

University of Szeged
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Doctoral School of History
Docotorate Program in Medievalistics

Abstract of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

***Imago Dei* as the Locus of Conflict:
The Sanctity of the Body and the Assault of
Demons in Christian Cosmology and Funerary
Practice during the First Millennium and a Half of
the *Aetas Gratiae***

Dr. Lilla Alida Kristóf
Kolics Dánielné

Supervisor: dr. Ágnes Horváth Dr. Tóthné college professor

Szeged
2026

1. THE SUBJECT OF THE DISSERTATION AND ITS INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK

The present dissertation builds upon the intellectual and methodological foundations of my 2023 research entitled *Corpus incorruptum: Mummification Customs in Medieval Christian Europe and the Examination of Hungarian Saints*, in a significantly revised and more structured form.

The aim of the dissertation is to examine, through an interdisciplinary approach, the theological and ontological interrelations of early Christian conceptions of the body, the cult of saints, demonology, the structural logic of legal thinking, certain conciliar decisions, systems of legislation, and burial practices. The research is based on the fundamental premise that in the examined period (the first 1500 years after Christ), self-interpretation and institutional structures were not merely intertwined with the structure of theological thought, but rather constituted its very foundation; consequently, the analysis of historical phenomena cannot be separated from their theological and ontological context. Within this framework, the development, source-based analysis, and **understanding of demonology provide the hermeneutical key to the functioning of burial practices, the treatment of the body, the cult of saints, and the related phenomenon of *corpus incorruptum*** – not as a dualistic structure, but as the influencing and destructive activity of pure spiritual beings fallen from the divine order (who nevertheless remain created beings) within the structure of human existence.

The interpretative framework of the dissertation is grounded in the intellectual horizon of the *aetas gratiae*, and seeks to reconstruct its internal logic. The study does not proceed from modern reductions rooted in the sociology of religion, historiography, or ethnography; rather, it examines the phenomena through the theological conceptual system and primary sources of the period itself.

The methodological and conceptual foundation of the dissertation continues to be the work of Romedio Schmitz-Esser, whose volume *Der Leichnam im Mittelalter* already served as a key reference in my 2023 dissertation and

remains a guiding framework in the present study. Schmitz-Esser demonstrated in a pioneering way that in the flourishing period of Christianity, the treatment of the body was an act imbued with theological significance: within the order of the cult of saints, burial practices, and the handling of the dead, the body becomes part of salvation history. His interdisciplinary approach – integrating historical, archaeological, anthropological, and theological perspectives – provides a fundamental point of departure for this dissertation. Of particular importance is that Schmitz-Esser does not separate phenomena related to the body—including the question of the *corpus incorruptum* and the order of burial—from demonological material; his work includes a dedicated chapter on the problem of the corpse besieged by demons (*Der von Dämonen belagerte Leichnam*). Building upon this foundation, the present research advances further: whereas Schmitz-Esser primarily reveals the interrelation of body and demonology at the level of historical sources, this dissertation examines its theological and ontological structure, with particular attention to the interrelated concepts of rebellion, redemption, the legal status of the body, and the shared foundational framework of the cult of saints and burial practices.

2. RATIONALE FOR THE SELECTION OF THE TOPIC

The choice of topic for this dissertation is the result of several decades of interdisciplinary research experience. My academic background in cultural anthropology and museology, combined with doctoral research in biological anthropology and bioarchaeology, brought me repeatedly into direct engagement with the material legacy of Christian Europe during its formative centuries. In this context, it became evident that funerary practices and phenomena associated with the cult of saints cannot be adequately interpreted within exclusively modern, reductionist historical or natural-scientific frameworks.

During the investigations of the mummy of Archbishop Pál Széchenyi (2006–2015) and the cranial relic of King Saint Ladislaus (2011, 2021), it became clear that the interpretation of relics, cult objects, and Christian burial forms can only

achieve internal coherence if the theological self-understanding and anthropological premises of the period are taken into account.

