



„RECALL: A Study of Central European Places of Memory for Collective Remembrance”

2023-1-HU01-KA220-HED-000154286

Module Title: *The Patrons and Guardians of the Land - Saints and Statehood in Central Europe (Topic 2)*

Target Duration: 38 minutes (video) + 15-20 minutes (e-learning tasks)

Target Audience: University students, researchers, and history enthusiasts

This 38-minute module examines how royal and episcopal saints shaped collective memory, political legitimacy, and national identity in Central Europe from the 10th to the 20th century, focusing on Czechia, Hungary, and Poland to show how saintly lives, legends, and cults became instruments of cultural narration and statecraft. Presented by Tamás Körmendi, Martin Wihoda, and Stanisław Rosik, the session moves from the era of Christianization and dynastic consolidation through early modern confessional politics to modern national reuses.

It opens with a conceptual frame (Körmendi) that treats national saints as a political language—explaining how cults legitimize power, embody moral order, and anchor state continuity from the 10th–13th centuries onward—then turns to the Czech perspective (Körmendi & Wihoda), where St. Wenceslas appears as *rex iustus* and eternal ruler and St. Adalbert (Vojtěch) as missionary connector, with modern appropriations from 1918 to 1989. The Polish perspective (Körmendi & Rosik) traces a line from Adalbert to St. Stanislaus of Cracow, highlighting episcopal resistance, martyrdom, national unity, the Gniezno network, and the Ottonian horizon. The Hungarian perspective (Körmendi) presents St. Stephen as lawgiver and symbolic founder and St. Ladislaus as warrior-protector, foregrounding legal memory (Stephen’s laws and their reception) and visual culture (the Ladislaus legend cycle).

The module concludes with a synthesis (Körmendi) that surveys early modern Counter-Reformation and anti-Ottoman narratives, Romantic nationalism, 20th-century ambivalences, and post-1989 commemorations, underscoring the enduring capacity of medieval sanctity to shape modern public memory.

Primary Goals of the Module:

- **Contextualize saints** as political and cultural tools in state formation, legal symbolism, and public memory.
- **Compare Czech, Polish, and Hungarian cases** to identify shared patterns (martyrdom, protection, lawgiving) and specific trajectories.
- Foster **critical reflection** on how hagiography, liturgy, and visual programs shaped national ideologies.
- **Link past to present** by tracing the modern mobilization of medieval saints in civic rituals, political discourse, and heritage.



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EU Key Competences Addressed in This Module:

- **Cultural awareness and expression** – Understanding how sanctity structures national memory and shared European heritage.
- **Critical thinking and digital literacy** – Evaluating sources (hagiography, chronicles, imagery, coins, monuments) and their later reinterpretations.
- **Social and civic competence** – Recognizing how religious symbols inform civic identity, pluralism, and democratic debate.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the session, learners will be able to:

- Identify the historical conditions (Christianization, dynastic consolidation, ecclesiastical reform) that enabled saintly cults to legitimize power in Central Europe.
- Describe the core figures and motifs: Wenceslas as rex iustus, Adalbert as missionary bridge, Stephen as founder-lawgiver, Ladislaus as warrior-protector, and Stanislaus as episcopal martyr.
- Analyze how cults operated across media—law codes, liturgy, chronicles, coins, fresco cycles, royal propaganda—to stabilize authority.
- Explain the legal-symbolic afterlife of Stephen’s laws and the Stephenian order in Hungarian political thought (e.g., rex perpetuus, coronation ideology).
- Compare Czech, Polish, and Hungarian trajectories to distinguish shared functions (martyrdom, protection, moral order) from national specificities.
- Evaluate early modern recodings (Counter-Reformation, anti-Ottoman rhetoric) and 19th-century nationalist reuses of medieval sanctity.
- Assess 20th-century appropriations and contestations (from 1918 statehood symbolics to communist suppression and post-1989 revivals).
- Reflect critically on the line between historical person, hagiographic construction, and modern political myth.
- Discuss how saintly memory can both bridge shared heritage and polarize contemporary identity debates.
- Apply a source-aware method to distinguish medieval evidence from later ideological overlays in public history contexts.

Saintly cults in Czechia, Hungary, and Poland created a durable vocabulary of legitimacy—law, martyrdom, and protection—that states and communities repeatedly reinterpreted. Understanding these layers equips learners to read medieval sources critically, recognize modern appropriations, and engage constructively with Europe’s shared yet contested memories.





