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Legends of a Transylvanian Shrine to the Virgin Mary

Abstract

My paper presents a legend tradition related to a well-known Hungarian (Transylvanian) place of pilgrimage. Csíksomlyó (Miercurea–Ciuc/Sumuleu) – currently part of Romania – has become a significant place of pilgrimage in the 20th century, similarly to Austria's Mariazell, Spain's Santiago de Compostela, the Orthodox Church's Athos, or the main international shrines to the Virgin Mary (Lourdes, Fatima, Medjugorje). Around this famous pilgrimage place known from the 15th century a thematically rich legend circle has developed over the centuries, typical of Hungarian folklore, which abounds in historical and narrative traditions. At the centre of the group of legends stands the statue of the Virgin Mary, of gothic origin, the miraculous reputation of which is complemented by several historical legend themes (foundational traditions, wars, heroes and saints, crime and punishment and other legend motifs inspired by the sacred place). I highlight the most important historical perspectives, the chronological characteristics, the geographical distribution and, above all, the typological diversity of these legends. The legend circle of the shrine of Csíksomlyó in Romania is the totality of the related narrative traditions, that is to say, both the hundred-year-old miracle stories found in written form in different historical sources, and the recent folklore texts collected from oral tradition. Although the time and the circumstances of the records differ significantly, the aim of the narration and the topic of the legends are the same. The legends about the shrine – separated into the given thematic groups – are an organic part of the *Catalogue of Hungarian Historical Legends*.

Keywords: legend, Virgin Mary, shrine, pilgrimage, Csíksomlyó



In my paper I will present part of the tradition of a Hungarian place of pilgrimage that has an exceptionally extensive, but to date little explored, folkloristic literature.¹ The monographic consideration and interpretation of the large number of narrative texts (about fifty types) related to the shrine at *Csík-somlyó* (Miercurea-Ciuc/Șumuleu)² is almost impossible within the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, I will try to demonstrate the thematic and typological diversity of these traditions, and their historical circumstances, chronological characteristics and geographical distribution. I think it is necessary to emphasize in advance that I will deal with the totality of narrative traditions related to the group of legends connected to the shrine of *Csík-somlyó*, that is to say, I take both hundred-year-old written religious stories from different church history sources (*Historia Domus*, *Canonica Visitatio*, etc.) and recent folk legends collected from oral tradition. I consider these two together because, while the time and the circumstances of the records may differ markedly, the aim of the narration and the theme of the folklore text are the same. As a cultural history parallel, it is important to refer to the fact that records of miraculous healings at three famous medieval Hungarian pilgrimage places (Saint Margaret's grave, John of Capistrano's grave, and the relics of Saint Paulus the First Hermit) are – in folkloristic sense – the same memorates as a contemporary legend about miraculous healing and other help provided by God. As we will see, there will be plenty of examples which show the similarity between narratives of different ages related to *Csík-somlyó*. (Pic. No. 1.)

For the majority of the sacred places and objects chosen by pilgrims, the basis and the trigger of respect is some kind of miracle, whose fame is often widespread. In the cult history of *Csík-somlyó* no such miracle data are known before the 17th–18th century, although their earlier existence can certainly be assumed. These supposed religious traditions can be connected with the foundation of the devotional place – the Somlyó Franciscan monastery –, with a highly valued relic, certain memorable historical events, and with the work of art that became the object of religious respect upon a pilgrim's arrival at *Csík-somlyó*. One of the scarce historical sources, the Papal Bull “*Dum precelsa*” of Pope Eugene IV of 27 January 1444, already mentioned

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² *Csík-somlyó* is located in the middle of Szeklerland, a region of current day Romania populated by Hungarians, which has belonged to Romania since 1920.

that in *Csík-somlyó* a “huge mass of pilgrims used to gather in order to pray; people don’t stop flocking there”³.



Pic. No. 1.: *The devotional church in Csík-somlyó* (photo by Zoltán Magyar, 2009)