Contemporary historical, anthropological, and archaeological scholarship frequently explains so-called “deviant burials,” “vampire graves,” and related cultic phenomena through social-historical, ethnographic, or *mentalité*-based models. A central methodological difficulty, however, lies in the marginalization of primary theological, juridical, and liturgical sources within these interpretative frameworks. As a consequence, explanatory models often rely upon anachronistic terminology, projecting eighteenth- and twentieth-century folkloristic categories onto earlier centuries. This practice separates the interpretation of material findings from the ontological and theological horizon within which they originally emerged.

Modern categories such as “deviance,” “apotropaic ritual,” or “vampire” do not derive from the conceptual vocabulary of the period under investigation; rather, they belong to later interpretative strata and may therefore distort historical reconstruction. In contrast, the present dissertation adopts a method grounded in primary sources and hermeneutical consistency. Archaeological and bioarchaeological phenomena are examined within the interconnected framework of theological anthropology, juridical order, and ritual practice operative in the period itself.

The rationale of the topic thus lies in the effort to determine how the sacred and juridical order of Christian civilization is reflected in sources concerning the body, burial, the cult of saints, and demonological thought, and to establish a methodological framework capable of reconstructing the period’s own ontological, legal, and theological horizon.

3. PRESENTATION OF THE SUBJECT

The dissertation examines the theological–ontological order of the first fifteen centuries of Christianity in relation to conceptions of the body, demonology, angelology, exorcism, the cult of saints, and funerary practices. At the center of the research stands the question of how the body, death, and the phenomenon

of incorruptibility (*corpus incorruptum*) may be interpreted within the framework of the period's own theological anthropology.

The point of departure of the study is the Christological concept of the *imago Dei*, understood as the foundational structure of salvation history in which the unity of body and soul is situated. From this perspective, the structure of the demonological system is analyzed, with particular attention to patristic interpretations of the two angelic falls (the Luciferian rebellion and the tradition of the Watchers).

The research is grounded in primary sources: the writings of early Christian authors (Saint Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Saint Irenaeus, Saint Athanasius, Origen, Saint Augustine, among others), biblical texts, conciliar decrees, royal legislation, and hagiographical sources. The aim of the investigation is not merely to describe theological assertions, but to uncover their structural role within the interconnected domains of juridical order, liturgy, and funerary practice.

The dissertation contains dedicated chapters on:

- demonological patterns in the Old and New Testaments;
- the Book of Tobit as a prefiguration of exorcistic practice;
- the theological significance of the exorcisms of Jesus Christ;
- the demonological dimensions of royal and ecclesiastical law, including the meaning of *striga* and *maleficium* within Lombard, Carolingian, and Hungarian legal orders;
- the body and burial of Christ as the ontological *origo* for the understanding of Christian funerary practice;
- the functioning of sacred space, including the juridical and exorcistic status of cemeteries, burial sites, and the cross as a sign of dominion;
- the reassessment of the Pannonian mummy burials;

- relevant episodes in the legends of Saint Ladislaus and Saint Gerard;
- a demonological interpretation of the iconographic cycles of the Hungarian Angevin Legendary;

Primer historical texts, archaeological and bioarchaeological materials are analyzed within this theological–ontological framework, with particular attention to the re-evaluation of modern interpretations of so-called “deviant” burials.

The overarching aim of the dissertation is to demonstrate that the intellectual, juridical, and ritual structures of Christian civilization form a coherent system when interpreted within the self-understanding of the period as the primary hermeneutical horizon.

4. RESULTS

1. A New Conceptual Framework for Describing the “Disruption of Order” in the Body

The dissertation introduces the concept of *caro obsessa* (alternatively: *caro immunda*) to denote ontological distortion manifested in the body, and contrasts it with the state of *corpus incorruptum*, interpreted as an eschatological anticipation of restored order.

2. Reconstruction of the Ontological Status of the *Imago Dei*

The dissertation demonstrates that in the first one and a half millennia of the *tempus Ecclesiae*, the *imago Dei* is not a moral metaphor but an ontological status grounded in Christology: the human being, called to conformity with Christ, becomes the focal point – the battlefield – of a cosmic conflict.

