

III Reports, News, Announcements

Review Essay

Magyar, Zoltán: *Erdélyi magyar hiedelemmonda-katalógus. Típus- és motívumindex, I–IV* (Catalogue of Hungarian Belief Legends in Transylvania. Type and Motif Index, I–IV). Budapest: Kairosz Kiadó, 2021. 629 pp., 493 pp., 394 pp., 476 pp.¹

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Wayland D. Hand (1907–1986), the late US American folklorist with a focus on popular beliefs, wrote the following remarks concerning the state of the international belief legend indices in his review on the then relatively newly published *Magyar hiedelemmonda katalógus* (A Catalogue of Hungarian Folk Belief Legends) compiled by Anna Bihari (1980):

The study of comparative folk legend and belief is still in its infancy, even though the growing number of collections of legends and beliefs points to related bodies of material in widely separated parts of Europe and America. Only part of this vast corpus of legends has been inventoried, and even less systematization has taken place in the study of folk beliefs, a field intimately bound up with legends. It is therefore a major event in these disciplines to see an index encompassing both genres (Hand 1983: 63).

Regarding the historical background of such thematic systematizations devoted to the belief legend, an epic subgenre of legend, there is still only a very limited number of indices in Europe – and no example worldwide hitherto. During the twentieth century, there have been realized mainly Scandinavian and Baltic belief legend systematizations; among them, two Finnish editions (Simonsuuri 1961; Jauhainen 1998), while in East-Central Europe, the above-mentioned Hungarian one beside them (Bihari 1980; see also Hand 1983; Magyar 2021, 1: 26), which includes Transylvanian folklore material too, albeit in a small quantity (see Magyar 2021, 4: 173). While Bihari's Index was based on no more than 3,294 folklore texts (Magyar 2021, 4: 347, footnote 306; see also: Magyar 2021, 4: 328),² the database of the Cata-

¹ References: Vol. 438–470 pp.; English Conclusion: Vol. IV, 474–476; Map: Vol. I: 33.

² The latter reference is a chart rubric, which includes the principal statistical data of all Hungarian and international belief legend catalogues known by the author: Lithuanian, Dutch, Norwegian, Finnish 1, Finnish 2, Hungarian, Swedish, Czech, and “Transylvanian” (without mentioning the ethnic or language designation).

logue under review is more than ten times larger than that of the previous achievement. Hence, publishing Magyar's Index is an event of even more importance in international folkloristics.

During his systemizing work, Magyar chiefly followed the recommendations made by the speakers of the founding meeting of the ISFNR in 1962 in Antwerp (see Tillhagen 1963; Magyar 2021, 1: 27). As he expressed in the Catalogue's Introduction, in contrast with the systematization of the historical legends, in which was not any prior systematic professional model available, since the 1950s, some publications have been published, which could be considered as a model for cataloguing the belief legends, and the underlying principles were at hand in the 1960s, which have proved useful with certain corrections for both the Catalogue by Anna Bihari (1980) and the Catalogue under review. From a formal point of view, the twelve-volume *A magyar történeti mondák katalógusa* (Catalogue of Hungarian Historical Legends; Magyar 2018) served as a model, which has proved to be operable during the elaboration of its much larger database (112,000 folklore texts) than the recent four-volume Catalogue (roughly 35,000); as the author reported, this model created a logical, transparent, and reader-friendly structure (Magyar 2021, 1: 31). The Catalogue is divided into fifteen thematic units, of which one (Legends about Treasure; K 1–670, Vol. 3: 199–201) occurs just as a mere indication with the thematic division of this tradition. The following two large chapters (D 1–900. Supernatural Beings, Vol. 1; E 1–920. Humans with Supernatural Power [Knowledge and Ability], Vol. 2) constitute two third parts of the entire catalogue (Magyar 2021).