Title: The Patrons and Guardians of the Land - Saints and Statehood in Central Europe (Topic 2 - ReCall Project)

I. Introduction: Patrons and Guardians, National Saints of the 10th to the 13th centuries in national memory in Czechia, Hungary and Poland - Tamás Körmendi

1. Patrons and Guardians, national saints of the 10th to the 13th centuries in national memory in Czechia, Hungary and Poland. We are now to explore the evolving roles of national saints in the formation of collective memory, state legitimacy and political identity in Central Europe from the 10th to the 20th century. Focusing on the cases of Czechia, Hungary and Poland, it argues that national saints are not only religious figures, but also powerful tools of cultural and political narration.
2. Through their lives, legends and cults, they came to embody the ideas of Christian rulership, resistance against paganism and foreign threats, and the moral foundations of national identity. The text traces how the Christianization of Central Europe between the 10th and the 13th centuries was accompanied by the emergence of saintly figures who were deeply intertwined with the construction of nascent states.
3. In Bohemia, St. Wenceslas served as the model of the *rex iustus*, the righteous king, whose martyrdom became a symbol of national unity and Christian virtue. Alongside him, St. Adalbert (Vojtěch) represented missionary zeal and cross-regional Christian cooperation.
4. In Hungary, King Stephen emerged not only as the founder of the Christian monarchy, but also as a legislative and symbolic cornerstone of the Hungarian legal tradition. His sanctity, reinforced through state-sponsored canonization and hagiography, transformed his laws into enduring legal precedents. Over the centuries, Stephen became the embodiment of sacred kingship and Christian order, an authority invoked in legal documents, coronational issues, and national ideology.
5. Saint Ladislaus, canonized in 1192, complemented this image by representing the warrior saint, a defender of Christian territory and Hungarian virtue. His cult, richly developed in legend, art and royal propaganda, reached its peak in the Angevin period and remained central in anti-Ottoman rhetoric and nationalist cultural memory.
6. In Poland, St. Stanislaus of Cracow embodied the spiritual and political tensions between the Church and monarchy. His martyrdom, at the hands of King Bolesław II, was interpreted as an act of moral resistance and became a foundational story for Polish religious and political identity. Like his Hungarian and Czech counterparts, Stanislaus was reinterpreted across centuries from Counter-Reformation veneration to Romantic nationalism as a symbol of national suffering and ethical leadership.
7. The study emphasized the dynamic evolution of these saints' meanings. In the early modern period, particularly under Ottoman pressure and Habsburg rule, saints were reframed as protectors of Christendom and moral guarantors of Catholic identity. In the 19th and 20th centuries, they became national icons, evoked in political discourse, cultural revival and symbolic resistance.
8. Though rooted in distinct traditions, the cults of Wenceslas, Ladislaus and Stanislaus share a shared Central European motto: "Saints and patrons of the people and guardians of the memory," whose sacred authority could legitimize dynasties, inspire military defence, or sustain national identity in the absence of sovereignty.



9. Central Europe's Christianization brought not only new faith, but new frameworks of collective memory as well. The emerging kingdoms of Bohemia, Hungary and Poland each created a canon of national saints, individuals whose lives and deaths served as models for Christian rulership, religious commitment and national identity.
10. From the 10th to the 13th century, the saints became patrons and guardians of the people. Over time, their cults grew into deeply embedded narratives of legitimacy, often mobilized in later medieval and modern national memory. Saints were not only mediators between heaven and earth — they became embodiments of collective values. And the idea of figures that were forged out of their historical identities were, in many cases, very much fictitious and far from reality. Their significance intensified in later centuries.
11. During the early modern period, especially in the wars against the Ottoman Empire and in the mid-fighting for independence, national saints became symbols of protection and Christian resistance. In the 19th and 20th centuries, amid national awakenings and political nationalism, their cults were reinterpreted as repositories of cultural memory, moral exemplars of devotion, and figures of historical continuity.

II. The Czech Perspective: Saint Wenceslas and the model of princely martyrdom -

Tamás Körmendi and Martin Wihoda

1. Körmendi: The cult of Saint Wenceslas, who lived between circa 907 and 935, Duke of Bohemia, became the most prominent narrative of Czech sanctity. His death at the hands of his brother was presented not as a dynastic failure, but as a Christian martyrdom.
2. Körmendi: Already in the 10th century, Wenceslas was seen as a *rex iustus*, the model of the righteous ruler. His cult was institutionally rooted in the cathedral of Prague and became a dynastic symbol for the Premyslid rulers. Over the centuries, Wenceslas was invoked as a military patron, a unifier in times of division, and eternal ruler of the Czechs. His figure was especially important in moments of political crisis or national awakening, from the Hussite Wars to 19th-century nationalism.
3. Körmendi: Saint Adalbert of Prague, martyred in 997, complemented Wenceslas as a symbol of missionary zeal. His cult extended beyond Bohemia, playing a role in Polish and Hungarian Christianization narratives as well.
4. *Wihoda: Although the pantheon of patron saints of the Czech lands includes 17 figures, only Saint Wenceslas has enjoyed lasting veneration; he has been regarded as the protector and heavenly intercessor of the Czechs since the mid-tenth century. The saint's feast day, September 28, was celebrated so spontaneously by the public that, from the thirteenth century, the Church had to refute the idea that Saint Wenceslas was the patron of drunkards.*

Wihoda itt kezd: Prestože panteon českých zemských patronů zahrnuje 17 postav, trvalé úctě se těší pouze svatý Václav, který byl považován za ochránce a nebeského přímlovce Čechů již od poloviny 10. století. Světcův svátek, 28. září, si veřejnost připomínala natolik spontánním způsobem, že církev musela od 13. století vyvracet představu, že je svatý Václav patronem opilců.

