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Wishing all our kind Readers a very blessed and healthy New Year!

*Kívánunk minden kedves Olvasónknak
áldásos, békés, egészséges új esztendőt!*

King St. László, Unifier of Peoples

EFP

King St. László (c. 1046 – 1095) was the first ruler of the House of Árpád to bring about cooperation among the peoples of Central Europe. The year 2017 marks the 940th anniversary of his ascending to the Hungarian throne, and the 825th anniversary of his canonization. Therefore, the Hungarian government has declared this "the Year of St. László", counting on Croatian, Polish, Romanian and Slovak political, civic and ecclesiastic entities to join in this special year of tribute.

Let us take a look at the life and work of this great king.

Born at a time of political turbulence, László was the son of King Béla I and his wife Richesa, daughter of King Mieszko of Poland, great-grandson of Emperor Otto II. He came into the world in Poland, but his family returned to Hungary in 1048.

László was tall of stature, strong and had plenty of opportunity to hone his military skills. He was also pious and upright in his relations with others, a man of prayer and mortification, and extremely generous to the poor. He was the quintessential image of the regal knight, intrepid and a champion of justice. On many occasions he confronted the invading Cumanians (*kunok*) and Pechenegs (*besenyők*), and repelled them, never losing a battle. But he did not have them all put to the sword; instead, he told his men to make them prisoners, and if they converted to Christianity, they could live together with the Hungarians. He settled many *kunok* in the Alföld, as evidenced to this day in many place names (Kunszentmiklós, Kiskunfélegyháza). He later did the same with the *besenyők* although, as István Sisa



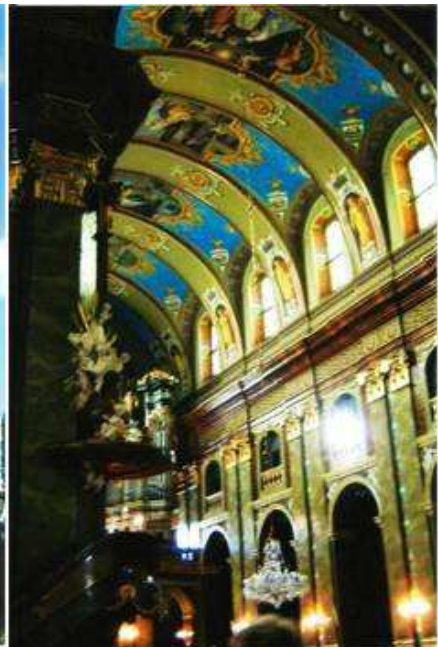
*St. László Herma (reliquary)
in Győr*

remarks in his *Spirit of Hungary*, "the assimilation of these pagan, foreign elements took centuries."

After years of wrangling among László's family and playing political musical chairs for possession of the Hungarian

throne, it finally came to be László's turn in 1077. He introduced strict laws to punish thievery which had become an epidemic throughout the land (although these laws were later eased after they achieved their purpose), and he forbade the pagan practice of offering sacrifices at springs and under trees – an indication that Christianity had not yet sunk very deep roots among the people.

Family connections helped László to gain a leadership role in Eastern Europe. His sister Ilona became the wife of *Bán* Demetrius Zvonimir, later crowned King of Croatia. Upon Zvonimir's death, who left no heir, civil war broke out, and Ilona turned to László for help. László then gathered an army and conquered Croatia and Slavonia (1091). Two years later, he established the Diocese of Zagreb in Croatia, which he placed under the Archdiocese of Esztergom. But Croatia always remained in what Sisa calls "a special, almost symbiotic relationship with Hungary", until the end of World War I, when the Treaty of Trianon separated Croatia from Hungary.



Top: Nagyváradi katedrális;inside;iron gate w.bishop's palace; Center: fresco detail, Székelyderzs,in "Középkori prédikációk és falképek Szt. László királyról", Madas Edit, Horváth Zoltán György; bas relief; St. László statue; Bottom:Torda Gorge

"St. László thought in terms of Christian unity, when he linked the Central European nations with his life's work," said Mikola István, Hungarian government Secretary responsible for international cooperation at the conference introducing the 2017 programs. The two peoples – the Hungarians and the Croats – have lived a common destiny ever since the time of St. László. This is exemplified by the recently established St. László Pilgrim Road connecting Zagreb and Nagyvárad, both of which dioceses he had founded.

It fell to László to strengthen the border areas, where he brought settlers. In addition, he expanded government administration to the eastern part of the country, laying the basis for political unity.