3. The Two Angelic Falls as Ontological Rupture

The Luciferian rebellion and the fall of the Watchers are interpreted not as mythic prehistory but as ontological ruptures within the created order, from which the operative logic of the *ordo daemonum* can be derived. The “Non serviam” appears as the archetypal expression of this negation of order.

4. Exorcism as Ontological Intervention in the Old and New Testaments

The research demonstrates that exorcism, in both the covenantal and Christian self-understanding, is not a psychological intervention but a sacramental–juridical act of restoring order; the authority of “binding and loosing” (Mt 16:18–19) emerges as a structuring principle. Within this framework, Old Testament narratives are reinterpreted, showing that the cults of foreign “gods” represent the ongoing re-enactment of the earthly structures of fallen angels.

5. The Book of Tobit as Demonological “Microscope”

The dissertation demonstrates that the Book of Tobit presents a concentrated form of the demonological macrostructure: the pattern of exorcism, the sequence of restoring order, and the healing of perception appear as a unified structure pointing toward New Testament fulfilment.

6. Demonological–Ontological Reading of Royal Legislation (*striga–maleficium*)

Through analysis of Lombard, Carolingian, and Hungarian royal sources, the dissertation demonstrates that the ontological denial of the *striga* (“*quae non sunt*”) and the sanctioning of *maleficium* do not constitute a contradiction, but rather represent a differentiated demonological reasoning articulated within juridical structures. In several instances, the legal subject is explicitly defined as *creatura Dei*.

7. Ontological Reconstruction of the *Striga/Strix* and Correction of Anachronistic “Vampire Grave” Readings

Based on philological, legal-historical, and comparative analysis, the dissertation demonstrates that the original layer of the *strix/striga* concept did not denote a “type of witch,” but rather a pattern referring to anomalous, liminal beings, which polytheistic systems treated as ontologically real and integrated into juridical–ritual frameworks. Analysis of Greek and Latin sources shows that the stable functional features of the *strix* (nocturnal activity, attacks on infants, human–avian permeability) appear not as folkloric topoi, but as descriptions of distorted, non-human entities. Roman legal material indicates that polytheistic systems did not deny the existence of the *strix*, but sanctioned human boundary transgression, whereas Christian legal thought ontologically denies the *striga* (“*quae non sunt*”) and classifies the phenomenon as demonological deception. On this basis, the dissertation demonstrates that modern “vampire graves” categories are both linguistically and ontologically anachronistic: the projection of early modern vampire concepts distorts the interpretation of archaeological material by conflating the *striga* – treated as non-existent in Christian law – with eighteenth-century folkloric constructs. The study thus performs a hermeneutical correction, restoring the phenomenon to its original ontological framework

8. New Iconological Interpretations

The pictorial cycles of the Hungarian Anjou Legendarium are analyzed as theological “visual maps”; the functioning of demonic figures conveys the structure of the invisible order. The exorcistic scenes of Saint Ladislaus receive, for the first time, a coherent demonological–iconological interpretation.

9. An Exorcistic Reading of the Death of Saint Gerard

The dissertation identifies the pattern of “demonic rage” manifested in martyrdom and interprets it as an extreme form of attack against the *imago Dei*, in which physical violence carries ontological significance, in accordance with the worldview of the period.

10. Theological Foundations of Embalming and the Normative Model of Christ’s Burial

The dissertation demonstrates that the early Christian use of aromatics and non-invasive preservation practices was neither a technical innovation nor a continuation of pagan tradition, but a conscious theological act interpreted within the Christological horizon of Incarnation and Resurrection. Patristic and liturgical evidence (e.g., Prudentius, Rufinus) attests that the body was not regarded as a mere *cadaver*, but as a *corpus* belonging to the promise of resurrection and remaining juridically “open” until that fulfillment. Christ’s burial emerges as a juridical–ontological norm: the wrapping in linen and the application of aromatics signify the body’s consecration and separation unto God, while establishing a normative boundary against invasive pagan procedures. The use of fragrant resins – particularly myrrh – thus signifies not hygienic practice but theological continuity of meaning: sacrificial offering, sanctification, and belonging to divine order.

