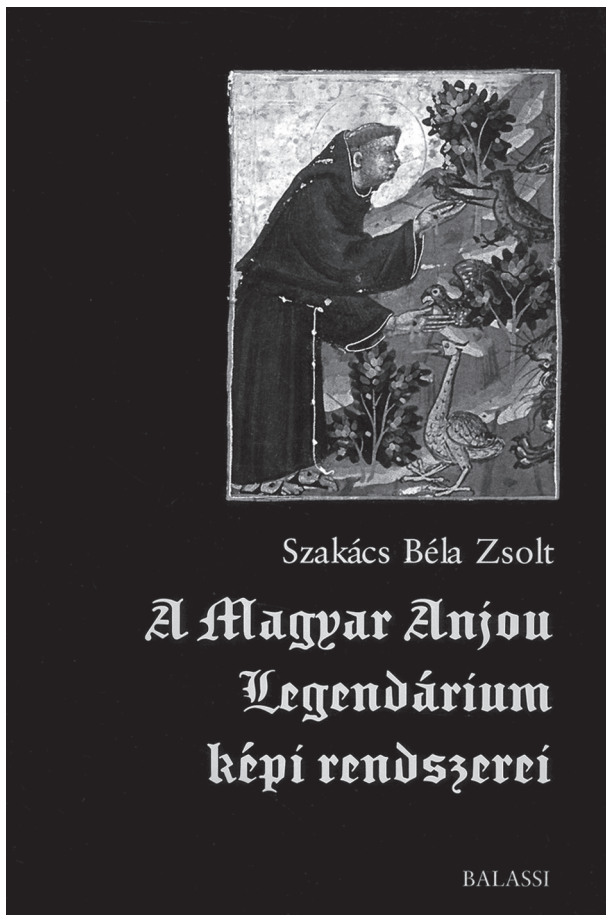


SZAKÁCS, Béla Zsolt: *The Visual World of the Hungarian Angevin Legendary* (Central European Cultural Heritage, Vol. I. Series editor: József Laszlovszky). Translator: Lara Strong. Central European University Press, Budapest, 2016. IX+339 pages, 116 figures, 25 tables. ISBN 978-963-7326-25-7

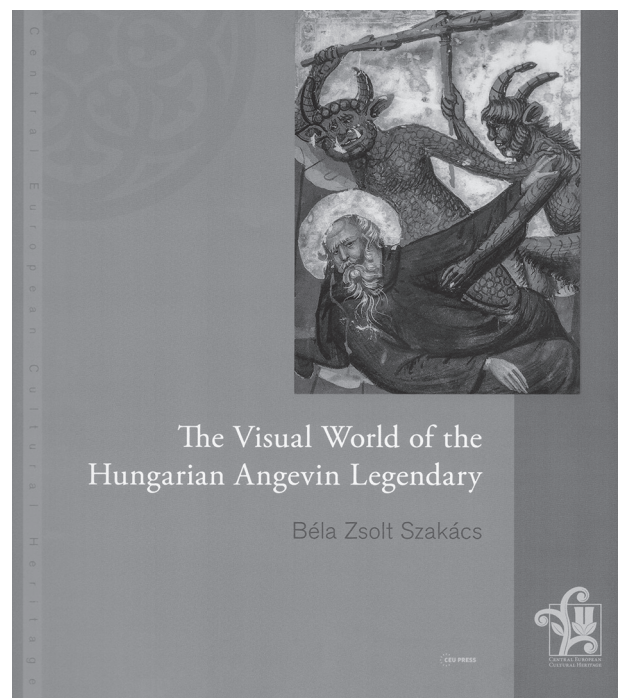
This book is the first volume in a new series by CEU Press dedicated to Central European Cultural Heritage. What endeavor could be more relevant for an institution of scholarly studies and education in Central Europe than a clear presentation of both the concept and the object of this geographical and intellectual realm. As Alice Choyke and József Laszlovszky wrote in their short foreword to this new series, there is a need to bolster awareness of our shared cultural heritage – an expression often used in current scholarship and monument protection to indicate a transcendence of modern national barriers. Therefore, a monograph devoted to the reconstruction of the visual world and medieval mentality based on a thorough analysis of an artwork is an ideal

and exemplary way to achieve this aim, as neither the appearance nor the meaning of a medieval object can be described with our modern terms.