Covering the history of legend classification attempts, Magyar sees the leading causes for the limited accomplishment as follows:

The content-based systematization of folklore texts has accompanied the history of international folkloristics throughout the 20th–21st century. Besides about a hundred folktale catalogues, the classification of the legend, the other primary genre of epic in prose, has already been stalled at its early stage, and – except for some national realizations – it has remained an unfulfilled promise until now. Its main reason is, besides the lack of clarification of methodological principles and the elaboration of a clear and coherent content structure, primarily that there were not available such extensive and comprehensive archives and databases, without which any intention of systematization has remained a pipe dream. (Magyar 2021, 1: 25)³

Magyar's Index, to some extent, can be considered the continuation of the above-mentioned Catalogue of Hungarian Historical Legends, reviewed by the author of the recent review in this journal (Mátéffy 2021). The altogether 1,992-page, four-volume opus is based on approximately 35,000 folklore texts from the Archives of Hungarian Belief Legends from Transylvania, a database that is the result of twenty-six

3 Translated from Hungarian by A. Mátéffy, henceforth trans. by A.M.

years of systematic archiving efforts (Magyar 2021, 4: 474). Although these Archives contain 29,500 texts (Magyar 2021, 1: 27), the textual basis of the Catalogue is much more extensive, since its author has also elaborated thousands of further texts, that have been archived in the Archives of Hungarian Historical Legends, whose corpus includes 114,000 texts at present.⁴ These texts and topics of transitional genres (fate legends, presage of war, giant, fairy, Romanian [Orthodox] priest, treasure guardians) come up in both catalogues (Magyar 2018; 2021). Thus, the number of folklore texts processed in this Catalogue has been increased to circa 35,000 (see Magyar 2021, 4: 355–56).

The material of Magyar's Index has been collected⁵ and recorded from Hungarian speakers (including ethnic subgroups of Hungarians, such as Székelys/Szeklers and Csángós from *Gyimes*/Romanian: *Ghimeș*; as well as occasionally Romani, e.g., from *Szék* [Romanian: *Sic*], *Kalotaszeg* [*Țara Călatei*] or *Magyarléta* [*Liteni*], all *Kolozs* [Cluj] County, etc.) in Transylvania (Hungarian: *Erdély*).⁶ Magyar outlined that the ethnographic “discovery” of Transylvania, which has been launched simultaneously with the Hungarian dance house movement,⁷ and especially the “yield” of folklore collecting activities in the last three decades resulted in a legend corpus of the order of tens of thousands, of which about 60 percent consist of folk belief, taken shape in narrative form, i.e., belief legend (Magyar 2021, 1: 26–27).

As the user manual (available just in Hungarian; Magyar 2021, 1: 31–41) reports on the Catalogue's structure, it is divided into chapters and subchapters, and in some cases into further two subchapters. In the lower levels can be found the types, subtypes, and (several thousand) narrative motifs functioning as types as well. The systemized narrative types appear in the same structural order in all volumes. The type numbers (e.g., D 695.) are followed by the type's title given by the author, or

4 This number was 112,000 in 2018 (see Magyar 2018, XI: 109–115; Mátéffy 2020: 203).

5 Zoltán Magyar is far from being one of the “armchair taxonomists” mentioned by Hand (1983, 63); during the last three decades, he has carried out numerous extensive fieldwork in several countries of East-Central Europe, such as Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Austria, but also in south-eastern Poland (folk traditions relating to *Szent Kinga*/Kinga of Poland), and Ireland (the village of Glencolmille [Glencolumbkille]; the cult of St. Columba).

6 Transylvania is a large region that – a non-exhaustive list – had been related to the Kingdom of Hungary between 1003 CE and 1526, after that, it existed as the Principality of Transylvania (Hung.: *Erdélyi Fejedelemség*, 1570–1711). Then, Transylvania became a part of the Habsburg monarchy until 1918; since the Treaty of Trianon (4 June 1920), Transylvania is – apart from Northern Transylvania that has been related to Hungary again between 1940 and 1944, during WWII – part of Romania. According to the population censuses in Romania in 2002 and 2011, the number of Hungarian speakers in Transylvania was less than one and a half million (18–19 percent of the total in the region), with a tendency to decrease (according to Table 6 in the Appendix [in Hungarian]; source: <http://statisztikak.erdelystat.ro/cikkek/nepesedesi-perpsektivak-erdelyben-2011-2031/24> (10 April, 2023)).