11. Christian Ontological Reinterpretation of the Pannonian Mummy Burials

The dissertation analyzes the Pannonian burials containing artificially preserved bodies as an empirical nexus and demonstrates that earlier interpretations attributing them to Egyptianizing or pagan survivals were grounded in methodological presuppositions. Integrated analysis of burial structure, textile layers, olfactory phenomena, and iconographic markers (including funerary footwear and avian imagery) situates these burials within early Christian practice informed by Christological ontology. Body preservation here is not technical adaptation but ritually and juridically framed practice, intelligible within the hope of resurrection and the integrity of the *imago Dei*. These findings constitute empirical corroboration of the dissertation’s ontological model.

12. Reinterpretation of Burial Phenomena within a Primary Framework

The dissertation demonstrates that modern categories such as “deviant burial” are fundamentally insufficient, as they fail to interpret evidence according to the logic of wounded and restored order. The grave is thus reinterpreted as a spatial

marker of juridical–ontological status within the conceptual framework of the period.

13. Methodological Result: An Integrated Model Grounded in Hermeneutical Fidelity

The dissertation advances an interpretative model in which juridical order, liturgy, the cult of saints, demonology, and theology of the body are not separate thematic domains, but articulations of a single, internally coherent structure of reality operative during the first fifteen centuries of Christianity.

5. MY PABLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC

Studies in the scientific journals

1. PAP, I., KUSTÁR, Á., KRISTÓF, L.A. & SZIKOSSY, I. (2007): Naturally mummified mummies from the Dominican Church of Vác, Hungary. – *Antike Welt. Zeitschrift für Archäologie und Kulturgeschichte*, Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2007(5): 23-28
2. KRISTÓF L.A., POHÁRNOK L., KERÉNYI T., TÓTH V., ISTÓK R., TÓTH G., HARGITAI P., FORNET B., PÁLFI GY. (2010): Paleoradiológia és múmiakutatás. A nagyecenki múmia interdiszciplináris vizsgálata és 3D koponyamásolatának nyomtatása CT adatok alapján. *Magyar Radiológia Online*, 2010/4: 6-16 (<http://www.radiologia.hu>).
3. KRISTÓF L. A., KOVÁCS M., BAKSA G., PATONAY L., SZATMÁRI F., POHÁRNOK L.: Mosonmagyaróváron található két ókeresztény vértanú szent maradványainak paleoradiológai vizsgálata. *Magyar Radiológia Online* 5:8 (2014).
4. Kristóf L. A., Kovács M., Baksa G., Bereczki Zs., Szatmári F., Patonay L., Pálfi Gy., Pohárnok L.: Condition assessment of two early Christian martyrs St. Christine's and St. Augustine's relics with paleoradiological methods in Hungary. *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 16 (2015). 249 –253. p. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2014.04.001> **Impact factor: 1.71 Q1**
5. Kristóf L.A.: Szent Bernadett holttestének azonosításai és orvosi feljegyzéseinek elemzése (Identification of St. Bernadett's corpse and analysis of her medical records.) *Orvostörténeti Közlemények* (Communicationes de Historia Artis Medicinae) 66:1–4 (2020). 109–119. p.
6. Gergely I.B. Varga, Lilla Alida Kristóf, Kitti Maár, Luca Kis, Oszkár Schütz, Orsolya Váradi, Bence Kovács, Alexandra Ginguta, Balázs Tihanyi, Péter L. Nagy, Zoltán Maróti, Emil Nyerki, Tibor Török, Endre Neparáczi: The archaeogenomic validation of Saint Ladislaus' relic provides insights into the Árpád dynasty's genealogy. *Journal of Genetics and Genomics*, 49:7 (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jgg.2022.06.008> **Impact factor: 5.723 Q1**

7. Nerlich, AG., Báthory, O., Kristóf, L.A., Balogh, AA., Donell, ST., Galassy, FM., Mattutino, G., Peschel, OK., Bianucci, R.: Jael syndrome in a Hungarian Hussar of the 16th century: Márk Baksa. *Ethics, Medicine and Public Health* 32 (2024). 100979 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jemep.2024.100979> **Q3**
8. Kristóf, L. A., Némethi, B., Báthory, O.: The Autopsy of Ferenc Barkóczy (1765). Medical and Legal History of Autopsy in the Hungarian Kingdom and the Habsburg Empire. *VIRUS – Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Medizin* 23 (2024). 221–238.