I had the occasion to follow the formation and maturation of this major work by my younger colleague, Béla Zsolt Szakács, for more than two decades. His first studies of this manuscript in 1994 were closely tied to the beginnings of the Medieval Studies Department of Budapest's Central European University and especially to the project to compile a modern database of visual resources there, which at that time was mainly in microfiche format. Another source of support and inspiration for the author was historian Gábor Klaniczay, due to his research on the ideology and iconography of the holy rulers. Dr. Szakács's interdisciplinary studies and considerable research abroad resulted in a doctoral dissertation that he wrote and defended at Budapest's Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in 1998. This thesis served as the core of his book, which was originally published in 2006 under the title



Cover of the Hungarian edition (2006);
Saint Francis of Assisi preaching to the birds, New York,
Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994.516



Cover illustration: Hungarian Angevin Legendary,
the temptation and consolation of Saint Anthony the Great,
St Petersburg, Hermitage 16934



Fig. 1. Hungarian Angevin Legendary, Life of Jesus, scenes L 4a-d; New York, Morgan Library M.360.2.

A Magyar Anjou Legendárium képi rendszerei [The visual systems of the Hungarian Angevin Legendary]. The Hungarian title alludes to the system of illustrations as elements of the narrative structure of the codex. The English edition, whose content and bibliography were both updated, was also given a new title that, to me, seems less precise than the original.

“Visual World” does not have the same meaning as “parallel visual systems,” a phrase that encompasses the three factors or levels helpful to understanding the genesis of this superb luxury codex, as the impact of the editorial work on it is now characterized at the end of the monograph. The result was a unique composition that is difficult to place within the typology of medieval book production. The process of creating this codex was rather unusual: the selection of the subjects provided by the hagiographic texts was a choice of moments to visualize, and the goal was not to simply illustrate, but to find corresponding visual formulas. Thus, the editorial work was not a simple process of text redaction but involved

attention chiefly to the visual character of the scenes, and this task was entrusted mainly to the illuminator(s). As the author astutely observes in the chapter analyzing the *tituli*, a further peculiarity of this editorial collaboration was that the painters’ work found its first and immediate interpretation in the form of short labels: “Therefore we have an extraordinarily exciting case of contemporary interpretations that can certainly be attributed to a fairly educated cleric who could read a large quantity of images with sufficient confidence” (p. 236). This is only an example of the results of the author’s investigation, with the key expression, “reading the images” – an essential statement hidden in a relatively neutral text.

Dr. Szakács’s book is a rare example of a monograph in which a question – “how were the legends edited, and how were the various stories translated into the visual idiom?” (p. 1) – is posed in the first paragraph of the introduction and is answered in the last chapter. These two sections, the introduction and the conclusion, frame three levels of analysis of the manuscript. In the introduction, the main premises of the monograph, the research history and the reconstruction of the dispersed pages of the codex are discussed. The second step was extremely important: based primarily on a study of the volume in the Vatican Library, the author provides a plausible reconstruction of how the dispersed leaves and mutilated folios (including cut-out images) of altogether seven more sets of material held now in five further collections were originally arranged. The system of the original quires and observations of secondary phenomena, such as different numberings and paginations, as well as further thematic phenomena helped Dr. Szakács to arrive at a relatively final reconstruction of the codex and the series of legends in it. Nevertheless, it is still a hypothesis, and certain problems and gaps can only be addressed once even more elements of the dispersed codex are discovered. For me, one of the main aesthetic issues of this careful investigation is the conclusion that the open codex originally looked like a golden diptych with two times four vivid images.

Here I would like to stress the importance of the short introduction into the historiography of the codex. It is more than a tribute to the scholars or a simple overview of the reception history of the work, because the evidence we have about

the codex comes not from any written sources, but from the erudition and scholarship of past experts. The miniatures were identified as having a Bolognese style and were attributed to various predecessors of Nicolò di Giacomo da Bologna (such as the Master of 1328, the so called *Illuminatore*, etc.), which resulted in the dating of the illuminations to the fourth decade of the fourteenth century. This is confirmed by another attribution to the same workshop, that of the Nekcsei Bible, which must have been completed before the death of its commissioner in 1338. Thus, a “Hungarian group” of Bolognese manuscripts was hypothetically created and is still presumed in the literature. Furthermore, researchers have posited that the masters of this workshop were active elsewhere outside Italy, specifically in Lower Austria and possibly Bohemia. Depending on how we judge these hypotheses, they could substantiate the attribute “Hungarian,” which has been applied to the codex. In fact, strong arguments have been made to support this based mainly on the presence of Hungarian saints, Saint Gerhard (d. 1046) and the Holy Kings of Hungary in the codex. Furthermore, the list of these seems to be incomplete: it seems that not only Saint Stephen (King Stephen I; 997/1000–1038), but Adalbert (d. 997) and perhaps Saint Elizabeth (d. 1231) are also missing from the surviving codex. The attribute “Angevin” is mainly justified based on the chronology, but is also confirmed by the presence of Saint Stanislaw (d. 1079), which reflects the Polish origin of the wife of King Charles I (1301–1342). Thus, the naming of the codex has its roots in the research tradition, and the author has accepted – and in stylistic questions rather implicitly followed – this tradition. Moreover, the term *Legendary* was maintained, while at the same time the hypothesis that the codex was a schoolbook for a child (made for Duke Andrew during his education at the Neapolitan court of King Robert) was rightly rejected.