5. *In 1346 a crown was also dedicated to Saint Wenceslas, which Czech kings could borrow only on the day of their coronation or on important festivals and holy days. At the same time, Charles IV asked Pope Clement VI to place the crown under his special protection.*

Svatému Václavovi byla roku 1346 věnována rovněž koruna, kterou si čeští králové mohli vypůjčit pouze v den své korunovace nebo při významných slavnostech a svátcích. Současně Karel IV. požádal papeže Klimenta VI., aby korunu vzal pod svou zvláštní ochranu.

6. *The cult of Saint Wenceslas weathered the unrest of the Hussite period and the Reformation without harm, and it was likewise esteemed in Baroque piety. On 28 October 1918, independent Czechoslovakia was proclaimed from the pedestal of the statue of Saint Wenceslas, and the Saint Wenceslas millennium was pragmatically linked to the tenth anniversary of its founding. In 1929 this anniversary was lavishly commemorated by the political elites of the First Republic as well.*

Kult svatého Václava přestál bez újmy nepokoje doby husitské i reformaci. Cenila si jej rovněž barokní zbožnost. Dne 28. října 1918 bylo z podstavce pomníku svatého Václava vyhlášeno samostatné Československo a svatováclavské milénium bylo pragmaticky spojeno s 10letým výročím jeho vzniku. Roku 1929 si toto výročí okázale připomněly i politické elity první republiky.

7. *During the Second World War, veneration of Saint Wenceslas was exploited by the occupation administration and authorities—Duke Wenceslas was even proclaimed a German collaborator. Yet, as the monument on Wenceslas Square in Prague attests, devotion to Saint Wenceslas remained a firm part of Czech sites of memory.*

Za druhé světové války byla svatováclavská úcta zneužita okupační správou a úřady – kníže Václav byl tehdy prohlášen za německého kolaboranta. Jak ale dokládá pomník na Václavském náměstí v Praze, svatováclavská úcta přesto zůstala pevnou součástí českých míst paměti.

8. *The monument occupied a special place during the protests against the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, a year later after Jan Palach's tragic self-immolation, and again during the Velvet Revolution in 1989.*

Výjimečné místo zaujal pomník v protestech proti okupaci Československa vojsky Varšavské smlouvy v roce 1968 a o rok později po tragickém upálení Jana Palacha, stejně jako během sametové revoluce v roce 1989.

III. The Polish Perspective: From Adalbert to Stanislaus - Martyrs and the Power of Ecclesiastical Resistance - Tamás Körmendi and Stanisław Rosik

1. Körmendi: Poland - St. Stanislaus and the power of ecclesiastical resistance. Poland's most iconic saint is Bishop Stanislaus of Cracow, who lived between circa 1030 and 1079, and was murdered in a conflict with King Bolesław II. His death was framed as an act of ecclesiastical resistance against royal injustice, echoing the European model of Thomas Becket.
2. Körmendi: Canonized in 1253, Stanislaus became the patron of the Polish kingdom. His cult was not only religious but also political — a symbol of the moral limits of royal power and a focus for national unity during the partitions and foreign rule.
3. Körmendi: Earlier saints, such as Adalbert and the missionary Five Brothers, contributed to Polish-Christian origins, but Stanislaus was central to the memory of ecclesiastical autonomy and the intertwining of Church and nation.
4. Körmendi: In the early modern period, his cult was rekindled in the context of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth identity as the Antemurale Christianitatis — the bulwark

Christendom. In the 19th century, under partition, Saint Stanislaus became a symbol of resistance, martyrdom, and national endurance.

5. Rosik: *At the close of the first millennium, the essential framework of European civilization emerged in the form of a circle of Christian monarchies ideologically centered on Rome. Facing the approaching millennium, Otto III—emperor since 962—developed a vision of renewing the Roman Empire, which from then on was to take a new shape. In addition to the three pillars already known in antiquity—Roma (i.e., Italy), Gallia, and Germania—it was to gain a fourth: Sclavinia, that is, the Slavic lands. Thus the emperor, then still a teenager, valued the countries of Central Europe; in this the bishop of the Czech capital, Prague, Saint Adalbert (Wojciech), likely played a role. He joined Otto’s court in 962, earning his respect and friendship, and soon contributed to tightening the emperor’s cooperation with the rulers of Hungary, Saint Stephen I, and of Poland, Bolesław the Brave.*

Rosik: U schyłku pierwszego tysiąclecia wyłoniły się zasadnicze zręby cywilizacji europejskiej w postaci kręgu chrześcijańskich monarchii skupionych ideowo wokół Rzymu. W obliczu nadchodzącego milenium panujący od 962 r. jako cesarz, Otton III, rozwijał wizję odnowy cesarstwa rzymskiego. Odtąd miało otrzymać nowy kształt. Oprócz trzech filarów znanych już w starożytności – Roma (czyli Italia), Gallia i Germania – miało zyskać czwarty: Sclavinia, czyli Słowiańszczyzna. Tak młody, kilkunastoletni wówczas cesarz docenił kraje środkowej Europy, a miał w tym zapewne swój udział biskup stolicy Czech, Pragi, św. Wojciech. Dołączył on do dworu Ottona w 962 r., zyskując jego szacunek i przyjaźń, a niebawem też przyczynił się do zacieśnienia jego współpracy z władcami Węgier, Stefanem I Świętym, oraz Polski, Bolesławem Chrobrym.