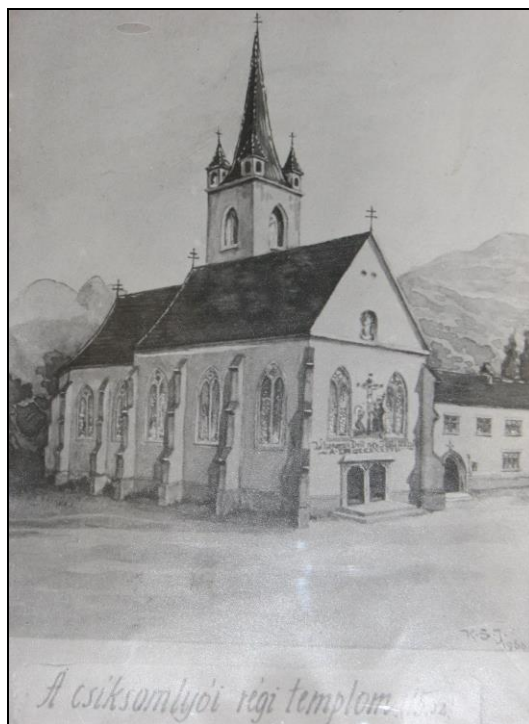
This was the decade of unprecedented fierce struggles against the Turks, during which János Hunyadi, Transylvania’s governor of that time, successfully defeated the Turkish army that had invaded Southern Transylvania. Hunyadi offered the victory trophy from the battle fought in 1442 at *Maros-szentimre* (Sântimbru) near *Gyulafehérvár* (Alba Iulia), to build (or rebuild) four Transylvanian churches. One of these was the Franciscan monastery in *Csík-somlyó*. While we are not aware of what destruction the Turks caused in Szeklerland in these years, the next papal document mentions the need to reconstruct the *Csík-somlyó* monastery (“*de novo contrui cepta et adhuc suis structuris et edificiis perfecta non existit*”⁴), which implies the church was in a dilapidated

³ Szabó ed. 1872: 153–154; P. György 1930: 148.

⁴ P. György 1930: 653.

state or that there were demands for its enlargement. The urging of the construction by the Holy See suggests that the latter was the case, specifically that a larger, sacred building worthy of the numerous pilgrims was needed.

The gothic church was consecrated in honour of the Visitation of Our Lady [Pic. No. 2]⁵, so it is likely that the medieval pilgrimages to *Csiksomlyó* also took place in the spirit of the cult of the Virgin Mary, or at least were partly inspired by it. The remarkable statue of the Virgin Mary, and its miraculous renown was not mentioned in the 15th century sources, just as was the case with a battle in 1567 associated with the origin of the Whitsunday pilgrimage at *Csiksomlyó*, which was not mentioned until the 18th century.



Pic. No. 2.: *The medieval devotional church*
(drawing by Keöpeczi Sebestyén József,
Szekler Museum, Miercurea–Ciuc)

⁵ The architecture of this church – demolished at the beginning of the 19th century – was very similar to an existing Franciscan church at *Tövis* (Teiuş).



Pic. No. 3.: *The epigraph on the wall of the Chapel of the Salvator, from 1734*
(photo by Imre Harangozó, 1992)

If we investigate the earliest layer of the legend tradition, besides the miraculum note from 1784 and the first sources of the origin tradition of the Whitsunday pilgrimage, we must mostly rely on Franciscan local historical works written at the end of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century. Hungarian writers who lived and were active in the middle of the 19th century also used these works; however, it is remarkable that the Franciscan chronicler Leonárd Losteiner (1741–1813), and later László Kőváry and Balázs Orbán, all mainly drew information from the local oral tradition. The earliest layer of these historical legends does not, in fact, refer to the pilgrimage church, but to its sacred geographical environment, the preferred site of the Whitsunday pilgrimage, the mountain of *Kissomlyó* (see: “holy mountain”). The Chapel of the Salvator (Saviour) on the top of the mountain, sometimes mentioned as the Saint Stephen Chapel by the 19th century sources,⁶ was, according to Losteiner, built by the first Hungarian king, to commemorate one of his victories.⁷ This is the tradition mentioned by Kő-

⁶ Thaly 1861: 146.

⁷ See Losteiner’s *Chronologia*, completed in 1777: 1742. This information was taken from the history of the monastery, copied from the archives of the convent of *Kolozsmonostor* (P. Boros 1994: 138).

váry and Orbán.⁸ This historical tradition is certainly a several centuries old legend in the *Csíksomlyó* region, similarly to the church founding traditions of which there are numerous examples in the Carpathian basin.⁹



Pic. No. 4.: *Statue of Saint Ladislas in the devotional church* (photo by Zoltán Magyar, 2009)

It is likely that the other origin tradition of the chapel, attributing it to angels also belongs to the medieval legend circle. The building of the chapel by angels is mentioned in a local collection of names from 1864.¹⁰ This tradition is supplemented by the motif of the heavenly ladder reaching down to the Chapel of the Salvator from the sky (on which angels go up and down) [Appendix 1.] and by the motif of the angels' song heard on the holy moun-

⁸ Kőváry 1852: 229; Kőváry 1857: 107; Orbán 1868, II: 12.

⁹ Magyar 2000: 130–138; Magyar 2018, I: 224. Type number: MZ I. G 69.1. Founding churches in memory of victory over enemies.