László's daughter from his first marriage became the wife of the Russian Prince Yaroslav. His daughter Piroška, by his second wife – known as Irene in the East and venerated as a saint – was married to the Byzantine Emperor John.

It was László who brought about the canonization of St. Stephen, St. Imre and St. Gellért in 1083, as well as of the two hermits of Zoborhegy, András and Benedek.

According to Sisa, "King László's valor, strategic skill and dedication to Christianity made him a pre-eminent candidate" to lead the First Crusade for the liberation of the Holy Land. However, he died suddenly before he could even start.

The nation mourned him for three years. He was buried in the cathedral at Nagyvárad, and people flocked to his tomb in droves, seeking his intercession for physical cures, comfort and counsel. It became customary to decide important lawsuits there, and to take oaths in front of his altar. He was canonized by Pope Celestine III in 1192.

Numerous legends grew up around László's person. Perhaps the best known, and most often depicted in an-

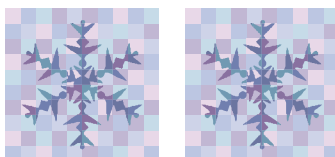
cient frescoes, was his rescuing of a Hungarian maiden from a Tartar who was carrying her off on his horse. Since the man's horse was very swift and he could not catch him, he called to the girl to throw the Tartar from the horse, which she did. Then László engaged the man in hand-to-hand combat, and beheaded him.

Another legend relates to László riding alone, unaware that he was being pursued. When he realized his enemies would soon overtake him, he prayed for deliverance. Thereupon a chasm opened behind him, leaving his pursuers on the other side. That is how Torda Gorge supposedly came into being.

A poem by Arany János relates another legend, how many years after László's death, the Székely people were once again fighting against the Tartars. When they called upon the name of St. László for help, the soldier-king returned from the grave, panicking the Tartars with his might, and defeated the invaders. Afterwards, his corpse at Nagyvárad was found bathed in perspiration.

The person of St. László connects the nations of Central Europe, and over twenty settlements within the Carpathian Basin carry his name. Not only does the memorial year aim at spreading knowledge about St. László among Hungarians, but it is intended to broaden the dialog among the peoples living together within the Carpathian Basin.

Among the most important venues for programs during this memorial year are the cities of Győr, Nagyvárad (now in Romania), the Upper Hungary communities of Debrőd and Nyitra (where he died, and which are now part of Slovakia), Zagreb (Croatia) and Cracow (Poland). There will be a traveling exhibit, conferences, contests for students, sporting events and children's camps.



Benedek Elek

Olga Vállay Szokolay

One of the favorite books of my childhood was called "Animals Tell Tales" (*"Állatok mesélnek"*), one of the lesser-known volumes written by the great Hungarian author of children's literature, Benedek Elek. That landscape-format book, with illustrations by the distinguished artist Mühlbeck Károly, was almost read into rags, a testimony of my never-ending devotion to the fables "narrated" by various animals. My very favorite of those was the account of the proverbial feud among the dog, the cat and the mouse. The rhyming lines of that story still ring in my head.

The three "protagonists" initially had been friends, until one day the dog had some important business to attend to and asked the cat to guard his valuable papers during his absence. The cat promised to do so. Yet, due to unforeseen circumstances, he had to relinquish his guardianship and ask someone to substitute. His choice was the mouse.

All went well until the dog came back and asked the cat to return his papers. The cat then went to the mouse and requested his charge. Oh, but mousies being as they are, the papers had all been chewed up while in his custody! This resulted in the cat chasing the mouse and the dog chasing the cat forever and ever since.

*"Kutyá kerget macskát, macska egerecskét,
Ezt csicsergik villásfarku fecskék..."*

("Dog chases cat, cat chases the mouse,
Fork-tailed barn swallows tweet all 'round the house".)

Besides the bittersweet enjoyment of the story, my lifelong benefit of it has been that I'd recognize a "fork-tailed" swallow anywhere...