6. *Adalbert (Wojciech) visited their countries on his way to a mission among the pagan Prussians, during which—already in April 967—he met a martyr’s death.*

Wojciech odwiedził ich kraje w drodze na misję do pogańskich Prusów, w trakcie której – już w kwietniu 967 r. – znalazł męczeńską śmierć.

7. *Adalbert was born around 956, in the Czech lands ruled by the Přemyslids, though he came from a different princely clan. He was the son of Slavnik, whose seat was Libice. At first he was being prepared for knighthood—somewhat in keeping with his name meaning “the comfort of the army”—but in the end his parents directed him to the clerical state. His father entrusted him to the care of a friend, Adalbert, the first archbishop of Magdeburg (from 968). He administered to the boy the sacrament of confirmation, at which he also received the name Adalbert (by which he is known in German-speaking lands). He studied in Magdeburg for nine years and, after returning to Bohemia, received priestly ordination in 981. Two years later he became bishop of Prague.*

Wojciech przyszedł na świat około 956 r., w Czechach rządzonych przez Przemyślidów, ale pochodził z innego rodu książęcego. Był synem Sławnika, którego siedzibą były Libice. Początkowo szykowany był na rycerza, niejako zgodnie z imieniem oznaczającym „pociechę wojska”, ale ostatecznie rodzice skierowali go na drogę duchowną. Ojciec powierzył go opiece zaprzyjaźnionego z nim Adalberta, pierwszego arcybiskupa Magdeburga (od 968 r.). Udzielił on Wojciechowi bierzmowania, na którym ten otrzymał też imię Adalberta (pod nim znany jest w krajach niemieckojęzycznych). Dziewięć lat kształcił się w Magdeburgu, a święcenia kapłańskie przyjął już po powrocie do Czech w 981 r. Po dwóch latach został biskupem Pragi.

8. *It was Emperor Otto II himself who, by performing the investiture during his stay in Verona, entrusted him with the office; he was consecrated by Willigis, the archbishop of Mainz, to*

whose jurisdiction the Prague diocese belonged. As bishop, Adalbert was known for charitable works; he promoted clerical celibacy—then not yet obligatory in the Latin Church, but recommended as a sign of special dedication to God’s service. He also sought to combat customs rooted for generations that conflicted with church doctrine. These efforts met with the dislike of part of his flock, but he particularly incurred the wrath of the elites, headed by the princely power, when he began to oppose the slave trade.

Urząd powierzył mu, dokonując inwestytury, sam cesarz Otton II, podczas pobytu w Weronie. Konsekwował go zaś arcybiskup Moguncji, Willigis, któremu podlegała diecezja praska. Jako biskup Wojciech słynął z działań charytatywnych, promował wśród duchownych celibat – wówczas jeszcze nieobowiązkowy w Kościele łacińskim, ale zalecany jako wyraz szczególnego poświęcenia się służbie Bogu. Starał się też zwalczać zakorzenione od pokoleń zwyczaje niezgodne z doktryną kościelną. Działalność ta spotykała się z niechęcią części jego diecezjan, ale szczególnie naraził się elitom z władzą książęcą na czele, gdy zaczął sprzeciwiać się handlowi niewolnikami.

9. *On this basis he fell into conflict with the Czech duke, Boleslav II, and in 988 left his diocese. He went to Rome, where he met the pope. He then traveled to the cradle of the Benedictine order, the abbey at Monte Cassino. He did not remain there, but he did not give up the monastic solitude; he found it in the monastery of Saints Boniface and Alexis on the Aventine in Rome itself. In 992—at the summons of his superior, Archbishop Willigis—he decided to return to Prague to continue pastoral work. After two years, however, he again had to abandon it, following a dramatic incident. Adalbert tried to save from a cruel death the wife of a nobleman accused of adultery when she had taken refuge in a church. He failed; and Adalbert drew upon himself the anger not only of her executioners but also of the duke of Bohemia. Thus once more the bishop of Prague left his diocese—this time for good—and began to travel across Europe.*

Na tym tle popadł w konflikt z księciem Czech, Bolesławem II, i w 988 r. opuścił swą diecezję. Udał się do Rzymu, gdzie spotkał się z papieżem. Powędrował następnie do kolebki zakonu benedyktynów, opactwa na Monte Cassino. Nie zagrzał tam miejsca, ale z mniszey samotni nie zrezygnował. Odnalazł ją w klasztorze św. Bonifacego i św. Aleksego w samym Rzymie na Awentynie. W 992 r. – na wezwanie swego zwierzchnika, arcybiskupa Willigisa, zdecydował się wrócić do Pragi, by kontynuować pracę duszpasterską. Po dwóch latach znów jednak przyszło mu jej zaniechać, a stało się to po dramatycznym incydencie. Wojciech starał się ocalić przed okrutną śmiercią żonę jednego z możnych oskarżoną o cudzołóstwo, gdy ta schroniła się w kościele. Nie udało się, a sam Wojciech ściągnął na siebie gniew nie tylko jej oprawców, ale też samego księcia Czech. I tak znów praski biskup opuścił swą diecezję – tym razem ostatecznie – i rozpoczął podróż po Europie.