¹⁰ Frigyes Pesty's place name collection manuscript from 1864, Csíkszék: Csíksomlyó. OSZK [Széchényi National Library] Manuscript Archives, Fol. Hung 1114.

tain.¹¹ This latter motif is the earliest in the local legend tradition, and had already been recorded by Hungarian writers. This miraculous apparition is witnessed by an epigraph on the outer wall of the chapel from 3 August 1743 [Pic. No. 3]. Orbán Balázs even saw fragments of a wall painting of this scene there in the middle of the 19th century.¹² Others relate this notable place to the conversion of pagans from the neighbouring areas,¹³ partly in the context of the Saint Ladislás legend circle: according to the legend, while escaping from his enemies, King Ladislás jumped on horseback from the Carpathian ridge to the Chapel of the Salvator in one leap¹⁴ [Pic. No. 4].

The foundation legend of the Saint Anthony chapel, also built on the holy mountain in 1673, represents the early layer of the local narrative traditions, as well. According to one of the manuscripts of the chronical of the holy order, the origin of the building is connected to the destruction caused by the Tartars in 1661, when the monastery and the church were burnt, and the Tartars did not spare the monks, either. The predecessor of the present-day chapel was established by an oath taken by one of the surviving monks¹⁵ and was extended to its current size at the end of the 18th century, in grateful memory of further miracles.¹⁶

The foundation tradition of the Saint Anthony chapel also indicates that the memory of the 17th century Tartar invasion had a major impact on the formation of local legends. The nation mainly attributed its survival through this period of conflict and the subsequent resumption of normal life to the Virgin Mary, as well as to its adherence to the Catholic faith. The battle known as the foundation legend of the Whitsunday pilgrimage, in which the Szeklers from *Gyergyó* and *Csík* regions defeated the army of the reigning prince, the Unitarian János Zsigmond, by calling on the help of the statue of the Virgin Mary from *Csík-somlyó*, is the best known historical legend related to the shrine [Appendix 2.]. A study published recently by Tamás Mohay convincingly showed that this famous battle from 1567 has no historical authenticity, or at least there is no trace of it at all in the 16th–17th century sources.¹⁷ As a historical legend (as “the invented tradition”¹⁸), however, it is

¹¹ Kőváry 1852: 229; Kőváry 1853: 38; Kőváry 1857: 107; Szentiváni 1986: 138; Bosnyák 1992: 22.

¹² Orbán 1869, II: 12.

¹³ Magyar 2003: 170, 256.

¹⁴ Kőváry 1857: 107; Magyar 1998: 115.

¹⁵ Orbán 1869, II: 20; Kovács 1898: 43–44.

¹⁶ Kovács 1898: 45–46; P. Boros 1994: 135–136.

¹⁷ Mohay 2000: 230–256; Mohay 2009: 106–128.

¹⁸ See: Hobsbawm–Ranger 1983.

not only relevant, but also has numerous analogues, because a great number of similar legends explaining the origins of festive customs are known outside Szeklerland. If we accept the fact that the battle is a mere fiction, it remains a question whether the mass Whitsunday pilgrimage preceded the development of this legend or on the contrary, the legend had developed first. According to our current knowledge, the only thing that is certain is that the first written mention of the battle is known from the first half of the 18th century.¹⁹ The victory in the battle as the redemption of the Whitsunday Pilgrimage is detailed in Farkas Cserey's work *Geographia Mariana Regni Hungariae* written in 1780, and in the above mentioned three manuscripts with monographic demand of the Franciscan author Leonard Losteiner (*Cronologia...*, 1777; *Propago Vitis...*, 1786–1789; *Istennek kincses tárháza...*, 1810–1815).²⁰ The origin tradition spread quickly, starting in the 19th century, due to the festive papal sermons and several publications (the first paper print was by Elek Jordánszky who cited Cserey, and later publications that refer to his work from 1836)²¹. [Pic. No. 5.]



Pic. N.o 5: *The Whitsunday pilgrimage* (photo by Imre Harangozó)

¹⁹ Darvas-Kozma 2011: 146–152. [Two data from 1735]; Tánczos 2016: 166–167.

²⁰ Mohay 2000: 231–234; Mohay 2009: 113–119; Mohay 2015a: 90–92.

²¹ Jordánszky 1836: 136–140.

