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The Renaissance of the Middle Ages in Hungary

[A stampa in *Fifteen-Year Anniversary Reports*, a cura di M. Sággy, “Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU” (Central European University, Budapest), ed. by J. A. Rasson and B. Zsolt Szakács, vol. 15 (2009), pp. 247-255 © dell'autore – Distribuito in formato digitale da “Reti Medievali”].

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State-formation and nation-building are what modern people living in modern nation-states seem to appreciate most of the many significant achievements that took place in the period between A.D. 476 and A.D. 1492. One could say, of course, that this was before globalization. Well, it looks as if things have not really changed that much with globalization, at least not in the field of humanities. Books on “medieval Europe” do exist, but research continues too often to focus on the national rather than the supranational past. This is what makes the Medieval Studies Department at CEU such a unique place, where transethnic, regional, and universal approaches to, and interpretations of, the past are encouraged. In Hungary, where statehood and national identity are so deeply rooted in the Middle Ages, the past fifteen years saw a revival of all things medieval. From the rich crop of this “medieval renaissance,” I present those trends, books, centers that have not only a fifteen-year old past, but also the hope of a future.

The most important change in the past decades in the field of medieval studies is the re-evaluation of “medieval.” We all know that the adjective is a pejorative one, signaling a period that is “in between” an idealized Antiquity and the renewal of its values in the early Renaissance. While in the nineteenth century and again in the 1930s this turned into a real cult of the Middle Ages, in the first communist decades, “medieval” was again viewed in slightly negative terms, and reinterpreted in terms of feudal exploitation and class struggle. This attitude changed gradually, and by the late 1970s and the 1980s research on medieval studies became less politicized, partly thanks to a growing number of translated works from the international scholarship (Georges Duby, Jacques Le Goff, Aaron Gurevich, and others), and partly thanks to the new works of Hungarian medievalists (György Györffy, Erik Fügedi, Jenő Szűcs) who had more and more opportunities to ignore ideological expectations.

Between 1949 and 1989, medieval history, literature, art history, archaeology, and linguistics figured in the curricula of most of the universities in Hungary. Besides the two main centers of teaching medieval history, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest and the University of Szeged, the respective institutes of the Hungarian Academy of Science dealt with the medieval period.

Today, these three places are still active, the Institute of History of the Academy being the one where the most numerous medievalists work in one place, and have

their own series of publications. To this list one can add today an active medieval center at the University of Pécs, one at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Piliscsaba founded in 1992, one in Debrecen, and a number of further universities where medievalists are working, and – outside Hungary, – one at the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Kolozsvár in Romania.

The Medieval Studies Department at the Central European University, founded in 1993/1994, offers an interdisciplinary Masters' (M.A.) and a doctoral (Ph.D.) program. Today this department (in cooperation with the Department of Medieval and Early Modern European History at ELTE) possesses the most extensive library in Central Europe in the field of medieval studies (<http://www.ceu.hu/medstud/>). Two important series are published by the department: the *Central European Medieval Texts* series, which offers text editions of Central European sources, and *CEU Medievalia*, which aims to be a complex publication series presenting source collections and handbooks on the state of various research fields.

One of the main characteristics of the scholarly life in the department is a surprisingly well functioning cooperation between scholars and doctoral students coming from different areas of Eastern, Central, and Western Europe, Central Asia, and North America. Apart from lifelong friendships, often marriages, that are formed here, a particularly helpful scholarly collaboration – sometimes friendly help with the secondary literature written in an obscure language, sometimes explicit teamwork – gives a special international character to the products of the department and also helps students gain insight into what is going on in other countries.

Thanks to the research opportunities provided by the university, doctoral students and professors have a variety of options to go to renowned research centers and update their methods and interests, a factor that acts strongly against the provincialism that characterizes certain parts of scholarly activity in Central and Eastern Europe.

In contrast to certain accusations that the department gives birth to “interesting” (read: superficial) scholarly products, one is struck by the great variety of works that are produced here, from the most philological and technical to the most theoretical, from the most positivistic to the most interpretative, from the most “boring” to the most “exciting.” As far as methodology and research questions are concerned, this school does not exercise restrictive force.

A measure of the success of the past fifteen years is that several alumni of the department have published their dissertations with prestigious publishing

houses.¹ Due to an unfortunate combination of good research possibilities and poor job opportunities, alumni usually find (if they find at all) a position in other universities and institutes (sometimes in other countries), thus constituting bridges between the Medieval Studies Department and other institutions in Hungary and in Central Europe.

