mother tongue" of most of the soldiers, we can highlight Hungarian, Czech, German, and further languages, because the soldiers were recruited from several regions. It made the international spread of narratives easier. Like so many iron fisted kings of feudal

times Matthias himself regularly came into conflict with the nobility, and although the life of the common people was certainly not easy under the rule of the bellicose king, who always had to collect more and more taxes in order to finance military ventures, under his successors the burdens simply grew while the benefits dwindled. It is conceivable that from the beginning of the 16th century the popularity of “our once great king” grew. *Matthias obiit, iustitia periiit* ‘King Matthias died, the justice ceased to exist’ – popular opinion may have said.

The splendid image of the Corvinus kingdom in contemporary Europe

The tidings of a dynamic reformer and a rich, splendor loving king quickly spread, mainly in Austrian, Czech, Italian, and Romanian territories, but also in more distant lands, among Germans and Poles, in the Balkans and even in the Ottoman Empire. His envoys traveled widely in Europe and foreign delegates who were masterfully entertained in his court, came to Hungary from all directions, from Stambul and Rome, from the Holy German Empire and even from Muscovy. The king was indeed a man of erudition, a sovereign ruler who had a firm opinion on many questions. Those who delivered weapons, luxury items, and splendidly decorated books to Hungary, no doubt spoke, in their home countries, of the ruler who assured such an immensely rich market. Yet, this could not have been the thematic basis of a “European folklore” about Matthias Hunyadi. If we take into consideration that in 1477 Queen Beatrix of Aragon’s (from Naples) sister, Eleonora, Duchess of Ferrara, sent 56 varieties of carnival masks to Hungary and that on other occasions lions (which – according to the narratives – later died on the same day when Matthias died!) were sent to the king’s court, this does little more than give the impression that this was a wealthy and somehow barbarian country (like today’s Kuwait or Abu Dhabi) where there was money to be spent on all sorts of luxury. And the idea that Matthias was the “hero” of Machiavelli’s work *Il principe* (‘The Prince’ – 1513), or that he was one of the main protagonists of the work of the German Emperor (1493–1519), Maximilian I entitled *Weiskunig* (‘The Wise King’ with a pun to ‘The White King’), an allegory and illustration of court pomp and splendor, is a mere suggestion put forward only by later scholars.

It is nevertheless certain that inscriptions and depictions in many places immortalized the Hungarian king, not only in Vienna, the place of his death, but even on the wall of a watch-tower in the Silesian (in Lusatia) town of Bautzen. When in 1541, the Turks pillaged the royal library in the Buda castle containing the magnificently illuminated Corvina codices, the soldier carrying the great tomes may not have had previous knowledge of the great Hungarian king, but he must have observed the existing traces of unusual splendor, and the bulk of the treasures sooner or later reached the Sultan's treasure house in Istanbul.²¹

There was, therefore, some foundation on which folklore, not solely Hungarian, concerning King Matthias could develop. When we read in the first tale of the second night of *Le piacevoli notti*, the famed collection of tales of Giovan Francesco Straparola (published in Venice in 1550), that Galeotto / a common family name in Italy, with no affiliation to King Matthias' court / – the rich king known from the so-called “Breton stories” in European tales – weds “*la figliuola di Mattias re di Ongaria, Ersilia per nome chiamata*” (“the daughter of the Hungarian king Matthias named Ersilia, in comparison with whom there was in her time no one more beautiful, virtuous or refined in courtly life”) we notice that the immense wealth of the Hungarian king goes without saying, as does the name of the daughter he never actually had.

Writing in the sixth chapter of his well-known book *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (published first in 1978), Peter Burke arguing about the prototype of the “ruler”, mentions King Matthias, who fought against the Turks and after whose reign “justice ceased to exist.” When discussing other stereotypical rulers he mentions the king traveling in disguise (*i.e.* the Harun al-Rasid *topos*) and lists Matthias among the examples of the Kyffhäuser motif. He is correct in all this and he draws a broad range of examples. Yet, precisely because so many figures mentioned in his chapter seem to embody this “prototype” (from King Arthur to Saint Olaf, the founder of the feudal Norwegian Kingdom, to the “real czar” figures as pretenders to the Russian throne and the bellicose Swedish King Charles XII of the 18th century), there is no explanation as to how national or international folklore of a particular ruler – in this case King Matthias – develops practically.