7 See Quigley 2014: 182–202.

previously known in the international folklore research, the content of the type (a sujet),⁸ and lastly, the list of the type's occurrence with the references, in geographical and chronological order.

Respecting the structure, the first three volumes of the Catalogue have been entitled separately. Volume 1 includes the legend types and motifs related to the supernatural world and has been divided into four thematic subgroups:

1. Fate Legends (Fate, Destiny, Omens): A 1–200. (Magyar 2021, 1: 49–97)
2. Death and the Dead: B 1–160. (Magyar 2021, 1: 99–172)
3. Sojourn in the Otherworld: C 1–30. (Magyar 2021, 1: 173–186)
4. Supernatural Beings: D 1–900. (Magyar 2021, 1: 187–629)

In the system created by Zoltán Magyar, there are four levels of types and motifs, as follows:

D 1–900. Supernatural Beings

[...]

D 661–830. Mythical Historical Beings

D 661–720. Giants

D 661–690. Giants of Ancient Times

D 691–700. Geomorphological Features attributed to Giants

D 701–710. Buildings of the Giants

D 711–720. Places Associated with Giants

D 721–830. Fairies

D 721–740. Wonderful Fairies

[...]

The title of Volume 2 is *Humans with Supernatural Power (Knowledge and Ability)*. This large thematic group is one of the principal characteristics of Hungarian folk belief. However, it constitutes just a relative majority (37–40 percent; Magyar 2021, 1: 28). As one can learn from the Handbook under review, the Transylvanian folklore (of Hungarian speakers – A.M.) is affluent in belief narratives about various cunning men/women (E 291–410. Diviner/Fortune-teller; E 411–450. Necromancer, etc.), while from among the various wise professionals (E 681–870.), primarily the domain of beliefs about the Romanian (Orthodox) priest (E 601–660.) and the wise

⁸ A *sujet* is a sequence of events. The term has no separate entry in the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (German: *das Sujet*), but it occurs several times in other entries of the encyclopaedia (e.g., “Vergil” by Albert Gier; Vol. 14, column 24).

shepherd (E 681–710.), have a text register with a high number of variants (Magyar 2021, 1: 28).

Volume 3 (*Other Legends and Bibliography*) includes all those thematic groups to which, as part of the “Hungarian belief system in Transylvania,”⁹ narrative traditions are attached (Magyar 2021, 1: 29). One can find the types and motifs like shapeshifting (F 1–160. Transformed People; 1–50. The Werewolf; F 51–130. The *Prikulics* [The Weredog]), mythical animals and plants, magical objects, nonreligious taboos, and everyday magic also in this volume. Important to know, that the domain of beliefs about hidden treasure, whose pieces appear occasionally in the catalogue under review, is not part of the recent handbook as a particular unit because it has been elaborated in a separate volume of the Catalogue of Hungarian Historical Legends (Vol. 8: Legends about Treasure; Magyar 2018, 8), and the related Transylvanian traditions (of Hungarian speakers – A.M.) are included in that volume (see Magyar 2021, 1: 29). Volume 3, in contrast with af Klintberg’s classification (2010), incorporates modern legends, too (e.g., about UFOs; Q 1–30); it is followed by the Bibliography, the utmost reference list of the subgenre in question hitherto (Magyar 2021, 1: 29; 3: 351–391). According to the intention of the author, this bibliography encompasses every publication, in which any Hungarian and/or Hungarian-related belief legend-featured folklore text, sujet, or data, relating to historical Transylvania, occurs. These are ethnographic monographs, collections of folklore texts, local history publications, related papers of journals, or newspaper articles (Magyar 2021, 3: 351). This Bibliography seems to be immensely helpful for the international community of folklorists.

