

Reviews

MAGYAR, Zoltán: *A magyar történeti mondák katalógusa* [A Catalogue of Hungarian Historical Legends]. 2018, Budapest. Kairosz Kiadó. Volume I–XI. ISBN 978-963-662-951-9

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Zoltán Magyar's 12-volume type- and motif-index is a milestone in Hungarian legend research. Through decades of persistent collecting, fieldwork in unexplored regions, regular inventory of existing collections, review of professional and promotional publications, consideration of historical sources, and the inclusion of unpublished manuscripts by solitary scholars, he created an extensive archive. The material of the collection thus created is systematized into a catalogue. It was a recurring task in Hungarian folkloristics to catalog the genres of oral poetry and to survey the legend tradition. It was one of the subfields of this significant, multifaceted work that has been published: the systematization of the Hungarian historical legend tradition has been accomplished. The decades-long persistent work of a single professional has resulted in a significant handbook.

The legend is the most important among the folklore genres of small epics, characterized by variability, variety, local delimitation, and, consequently, type-clustering; that is, the legend is at once unique yet typical. There are types that are associated with only one region, while others are known nationwide, and many have international parallels. In the 1960s-70s, the international community of folklorists has set itself the goal of organizing legends according to a common criterion. When discussing the conceptual, methodological proposals and cataloging suggestions, researchers familiar with the national material presented a plethora of objections, disputing the plan. As a result, of the discussions, cataloging commenced, which in many countries lead to publications, while elsewhere the material is available in manuscript form. All of the completed legend catalogues were based on national characteristics and are therefore different. Recognizing the problems of systematization, researchers of folk traditions developed different systems in each country, although they all considered the systematization of German legends as an example. The publications released clearly demonstrate that the most adequate way of developing a system for the publication of the material is based on the characteristics of the folklore of a given people. Which is what Zoltán Magyar did: he surveyed the results of European legend research, became acquainted with domestic and international systematization principles and practices – which are not without internal contradictions – and then developed his own method. Of the many international antecedents, he utilized the methods of Bengt af Klintberg and Pirkko-Liisa Rausmaa, while in the index, he referred to Stith Thompson's still indispensable motif-index. In each case, he started out from the genre conventions of the historical legend, being mindful of how far a narrative can be considered a legend, historical legend, belief legend, or fairy tale. In addition,

during the systematization, he had to decide when and to what extent a text can be viewed from a historical perspective and when to classify it as a belief legend. It is an open issue in cataloging whether narratives about mythical heroes and supernatural phenomena are historical legends. Every specialist preparing a catalogue of legends has struggled with borderline cases and faced contradictions. Occasionally, one has to face the fact that folk poetry does not shape the message of the epic according to types or aesthetic categories – this is done by a specialist, and so the rigid categories must be broken. For researchers, the distance between reality and historical memory is a matter of fact. The tradition of what happened or supposedly happened may be associated with elements of morals or faith, and in cataloging may fit into two or even three thematic groups. In oral tradition, legends have survived independently of technical terminology, and common elements of local legends are sometimes linked to a specific person, other times generalized or linked to a geographic location or belief. In the legend cycle of the revolutionary war, for example, legends of miraculous escape are both belief legends and historical legends. Luckily, the motif-index eliminates the inconsistencies in the systematization method. The catalogue lists the variants of each type according to their geographical and regional order from west to east. Volume X, *Motif-index and bibliography*, provides a thematic grouping in alphabetical order. This is how the type- and motif-index listed in the nine volumes forms an integral unit.

Zoltán Magyar created the type- and motif-index based on a collection of 112,000 narratives. When creating the types and configuring the larger thematic units, he utilized the results of previous research and preserved the established vocabulary. This applies to the fundamental question of the research, the definition of legend and historical legend, and the boundaries of the genre. The fundamental theoretical questions are presented not at the beginning of the handbook but after the presentation of the results, in Volume XI, *The system and structure of Hungarian historical legends*. The material of the first nine volumes demonstrates that the author's starting point was not the definition of legend but a summary of the lessons of systematizing a huge body of texts. This is reflected in the entire structure of the completed catalogue. I repeat, Zoltán Magyar starts from data, not from theoretical definitions; he has organized thousands of texts in a way that anyone can recognize, with the help of the references, the various aspects, word usage, type names, concepts, motifs, and the different ways historical legends are connected to each other – the essence of oral tradition. The indexes of the tenth volume and the bibliography provide guidance to the Hungarian historical legend tradition. If a legend consists of many elements – e.g., about the conquest – the motifs and their parallels, the names of people, their local aspects will be found in the index, but not the full text.