That the memory of the Transylvanian religious wars from the 16th–17th century had been part of the Szeklerland folklore before 1780 is shown by several pieces of information reported by Balázs Orbán in the 19th century, as well as by recent legend collections. One of the narrative motives of the mentioned battle (the Szeklers knock trees onto the Royal army by cutting them down with a saw)²² is present as a widespread stratagem in the Transylvanian legends about the Tartar invasion.²³ The main cause of the military action taken against the Catholic Szeklers, according to the legend alive today in the oral tradition, is that the reigning prince, Zsigmond János, first sent Protestant preachers to convert the Szeklerland Catholics. However, the Szekler Catholics dug the prince's "seedlings" into the ground up to their armpits, watered them, then sent an answer back to the prince that the seedlings had frozen because Szeklerland's climate is cold.²⁴ Although the folklore parallels need further investigation, we can suppose that this latter legend is a characteristic migration story, a narrative which is likely synchronous with the classical foundation legend of the Whitsunday pilgrimage or it even precedes it. While the story about the seedlings only spread in the last two or three centuries among the Szeklerland Catholics, the memory of the victory of 1567 went beyond the borders of Szeklerland. Its popularity is due to the different written publications and sermons and educational activities, and – beginning in the 19th century – it was accepted as authentic historical data and has spread in parallel as an oral tradition.²⁵ Today if the folklore collector inquires in Transylvanian's Catholic-inhabited communities about the sights of *Csik-somlyó*, the answers will typically include this "canonized" foundation legend.

However, the centre of the local legends of *Csik-somlyó* is first and foremost the statue of the Virgin Mary [Pic. No. 6.]. The gothic devotional statue has towered in the sanctuary of the pilgrimage church for centuries, and the legends surrounding it are probably of the same age as the completion of the statue, or its arrival in *Csik-somlyó*. According to the tradition recorded by the chronicler Losteiner, the statue descended from heaven to protect Szeklerland.²⁶ A similar ecclesiastical source is suggested by data provided by Mihály Latkóczy, who popularized legends about Hungarian churches, according to which the prior of the monastery saw the devotional statue in a dream and

²² Boldizsár 1930.

²³ Magyar 2011, I: 204; Magyar 2018, IV: 195. Type number: MZ IV. C 129.5. Trees knocked over the enemy.

²⁴ Kozma 1983: 46; Simén 1999: 135; Magyar 2011, I: 156. Another variant from Bukovina: Bosnyák 1993: 41–42.

²⁵ Tánzos 1991: 138; Gál–Molnár V. 1999: 107–108; Magyar 2003: 257, 691.

²⁶ Orbán 1869, II: 15; Latkóczy 1898: 146–147; Mohay 2015a: 86.

the next day found it on the main altar of the church.²⁷ It is only known from the Hungarian folklore of *Gyimes* in Moldavia province that the statue was found after digging out a beautiful lily from the ground [Appendix 3].²⁸

The tradition that also disappeared in the mists of the past, according to which the statue arrived from Moldavia to its present place, is generally known in Moldavia, and sporadically also on the border of Transylvania (in the Gyimes Valley).²⁹ Regarding the place of origin and the date of this devotional object, there are several hypotheses. The most likely is that similarly to other Szekler triptychs, this is also a work of art from a workshop in *Csík-somlyó* dating from the first half of the 16th century.³⁰ The Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga suggested, probably not independently from the Hungarian oral tradition in Moldavia, that the origin of the statue can be related to the Franciscans who settled in 1510 in Bákó (Bacău) and that it was taken (back) to *Csík-somlyó* before their Moldavian monastery burned down in 1574.³¹ I agree with Tánzos in that the Moldavian origin of the devotional statue could explain both the Hungarian speaking Moldavians' (Changos') legends, and the Moldavian Hungarians' attachment to the Virgin Mary of *Csík-somlyó*.³² To a certain extent this is analogous to the folklore tradition of the transportation of church bells to Bákó, recorded by Balázs Orbán in several places in Szeklerland.³³ However, I do not insist on the factual accuracy of this, particularly because this tradition is mainly interesting as folklore heritage.

²⁷ Latkóczy 1898: 149–150.

²⁸ Tánzos 1991: 138; Gál–Molnár V. 1999: 107–108; Magyar 2003: 257, 691.

²⁹ Tánzos 1991: 138–140; Magyar 2003: 691; 2011, II: 512–513.

³⁰ Radocsay 1967: 129.

³¹ This tradition is first mentioned in mid-19th century sources (Erős 1852: 13), but it is not certain whether the records of the Franciscan author are an authentic folklore tradition or a scientific hypothesis.

³² Tánzos 1991: 140; Tánzos 1997: 154.

³³ Orbán 1968, I: 106. The same author mentions a similar local legend according to which the triptych of *Csikmenaság* (Armășeni) arrived in Szeklerland from a Transylvanian Saxon locality during the Reformation (Orbán 1873, VI: 429).