Folklore in itself is international; however the development of individual works and genres must be carefully and separately examined in each case.

²¹ On the *carnevalesque* features of the court life in Corvian – and later – Hungary see my paper: Voigt 2000.

The first non-Hungarian folkloric texts concerning Matthias

Czech scholars (such as Čeněk Zíbrt and Otakar Hostinský as early as 1888 and 1892) alluded to the fact that from the mid-16th century there are traces of songs mentioning King Matthias in Czech hymnals.²² (See 1564: *Pán Bůh z své milosti nyní lid sobě vybírá...* 'By the All-Merciful Lord God the people has elected...' – 1612: *Bože nebeský, ty věrou spojuješ* 'O Heavely God, connected with the faith' – the same appears in 1620 in an evangelical hymnal too.) Komorovský assumed that these pieces were also sung by Slovaks. In a poem by Aleš Knobloch written in 1561, there is some data about melodies which is relevant to Matthias folklore (*Zpívá se jako starodávná píseň vojenská o Králi Matyášovi, Králi Uberském...* "On the melody of very old soldiers' songs about King Matthias, the king of Hungary..."). But we cannot determine, whether they are Czech, Slovak, or Hungarian songs, translated into a Slavic language.

Among Slovenian scholars, Simon Rutar mentioned in 1879 the comment by Marcantonio Nicoletti (1536–1589), notary of Cividale, which the Slovenes in the seaside region of Tolmin "sang in their mother tongues not just about Christ and the saints, but also about the Hungarian King Matthias and other heroes of that people. (*Usano essi cantare in versi ne' varii modi della loro lingua le lodi di Christo e de' Beati, nonche di Mattia re d'Ungheria e di altri celebri personaggi di quella Nazione*)."

Since then, this record, which can be dated to the second half of the 16th century, has been mentioned by all philologists examining the Slovenian Matthias tradition. But we do not know to which nation belong the "altri celebri personaggi."²³

There is little doubt that both the Czech and the Slovene records in some way refer to the Hungarian king, which indeed is how they were interpreted by the late authors themselves. Yet, the content and texts of the songs are unknown, as is the manner in which they became part of the Slovene and Czech (and Slovak) tradition. If there are references to heroic deeds and soldiers' songs the simplest approach would be to link these songs to the songs of Matthias' army. This constitutes little more than a readily available hypothesis, however. Nor do we know if these songs were translated from

²² Data quoted by Kuzelja, Komorovský and others.

²³ Data quoted by Grafenauer, Lukács and others.

Hungarian or if it was only the subject matter, possibly only the name of King Matthias that was Hungarian.

As for the first Romanian folk narratives referring to King Matthias, German agricultural engineer Arthur Schott was working 1836–1841 and again 1844–1852 in Oravița (Banat, then in south-eastern Hungary) collecting Romanian folklore. Together with his brother, Albert they have published the very first collection of Romanian folk tales: *Walachische Märchen* (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1845), which does not contain stories about King Matthias. But among the texts from his second collection, published originally in the German journal *Hausblätter*²⁴, there is a legend about “Emperor Matei Corvin”, who learned the language of the animals, and being a magician visits Tsarigrad (Constantinople). Schott remarks that one could read about the trip “in books”.²⁵ Thus, the oldest known Romanian folklore text about King Matthias at least to some extent might stem from written sources. All the later Romanian folk legends²⁶ were collected in Transylvania.²⁷

A noted Transylvanian Hungarian folklorist, József Faragó recently mentioned two Romanian folk ballads, with *Mateasiu Craiu* or *Mateias Crai* (King Matthias) as their protagonists’ names.²⁸