The author places the codex midway between traditional martyrologies or passionals and richly decorated *libelli*, with the statement: “Based on the level of decoration, the *Hungarian Angevin Legendary* falls between the *libelli* and the *legendaries*, appearing like a series of *libelli* bound together. Thus it occupies an entirely unique place, not only among manuscripts of the *Golden Legend*, but also among the entire stock



Fig. 2. Ivory relief, Miracles of Christ, late fifth century; Berlin, Bode Museum

of hagiographic codices” (p. 254). This hypothesis deserves further intensive investigation.

After this discussion of the art historical framework, we can speak more briefly about the three main chapters dealing with different



Fig. 3. Ivory diptych, Miracles of Christ, late fifth century; London, Victoria and Albert Museum

aspects or “levels” of the composition. They represent the author’s main contribution to our knowledge of illuminated codices and are based on a wide interdisciplinary scholarship in codicology, philology and the history of the medieval mentality.

The first aspect of this investigation (entitled: A Circle of Saints) concerns the principle of the composition and leads to the statement that the hierarchical order of saints (corresponding approximately to the Litany of Saints) played a primary role and the calendar system of the *de tempore* principle remained secondary. In contrast to the selection of the *Legenda Aurea*, in which saints from the seventh through twelfth centuries are missing, the Hungarian Angevin Legendary shows more contemporary saints, and Central European saints seem to fill the gap in the eleventh century, a crucial period in the kingdoms of this area. Also the cult places seem to represent primarily French and Central Euro-

pean usage. The criteria for the choosing of the saints confirms an affinity with another Central European series of illustrated legends, the nearly contemporary Bohemian *Liber depictus*, which is stylistically different but displays a similar mindset.

The chapter entitled “Analysis of the Legends” is devoted to the sources of individual biographies. Here, the main goal of the investigation is to compare the series to the *Legenda Aurea* and other textual sources and the iconographic tradition as well. In terms of the number of images within individual cycles, the main emphasis falls clearly on Saint James the Greater, King Saint Ladislav of Hungary (Ladislav I; 1077–1095), and Saint Francis of Assisi. A thorough analysis proves that the Hungarian saints were represented not on the basis of any iconographic tradition but mainly according to the hagiographic texts, as can be proved in the case of saints Emeric (d. 1031) and Gerhard. The scenes of the legend of Saint Ladislav cannot be documented with textual sources, thus the existence of different text variants can be supposed. This is also important for the missing cycle of King Saint Stephen of Hungary, which can be hypothetically reconstructed on the basis of the four pictures included in the *Paduan Decretales* of Miklós Vásári, painted in 1343, perhaps by Nicolò da Bologna himself. (A further question, however, is whether the four scenes decorating codex A. 24 in the *Biblioteca Capitolare* of Padua, focusing on the role of the archbishops of Esztergom, could be interpreted in the same general hagiographic context.) Another very clear and important investigation was devoted to the Legend of Saint Francis of Assisi; this contribution to his iconography cannot be overestimated. Here the author manages to verify the use of different texts that bear witness to the early stages in the evolution of the saint’s biography. Mainly the composition of the Saint Francis cycle supports the author’s hypothesis that the program of the codex corresponds to the unpolitical, ascetic and ethical mentality of a “designer of the cycles [who] was more preoccupied with the worldly hierarchy and the perspective of the bishops” (p. 150). A new theory has been posited based on this important observation in the conclusion: the editor of the image program and the recipient of the codex can be assumed to be one of the bishops who sent a let-



Fig. 4. Ivory relief, Genesis scenes, late eleventh century; Berlin, Bode Museum

ter to Pope Clement VI around 1338 registering the complaints of the Hungarian bishops against King Charles I (p. 252). According to the author's hypothesis, the recipient might have been Bishop Coloman, King Charles' illegitimate son.