Elek was born on September 30, 1859 at Kisbacon, Székely land, in the deep corner of Transylvania, Hungary (since

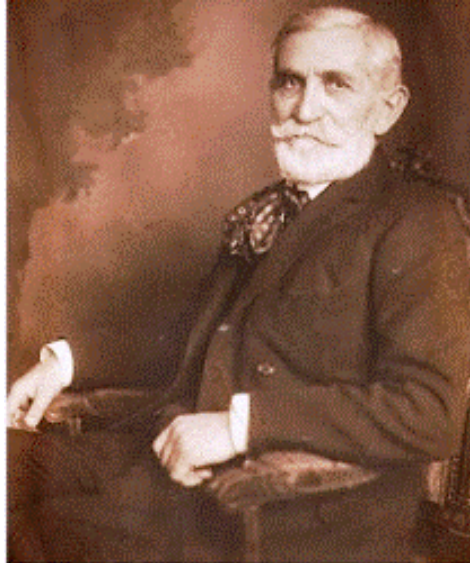
the 1920 Trianon pact, Romania). His father was Benedek Huszár János, his mother Benedek Marczella. The family received their letter of nobility and coat of arms in the 17th century.

Elek's father was a famed story-teller who told his son original folk-tales as well as ones he composed from his readings, staging the realistic tales at Kisbacon and vicinity, fairy-tales at the snow-covered, endless mountains surrounding the nearby area. Thus the boy grew up absorbing the love of tales, lullabies, and legends that he cherished over a lifetime – using yarns in the wonderful fabric of his life's opus.

He started his education at the Kisbacon village school. At age 8, he was enrolled in the Reformed Collegium in Székelyudvarhely, a school with a rich tradition of folk-tale collecting. In the 1875-76 school-year there was a competition among students, with a grand prize for the author of the best collection of folklore material. The winner was the 16-year old Benedek Elek. Between 1877 and 1881, he attended the University of Humanities in Budapest, majoring in Hungarian and German – but he never graduated. While still in school, he went with his friend to research folklore elements (witches, dragons, fairies, wild animals) of the region, the result of which was published as "Transylvanian Folk Tales." This was received with much positive critique in professional circles. He embraced writing.

By age 23, Elek was a journalist at the reputable daily newspaper, Budapesti Hírlap. One afternoon in the autumn of 1882, he stopped to buy cigars at a tobacco store near Rókus Hospital with his editor, Rákosi Jenő. The two men were discussing a news article when the young daughter of the widowed owner, sitting in the corner, overheard them and commented on the topic. She engaged in an argument with the famous editor-in-chief – something Elek himself would perhaps not have had the guts to venture.

The tall, good looking young Elek was so taken by the witty girl that he forgot to pay for the cigars. The next day, he returned with the payment accompanied by a small bouquet of violets. From that day on, he revisited the store daily to see 19-year-old Fischer Mária. Many were at a loss to understand the attraction between the son of an impoverished Székely noble family and the fatherless, religious Jewish girl. Yet the two of them could not understand what the problem could be.



After two and a half years of courtship, Elek walked into the store, stood in front of the girl and said, "Miss Mária, I have seen a beautiful dream. I was napping under a flowering apple tree and you dropped a flaming-red rose on my chest...Could my dream mean it could come true?" "It could," was the answer. In 1884, they married and never parted for 45 years.

Although Elek became a well-known journalist and, for one electoral cycle, also a member of Parliament, they lived modestly in their apartment at Reáltanoda utca. Elek did not value money, thus he could not keep it either.

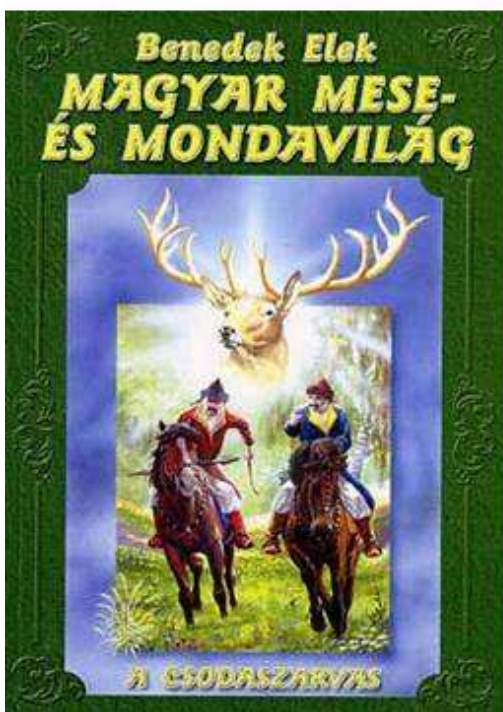
Mária was the motor of the family. Besides their six children, she handled her husband's business as well. He worked a lot. He published numerous

volumes of children's tales. Though nowadays he is remembered as a fabulist only, he was also a tough publicist and sensitive author of novels dealing with social injustices. His novels attest to his support of women's equality as well as love that lasts a lifetime.