Studies in the books

9. SZIKOSSY, I., KUSTÁR, Á., GUBA, ZS., KRISTÓF, L. A. & PAP, I. (2007): Natürlich mumifizierte Leichname aus der Dominikanerkirche von Vác, Ungarn. – In: WIECZOREK, A., TELLENBACH, M. & ROSENDAHL, W. (eds), 2007. Mumien. – Der Traum vom ewigen Leben. Publikationen der Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, Mannheim (Philipp von Zabern Press), Band 24, 154–166. p.
10. SZIKOSSY, I., KRISTÓF, L. A. & PAP, I. (2007): Mumien aus der Dominikanerkirche von Vác, Ungarn. – In: WIECZOREK, A., TELLENBACH, M. & ROSENDAHL, W. (eds), 2007. Mumien. – Der Traum vom ewigen Leben. Publikationen der Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, Mannheim (Philipp von Zabern Press), Band 24, 367–369.
11. KRISTÓF L. A.: „Si deus pro nobis quis contra nos.” Széchényi Pál érsek múmiájának kutatása. In: Kristóf L. A., Tóth V., (eds): *Széchényi Pál érsek emlékezete. Adalékok az életúthoz, és a nagycenki múmia vizsgálatának eredményei*. Universitas-Nonprofit Kft., Győr, 2012. 14–21 p.
12. KRISTÓF L. A., KOVÁCS M., TÓTH G., POHÁRNOK L.: A nagycenki múmia paleoradiológiai vizsgálata. In: Kristóf L. A., Tóth V., (eds): *Széchényi Pál érsek emlékezete. Adalékok az életúthoz, és a nagycenki múmia vizsgálatának eredményei*. Universitas-Nonprofit Kft., Győr, 2012. 116–125 p.
13. ISTÓK R., KRISTÓF L. A., TÓTH V., HARGITTAI P., GLASZ T.: Széchényi Pál múmiájának paleopatológiai vizsgálata. Adalékok a mumifikálás gyakorlatához a barokk kori Magyarországon. In: Kristóf L. A., Tóth V. (eds): *Széchényi Pál érsek emlékezete. Adalékok az életúthoz, és a nagycenki múmia vizsgálatának eredményei*. Universitas-Nonprofit Kft., Győr, 2012. 126–135 p.
14. MOLNÁR E., FALK GY., PÁLFI GY., KRISTÓF L. A.: Antropológiai vizsgálat Széchényi Pál háromdimenziós, nyomtatott koponyamásolatain. In: Kristóf L. A., Tóth V. (eds): *Széchényi Pál érsek emlékezete. Adalékok az életúthoz, és a nagycenki múmia vizsgálatának eredményei*. Universitas-Nonprofit Kft., Győr, 2012. 142–149 p.
15. KRISTÓF L. A.: Testek a múltból. Három 18. századi apáca múmiájának vizsgálata. In: Kristóf L. A., Tóth V., (eds): *Széchényi Pál érsek emlékezete. Adalékok az életúthoz, és a nagycenki múmia vizsgálatának eredményei*. Universitas-Nonprofit Kft., Győr, 2012. 154–169 p.
16. KRISTÓF L. A.: „Si deus pro nobis quis contra nos.” Széchényi Pál érsek múmiájának kutatása. In: Kristóf L. A., Tóth V., (eds): *Széchényi Pál érsek*

emlékezete. *Adalékok az életúthoz, és a nagyecenki múmia vizsgálatának eredményei.* Győri Hittudományi Főiskola, Győr, 2015. 14–21. p.