Pic. No. 6: *The statue of the Virgin Mary in Csíksomlyó*
(photo by Zoltán Magyar, 2009)

In several legend texts this Moldavian origin tradition is linked to one of the internationally acknowledged motives of the foundation legends, the miracle of the devotional statue (in other regions, a picture) which becomes heavy: the transporters/thieves of the statue try in vain to move the devotional object further than a given point (in our case this is the outskirts of the settlement). According to current knowledge, nowadays this is the most widespread and most popular legend concerning the devotional statue,³⁴ and it is related to the type well known in this legend circle but represented by just a few text variations: when the statue is taken away, it always flies back to its original place [Appendix 4].³⁵

In several legends concerning the statue the international legend motif that the Virgin Mary's statue is inviolable is commonly found: although it is made of wood, it does not catch fire [Appendix 5.] and even if the monastery burns down, the statue remains intact.³⁶

³⁴ Magyar 2003: 691–693. This type is not yet mentioned in Losteiner's records

³⁵ Bosnyák 2001: 170; Magyar 2003: 693–694.

³⁶ Mohay 2015a: 98; Jordánszky 1836: 139.

This legend type is related to the crime and punishment type of stories that form part of the legends of other devotional places and objects. These include the idea that those who damage the sacred place, the devotional statue, the devotional picture, the cross, or the Holy Eucharist etc. will be struck by divine punishment. In the Transylvanian legends this negative role is played by the Tartars invading *Csik-somlyó*. Leonárd Losteiner recorded several similar miraculous stories in his manuscripts.³⁷ The most frequent motif of these legends is that the Tartar soldier who wants to destroy the statue collapses dead, or when he raises his weapon his hand becomes paralyzed [Appendix 6.].³⁸ According to a widespread subtype of this legend, the injury on the statue's face can be traced back to the chief Tartar's sword, and its failure to 'heal' in any way later can be interpreted as a divine sign.³⁹

A further group of legends related to devotional statues concerns signs and actions connected with believers and pilgrims. Particularly characteristic of the folklore traditions dating back to the 18th–19th centuries is that changes in the statue's face (i.e. saddening) were interpreted mainly as signs of imminent tragic events.⁴⁰ Although it is already mentioned by the 18th century Franciscan chronicler,⁴¹ it is in the popular folklore element of the 20th century collections that the statue of the Virgin Mary was seen to shed tears [Appendix 7.].⁴²

The Virgin Mary's face brightening up is similarly mentioned in several miracle accounts,⁴³ and occasionally in the form of a shining star above the devotional statue's head.⁴⁴ A further group of legends related to the devotional statue emphasizes its immaculate nature: it remains fine and pure in every circumstance, dust never sticks to it, and therefore it never needs dusting.⁴⁵ We can read in a contemporary collection that similarly to the Virgin

³⁷ See the excerpts of the tradition in: Orbán 1869, II: 15; Miklós Endes' manuscript (OSZK Manuscript Archives, Fol. Hung. 2101); Mohay 2015a: 96–97.

³⁸ Examples of divine punishment related to the devotional statue are known from the 20th century, too: Bosnyák 1982: 101; Magyar 2003: 696.

³⁹ Mohay 2015a: 103, 129 (Leonárd Losteiner' manuscript, 1810–1815); Magyar 2003: 694–697. There is one remote analogy according to which the local tradition holds that the brick wall of the 13th century church of *Ákos* (Acîș) in Szatmár County could not be plastered in any way.

⁴⁰ Orbán 1869, II: 15; P. Boros 1994: 67, 71; Mohay 2015: 102. (Leonárd Losteiner's manuscript.)

⁴¹ Mohay 2015a: 99, 103–104.

⁴² Kozma 1983: 39, 42; Bosnyák 2001: 169; Magyar 2005: 122.

⁴³ Mohay 2015a: 100, 103, 125, 128. (Leonárd Losteiner's manuscript, 1810–1815.)

⁴⁴ Mohay 2015a: 102.

⁴⁵ Mohay 2015a: 128.

Mary's facial expression the colour of her hair also changes: it becomes dark in spring, and turns grey in autumn. Similar miraculous phenomena are attached to the Virgin Mary's face and eyes according to the evidence of recent folklore texts: her eyes follow people arriving at the devotional church and if the person in question is good, she smiles, while if the person is guilty then her look becomes sad and gloomy [Appendix 8].⁴⁶ A local Franciscan author mentions several testimonies to prove that sinful people could not stand in front of the statue, because they could not withstand the Virgin Mary's keen, inquiring gaze.⁴⁷ Further sporadic data illustrate the devotional statue in active situations: according to a tradition recorded by Losteiner, the Virgin Mary once spoke to her believers,⁴⁸ and in "The Clowns' Present" type of story (see: ATU 827. *A Pious Innocent Man Knows Nothing of God*) probably traceable to popular prints, the Virgin Mary bent down and embraced the person who brought her a heartfelt gift [Appendix 9].⁴⁹