In this reality, beyond the productive university departments mentioned thus far, several research groups have also been active in the field of medieval studies in the past fifteen years. One should start with a center that has become a proper department at Eötvös Loránd University: the *Atelier*. This center, as its name indicates, concentrates first of all on French scholarship, and particularly on the works and methods of the famous Annales School. This is worth a separate mention because among the various international traditions and schools it is the main actors of the first three generations of the Annales who have been translated into Hungarian in the highest concentration. They paved the way for the equally popular traditions of historical geography and microhistory.

As far as other centers are concerned, the Szeged Research Center of Medieval

¹ See the following long but not exhaustive list: Stanko Andrić, *The Miracles of St. John Capistran* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2000), translated into Hungarian as *Kapisztrán Szent János csodái* by Gabriella di Sandri and Dávid Falvay (Budapest: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Enciklopédia Munkaközösség, 2008); György Heidl, *Origen's Influence on the Young Augustine. A Chapter of the History of Origenism* (Notre Dame University, Louaize, and Gorgias Press, 2003); Előd Nemerkenyi, *Latin Classics in Medieval Hungary: Eleventh Century* (Budapest-Debrecen: CEU Press and University of Debrecen, 2004); Anu Mänd, *Urban Carnival. Festive Culture in the Hanseatic Cities of the Eastern Baltic, 1350-1550* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2005); Péter Szabó, *Woodland and Forests in Medieval Hungary*, British Archaeological Reports S1348 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005); István Bugár, *Szagrális képzőművészet a keresztény ókorban: Források* [Sacred Art in Christian Antiquity: Sources] (Budapest: Kairosz, 2004); Benedek Láng, *Unlocked Books, Manuscripts of Learned Magic in the Medieval Libraries of Central Europe* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2008); Irene Barbiera, *Changing Lands in Changing Memories. Migration and Identity during the Lombard Invasions* (Florence: Edizioni All'Insegna del Giglio, 2005); Lucie Doležalová, *Reception and its Varieties. Reading, Re-writing, and Understanding Cena Cypriani in the Middle Ages* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007); Ildar Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c.751-877)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Vasco La Salvia, *Iron Making during the Migration Period. The Case of the Lombards*, British Archaeological Reports S1715 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007); Giedre Mickūnaitė, *Making a Great Ruler: Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006); Marina Miladinov, *Margins of Solitude. Eremitism in Central Europe between East and West* (Zagreb: Leykam International, 2008); Mária Pakucs, *Sibiu – Hermannstadt: Oriental Trade in Sixteenth Century Transylvania* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007); Kiril Petkov, *The Kiss of Peace: Ritual, Self, and Society in the High and Late Medieval West* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Gábor Virágos, *The Social Archaeology of Residential Sites: Hungarian Noble Residences and their Social Context from the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Century: An Outline for Methodology*, British Archaeological Reports S1583 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2006).

Studies (<http://primus.arts.u-szeged.hu/szkm/>) is organized primarily to publish secondary literature and source collections; the CAPITULUM is a research group for medieval church history (<http://www.staff.u-szeged.hu/~capitul/capiteng.htm>) that recently launched a project to build a digitized database of medieval charters.

In 2001, the Hungarian Patristic Society (Magyar Patrisztikai Társaság) was founded to research the teachings of the Church Fathers and the early history of the Christian Church (<http://www.mpt.org.hu/>). Members of the Society (among them Marianne Sággy, from the faculty, István Bugár, and György Heidl) have published and translated a great number of monographs and published basic source editions, thanks to which this area of research received a great stimulus.

For several decades a special research group, the Fragmenta Codicum group – directed first by András Vizkelety and now by Edit Madas – has been exploring, identifying, and cataloguing fragments of medieval origin that survived in the binding of codices (<http://www.fragmenta.oszk.hu/>). Another group has undertaken the task of compiling a dictionary of medieval Latin in Hungary, edited by Iván Boronkai et Kornél Szovák.

The Medieval Studies Department at CEU also tries its best to take part in fruitful national and international collaborative research projects, such as those concentrating on nobility in East Central Europe (János Bak), visual resources in medieval Central Europe (Gábor Klaniczay, Ernő Marosi, Tamás Sajó, Gerhard Jaritz, Béla Zsolt Szakács), medieval economic history (András Kubinyi [d. 2007], József Laszlovszky, Balázs Nagy, Katalin Szende), the Center for Hellenic Traditions (István Perczel, Niels Gaul), Central and Eastern European cultural heritage, and the Ravenna-Classe Project (József Laszlovszky and many alumni of the department).

In addition to these departments and research groups, special web pages are devoted to medieval manuscript production, the structure of books and illumination (<http://web.ceu.hu/medstud/manual/MMM/index.html>), the history of Hungarian music (<http://www.magyarzenetortenet.hu/>), the Corvina library of King Matthias (<http://www.corvina.oszk.hu/>), medieval charters (<http://www.staff.u-szeged.hu/~capitul/compute.htm>), and castles of medieval and early modern Hungary, presenting maps and pictures of the remains of fortified places in Hungary (including aerial photos, 3-D map animations and publications on castles in Hungarian: <http://www.varak.hu>). An internet manual on dress, jewels, arms and coats of arms presents material culture and self-representation in the late Middle Ages, including images, a glossary, and bibliography (<http://www.ceu.hu/medstud/manual/SRM/index.htm>).