Kisbacon, his birthplace, was the location Elek chose to build the house of his dreams. Above the porch is the inscription *MÁRI* which even today still testifies that he built it for her. They did not like to be apart. If Elek had to travel, he wrote letters to his wife daily and she duly responded. He deliberately turned to children's literature and considered that a political stance as well. At the turn of the century, though barely a quadragenarian, everyone called him "Elek apó" ("Old Elek"). Over the years he published many children's newspapers and periodicals.

The Jewish girl from Pest ultimately became a real Székely woman, and the village accepted her. During WWI, one of their sons, János, took ill and Mária moved with him to Kisbacon for proper care. When János died in 1920, Elek decided to return home for good. After a year-long hiatus, at the request of the young Transylvanian writers, he returned to public life by becoming a newspaper editor. On August 17, 1929, as he was writing an article about the task of writers, he had a stroke. His last written words were: "...most importantly, they should work." He then fell off the chair and lost consciousness.

Mária took her husband's hand, and after realizing there was no pulse – she suddenly rose and left the house. A few minutes later she returned, sat beside him, and calmly told the family gathered around them that they would shortly lose them both. They were greatly upset, understanding that she had taken some sort of poison. They wanted to give her an emetic to reverse the effect of what she had ingested, but she clenched her teeth and refused to take any-



Top: His house in Kisbacon; living room; Middle: one of his fairy tale and legend collections; embroidery in his memory; his desk; Bottom: dedication of his bust in Hajduböszörmény, May 2016; one of his youth magazines

thing after the nine Veronal pills that she had saved for the occasion.

The family finally understood that this was their wish, a pact, and in a reverse situation Elek would have done the same. Mária said her farewells to their children and soon she became unconscious. A day later she too passed away. The couple was buried together, with the whole village and many fellow-writers present.

Benedek Elek was followed by his wife even into death. Old Elek's epitaph quotes the New Testament, "I have been Jesus' disciple, I had bent down to children, raised them up to my heart, raised them for love". His wife, Fischer Mária, bound to her husband with lifelong love, was true to her marriage vow. "We shall not leave another either in life or in death." Her tombstone inscription is from the Old Testament, from the Book of Ruth, "I shall go where you go."

According to the annals, there was a peasant burial for the former noble Székely lad and the Jewish city girl, who could never part from each other.

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How the Old Woman Fooled Death

Benedek Elek

Here is a tale for a cold winter evening, perhaps to be read in front of a blazing fire. It was told by Benedek Elek, as translated by Emőke de Papp Severo, and published in her collection entitled Hungarian and Transylvanian Folktales, Borealis Press Ltd., 1997. Used by permission of the author.

Once there was, where there was not, beyond the ocean at the edge of the world, an old woman, older than the

hills, all mumbles and spills, who didn't want to die. She dearly loved life.

Children she had none; she had no one. Still she hustled-bustled, toiled, clinking one hard-earned coin upon another. Her small, tulip-decorated trunk was full of gold and silver.

Her heart throbbed painfully if she thought about it: that all of a sudden Death would arrive and without even asking, "Are you coming? Not coming?" – Death would grab her and take her.

Well, you can be sure she thought correctly, because one day, all of a sudden, Death arrived and said:

"Prepare, old woman, because I am taking you!"

"Just ten more years!" begged the old woman.

"No, it's not possible! I am taking you!"

"Well then, only five!"

"No, I have already written your name in my big book. I can't erase it!"

But the old woman begged so hard that Death gave her three more hours.

"Give me a little more time than that!" cried the old woman. "Come back tomorrow!"

"Very well," said Death. "I don't care! But you can be sure I'll be here tomorrow."

"Do you know what?" said the old woman. "It would be better if you wrote 'tomorrow' on the doorpost; then I won't forget, either."

So Death took a piece of chalk from a pocket, wrote "tomorrow" on the doorpost and left.

Very early next morning, Death came back and the old woman was still lying in bed.

"Move, old woman, your time has run out!"

"No way has it run out!" said the old woman calmly. "Just look at the doorpost! What's written there? You can't take me today, only tomorrow!"

"Very well," grumbled Death. "I will take you tomorrow," and left.

This went on for a week, two weeks. Punctually each morning, Death came for the old woman, but the old woman

pointed to the doorpost and Death had to leave again.