Folklore texts belonging to the tradition of the helping Virgin Mary form a separate group within the *Csiksomlyó* devotional place legend circle. Essentially, the legend of the origin of the Whitsunday pilgrimage is already one of these, similarly to all legends attributing the escape from the Tartars to the Virgin Mary (particularly in relation to the 1694 Tartar invasion). In reality, this is the miraculum group, which led in 1798 to the declaration of the wonderworking nature of the devotional statue and its canonisation. In evidence of witnesses from 1784, recently discovered and published by János Bárh, the picture of a devotional statue generally considered to be wonderworking was already taking shape in Transylvania in the second half of the 18th century⁵⁰. However, the list of the 1784 hearings of witnesses are by no means without precedent: miraculous healings and cases of other prayers being heeded had been recorded in the preceding decades, primarily by the Losteiner manuscripts, and the number of these miracles has been increasing ever since,⁵¹ being the most dynamic part of the legend circle, even at the beginning of the 21st century [Appendix 10.]. The number of legends belonging thematically to this circle nowadays exceeds one hundred; from among

⁴⁶ Mohay 2015a: 98–99, 129.

⁴⁷ P. Boros 1994: 71.

⁴⁸ Orbán 1869, II: 15.

⁴⁹ Dobos 1984: 18; Magyar 2003: 703. Type number in the *Catalogue of Hungarian Historical Legends*: MZ V. C 40.6. The Donation Accepted Wholeheartedly (The Clowns' Present) – Magyar 2018, V: 92.

⁵⁰ Bárh 2000.

⁵¹ Esterházy 1696: 130; P. Kunits 1731: 54; P. Boros 1994: 71–73; Mohay 2015a: 104–122; Mohay 2015b: 635–639.

these I refer to a group of a few texts that were widespread in the medieval miraculums⁵² [Pic. No. 7–8.]. These are stories not only of simple healings, but also of the resurrection of the dead (by the Virgin Mary’s heavenly intervention – see: Thompson: Mot. D1865.).⁵³



Pic. No. 7.: Objects expressing gratitude for prayers being heeded
(photo by Zoltán Magyar, 2009)

As I have already mentioned, the sacral aura of the church extends beyond the building itself. Henrik Wlislöcki’s data recorded at the end of the 19th century about a famous tree (a “holy tree”) on which pilgrims wishing to be healed of a sickness hang pieces of cloth⁵⁴ [Pic. No. 9.] resembles the world of animism and is part of the Hungarian tree and forest cult.⁵⁵ The custom of touching pieces of cloth to the Virgin Mary’s statue can even be observed among contemporary pilgrims, similarly to the fact that certain

⁵² Magyar 2009a: 159; Magyar 2010: 132.

⁵³ Vö.: Orbán 1869, II, 15; P. Boros 1994: 73; Bárh 2000: 37; Mohay 2015a: 109–110.

⁵⁴ Wlislöcki 1895: 17. This belief and rite can be observed nowadays in a Szekler village situated about 50 km away from *Csíksomlyó* (*Oroszhegy, Dealu*) at the spring named “*Urusos kút*” (“Healing well”) which was a place of pilgrimage before the 19th century. For the general bibliography on the topic, see Wlislöcki 1894.

⁵⁵ See Ferenczi 1960.

grasses, roots, and branches found in the surroundings of the devotional church are considered to have healing and sacramental power.⁵⁶ In a contemporary collection by Zoltán Kakas we can read about cobbles picked up on the holy mountain whose sacramental strength is due to the touch of angels' feet, according to the folk belief.⁵⁷ Other "pagan" stones have also been highly respected for a long time and even found their way into the devotional church and the Chapel of the Salvator, in order to demonstrate the millennial continuity of the place of worship.⁵⁸



Pic. No. 8.: Objects expressing gratitude for prayers being heeded
(photo by Zoltán Magyar, 2009)

⁵⁶ Tánzos 1991: 154.

⁵⁷ Kakas 2000.

⁵⁸ Simén 1999: 132.



Pic. No. 9.: *Clothes hung on trees and on the cross near Oroszhegy/Dealu*
(photo by Zoltán Magyar, 2009)

Another stone or group of stones inspired a legend which is still widely known among older pilgrims, and is in reality a crime and punishment type of story localized to *Csík-somlyó*: a woman wove even on a feast-day, and as a result God turned her to stone [Appendix 11.]. This strange shaped rock, the so-called “stone weaving loom” (*Kőszövőváta*), could actually be seen on the mountain until the 20th century and pilgrims made a point of visiting it; however, it no longer exists, having been destroyed or simply disappeared.⁵⁹ Another tradition that belongs to the crime and punishment thematic group reports that it is impossible to climb the holy mountain with a sinful soul (i.e. without confession).⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Some variants of this type of legend: Orbán 1869, II: 22.; Kritsa 1887, 2.; Duka 1993: 41–42; Magyar 2003: 281–283; Magyar 2009b: 270–271.