Hungarian museums also play an important role in the research and popularization of medieval studies. Particularly rich exhibitions have been organized by a number of institutions: the Hungarian National Gallery (*Pannonia Regia* in 1994; *Mons Sacer* in 1996 at Pannonhalma; *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* (on Master MS) in 1997; *Történelem-kép* [History-image] in 2000) the Hungarian National Museum (*Europe's Centre around A.D. 1000/Europas Mitte um 1000*) in 2000; *Tatárjárás* [The Mongol Invasion] in 2007), the Museum of Fine Arts (*Sigismundus* in 2006), the Budapest Historical Museum (*Mary of Habsburg*, 2004; *Matthias Rex*, 2008), and the Kiscelli Museum (*Mariazell and Hungary in 2004*). 2008 was declared the Year of the Renaissance, when exhibitions on the culture, politics, social life, science, literature, and eating habits of fifteenth-century Hungary became central themes in a great wave of exhibitions in which virtually every museum took part. Although not devoted to the study of the Middle Ages, but rather to modern political and cultural uses and interpretations, exhibitions such as the *Uses and Abuses of the Middle Ages* (2005, CEU), and the *Contagious Middle Ages* (2007, Open Society Archives) were also organized.

Various journals focusing on history in general include articles, and sometimes special issues, on medieval studies, such as *Századok*, *História*, *Történelmi Szemle*, *Rubicon*, *Múlt-kor történelmi portál* on the internet (<http://www.mult-kor.hu/>), *Magyar Könyvszemle*, *Budapesti Könyvszemle* (which had a widely disseminated English version for thirteen years: *Budapest Review of Books*, 1990-2003), *Korall*, and *Aetas*. These journals are available only for those who read Hungarian, only the journal *Chronica* and the *Annual of Medieval Studies* at CEU publish articles in English. At the moment, Hungarian history writing has no proper journal that appears regularly and that is available for a non-Hungarian readership.

Even though the proliferation of scholars, studies, researches, and schools in the field of medieval studies is impressive, certain tensions in the area cannot be ignored. Members of the “schools” and research centers listed above, although they cooperate frequently, have a tendency to see each other’s results, methods, and even research questions with some reservation, even suspicion. One is too philological and does not situate their topics in the wider context, the other does not read the relevant international literature, one is too superficial, and does not even consult manuscripts, the other is doing provincial history writing, one is well known abroad but is not taken seriously in Hungarian scholarship, the other is an important personality in the country, but has virtually no contacts elsewhere – we hear too many such claims, gossip, and blather, which does not always improve cooperation and professionalization.

Among the reasons for this situation, the first one is not uniquely Hungarian; politics have not disappeared from the area of research to the extent as it would be desirable, causing no little suspicion in each others' research primarily on a political basis. Second – again, not a Hungaricum – research in the humanities is underfinanced, scholars working at the state universities or academic institutions usually do not have enough material resources to attend conferences and take research trips. They can only go if they are successful at finding and winning grants. This causes no little frustration and no little tension among scholars. Those who are in better funded institutions such as the CEU face this problem to a considerably lower extent. Third, a peculiarity of all Central European nations, the country has a good number of excellent researchers producing genuine scholarship, who – because they lack language skills – are not able to publish in international forums, a sad fact that produces tension against those who do have the ability, talent or knowledge to manage better on the international playing field and who consequently are more aware of the latest developments in international scholarship. All the above developments, however, and fortunately, show movement in the direction of the demise of these problems. This will certainly not raise more money for the discipline, but it may increase professionalization and decrease tension.

Below follows a set of works published in the last fifteen years that I consider significant for one reason or another, without implying that they are the most important works. Compiling a list of the most significant studies is always subjective because such a list necessarily mirrors the limited perspective of the author. Preference was given to works issued by prestigious publishing houses, for overviews that – either because they are written in English or because they are in Hungarian but written in a good style – have the virtue of reaching a wide, even non-specialist, readership, and for studies that employ up-to-date methodology.

A magyar irodalom története, I. kötet: A kezdetektől 1800-ig [Histories of Hungarian Literature: from the beginnings to 1800]. Editor-in-chief Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, ed. László Jankovits, Géza Orlovsky. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2007.

Bak, János M., Ottó Domonkos, and Paul B. Harvey. *The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary*. Bakersfield: C. Schlacks, 1989-1996.