Volume 4, as a practical and theoretical tool, is supposed to contribute to the usage and interpretation of the folklore material systematized in the preceding three volumes. The alphabetically ordered motif index, which also refers to the context of the subject heading, is patterned after Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955–1958) and constitutes the first half of this volume. It is complemented by the Concordance Index (pp. 173–294), in which the corpus of Hungarian belief legends from Transylvania is compared with the international parallels, furthermore, the theoretical part in a form of accompanying essays, in which the author attempts to elucidate the main characteristics and nodes of this “regional belief system”¹⁰ and the aspects of the systematization, not replacing the scientific, theoretical synthesis and analysis of Hungarian popular belief (see Magyar 2021, 1: 29–30).

⁹ Quotation mark is mine – A.M. See my critique of such notion later in this review.

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Volume 4 incorporates the alphabetical Motif Index (Magyar 2021, 4: 9–172), which is the second-largest analytic register in the history of Hungarian literary folkloristics research, following the *Catalogue of Hungarian Historical Legends* by the same author. With specific alterations by Magyar, the final volume of Thompson's Motif Index served as its primary model again (see Magyar 2021, 4: 9). This Index is followed by the Concordance List (Magyar 2021, 4: 173–294), which is an excellent tool for international comparative research. Here is an example below:

MZH D695.2. A kötényből kiszórt hegy. (A mountain scattered from the apron – A.M.)
 Jauhainen N221–224., 251. – KerbelytèA 2. A giant pours out a handful of sand; KerbelytèB
 1.1.1.17. – Szendrey 56. Az óriáslány kötény-hegye. – MZ IX. A 35. A kötényből
 kiszórt hegy (Magyar 2021, 4: 229).

The closing Essay with a theoretical focus, under the title *The System of Hungarian Belief Legends in Transylvania* (Magyar 2021, 4: 298–437), written exclusively in Hungarian, covers the following subject matters: *International antecedents; The beginnings of legend cataloguing; Conferences in the spirit of legend systematization; International outcomes; International catalogues of belief legends; Hungarian antecedents in the research history; The research of Hungarian belief legends; Antecedents of the systematization of Hungarian belief legends; The database of Hungarian belief legends in Transylvania; The objective requirements of the belief legends' systematization; The textual base of the catalogue [The Archive of Hungarian Belief Legends from Transylvania]; Transitions in Genres; The regional distribution and thematic characteristics of Hungarian belief legends in Transylvania; References.*

The above chapters are followed by the Conclusion both in Hungarian (Magyar 2021, 4: 471–473) and in English (Magyar 2021, 4: 474–476), in which the author expresses his hopes that his recent contribution to the national systematizations of belief legends will be essential in comparative textual folkloristics internationally.

In the last two hundred years, Hungarian studies of belief systems and textual folkloristics have sought to explore and publish national traditions in a mainly representative and encyclopaedic¹¹ way. The four volumes of this handbook aspire to join this ambitious scientific endeavour as a latent continuation of the *Catalogue of Hungarian Historical Legends* published in 2018, the first large-scale systematization of historical legends in international folkloristics. Although the *Catalogue of Hungarian Belief Legends in Transylvania* cannot aspire to a similar primacy, in many respects it likely surpasses comparable works produced to date.

¹¹ In this review, I strived to follow the British English spelling, e.g., *catalogue* instead of American English *catalog*; *encyclopaedia* instead of *encyclopedia*, etc. In the *Catalogue* under review, it is rather mingled.