How did Zoltán Magyar's present volume enrich Hungarian folkloristics? Folkloric creations that are associated with historical figures, events, or specific locations represent the historical consciousness of the community. By comparing the material of published national catalogues, it has become possible to compare the folklore of different peoples and to present the changes in historical consciousness, from origin myths to memories of recent events. The complex relationship between legends becomes apparent in the very first volume, in the organization of foundation legends. Numerous geographical names preserve the memories of historical events, the formation of castles, the establishment of temples, and various landscape groups. Volume I begins with data from Hungarian chronicles referring to the conquest of Hungary. This is followed by the lore of the origins

of a settlement, the construction of a castle, the foundation of a temple, the destruction/reconstruction of a village. The legend cycle of church construction is particularly rich, which is partly related to treasure tales. Legends usually reflect local historical consciousness, but sometimes they demonstrate that the inhabitants of geographically separate settlements are familiar with the same narrative. Consequently, not all of the data in Volume I, *Foundation legends*, can be considered “foundation” legends in the strict sense of the word, because they include treasure tales, narratives about nationalities and ethnic groups, and numskull tales. Occasionally belief elements add color to origin myths. The author also included the folklore of the origins of famous families and their crests in the foundation legend cycle.

The number of legends associated with historical names is very large, and they logically form an integral unit, so the second volume consists of two parts, essentially in the chronological order of when the individuals lived, from Atilla to the luminaries of the 20th century. In the folklore of famous historical figures, King Matthias is the most popular; considering the number of types, the Habsburgs-related verbal lore is more diverse than the Kossuth and Rákóczi legend cycles. However, if we consider the number of variants, the popularity of the Kossuth legends outweighs the Habsburg legend cycle. The objective information provided by the catalogue reveals new contexts. It is noteworthy that the folklore of Hungarian historical figures occasionally shows significant international parallels. In case the name and activities of the historical person can be linked to a larger theme, their tales are included in the third volume of the catalogue, where we find diverse groups, from dragon-killing heroes, brave female warriors, negative and ambivalent heroes all the way to Hitler, in ten thematic units. Here we find legends of the holy crown, although – in my opinion – these are closer to the theme of holy places and sacred objects, the legends of which are included in the fifth volume. Another big unit of historical legends, the folklore of wars, freedom fights, battles, social conflicts, cataclysms, revolutions and counterrevolutions, is found in the fourth volume. This volume is a rich compendium of the historical events of the 20th century, even though the number of publications and collections available is limited. Zoltán Magyar added little-known narratives to the catalogue and was the first to systematize the legends found in personal experience narratives. The scarce data, particularly on the folkloric aspects of the memories of 20th-century cataclysms, narratives about disgraced women and priests, prison experiences, lynchings, the legends of the Iron Curtain, and typical texts surviving in urban folklore, indicates that further work is needed in this area.

The fifth volume (*Legends, religious myths*), includes the types and motifs of religious myths and legends separate from historical figures. Legends about shrines, miraculous apparitions, persons with supernatural powers, angels, visions, and other religious subjects are organized into 17 groups. Only a small portion of the rich material of folk religiosity is included in the catalogue arranged by historical aspects, such as apparitions linked to specific geographic locations, miracles linked to specific shrines. Supernatural phenomena are an integral part of local legendary lore, which is why Marian apparitions were included in the catalogue not as belief legends but in their historical context. The sixth volume, the subject of which is *Crime and punishment*, contains predominantly belief legends. The themes of turning to stone, sabbath-breaking, false testimony, blasphemy, violation of Christian morality and expectations, and others has nearly 900 motifs in 12 major thematic units. When the complete Hungarian legend catalogue is

finished, narratives of the supernatural will undoubtedly be included among the belief legends.

The seventh – and most extensive – volume covers the prose tradition of *betvár* (outlaw) poetry. In Hungarian historical legend poetry as a whole, *betvár* legends form the richest, most varied and colorful thematic unit. Many outlaws are known by name from records, their lives recorded in testimonies, historical records, registers, and other documents, but there are some who are only known in the oral tradition by their pseudonym. *Betvár* poetry is a fine evidence of the constant changes taking place in folk poetry. Moreover, the Hungarian tradition is further expanded by the outlaws popular among the neighboring peoples, adding even more color to the already rich legend cycle. In addition to registering prominent outlaws by name, the events linked to them have also been typed. Thus, through stories of their origins, becoming outlaws, escapes, bravado, robberies, good deeds, lovers, enemies, helpfulness, prison life, and much more, the seventh volume of the catalogue becomes a colorful registry of the lives of the outlaws, providing an excellent arsenal for a new monograph.