The third analytical chapter has more to do with art history and is devoted to an analysis of the image types. Beyond the evidence of widespread and generally known representation types used to identify scenes (e.g. in the Christological cycle) and conventional images, the main contribution of this chapter is the analysis of the compositional methods of the painters. In their pictorial world, physiognomies and expressions have no role, only liturgical or conventional gestures of figures as if moving in the narrow boxes of a puppet-theater. Thus, instead of the often repeated art historical hypotheses that compositional models were used, Dr. Szakács suggests a general procedure was employed for creating a spatially conceived, typical relationship among figures. The word 'box' must be repeated here, because outside of the spatial units conceived as perspective-scenic boxes (named *casamenti* in the description of the Giottesque *storie* by Cennino Cennini), these general figural relationships also follow the rules of a kind of *Baukastensystem*. They can be easily used for visualizing a situation according to a given text when concrete artistic models were not available. Dr. Szakács gives a general list of such situations: images of public life, such as ordination scenes; images of schol-

arly life (e.g. authors' studios); liturgical scenes, etc.; images of the virtuous life; the world of miracles; images of suffering; and images of the Last Rites. The examples supporting the analysis are convincing, but also inspiring. Everybody has the impression that, using these compositional types (in the meaning of Warburg's *Pathosformeln*), one could create entire fictional legends. And in fact, it was exactly what the illuminators did. But a remaining question is important: which came first – the text or the image? And this question is answered by the author in a very wise way: neither factor had absolute primacy in the Middle Ages. This example characterizes the author's well-balanced and moderate attitude.

The author has shown in a convincing way how the growing demand for visual images in the fourteenth century influenced the spread of new types of cult images (*Andachtsbilder*) and historical representations as well as corresponding illustrated works: *Bibliae pauperum*, *Specula humanae salvationis*, etc. This use of images as tools of meditation was not limited just to educating children or nuns. It was a general aim of society and also an important step in the development of personal devotion. One of the main results of this scholarly investigation is that the Hungarian Angevin Legendary was a highlight of this new type of representation. And this is the point at which we must return to the question of the book's title. The original title of the Hungarian edition correctly captures the investigation



Fig. 5. Relief, detail with scenes from Samson's history (detail), early thirteenth century; Naples Cathedral (from Sta Maria del Principio)

into the creation of a visual system. From the visual world, however, one more element is still missing: the style of the *Legendary*, which is of course not only determined by the fact that members of the Hungarian court elite often studied in Bologna. In addition, Bologna was not only the production place of *decretales* and codices with the text of the Golden Legend, but also the preferred city for almost two generations of Hungarian clients seeking illuminators' workshops.

The style of the *Legendary's* scenes, with figures crowded in box-like, narrow spaces, and the strong *rilievo* of compact figures (*Fig. 1*) cannot be characterized simply as a Giottesque element in Bolognese manuscript painting common in the generation after the Master of 1328. Some peculiarities of this Bolognese style can be traced back to prototypes of Late Antiquity (of the late fourth and early fifth centuries): an early exam-

ple for the arrangement of the pictures in the Hungarian Angevin *Legendary*, the Itala fragment of Quedlinburg, was also mentioned by the author (p. 254). Its contemporaries, crowded historical reliefs with Christological subjects in Berlin, Paris and the ivory diptych in the Victoria and Albert Museum represent a relief style whose tradition survived in the southern Italian Genesis ivory of the eleventh century in Berlin, as well as in the early thirteenth-century relief cycles with the narrative of the story of Joseph, Samson, and San Gennaro in Santa Restituta of Naples. (*Figs. 2–5*) It seems that a Sienese *modus* of relief, best represented by the reliefs of the Tarlati tomb of Arezzo, belongs to the same continuous stylistic tendency, which cannot be considered as either a simple Giottesque phenomenon or as a Byzantinism following an earlier Bolognese tradition. This is exactly the point at which the miniature painting of Bologna corresponds to the monumental pictorial style of Vitale da Bologna and Tommaso da Modena, which had a strong impact on the most monumental phenomenon of this new Central European visual world, the virtual presence of the Karlštejn figures painted by Master Theodoric of Prague.

Shortly: we look forward to further conclusions drawn from the present story told in the book and thus for its continuation.

Ernő Marosi