17. KRISTÓF L. A., KOVÁCS M., TÓTH G., POHÁRNOK L.: A nagyecenki múmia paleoradiológiai vizsgálata. In: Kristóf L. A., Tóth V., (eds): *Széchenyi Pál érsek emlékezete. Adalékok az életúthoz, és a nagyecenki múmia vizsgálatának eredményei.* Győri Hittudományi Főiskola, Győr, 2015. 148–157. p.
18. ISTÓK R., GLASZ T., KRISTÓF L. A., TÓTH V., HARGITTAI P., KERÉNYI T.: Széchenyi Pál múmiájának paleopatológiai vizsgálata. Adalékok a mumifikálás gyakorlatahoz a barokk kori Magyarországon. In: Kristóf L. A., Tóth V. (eds): *Széchenyi Pál érsek emlékezete. Adalékok az életúthoz, és a nagyecenki múmia vizsgálatának eredményei.* Győri Hittudományi Főiskola, Győr, 2015. 158–171. p.
19. MOLNÁR E., FALK GY., PÁLFI GY., KRISTÓF L. A.: Antropológiai vizsgálat Széchenyi Pál háromdimenziós, nyomtatott koponyamásolatain. In: Kristóf L. A., Tóth V. (eds): *Széchenyi Pál érsek emlékezete. Adalékok az életúthoz, és a nagyecenki múmia vizsgálatának eredményei.* Győri Hittudományi Főiskola, Győr, 2015. 172–177. p.
20. KRISTÓF L. A., LUKÁCSI Z., PATONAY L.: Bevezető. In: Kristóf L. A., Lukácsi Z., Patonay L. (eds.): *Szent király, Lovagkirály. A Szent László-herma és koponyaereklye vizsgálatai.* Győri Hittudományi Főiskola, Győr. 10–13. p.
21. POHÁRNOK L., KRISTÓF L. A., SZATMÁRI F., PATONAY L.: Szent László király koponyaereklyéjének paleoradiológiai vizsgálata. In: Kristóf L. A., Lukácsi Z., Patonay L. (eds.): *Szent király, Lovagkirály. A Szent László-herma és koponyaereklye vizsgálatai.* Győri Hittudományi Főiskola, Győr. 116–123. p.
22. FALK GY., PATONAY L., KRISTÓF L. A.: Szent László koponyájának háromdimenziós nyomtatott másolata. In: Kristóf L. A., Lukácsi Z., Patonay L. (eds.): *Szent király, Lovagkirály. A Szent László-herma és koponyaereklye vizsgálatai.* Győri Hittudományi Főiskola, Győr. 136–141. p. (Three-dimensional printed replica of the skull of Sant László)
23. KRISTÓF L. A., LUKÁCSI Z., RÉTHELYI M., MOLNÁR E., PÁLFI GY., PAPI I., PATONAY L.: Mumifikálási szokások Magyarországon. Királyok, főnemesek, főpapok holttesteinek konzerválása a középkortól. In: Kristóf L. A., Lukácsi Z., Patonay L. (eds.): *Szent király, Lovagkirály. A Szent László-herma és koponyaereklye vizsgálatai.* Győri Hittudományi Főiskola, Győr. 202–225. p. (Customs of mummification in Hungary. Conservations of the remains of kings, aristocrats, prelates from the Middle Ages to the Baroque age. In: *Holy king, Knight king. Examinations of the herma and skull relic of St. Ladislaus*).

Editorial works

24. KRISTÓF L. A., TÓTH V. (eds): *Széchenyi Pál érsek emlékezete. Adalékok az életúthoz, és a nagyecenki múmia vizsgálatának eredményei.* Győr, 2012. (196 oldal) (*The memory of Pál Széchenyi. More data on his life and results of the examination of the mummy from Nagyecen*) 196 pages.
25. KRISTÓF L. A., TÓTH V. (eds): *Széchenyi Pál érsek emlékezete. Adalékok az életúthoz és a nagyecenki múmia vizsgálatának eredményei.* Második, bővített

kiadás. Győri Hittudományi Főiskola, Győr, 2015. (220 oldal) (*The memory of Pál Széchenyi. More data on his life and results of the examination of the mummy from Nagycenk*) 220 pages.

26. KRISTÓF L. A., LUKÁCSI Z., PATONAY L. (eds): *Szent király, Lovagkirály. A Szent László-herma és a koponyaereklye vizsgálatai*. Hittudományi Főiskola, Győr, 2017. (*Holy king, Knight king. Examinations of the herma and skull relic of St. Ladislaus*) 248 pages