In the eighth volume, the catalogue of *Treasure tales* is arranged into ten smaller groups based on the main characteristic motifs. Treasure tales are partly associated with historical figures, events, local landmarks, although they are predominantly belief legends. Hiding and discovering the treasure, guarding the hiding place, and helpful mythical animals and supernatural characters appear as characteristic motifs not only in legends but also in fairy tales. The relationship between fairy tales and legends is well illustrated by the concordance list. We know that the fairy tale catalogue has cataloged numerous legends and anecdotes, which is why genre boundaries had to be disregarded there as well.

The ninth volume, comprised of mixed topics, covers legends of other geographic phenomena, such as the origins of rivers, waters, caves, tunnels, stories of giants and fairies, or narratives of real-world problems, serfdom, land allotment, and hard-to-categorize topics. From mythical antiquity to historical social processes, memories of the gentry, communism, catastrophes, epidemics, and lawmaking all became the subject of oral tradition. The origin stories of waters, rivers, etc. that were partly included in the first volume, among the foundation legends, were included here based on new criteria, demonstrating the problems of cataloging. The heterogeneous aspects of thematic unit, type, subtype, topos, motif, historicity are difficult to reconcile.

Through this brief presentation, I illustrated the diversity of historical legends and trends in grouping. Indeed, historical figures, phenomena, and events from the age of the Conquest to the 20th century have persisted in memory in large numbers, with varying degrees of significance and frequency. This is well reflected in the catalogue. In cataloging, historical succession is a priority, but a thematic grouping independent of chronological order is also warranted, e.g., in the case of outlaw legends. It is clear from the catalogue that the folklore associated with geographical place names is significantly smaller than the collection of historical legends, even though treasure tales and legends are also part of the local tradition. In the tenth volume, type-, name-, and motif-indexes provide information on the richness, variability, and prevalence of legends. This enormous treasury of folklore, an archive comprising 112,000 texts, through its diversity of types and motifs organized in a catalogue, is evidence of the richness of Hungarian folk poetry and of the rural population's knowledge of history.

The final volume of the catalogue contains the author's studies on legend research, everything concerning the history and premise of the legend catalogue, the genre issues encountered in the course of the work, the distinctions between different sub-genres, and the many questions of heritagization. As mentioned above, this volume gives us an insight into the background of the work, the theoretical problems encountered, the concepts of hero types, and historical and regional articulation. Through decades of persistent and consistent work, Zoltán Magyar has developed a system of historical legends. Drawing on national and international literature and the work of his predecessors, he created his own method, which resulted in the extensive catalogue of legends just published. There may be objections to methodological, theoretical, or practical issues, but the work that has been accomplished is indisputably deserving of recognition. The great merit of the catalogue is a clear overview of the Hungarian historical legend tradition, as well as the fact that through a large amount of data, it represents the historical consciousness preserved in the oral tradition. And he did it all in a readable style, not in a dry gibberish language. The English translation of the types listed in the catalogue opened the door for international comparative folkloristic research. The correlation of Hungarian and international motifs was recorded in the concordance list, and even this simple form demonstrates the more distant connections of Hungarian folklore. The impatient researcher will not easily find the type or motif he or she is looking for at the moment in any catalogue. Difficulties in finding information are well illustrated by the criticisms of the Thompson motif-index. It is good to see that a shorter summary in English is in the works for FFC. We hope that with its various referencing methods, the catalogue of legends compiled by Zoltán Magyar will be an easy-to-understand, usable manual for folklorists and folklore enthusiasts alike.

The catalogue has a prestigious printing and editorial design, and it is a worthwhile work in terms of bibliography as well. Before one looks at the monotonous letters, the elaborately designed book binding provides a great experience. The cover was created by Mónika Koszta based on the decorations of the Reformed Church of Magyarköblös (Cubleșu Someșan) from 1778. The twelve details of the chancel painting provide a visual impression of the complex existence of folk tradition, evoking dimensions beyond legends. In addition to capturing moments of ethnographic collection, the 133 photographs published at the end of the final volume document the memories associated with historical legends, including the petrified footprint of St. Ladislaus' horse, the appearance of the angel, and Jacob's ladder. I can say without exaggeration that Zoltán Magyar's essential handbook has enriched ethnography, comparative folkloristics, historiography, as well as cultural studies.