One day, greatly vexed by the many useless trips, Death angrily wiped the writing from the doorpost and threatened the old woman.

"Now, just you wait! Tomorrow I'll certainly take you. No more mercy!"

How frightened the old woman was! Her entire body trembled. She would have to hide somewhere, where Death could not find her.

"I have it," she said to herself. "I'll crawl into my barrel full of honey. Surely Death will not find me there." But once inside, she thought, "Perhaps Death will find me here." So she crawled out of the honey, slit open her down-filled comforter and crawled in among the feathers. There, she cowered for a while, but she couldn't stay put. She climbed out from the feathers to find a better place to hide. Just then, Death appeared at the door, took one look at the old woman and gasped:

"What in heaven's name is this pale, feather-spiked horror?"

Death whirled in fright, ran off, and the old woman is living still.

Source: "A vénasszony és a halál" ("The Old Woman and Death"). Világszép nádszál kisasszony és más mesék [The World-Beautiful Lady of the Reeds and Other Stories]. As told by Elek Benedek. 8th ed. Budapest-Uzsgorod, USSR:Móra-Kárpáti, 1976: 66-67.



Old-fashioned Stretched Strudel

Although better known by its German name, rétes is very popular among those who love Hungarian pastry. The directions might explain why it is not so frequently made nowadays, but we also provide a version that is less labor-intensive and time-consuming, leaving the housewife no excuse for not preparing it!

2 cups flour
1 egg
1 tsp vinegar
¼ tsp salt
2/3 cup warm water
5 Tbsp melted lard or butter

Generously grease baking pan.

Mix vinegar into water with salt.

Mix egg with flour, slowly add warm water – as much as the flour will take to make the right consistency dough (can't be hard or too soft).

Work all ingredients together well, until dough is bubbly and feels elastic, about 10 minutes.

Divide into two, and work each so all sides will be smooth.

Put dough balls on floured board, cover them with a bowl, and let rise for 20 minutes (no longer than 30 minutes, otherwise the dough will tear). In the meantime prepare the fillings.

Cover the table with a tablecloth (I use that cloth only for that purpose), cover lightly with flour. Take one ball at a time, place it in the middle of the table, then roll it with a rolling pin to the size of a dinner plate. Brush it with melted butter. Then reach under it with your fingers and pull the dough, pull it, stretch it around and around until it covers the table completely. (Another method is to put your hands under the dough, palms down, so that it rests on the back of your fingers; then move your hands outward from the center to

stretch it. This will help avoid making holes in the dough.)

Let it dry for 2-3 minutes. Remove the edges. Sprinkle filling all over the dough, or just one half, and sprinkle melted butter evenly over filling. Fold up uneven edges, and starting with one side, with the help of the tablecloth, start to roll the dough. Either cut rolled up strudel, or fold it to the length of the pan.

Put it in pan, bake on 400° for half an hour, or until golden in color. Cool on rack. Cut into pieces when cool.

Fillings can be sweet or without sugar.

Apple filling: 2 lbs apple julienned, ¼ cup sugar, ½ tsp cinnamon.

Cherry filling: 2 lbs pitted cherry. 1/4-1/2 cup sugar. Drain juice from cherry, do not squeeze.

Poppy seed filling: ¼ lb ground poppy seeds, ¼ cup sugar, and ½ tsp vanilla sugar.

Pot cheese filling: 1 lb pot cheese, 2 eggs well beaten, 4 Tbsp sugar. White raisins maybe added. Mix ingredients well and spread over strudel.

Cabbage filling: 1 head cabbage chopped fine, 1 Tbsp salt, ½ tsp black pepper, 4 Tbsp lard, butter or oil, 1 pt sour cream.

Salt cabbage; let stand for 30 minutes. Melt lard in pan, squeeze out excess moisture from cabbage and cook in lard until soft. Spread over dough, sprinkle with pepper and sour cream, roll and bake.

Modern chef's version

2 cups flour, 1 egg, 1 Tbsp margarine, ¼ tsp salt, and sour cream. Work these ingredients together until dough is smooth, and softer than you would make for a beigli. Roll out dough to a

rectangular shape, as large as you can. Mix ¾ cup flour and 6 Tbsp softened margarine. Spread mixture over the dough.

Roll up the dough tight and refrigerate overnight.

Next day, do NOT knead the dough, otherwise it will not be flaky! Rather, cut it into 4 or 5 pieces. Roll out each piece, spread filling over each and roll up as you do the beigli. Brush top with melted butter or sour cream. Bake as you do the Stretched Strudel.