Bárczi, Ildikó. *Ars compilandi: A késő középkori prédikációs segédkönyvek forráshasználata (A hiteles információk összegyűjtésének kevésbé bevallott módszerei – Az intertextualitás információs rendszerei)* [Ars compilandi: Use of Sources in Late Medieval Sermon Books]. Budapest: Universitas Könyvkiadó, 2007.

Bartosiewicz, László, and Zsolt Visy, *Hungarian Archaeology at the Turn of the Millenium*. Budapest: Ministry of National Cultural Heritage, Teleki László Foundation: 2003.

Csukovits, Enikő. *Középkori magyar zarándokok* [Medieval Hungarian Pilgrims]. Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete, 2003.

Engel, Pál. *The Realm of St Stephen, A History of Medieval Hungary, 895-1526*. London: Tauris, 2001.

Erdélyi, Gabriella. *Egy kolostorper története. Hatalom, vallás és mindennapok a középkor és az újkor határán* [The Story of a Convent's Case: Power, Religion, and Everyday Life at the Turn of the Middle Ages and Modern Times]. Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete, 2005.

Font Márta. *A keresztény nagyhatalmak vonzásában: Közép- és Kelet-Európa a 10-12. században* [Under the Influence of Christian Powers. Central and Eastern Europe in the Tenth and Twelfth Centuries]. Budapest: Balassi, 2005.

Klaniczay, Gábor. *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Kovács, Péter. *Hétköznapi élet Mátyás király udvarában* [Everyday Life in King Matthias' Court]. Budapest: Corvina, 2008.

Kubinyi, András. *Matthias Rex*. Budapest: Balassi, 2008.

Kubinyi, András, József Laszlovszky, and Péter Szabó. *Gazdaság és gazdálkodás a középkori Magyarországon: gazdaságtörténet, anyagi kultúra, régészet* [Economy and Material Culture in Medieval Hungary: Economic History, Material Culture, Archeology]. Budapest: Martin Opitz Kiadó, 2008.

Laszlovsky, József, and Péter Szabó, ed. *People and Nature in Historical Perspective*. Budapest: CEU and Archaeolingua, 2003.

Madas, Edit. *Középkori prédikációirodalmunk történetéből. A kezdetektől a XIV. század elejéig* [From the History of our Sermon Literature: From the Beginnings to the Early Fourteenth century]. Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2002.

Marosi, Ernő. *Kép és hasonmás. Művészet és valóság a 14-15. századi Magyarországon* [Image and Likeness. Art and Reality in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries in Hungary]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1995.

Novák, Veronika. *Hírek, hatalom, társadalom* [News, Power, Society]. Budapest : Gondolat, 2007.

Sághy, Marianne. *Isten barátai. Szent és szentéletrajz a késő antikvitásban* [The Friends of God. Holy Men and Holy Biography in Late Antiquity]. Budapest: Kairosz, 2005.

Sebők, Marcell. *Humanista a határon. A késmárki Sebastian Ambrosius története* [A Humanist on the Border: The History of Sebastian Ambrosius of Késmárk]. Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2007.

Szakács, Béla Zsolt. *A Magyar Anjou Legendárium képi rendszerei* [The Visual World of the Hungarian Angevin Legendary]. Budapest: Balassi, 2006.

Szende, Katalin. *Otthon a városban. Társadalom és anyagi kultúra a középkori Sopronban, Pozsonyban és Eperjesen* [At Home in the Town. Society and Material Culture in Medieval Sopron, Pozsony and Eperjes]. Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete, 2004.

Veszprémy, László. *Lovagvilág Magyarországon* [Knighthood in Hungary]. Budapest : Argumentum, 2008.

Vizkelety, András. *Die Rezeption der europäischen Sermonesliteratur im "Löwener Kodex."* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2004.

Zemplényi, Ferenc. *Az európai udvari kultúra és a magyar irodalom* [European Courtly Culture and Hungarian Literature]. Budapest: Universitas Könyvkiadó, 1998.

Zsoldos, Attila. *Az Árpádok és asszonyaik. A királynői intézmény az Árpádok korában* [The Árpáds and Their Wives. The Institution of the Queen in the Age of the Árpáds]. Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete, 2005.

A few important source editions:

Iani Pannonii opera quae manserunt omnia. Vol. 1. Ed. Gyula Mayer and László Török. Budapest: Balassi, 2006.

Az Árpád-házi hercegek, hercegnők és a királynék okleveleinek kritikai jegyzéke [The Charters of the Princes, Princesses and Queens of the Arpads]. Ed. Attila Zsoldos, relying on the manuscript of Imre Szentpétery. Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár-Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete, 2008.

A Perényi család levéltára 1222-1526 [The Archives of the Perényi Family]. Ed. István Tringli. Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár- Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete, 2008.