[...] We hope that this handbook will become indispensable in an international context as well because the amount of data and the number of folkloric types it presents are many times higher than any belief legend systematizations published to date. (Magyar 2021, 4: 474)

As the author expressed his intention, although his handbook does not contain an English version as well (except a Table of Contents [Vol. I: 15–24] and an Abstract/Conclusion [Vol. 4: 474–476]), primarily because of the extent, it is his purpose to publish an English edition soon, as far as possible, in the renowned monograph series of Folklore Fellows Communications (FFC; Magyar 2021, 1: 40). It has to be noted that the lower levels of the catalogue, i.e., the subtypes (e.g., *D 695.2. A mountain scattered from the apron*; *D 711.1.*), and the single narrative motifs (e.g., *D 711.1.1. The golden fortress of the giant king*), can be found neither in the Hungarian nor in the English Table of Contents; therefore, an English version intended by the author will be warmly welcomed by the community of international folklorists.

Despite the incontrovertibly unrivalled and unrepeatable achievements of the author, some shortcomings, obscurities, and inconsistencies in the definitions and notions used by the author during his systematizing work should be mentioned. According to the opinion of the author of the recent review, these should be revised for future editions of this valuable work. As the author expressed:

In a certain sense, the recent handbook can be regarded as a preliminary work for a belief legend catalogue, possibly reaching completion in the future, encompassing the whole Hungarian-speaking area. However, it is much more than a preliminary work since the text corpus of the Transylvanian folk belief is overrepresented in Hungarian folklore. (Magyar 2021, 1: 26; trans. by A.M.)

My critical remarks concern the above-mentioned text corpus as well. The author uses the designation “Hungarian” (in Hungarian: *magyar*) sometimes in an ethnic and elsewhere in a linguistic sense alternately. It would be reasonable if he would incorporate data into the Index originating from exclusively ethnic Hungarians. But the text corpus of the Catalogue includes a few belief legends collected from Hungarian-speaking ethnic Romani populations of Transylvania as well (see, e.g., Nagy 1976, 1996; Magyar 2021, 4: 339, 411, 432), although in an extremely limited number. It is important to note that 474,122 Romani live in Transylvania, and the number of Hungarian-speaking Romani is around 105,000.¹² On the basis of this information, the text corpus collected from Romani people and represented in this

¹² Source (in Hungarian): <http://statistikak.erdelystat.ro/cikkek/magyarul-besz-el-romak-erdelyben-terleti-elhelyezkedes-es-lakohelyi-szegregacio/60> (26 January, 2023); Nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet, Kolozsvár (Romanian Institute for Research on Minorities Issues, Cluj-Napoca), SocioRoMap investigations, 2016; last revision: 2020.

Catalogue seems to be strongly underrepresented. The situation is different if the designation *magyar* is of an ethnic nature in the title of the Catalogue; in this case, all the ethnic Romani data should have been excluded from the recent text corpus and transferred to another one. However, the narrative elements of a former Hungarian domain of beliefs about the *táltos* have not been found by folklore researchers among Hungarians anymore but in the folk beliefs of Hungarian-speaking Romani living together with Hungarians in Transylvania, as Magyar reported (4: 432; based on Nagy 1996: 10–12); therefore, I would suggest much more expanding the Romani data in the text corpus of the recent Catalogue significantly, instead of excluding the sporadic existing data from it.

Another problem is the inconsistent usage of the notion of “belief system”; moreover, this term is left undefined by the author, so it is unclear if it is based on ethnic, religious, linguistic, geographic, hybrid or another affiliation. Furthermore, it occurs in several variations: “néphit (hiedelemrendszer)” (popular belief [belief system]; 1: 25), “nagy táji hiedelemrendszer” (belief system of a great region; 1: 27), “erdélyi magyar hiedelemrendszer” (Hungarian belief system in Transylvania; 1: 29), “regionális hiedelemrendszer” (regional belief system; 1: 30), “belief systems” (4: 474, 475), and “the Transylvanian belief systems” (4: 475). As one can learn from the author’s *Introduction*, the Catalogue will be published in an electronic version soon (Magyar 2021, 1: 37). Therefore, before publishing the planned English edition, an extended and revised (electronic or printed) version of the recent valuable catalogue would be welcomed.