10. *In Aachen he met Otto III, before the latter became emperor. He impressed him with his humility, asceticism, and desire to contemplate spiritual matters. He then went to the monastery on the Aventine. In the “Eternal City” he again met Otto III. His situation was not easy. The archbishop of Mainz again called him to return to Bohemia, and by the pope’s decision he was given an alternative: either return to Prague or take the Gospel to the pagans. The road to Prague was closed to him because of the hostility of the Czech ruler. In 995 his opponents attacked Libice and murdered Adalbert’s brothers who were found there.*

W Akwizgranie spotkał się z Ottonem III, jeszcze zanim ten został cesarzem. Ujął go swą pokorą, ascezą i pragnieniem kontemplacji spraw duchowych. Potem udał się do klasztoru na Awentynie. W „Wiecznym Mieście” znów spotkał się z Ottonem III. Jego sytuacja nie była łatwa. Arcybiskup moguncki znów wzywał go do powrotu do Czech i ostatecznie z woli papieża otrzymał alternatywę: albo wracać Pragi, albo udać się z ewangelią pogan. Do Pragi

drogę miał jednak zamkniętą ze względu na wrogość władcy Czech. W 995 r. jego stronnicy napadli na Libice i wymordowali zastanych tam braci Wojciecha.

11. *In 996 he accompanied Otto III to Germany. He then made pilgrimage to sanctuaries in France, and, after returning to Germany and staying there briefly, set out through Hungary and Poland toward the pagans. He already shone with apostolic zeal on the way, converting crowds on the Baltic fringes of Bolesław the Brave’s dominions, most likely in Gdańsk. From there he went by boat to the land of the Prussians, foregoing the military escort assigned to him in Poland. Whether he managed to baptize even a single pagan is unknown, for he was soon put to death by them. His companions survived, among them his half-brother Radzim. Bolesław the Brave ransomed the martyr’s body from the Prussians and laid it to rest in Gniezno.*

W 996 r. podążył u boku Ottona III do Niemiec. Potem peregrynował jeszcze do sanktuariów we Francji, a wróciwszy do Niemiec, krótko tam zabawił, po czym przez Węgry i Polskę wyruszył do pogan. Talentem apostołskim błysnął w drodze do nich, gdy nawracał tłumy na krańcach władztwa Bolesława Chrobrego nad Bałtykiem, najpewniej w Gdańsku. Stąd udał się już łodzią do kraju Prusów, rezygnując z przydzielonej mu w Polsce wojskowej eskorty. Czy udało mu się ochrzcić choćby jednego z pogan, nie wiadomo. Prędko bowiem został przez nich uśmiercony. Ocalili zaś jego towarzysze, a wśród nich jego przyrodni brat Radzim. Ciało męczennika Bolesław Chrobry wykupił od Prusów i złożył w Gnieźnie.

12. *Already in 999 Pope Sylvester II declared Adalbert a saint, and in the year 1000 Otto III himself arrived as a pilgrim at his tomb. He was accompanied by Adalbert’s brother Radzim, already elevated to the rank of archbishop with the special title “archbishop of Saint Adalbert.” He took the see of the newly established Gniezno metropolis. Otto III took part of the martyr’s relics to Rome; others went to Hungary, to the cathedral erected by Saint Stephen I for the metropolis founded at Esztergom in 1000. Then, in 1038, the Czech duke Bretislav I brought Adalbert’s Gniezno remains to the cathedral in Prague, having seized them during a raid on Poland, which was plunged into crisis after the temporary exile of its ruler, Casimir the Restorer.*

Już w 999 r. papież Sylwester II ogłosił Wojciecha świętym, a w roku 1000 do jego grobu dotarł jako pielgrzym sam Otton III. Towarzyszył mu brat Wojciecha, Radzim, już podniesiony do rangi arcybiskupa ze szczególnym tytułem: „arcybiskup św. Wojciecha”. Objął on tron utworzonej wówczas metropolii gnieźnieńskiej. Część relikwii męczennika Otton III zabrał do Rzymu, inna trafiła też na Węgry, do katedry wzniesionej przez Stefana I Świętego dla założonej w 1000 r. metropolii w Ostrzychomiu. Z kolei w 1038 r. czeski książę Brzetysław I sprowadził gnieźnieńskie szczątki Wojciecha do katedry w Pradze, a zdobył je podczas najazdu na Polskę pogrążoną w kryzysie po czasowym wygnaniu władcy, Kazimierza Odnowiciela.