The famous Romanian folklorist, Atanasie Marian Marienescu published the first ballad in a journal *Albina* (1866, Nr. 20.), then in his collection of Romanian ballads.²⁹ The story says that punishing his treacherous lords, King Matthias destroys the castle of Buda and all its inhabitants (!) by shelling (!). The story is unknown elsewhere in Romanian or Hungarian balladry. Most probably it stems from the Romanian Banat, where Marienescu was working as lawyer as of 1862. In his rich collection of Romanian folk literature, he wanted to find motifs, which might be related to historical persons, as Marius, Sulla, Hadrian or Aurelian from the Ancient Rome.

²⁴ *Hausblätter* vol. 4, 1858: 367–371)

²⁵ See the modern edition Schott 1971: 300–305.

²⁶ See the entries in the modern type index of Romanian historical legends: Brill, 2006. Nr. 14632–14637, 295–298.

²⁷ For the correct references to the Schott and Brill texts, I owe to Professor Nicolae Constantinescu. See also his paper in the present volume, pp. 43–45. I thank academic fellow Sabine Ispas for making the completed edition of Brill’s legend catalogue accessible to me.

²⁸ Faragó 1997 (and in a later publication too). Faragó gives the data of the first Romanian publications, together with data concerning the Hungarian translation of the texts.

²⁹ *Poezia populară. Balade* ‘Popular Poetry. Ballads’ vol. II. Vienna, 1867: 92–94)

A teacher called Iona Papa collected the second in the Bravo region of Transylvania in November 1898. It is a common European ballad (international type number *Child 75*) well-known both in Hungarian and Romanian variants. Papa's version is the only one, where the hero is named King Matthias.

In both cases we find very late and corrupted texts, which do not represent any historical traces of King Matthias in Romanian folklore in the proper sense of the term.

Hungarian heroes have been included as characters in the heroic epic poetry of the Southern Slav peoples (Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian) for centuries. As the examples of such texts are from later times, the task of unraveling their historical layers is not simple.³⁰ We can find some songs, which mention *kralj Matijaš* as early as the *Erlangen manuscript*³¹ of South Slavic heroic songs. Serbian philology and folklore use the material to establish the historical development of Southern Slavic epic poetry. Folk or popular variants occur in 19th century collections. However, we can claim with some certainty that those songs collected later also had precedents. They are essentially of a Southern Slav point of view, so while we may be able to explain the heroes or events on the basis of events and characters of Hungarian history (as e.g. *Janko vojvoda*, *Jankula vojvoda*, *Sibinjanin Janko* = János Hunyadi, *Mihailo Svilojevič* = Mihály Szilágyi, *varadinski ban Petar Dojčin* = most probably Péter Dóczi, etc.), we should not assume that they represent Serbian or other adaptations of completed Hungarian texts. (See the works e.g. Dávid, 1978, and especially Jung, 2008 – with detailed textual history of some variants.)³²

Conversely we must call attention to the fact that until now scholarship has devoted little attention to the images of Hungarian rulers in the Balkans

³⁰ I do not enter here into the very complicated problem of the historical stratification of South Slavic epic poetry. For summaries see e.g. Burckhart (1968: 3.1. – p. 60–63. *Petür ban und Kral Mateja*), Krstić (1984: *s.v. Matijaš, Matija*), p. 524–525. For a folkloristic treatment of several motifs in “non-historical” Serbo-Croatian “epic songs” see Milošević–Djordjević 1971, about King Matthias especially p. 220–221.

³¹ A collection of 220 lyrics, the majority from possibly oral sources. The manuscript can be dated to 1717 and 1730, and some of the texts belong to an earlier time of the Serbian–Ottoman wars. Their attitude is clearly against the Turks, and represent Serbian attitudes – but not the Hungarian point of view.