Cherry strudel (cseresznyés rétes)

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Erika Papp Faber

I had an opportunity to see Nagyvárad in 2011, first with my publisher Horváth Zoltán who was giving a slide-show on St. László there. He had also arranged for me to give a talk in the Kanonok-sor, about my book "Égi Édesanyánk könnyei – tizenkét könnyező Mária-kép a Kárpát-medencében" (the Hungarian version of "Our Mother's Tears: ten weeping Madonnas in the Carpathian Basin"). Incidentally, this also led to an interview with Mária Rádió about the same topic.

I was in Nagyvárad for the second time a few weeks later, when Zsuzsa Lengyel and I went on a 9-day bus tour of Transylvania (although Nagyvárad is technically not a part of Transylvania, but of the Partium). The poet Ady Endre, who came here in 1900 after a stay in Paris, dubbed it "Paris by the Pece (brook)" (Peceparti Párizs), while the poet Juhász Gyula, who taught here between 1908 and 1911, called it "Paris by the Kőrös (river)". I don't know about Paris, but both were right in that Pece Brook flows into the Sebes-Kőrös River here. Nagyvárad's wide avenues and parks, its turn of the last century architecture make a very pleasant impression on the visitor.

Originally called Várad, it grew up, in the 10th century, around a small fortress (vár), remains of which are now being reconstructed. It was made a bishopric by St. László, after the kunok (Cumanians) devastated the nearby Bihar bishopric established by St. Stephen. (For more about St. László, see article about him elsewhere in this issue.)

After construction of the cathedral, St. László's remains were reburied there, sometime between 1113 and 1140. It soon became a very popular place of pilgrimage, and trials by fire and water were held at his tomb. The cathedral chapter took on notarial

functions, making the city a so-called "hiteles hely". Consequently, Várad developed into the country's second most important religious and spiritual center, after Székesfehérvár.

In 1241, the Mongolians devastated the city, tore down its walls, butchered some of the population, and carried off the rest. Rebuilding the city attracted Italian and other foreign stonecutters and artisans.

Várad became a center of Renaissance art and of Hungarian humanism. During the time of Bishop Vitéz János (15th century), who set up an astronomical observatory and compiled tables for determining solar and lunar eclipses, Várad became the most important city of Transylvania. Its fortunes waxed and waned with the events of history, but the city's name was changed to Nagyvárad only in 1848. In 1920, it became part of Romania.



Top:statue of St. László; Nagyvárad city hall with Sebes-Kőrös River; Center:Fekete Sas Palace; an old window in town; Bottom: Inside Fekete Sas Palace; statue of poet Ady Endre in front of coffee house he frequented

The Salt Mine of Parajd

Claudia Margitay-Balogh

The New Year has arrived, and with it come resolutions. Among the most common resolutions are ones that have to do with improving one's physical as well as mental well-being by thinking positively, laughing more often, and enjoying life. As one knows, the greatest gift is the gift of health. Although making and breaking resolutions may be a modern idea, there are places in Eastern Europe that people have visited and continue to visit to improve their physical and mental well-being throughout the year. These places are salt mines. Some of them are still active while others are closed for mining but used as treatment centers, amusement parks, and as museums.

One very impressive salt mine which is closed for excavation is situated in the Harghita District of Transylvania. The Parajd (Praid) Salt Mine is one of the biggest salt mines in all of Europe. The excavation of salt has been a source of income for the inhabitants of the area for hundreds of years. Having an elliptical shape, its deposits represent a true treasure for the economy of Transylvania. In fact, Romania's Tourist Bureau states that the Praid Salt Mine is a must see when one is traveling in Transylvania. This salt mine is very important not only in terms of tourism but also from a therapeutic standpoint.

Within the Praid Salt Mine, there are subterranean holes of great dimensions due to its massive excavations. Because of this, a saline microclimate has slowly and uniquely developed. Temperatures are relatively consistent at 57-60 degrees Fahrenheit; the humidity is low, and the pressure in the mine is stronger than the pressure on the surface. Moreover, the air is powerfully ionized and is utilized very efficiently by a person who has breathing problems. Medical treatments are given under the supervision of a medical team that organizes gym programs and breathing exercises for respiratory conditions such as allergies, asthma, COPD, and

TB as well as common colds and the flu. Depending on one's medical condition, treatments consist of saline air inhalation.