13. *The presence of Saint Adalbert’s relics thus became a distinctive sign of his patronage over Poland, Hungary, and Bohemia, as well as over the Roman Empire—the future German Reich. Such a role was assigned to Adalbert already by the rulers contemporary with him of Poland and Hungary, and above all by Otto III, who reigned in Germany and Italy. By supporting the missionary and then promoting his cult, they contributed to shaping a new form of the world in which the countries of Central Europe occupied a place of honor. In this way the figure of Saint Adalbert—by virtue of the great events, ideals, and values associated with him—became permanently inscribed in the spiritual and civilizational foundations of Europe.*

Obecność relikwii św. Wojciecha stała się więc szczególnym znakiem jego patronatu nad Polską, Węgrami, Czechami, a także cesarstwem rzymskim, w przyszłości Rzeszy Niemieckiej. Taką rolę wyznaczyli Wojciechowi już współcześni mu władcy Polski, Węgier, a przede wszystkim panujący w Niemczech i Italii Otton III. Wspierając misjonarza, a następnie propagując jego kult, włączali się w kreowanie nowej postaci świata, w której kraje środkowoeuropejskie znalazły się na poczesnym miejscu. Tym samym postać św. Wojciecha – za sprawą łączonych z nią wielkich wydarzeń, ideałów i wartości – trwale wpisała się w duchowe i cywilizacyjne fundamenty Europy.

IV. The Hungarian Perspective: St. Stephen, St. Ladislaus, and the Making of a Christian Kingdom - Tamás Körmendi

1. In Hungary, the foundational figure was King Stephen I, who reigned between 1000 or 1001 and 1038, canonized in 1083. He was not only the first king, but also the architect of a Christian kingdom, establishing bishoprics, Benedictine monasteries, and centralized royal authority under papal recognition. Albeit he had not been venerated as a saint among the people shortly after his death, his cult grew strong after King Ladislaus I had him canonized. After Kings Ladislaus I and Coloman commissioned them, three different versions of his legend were written — legends which were not only religious texts at the time, but also means of political propaganda.
2. Saint Stephen thus became a crucial figure in Hungarian state propaganda, a cornerstone of the newly born Christian state among the Hungarians, and also the alleged source of state order — just less than 50 years after his death. The significance of St. Stephen in Hungary's legal history set Stephen as a point of reference in feudal Hungarian law. King Saint Stephen is a foundational figure in Hungarian legal history as well. His importance goes far beyond his role in establishing the Christian state and organizing the Church.
3. Over the centuries, Stephen's person and legacy became a central point of reference in Hungarian legal and political thought. His sanctity and royal authority gave enduring legitimacy to his laws, which were repeatedly invoked throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Stephen's two surviving law codes, the First and Second Book of Laws, were among the earliest and most authoritative legal sources in Hungarian history. Though not preserved in systematic codex form, these laws offer a clear picture of the Christianization of society and the legal architecture of the emerging Hungarian kingdom.
4. His legislation covered ecclesiastical matters such as the founding of bishoprics, mandatory tithe payment, and Sunday observance, as well as secular concerns: property protection, the legal status of slaves, and court procedures. These laws served not only as tools of religious transformation but also as instruments for creating a stable and centralized royal authority. Their content and form reveal Stephen's intention to align Hungary with the Latin Christian world while also asserting his own authority as a lawgiver.
5. Stephen's canonization in 1083 was not only a religious event — it had major political and legal consequences. His sanctity conferred a sacred order on his laws, transforming them into quasi-divine foundations of order. Later generations of rulers, judges, and even assemblies frequently referred to Saint Stephen as the model of a Christian king and founder of Hungary in law. In medieval Hungary and legal thinking, Stephen was not only the first lawmaker, but also the perpetual king (*rex perpetuus*). This title, formerly granted, later meant that all subsequent rulers governed by his name and by his legacy. Royal legitimacy was therefore tied to fidelity to the Stephenian order.

6. This concept had far-reaching consequences — especially in public law, coronation rituals, legal symbolism, and theories of sovereignty — which often rested on the alleged notion that Stephen’s legacy defined the limits of legitimate power (which was, in fact, not the case). Stephen’s laws continued to function as legal precedents long after his death, even when the original Books of Laws were lost. For instance, the Golden Bull of 1222, a key document in Hungarian constitutional history, explicitly referred to ancient rites, among which Stephen’s enactments were held in the highest esteem.
7. Throughout the medieval and early modern periods, Stephen’s laws were cited by royal chanceries and ecclesiastical institutions alike, especially in matters of land rights, ecclesiastical privileges, and legal traditions. His name served not only as historical authority but also as a normative invocation. Appeals to the laws of Saint Stephen — or to the gifts of Saint Stephen — were common in legal argumentation.
8. Werbőczy’s Tripartitum of 1514, the most influential compilation of Hungarian customary law, reflected this reverence. Although the Tripartitum focused on noble privileges and customary norms, it treated Stephen’s legislation as foundational. The Stephenian legal tradition was thus regarded as the source of national legal identity — albeit a partly fictitious one. Stephen’s legal significance extended beyond his actual laws. His figure became a symbol of legitimacy, Christian rule and national unity.
9. In his dual role as a historical legislator and a mythic origin of law, Stephen’s place in legal history is unique. Few historical figures in Hungary were cited both in precise legal disputes and in broader ideological narratives about sovereignty and tradition. In sum, Saint Stephen played a central role in shaping Hungarian legal culture — not only through his early legislation, but also through the centuries-long process by which his person, legacy and laws became foundational elements of Hungary’s political and legal identity.
10. Saint Stephen legitimized the continuity of the Christian monarchy: His image as a Christian king resisting pagan revolts was reinforced by hagiography and courtly culture. The crown that was attributed to him from the 14th century — but which in fact had nothing to do with Stephen, as it was produced at least two generations later — became a symbol of sacred kingship. Later it became a symbol of the integrity of the Kingdom of Hungary, the rights of its inhabitants, and, later still, it was abundantly used (and misused) by the state symbolism of Hungary, and even by Hungarian nationalists in the 19th and 20th centuries. Alongside Stephen, his son Emeric and Bishop Gerard were canonized in 1083, forming a dynastic cult that emphasized moral authority and divine favor.
11. A generation later, Ladislaus I, who reigned between 1077 and 1095, became another cornerstone of Hungarian sanctity. Canonized in 1192, Ladislaus was remembered as a chivalric king, a defender of Christianity and Hungarian territorial integrity. His cult played a crucial role during the Crusades and the wars against the Cumans and later the Ottomans. He was especially venerated as a warrior saint and protector of the kingdom during periods of foreign threat.
12. Saint Ladislaus was a national ascendant and Christian hero fighting the pagans. King Ladislaus occupies a special place in Hungarian history and religious culture. Canonized in 1192, nearly a century after his death, he was remembered not only as a wise and just ruler, but also as a warrior saint and Christian hero. His cult combined royal authority with ideas of knightly virtue and defence of the faith, contributing to the formation of a distinctive Hungarian model of sanctity.