³² The recent summarizing publication of Hungarian narratives on King Matthias from Vojvodina (Raffai 2008), mostly with recently collected and hitherto unpublished texts, does not show direct Serbian–Hungarian textual interferences.

and Romania during the time of King Matthias. Therefore, it would be informative to specify both the similarities and the differences.

As for the literary traditions praising or mentioning King Matthias, a thorough and detailed study would be very useful.

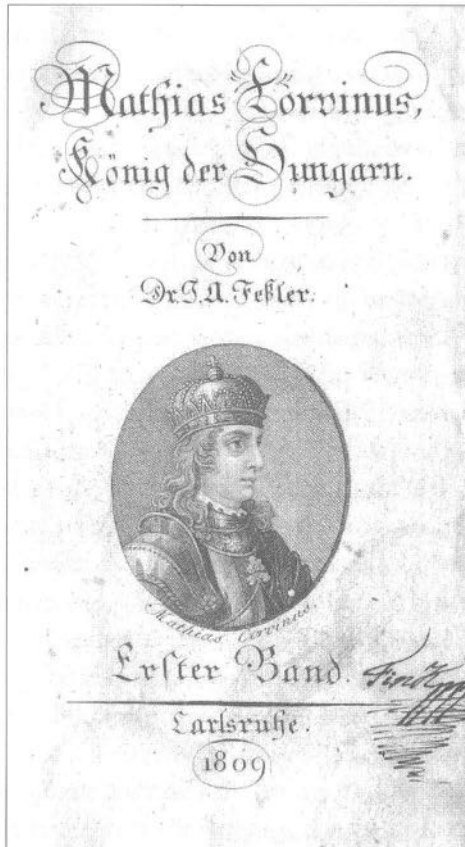


Fig: 1. *Matthias Corvinus, König der Ungarn* von Dr. I. A. Fessler. Erster Band. Carlsruhe, 1809. (without the publisher's name). Front pages.

If we turn the pages of any later publications, we find interesting details – but no explanations for them. For instance, in the third volume of Fessler's *Gemälde aus den alten Zeiten der Ungarn* (Carlsruhe, 1809) on the frontispice of *Matthias Corvinus, König der Ungarn*, we find an ideal portrait (Fig 1.) of the king (with an appropriate inscription). But, on the opposite page, there is a drawing of a historical scene and it cannot be identified. Five men meet and greet each other at an unidentified event. The third person from the left

looks like a Lutheran bishop with the Ten Commandments sporting two white ribbons. The central figure on the opposite page looks like the young

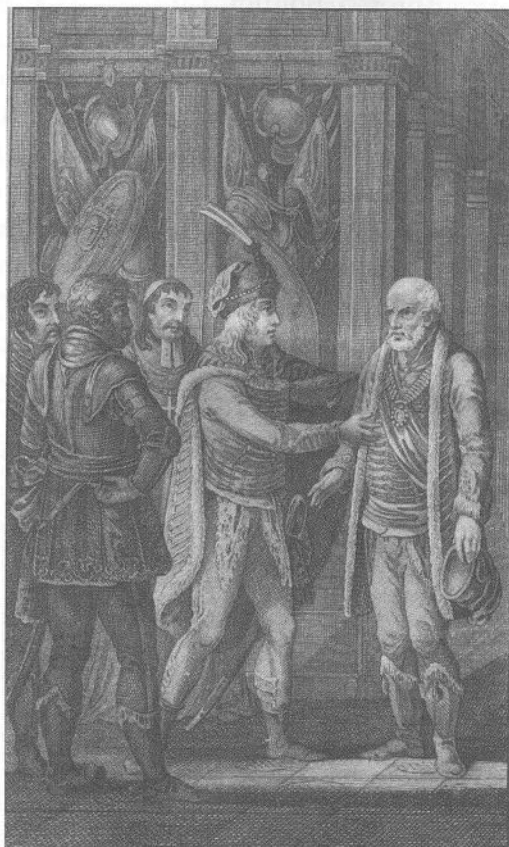


Fig: 2.