Eastern Europe is well aware of the benefits of salt therapy, otherwise known as Speleotherapy. In Hungary, the treatment is recommended by doctors and is even covered by health insurance. People suffering from neurological and rheumatoid problems as well as locomotor system dysfunctions are recommended to spend significant time in a salt mine. Good results can be achieved only after 18 days if one

spends 4 hours per day in the saline atmosphere. The medical records of Dr. Emese Fazekas, one of the Praid Salt Mine's physicians, indicate that those who returned to the salt mine three or four times for treatment reported that the occurrences and intensity of their asthma attacks diminished while their bodies' resistance increased.

During the summer months, nearly 3,000-4,000 people enter the Praid Salt mine each day. Although some come for treatments, the majority come to enjoy all that the mine has to offer. There are coffee shops, restaurants, a



The Salt Mountain and Salt Mine of Parajd

wine cellar, billiard tables, libraries, an amusement center, a museum, saline swimming pools, hot salted baths, and places where people can pray. The chapel of salt was built in 1993. Since then on every Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, one can attend services for Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant believers. Needless to say, the Praid Salt Mine has something for everyone!

Readers of the Magyar News Online already know that wherever any one goes, one can find a Hungarian connection. This is certainly true with salt mines because the patron of all salt mines is St. Kinga. Kinga was the daughter of the Hungarian King Béla IV of the Árpád Dynasty and the niece of St. Elizabeth of Hungary. At the age of sixteen she was chosen to marry King Boleslaus V of Poland.

When the Polish envoys arrived to take Princess Kinga to Poland, her father the king offered gold and silver from his treasury as a wedding gift to the Poles. Kinga asked her father to give the Polish people salt instead because the Poles already had gold and silver, but they did not have much salt. The king was determined to please his daughter and offered her the biggest and most prosperous salt deposit in Hungary – the Máramaros Salt Mine. However, nobody knew what Kinga could do with this gift. On her way to Poland, the princess and her envoys visited the Máramaros Salt Mine. Kinga knelt to pray next to the entrance, and to everyone's surprise, she suddenly threw her engagement ring inside the mine. She then gathered a group of the best Hungarian salt miners and told them to accompany her to Poland.

After Kinga's wedding in Krakow, Poland, she went for a trip to a nearby town of Wieliczka and ordered her Hungarian miners to dig a well. The men had to stop because they encountered a hard stone. Kinga ordered the miners to lift up a chunk of the stone. To everyone's surprise, the chunk was made of pure salt. When the chunk was broken open, everyone

was amazed at what was hidden inside: it was Kinga's engagement ring! In the place where Kinga asked to dig a well, huge deposits of pure salt were found. That is how Kinga, the Hungarian daughter of King Béla IV, according to legend, brought salt to Poland. Presently, the Kopalina Soli Wieliczka Salt Mine, which is located under the town of Wieliczka, a suburb of Krakow, is home to the 18th century Cathedral of St. Kinga – a subterranean church carved in rock salt. This masterpiece was created by three miners in their spare time, taking 68 years to complete. Everything in this underground chapel is made of salt - from floor to ceiling with its wall decorations, the altar, the religious statues, and a sculpture that represents Kinga and a miner with a chunk of salt and her engagement ring. To commemorate this Hungarian born princess, 331 feet underground in the Wieliczka Salt Mine, there is the world's largest underground chapel, and it is dedicated to Saint Kinga the Patron of Salt Miners. It is indeed wonderful to once again learn about a Hungarian from the past.

By the way, another popular New Year's resolution is to take a trip. After researching the information for this article, I have definitely put visiting a salt mine not on my resolution list for this year but on my bucket list. I am sure you will agree that a trip to the Praid Salt Mine or to the one in Poland

would be incredible. Hopefully, when I do get to visit it, I will write another article for you.

With best wishes for keeping your resolutions and accomplishing your bucket list!!!!

Claudia Margitay-Balogh, retired English teacher and wife of Joseph F. Balogh.

Did you know ...

... **that** a giant catfish was caught by a Hungarian, Veégh Viktor on the Petit Rhone in France in November 2016? It measured 195 cm (approximately 76.7 in.) He had used a so-called wobbler, a device that imitates the vibration of a small fish. After being measured and photographed, it was returned to the river unharmed.

Earlier in the year, in May, a record was set by another Hungarian, Varga Vilmos, on the same river. His gray catfish had measured 270 cm (106 in. plus), and had also been returned to the river.