13. Ladislaus I came to the throne at a time of internal unrest and external threat. Following the dynastic conflicts in the mid-11th century, his reign represented a period of political consolidation and religious structuring. He supported the Church, promoted ecclesiastical discipline, and encouraged a monastic movement. At the same time, Ladislaus was renowned for his military prowess, particularly in campaigns against pagan groups and Hungary's eastern frontier. He successfully confronted the nomadic Cuman commands and raiding acts, defending the kingdom from raids and protecting Christian populations. These military actions became central elements in historical memory, representing him as a Christian king who secured the borders of Latin Christendom. The image of Saint Ladislaus that emerged after his death was shaped as much by legend as by history. In medieval hagiography and popular devotion, Ladislaus was idealized as a model of chivalric virtue — brave, pure, just, and pious.
14. One of the most enduring legends is the story of his duel with a Cuman warrior who had abducted a Hungarian girl. The tale, depicted in countless church frescoes, presented Ladislaus as a defender of Christian innocence and Hungarian honor. The iconography of Saint Ladislaus is one of the richest in medieval Hungarian art. Among the most widespread visual motifs is the so-called Saint Ladislaus legend cycle, typically depicted in frescoes across the Kingdom of Hungary, especially in 14th- and 15th-century churches in Transylvania and northern Hungary.
15. This cycle illustrates the legendary duel between Ladislaus and the Cuman warrior who abducted a Hungarian girl. The story unfolds in sequential scenes: the abduction, the pursuit, the fight, the victory, and the rescue. These images were not merely narrative — they conveyed political and moral messages. Ladislaus was portrayed as a strong, noble knight, combining Christian virtue with military heroism. The saint is typically shown as a bearded warrior king wearing a crown and mail armor, holding a sword or battle axe. His figure often appears on church facades, altarpieces, and stained glass, underlining his role as a defender of faith and national protector. The visual emphasis on his martial aspect distinguished him from other royal saints and contributed to his lasting popularity.
16. Saint Ladislaus' veneration spread quickly in the 13th century, especially after his canonization by Pope Celestine III. Numerous churches were dedicated to him, and his cult extended beyond Hungary's borders. He was invoked in times of war, plague, and political instability. During the reign of the Angevin kings in the 14th century, and most notably under Charles I and Louis the Great, the cult of Saint Ladislaus received renewed emphasis. The Angevins sought to legitimize their rule through association with earlier native saints, particularly Saint Emeric and Ladislaus.
17. Saint Ladislaus was presented as the model of ideal kingship. Royal propaganda highlighted his justice, piety and military strength — virtues that the Angevin kings themselves wished to embody. His relics, enshrined in Nagyvárad (present-day Oradea, Romania), became the focus of pilgrimage and royal devotion. His portraits were minted on the most important pieces of gold coins of Hungarian kings, the Hungarian florin (fiorini). The canonization anniversaries and relic translations were celebrated with ceremonial pomp. Ladislaus was included in official liturgy, and his image was prominently featured in manuscripts, series and coins. His figure also appeared in the decorative programs of court chapels and monastic foundations.
18. Through these efforts, the Angevins transformed the cult of Saint Ladislaus into a cornerstone of dynastic identity and a symbol of continuity between the Árpád and the Angevin houses. Saint Ladislaus's significance grew during the late medieval and early modern periods, especially in the context of Hungary's long struggle against the Ottoman Empire. As the

kingdom found itself on the front line of Christian Europe, the memory of Ladislaus gained new relevance. He was celebrated not only as a king saint of the past, but as a protector of the present.