⁶⁰ Tánczos 1991: 149.



Pic. No. 10.: *Looking into Sun*
(photo by Zsigmond Csoma)



Pict. N. 11.: *Looking into Sun*
(photo by Imre Harangozó, 1998)

The Moldavian Hungarians' Whitsunday religious tradition, the so-called "looking into the Sun", is also linked to the *Kissomlyó* mountain. [Pic. No. 10–11.] According to the pilgrims' belief, at this time the Holy Spirit appears in the rising Sun, mainly as a pigeon symbol.⁶¹ The narratives of these apparitions can be collected sporadically at the eastern border of Transylvania, in Gyimes Valley.⁶² Although this custom and belief counts as a folkloristic curiosity, similar sacred traditions are also known from several Hungarian settlements in Transdanubia and the Hungarian Highlands, but there they are related to the Day of the Birth of Mary (8 September) and to the Virgin Mary seen in the morning sun.⁶³

Sporadic folklore texts about seeing the Virgin Mary and the Virgin Mary's appearance exist in relation to *Csiksomlyó*;⁶⁴ however, taking the whole legend circle into consideration these texts are not an organic part of the tradition, and they can be considered invariants in the folkloristic sense. Since these are all folklore texts recorded in the 20th century, they show one of the possible developing directions of the devotional place legend circle.

Besides the numerous and renewing text groups of miraculous healings and prayers being heeded, cases related to Russian invaders in 1944, stories of communists' miraculous conversions in *Csiksomlyó* or those punished by the Virgin Mary, the memory of Bishop Áron Márton's presence at the last Whitsunday pilgrimage in 1949 before the communist prohibition and the hermit settled near the Chapel of the Salvator have become historical legends related to the shrine. The survival of the legend circle and its possible thematic enlargement in the future is not only stimulated by the devotional place becoming a symbol for all Hungarians and the Whitsunday pilgrimage being attended by hundreds of thousands, but also – in a somewhat ambivalent way – by the regular presence of Hungarian neo-pagan groups, who likewise see the devotional place as the part of their own mythology.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Tánzos 1991: 153; Barna 1993: 58; Daczó 1997: 172; Peti 2008: 151–161; Peti 2012: 145–161; Keszeg–Pócs–Peti eds. 2009: 126–132.

⁶² Magyar 2003: 700–701.

⁶³ Bálint 1977, II: 269.

⁶⁴ See Salamon 1987: 175, 178.

⁶⁵ For the neo-pagan presence at Csiksomlyó see Ilyés 2014: 308–311.



Pict. N. 12.: “Angel” above the holy mountain
(photo from the Internet)

Appendix

Heavenly ladder

1. They saw a heavenly ladder descended from Heaven at his place, where miraculous processions and songs could be heard at night. That is why this place was called the Saviour’s place. 1734 DI20 Aug MA.

(Romania: Szeklerland: the epigraph of the outer wall of the Chapel of the Salvator in *Csík-somlyó*.)

The origin of the Whitsunday Pilgrimage

2. In *Csík-somlyó* there is the pilgrimage because one of the big landlords was Protestant and wanted to convert the whole region to the Protestant religion. Then the Catholics rallied to the hillside, so children, women, everybody wearing the same men’s caps, and the army was halted. When the army came, they wondered what a great force they were facing, but most of them were woman and children. So the way they came, the same way they withdrew. And in memory of this they hold the *Csík-somlyó* pilgrimage.

(Romania: Szeklerland – Zoltán Magyar’s collection 2011.)

The statue dug out from the ground

3. A little girl was hoeing in the field. As she was hoeing, all of a sudden, she found a beautiful lily. She was delighted by it, then she ran away to call for help, to dig it out, to take it home. To plant it in their garden. However, the news spread quickly and even the bailiff heard about it. They went to admire it. When they went there, the bailiff spoke: "That beautiful lily has to be taken, not to the backyard, but to the county's yard."

As they started digging, they noticed that there was something underneath. They looked and they found a coffin: the lily had grown out of a coffin. Then they dug out the coffin and opened it. Well, there was a statue of the Virgin Mary in it. They put it on a cart and hitched the cart to oxen, but the two oxen couldn't drag it. They hitched up four oxen and the four oxen couldn't pull it. Even six oxen couldn't move it. Well, they were astonished. They realised that the Virgin Mary statue has its rightful place right there, and that's why they can't take it away. Then they decided that they would build a church there so the statue of the Virgin Mary would stay there. And then they built that big monastery in *Csík-somlyó* and they placed the Virgin Mary's statue there.