Finally, I am briefly discussing the problem of the usefulness of a type and motif index by way of an example taken from this Catalogue. I find it necessary to do so since there are also critical voices in the discipline of folkloristics referring to the practicality and necessity of such structural systematizations. For instance, some colleagues expressed their scepticism in relation to the problem during the comment section following the presentation of the author of the recent review at the ISFNR-AFS Joint Conference, 18–22 October 2016, in Miami, Florida.

I will demonstrate my view through the following case taken from the history of folklore research. Will-Erich Peuckert lists a Slovak legend in the entry “Schöpfung” (creation) in the Concise Dictionary of German “Superstition” (i.e., folk belief) as one that would include the motifs of Earth Diver (A812) and Primeval water (A810; see Thompson 1955–1958) (“Das Urmeer-Tauchmotiv;” Peuckert 1941/2000: col. 278–279). It was definite misinformation by Peuckert based on his misread of Dähnhardt (1907, 1: 58; “Die Entstehung der Berge” [The Formation of the Mountains], pp. 52–58) who translated the original Slovak legend published by Dobšinsky (1871: 38–39; see also Mátéffy 2021: 54–56) carelessly but still without the “Urmeer-Tauchmotiv.” However, in the Slovak legend, there cannot be found the Earth-Diver motif and Dähnhardt translated the Slovak phrasal structure (gram-

matical construction) *v zástere* (in his apron) as “in seinem Kleide” into German. Peuckert’s misinformation has been taken over by Lixfeld (1971: 192–194, esp. 192), and from Lixfeld by I. Nagy (2004: 203; it was an indirect citation of the third level) unchecked; the latter translated the legend not from the original but from Dähnhardt as “in his clothing” (2006: 310).¹³ The indirect citation (or secondary source) is never advisable but in the above case, one can find a range of it. If these authors would have checked the original Slovak source and could have had the opportunity to also check the Catalogue under review, they could find the motif parallel of *D 695.2.A mountain scattered from the apron* among the Hungarian belief legends from Transylvania:

*D 695.2. A mountain scattered from the apron.*¹⁴ A giant/giant girl/young shamaness (*táltos* girl) is carrying sand/stones/trash in his/her apron, and whereabouts he/she spills it out/whereabouts the sand, carried in the apron (dorsel/sack/under the shirt) has been scattered, a mound/hill/several mounds/hills is/are arisen (castle hill of *Görgény*¹⁵/Giant mound of *Kövend/Pontuskő* at *Fekete-Körös* valley; Magyar 2021, 1: 503; trans. by A.M.).

The fundamental lesson that all folklorists focused on comparative and historical research of oral traditions may draw from the above example is that the national motif indices are destined for both the search for data of large amounts expeditiously and avoid such erroneous inferences derived from methodological deficiencies and a lack of data. Naturally, a motif index is never the goal but a highly beneficial tool for research. Magyar’s Catalogue is a prime example of such an index, which is now at the disposal of the international community of folkloristics.

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¹³ In this paper (2006) based on her former contribution (2004) written in Hungarian, Nagy mentioned the lack of the Earth-Diver motif in the Slovak legend (conf. 2004: 211).

¹⁴ Its concordance: “MZH D695.2. A kötenyből kiszórt hegy. Jauhainen N221–224., 251. – KerbeltyéA 2. A giant pours out a handful of sand; KerbeltyéB 1.1.1.17. – Szendrey 56. Az óriáslány kötény-hegye. – MZ IX. A 35. A kötenyből kiszórt hegy.” (Magyar 2021, 4: 229)

¹⁵ It is located beside the village *Görgény* (*Görgényszentimre*/Romanian: *Gurghiu/Sântimbru* *Gurghiuului*), Mureș County, between 1918 and 1940, and since 1945 again, as part of Northern Transylvania, related to Romania. On the top of *Görgény* hill is the Rákóczi-Bornemisza castle.

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