19. His image was used to mobilize resistance — both spiritual and military — against the infidel threat. In sermons, chronicles and visual art, Ladislaus appeared as a second Constantine or a Hungarian Charlemagne. He symbolized the martial aspect of Christian kingship — a ruler who not only governed justly, but fought courageously for the faith. His cult became part of the ideological arsenal of Counter-Reformation Catholicism in the Habsburg lands, aligning national memory with the universal Church. By the 17th and 18th centuries, Saint Ladislaus had become one of Hungary’s most cherished national saints. Alongside Saint Stephen, he represented the ideal of sacred kingship.
20. If Stephen stood for foundational law and ecclesiastical order, then Ladislaus embodied courage, defence and purity. His cult remained vital during the 19th century, when Romantic nationalism rediscovered medieval heroes. In literature, painting and historiography, Ladislaus reemerged as a symbol of national valour and Christian resilience. His legends were seen as expressions of the Hungarian spirit, linking the medieval past with contemporary aspirations for independence and identity. Saint Ladislaus represents a unique synthesis of Christian sanctity, royal authority, and heroic virtue. As a historical ruler, he consolidated the kingdom and promoted the Church. As a saint, he protected his people in both spiritual and physical terms. And as a national figure, he became a timeless model of what it means to be both Hungarian and Christian. His memory, preserved in law codices, liturgy, art and legend, remains a powerful reminder of the medieval roots of Hungarian national consciousness. In the early modern period, especially under Habsburg rule, the Hungarian saints were invoked as defenders of the Catholic faith and the integrity of the Hungarian nation. In the 19th century, Saint Stephen’s legacy was reshaped into the ideological foundation of national continuity. The 20th of August, the Church holiday of his celestial birthday — in fact the anniversary of his canonization in 1083 — became a national holiday.

V. Conclusions: Common features and modern uses of Central European Saints from 16th to 21st century - Tamás Körmendi

1. Among the national saints of Central Europe, Wenceslas, Stephen, Ladislaus, and Stanislaus emerged from medieval contexts of dynastic consolidation and Christianization. Their reinterpretation from the 16th century onward reveals striking similarities in both their symbolic functions and the ways they were mobilized by emerging states, churches, and nationalist movements. These saints shared core traits that lent themselves to enduring ideological reuse. They combined royal or episcopal authority with Christian virtue. They were often portrayed as martyrs or defenders of the faith and came to embody ideas of moral order, resistance to tyranny, and the historical continuity of the nation.
2. What began as cultic veneration evolved into a flexible cultural and political vocabulary. In the early modern period, especially amid the Reformation and the Ottoman wars, saints were reframed as guardians of Catholic orthodoxy and national unity. In Habsburg-controlled lands, saints like Stephen, Ladislaus, or Stanislaus were integrated into Counter-Reformation iconography and devotional literature. They were presented as protectors not only of the faith, but of the true order — standing against both heresy and foreign invasion. Ladislaus’ martial image in particular was used in anti-Turkish propaganda, while Wenceslas and Stanislaus became symbols of ecclesiastical steadiness and Catholic sovereignty.

3. From the 18th century onward, Enlightenment criticism sought to deconstruct or marginalize such figures, viewing them as remnants of irrational superstition. However, the rise of Romantic nationalism gave new life to these cults. Saints were now seen as cultural ancestors, symbols of a premodern, morally intact past. They were invoked in literature, patriotic sermons, and painting. Their images were reshaped to reflect 19th-century values: heroism, purity, sacrifice, and national authenticity. Ladislaus’s duel with the Cuman became a metaphor of national resistance. Stephen was transformed into the father of the Hungarian constitution or tradition. Stanislaus symbolized defiance under foreign rule.
4. In the 20th century, especially under totalitarian regimes, the use of national saints became more ambivalent. In some contexts, their cults were co-opted by conservative regimes as pillars of traditional authority. In others, their legacy was suppressed or reinterpreted. Under communism, public reference to saints was discouraged, yet they often survived in private devotion and cultural memory. In Poland, for instance, Stanislaus remained a quiet symbol of opposition and clerical moral authority, especially in the lead-up to the Solidarity movement.
5. Since the fall of communism, national saints have experienced a renaissance. They feature in public holidays, liturgical calendars, cultural heritage programs, and even tourist branding. Their names adorn schools, churches, squares, and civic awards. In the European Union era, they are sometimes reframed as bridges between national memory and shared Christian heritage. Yet their symbolic weight is not without tension. In some cases, saints are used in nationalist or populist rhetoric as anchors of “true identity” or “Christian values” — often with exclusionary overtones. Others argue that they offer a deeper resource — not political dogma, but moral continuity, historical rootedness, and an enduring connection between the civic and the communal.
6. Though distinct in narrative and symbolism, the saints of Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland reveal common patterns. They reflect tensions between rulers and church, between local traditions and universal Christianity. They became vectors of cultural memory, invoked in Baroque Catholic piety, Enlightenment criticism, and Romantic nationalism.
7. Their significance evolved with the times:
 - In the early modern period, they were defenders of Christendom against the infidel.
 - In the age of nationalism, they became timeless figures of identity, culture and historical destiny.
 - Their images live on — not only in churches and chronicles — but in national holidays, political rhetoric, and cultural consciousness. They were once patrons of dynasties — today, they remain guardians of memory.