(Romania: Gyimes Valley – Magyar 2003: 691. – Zoltán Magyar's collection, 2001.)

The devotional statue flies back to its original place

4. Listen to this: The Turks wanted to take it away, and they went to the bridge over the Olt, and neither human power nor animal power, nothing, nothing could take it further on from that bridge. They struggled for three nights and three days, because at nights the statue flew back to that willow. So, they had to leave it there, because it always flew back to that willow. And then the old monk said that where Virgin Mary's statue was, there they should build a monastery.

(Romania: Gyimes Valley – Bosnyák 2001:170. – Sándor Bosnyák's collection, 1988.)

The devotional statue intact even in fire

5. The Tartars wanted to take it away, and they even set light to it, but it didn't burn. The Tartars lit the statue, they wanted to burn it, but it didn't burn.

(Szeklerland: Orotva – Magyar 2011, I: 166. – Zoltán Magyar's collection, 2009.)

The devotional statue cannot be destroyed by the enemy (Those who offend the devotional statue are struck by divine punishment)

6. I don't know more about it than that the Turkish chased it that time. The monks tried to save the statue of the Virgin Mary, taking it on a cart towards *Udvarbely*, across Hargita. One of the Turks was rude, and pulled out his sword to cut it into the statue. And as he pulled it out, his sword stiffened, and so did his whole body. He also turned to stone. Then the Virgin Mary's statue was saved for a while during the time the enemy was approaching. Then they returned, because that monastery is the Virgin Mary's home. That statue works so many miracles that anyone who prays to the Virgin Mary, will be listened to. Even nowadays, too.

(Romania: Gyimes Valley – Magyar 2003: 695. – Zoltán Magyar's collection, 2006.)

The weeping devotional statue

7. I heard it in this way, that they said that her eyes were shedding tears. Then they said that if the Virgin Mary was weeping then danger would come to the people. Because they said this when the first World War started, at that time too, and at the time of the second World War too, and now during the Revolution of 1989, too [in Romania], they said this, that the Virgin Mary was shedding tears.

(Romania: Szeklerland – Magyar 2011, I: 178. – Zoltán Magyar's collection, 2007.)

Alternations to the face of the devotional statue

8. An old woman said: "Oh, you Julia, if you went to *Csiksomlyó* just once, then you would always go!" I went as long as I could. And she said: when people enter the church, then she smiles [Virgin Mary's statue]. And when they come out, she sheds tears.

(Romania: Szeklerland – Magyar 2011, I: 178. – Zoltán Magyar's collection, 2007.)

The clown's present

9. The clown also heard about the Virgin Mary. But he could neither pray nor do anything at all; even so, he would have liked to get to *Csiksomlyó*, to the Virgin Mary, so much. And he went to *Csiksomlyó*. And what can he do? He can't pray. But he can show his clown acting. In the meantime, a priest was looking at him in secret from the back. And when he did his clown acting, when it ended, the Virgin Mary bent down to him and hugged him.

But only the priest saw this. That Virgin Mary was pleased with this present too, because he offered it to her.

(Romania: Valley of Gyimes – Magyar 2003: 703. – Zoltán Magyar’s collection, 1996.)

The sweating devotional statue

10. The Virgin Mary is sweating. They go to wipe her. And they use the handkerchief even afterwards: when somebody has a headache, or they wipe other painful parts with it, and the pain goes away.

(Romania: Moldova/Gyimes Valley – Magyar 2011, I: 100–101. – Zoltán Magyar’s collection, 2002.)

The weaving woman turned to stone

11. It happened somewhere where the *Somlyó* pilgrimage is held, where people go to the mountain in a procession. Well, this must have been a very long time ago. I was little when it was said that it had happened sometime there. There were houses there on that on hilltop, and then a woman wove. She wove the canvas. The other went there, her neighbour:

“Thank God”, she said, “God helped me, your weaving is shrinking now”.

“Whether He helps or not, this is shrinking!”

And she turned to stone. And they said, those who went to the *Csíksomlyó* pilgrimage saw her, looked at her. People went and looked, but then it was destroyed in the end, fell to dust, so it can’t be found now. But they said it had been there for a long time: the woman in the weaving loom, and underneath even the brood-hen with its chicken. They were turned to stone.

(Romania: Gyimes Valley – Magyar 2003: 282. – Zoltán Magyar’s collection, 1996.)

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