Matthias but without Hungarian royal insignia. It probably means that Matthias is depicted here before his coronation. The fifth figure, an elderly man, might be either the Czech George Poděbrad, as a prospective father-in-law or Mihály Szilágyi, Governor of Hungary. Since the costumes are “historic” but not specific, they are also open to different explanations. (Fig 2.)

To illustrate how complicated those traditions may be, I mention only one more example. It is a well known fact that an Italian humanist in the court of the Hungarian king, Alessandro Tommaso Cortese wrote (1487–1488, i.e. when his patron king was still alive) *Carmen panegyricum* in Latin hexameters honoring him. A later edition of the poem (Hagenau, 1531) was included by the famous Hungarian scholar Johannes Sambucus (János

Zsámboky) as an appendix to the new edition (1606) of the summary of the Hungarian history entitled *Rerum Hungaricarum Decades* by Italian court historian of Matthias, Antonio Bonfini. Cortese's epic poem could serve thus as one of the sources of the "Meditations about King Matthias" (as well as to the baroque heroic poem *Obsidio Sigetiana*) by famous Hungarian poet and statesman, Nicolaus Zrini (Miklós Zrínyi). Later, a sample of Bonfini's and Istvánffy's Hungarian history was published (*Livii Hungarici ... Antonii Bonfini ... Nicolai Istvanfi ...*) in Kassa (Kaschau, Košice). At the end of the book³³ we can read Cortese's literary work *De Matthiae Corvini invictissimi Ungariae Regis laudibus bellicis* – a poem among the historical sources, and after 250 years of its first publication.³⁴ (Fig 3.)



Fig: 3. The first pages (p. 132–133) of Cortesius: *De Matthiae Corvini ... in Livii Hungarici ... Antonii Bonfini ... Cassoviae*, Typis Academ per Joan Henrie. Frauenheim 1732.

³³ On pages 132–166.

³⁴ See the ingenious remarks by Szörényi 1993: 26–31.

To summarize, when examining Hungarian Matthias folklore it is worthwhile to demonstrate old and international connections. This would serve not only the promotion of the comparative study of folklore but also further efforts to interpret Hungarian historical records.

There are two major problems involved. First, it is not easy to separate the “international” versus “historic” context data. Second, it is not easy to prove the historical “continuity” of texts, narratives, motifs etc. In many cases the folklore publications from the 19th century can only be dated back to popularizing historical works, literary works, schoolbooks, calendars from some earlier time. There are “optimistic” and “pessimistic” scholars in constructing the “continuation” of the “King Matthias lore”. I definitely belong to the second group.

It is not difficult to demonstrate that there is still a lot to be achieved, even if we deal with seemingly “long traditions” of that lore.

One of the most well known elements in the iconography of the Hunyadis is the raven (*corvus* in Latin, from which the word *Corvinus* was forcefully derived), carrying a (golden) ring in his beak. We do not know for sure, what was the actual origin of the adopted family name *Corvin/us*. (Perhaps it originated from the name of the town Kovin on the borderline of southern Hungary, which in fact was owned by the Hunyadi family. But there is no direct evidence supporting the suggestion.) Though several scholars have studied this heraldic motif, we have no precise knowledge of its origins. The old references do not describe the story relating to it precisely, alluding instead at most to some kind of ostensibly commonly known explanation.³⁵

A best candidate for proof of the continuity would be the proverbial lore: proverbs and sayings mentioning King Matthias. In fact, there are such texts, but most of them are modern, and can not be traced back with centuries. They represent school lore. There are only some possible exceptions. The recent Hungarian collections of proverbs³⁶ all mention the well-known maxim: *meghalt Mátyás király, oda az igazság* (‘King Matthias has died, gone is justice’, which has a counterpart in Antal Szirmay’s book, *Hungaria in parabolis* (1805) i.e. a common source brought out centuries later. The

³⁵ The difficulty of the interpretation of the *Corvinus*-raven is mentioned in several historical books.