Veégh Viktor and his "big fish"



Siberian Huskies in the Mátra Mountains

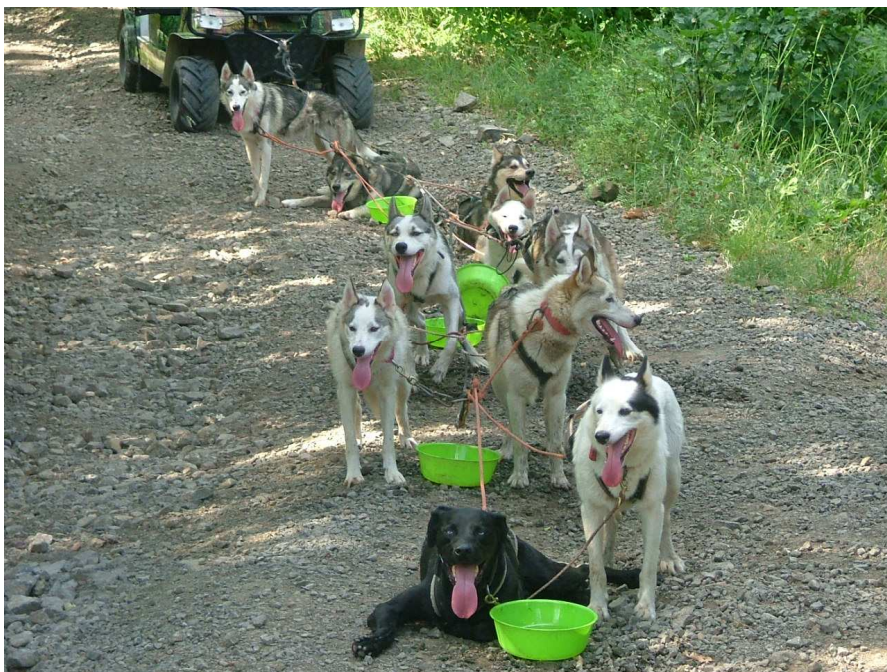
viola vonfi

Better known as an Alaskan sport, dog-sled racing has become the passion of Hering Tamás, European champion dog-cart driver who has won numerous international races in the last 20 years. He trains his Siberian huskies in the Mátra Mountains of Hungary, specifically, at Mátrafüred. There, he has started dog-cart and -sled tourism to keep the dogs exercised and trained, and to provide for the maintenance of his 27 beauties.

The Mátra Mountains are located in the north-central part of present-day Hungary, with Kékes Mountain, the highest peak (elevation 1014 m or about 3,400 ft). The resort town of Mátrafüred has been a spa since the end of the 19th century, and offers tourist amenities and recreational opportunities. Thanks to the entrepreneurship of Hering Tamás, these include dog-cart, and in the winter, dog-sled rides.

A stonemason by trade, Hering has been fascinated by sled dogs since his boyhood. He entered his first dog-cart competition in 1997. He won a gold medal in a European championship race in 2014, and a bronze in a world championship competition. Altogether, he has won prizes 150 times! (For some reason, there does not seem to be a website listing winning drivers, so I cannot tell you where and in what ranking he achieved his fame.)

When not racing, his Siberian huskies need to be trained and exercised. Pulling an electric cart, with rubber wheels, over a three-mile course through the Mátra woods provides 12 dogs with the exercise they need to channel their bounding energy. (The cart is electric to help the dogs on the uphill stretches of the course.) They can reach speeds up to 30-35 km, or 18-22 miles per



hour. The cart can take 3 people, including the driver. All must wear safety helmets and protective gear.

At the end of the tour, the dogs are given water in their individual bowls, a small snack as a reward, and lots of praise and petting. Then the dogs rest in the afternoon and the following day before their soft padded harnesses are strapped on them again.

If there is sufficient snow cover – at least 30 cm or about 11 inches - the cart is replaced by a sled.

Since competitions do not award monetary prizes, Hering himself must come up with the funds to maintain his dogs. Just feeding them costs 120,000 forints (about 600 dollars)

per month. So he works at his profession and offers rides to provide the funds necessary for the dogs' upkeep.

A dog is trained for 6-7 months, and is at its best for two to three years. Many of his 27 huskies no longer take part in races.

Hering has one sponsor, a manufacturer of garage and other doors, who provides the thermal clothing he needs for racing.

The next time you visit Hungary, make reservations for a dog-cart or dog-sled ride at Mátrafüred. You're in for a (wow) experience!

viola vonfi writes from Stamford, CT.