³⁶ There is no concise historical publication of Hungarian proverbs, thus I can give here only general remarks. I thank to my colleague Gyula Paczolay for some valuable – although negative – references.

history of the saying (not only used in Hungary or in the Hungarian language) is an interesting, complicated and international topic, which needs further investigation.³⁷

The other, today a less well-known phrase (*Király Mátyás és Mátyás király* 'Matthias the King and King Matthias' = "there is a great difference between seemingly identical names") appears in the highly personal collection of proverbs by András Dugonics (written from 1792 on, and published in 1820) entitled *Magyar példabeszédek és jeles mondások*³⁸. Dugonics, who also wrote works of literature about the age of King Matthias, had a penchant for transforming proverbs, with which he was familiar, concocting explanations for them if nothing else. In other words, even in the case of about twenty sayings concerning King Matthias that appear in his writings, we cannot prove when they came into being. In some cases he refers to Galeotto Marzio's work.

(Incidentally, Hungarian sayings more frequently mention *Jégtörő Mátyás* 'Matthias the Icebreaker' [February 24] and the connected weather forecasts than they do the king himself.)

We have already mentioned that we know of many popular texts collected from the 19th century onwards. These and the official Hungarian Matthias tradition however will be the topic of another paper.

When I finished my paper, a rich exhibition was organized at the Ethnographic Museum in Budapest: "*Legendary beings, enchanting flowers. The Renaissance We All Know and Love*".³⁹ Its aim was to "rethink the relationship between Renaissance and Hungarian folk artifacts of the 18th and 19th centuries." Showcases and rooms were filled with printed books and

³⁷ There is at least one (perhaps two) reference(s) from 16th century. For some complications of their tradition, see Jung 2008: 96–98. For Szirmay see Csörsz Rumen 2008: 112, 726.

³⁸ Dugonics tells an explanatory story most probably created by himself. A shoemaker by the name Király Mátyás ('King Matthias') lived in the capital Buda, and on the name day of the Corvin King, he went to the royal castle, to greet the ruler. The guards stopped him and the shoemaker told them he had the same name as the king, and he had come to greet his namesake. The guard replied: the difference of King Matthias and Matthias the King is as great as the difference between a king and a shoemaker. We know from historical documents concerning the development of family names in Hungary that at King Matthias' time practically nobody could be called by the surname 'King' or the 'Christian name' 'Matthias' especially if he was from the lower social strata. A plausible construction, Varga Mátyás ('Shoemaker' + Matthias), became frequent from the 16th century on. "Name day", i.e. celebrating someone's first name (in Hungarian: Christian name) on the patron saint's day in the calendar – is much later attested as a common family event. The explanation by Dugonics has been cited in later collections of Hungarian proverbs. 'Hungarian parables and notable sayings'. Szeged, by Orbán Grün, vol. I. 44.

³⁹ Fejős 2008.

woodcuts, stove tiles, gild-woven cloth, illuminated documents and manuscripts, figural images on painted wooden church ceilings, decorative vessels, furniture, embroidery on linen – as the chapters of the impressive catalogue lists the various displays. Historical continuity and the social connection of the exhibited items were always very complicated and the labels (e.g. “folk”) were to be taken with a pinch of salt. The presence of the international context was clear from the descriptions and bibliographical references. Many of the artifacts were from Hungary, even is not necessarily of “Hungarian” origin. All this demonstrated the difficulty of comparative and historical interpretation of Renaissance in Hungary and its possible “folklore continuation”.

Of course, we welcome the splendid exhibition with its 500 meticulously presented and described items. Only after the review of such an impressive collection of data can we start a thorough analysis of Renaissance’s impact on Hungarian folk culture.

It is not necessary to stress again that in all aspects of the exhibition, the motifs represented a broad range of international character, and they reached far beyond the borders of the 15th century kingdom of Hungary. Not only can we say that Renaissance is a “Europe-wide” phenomenon but also that artifacts and motifs mirroring Renaissance in the folk cultures of Europe are of the very same character.

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