

JERUSALEM HAJJ

HUNGARIAN ACADEMY IN JERUSALEM JOURNAL
VOLUME | 1



JERUSALEM, 2026

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Publication of the
HUNGARIAN ACADEMY IN JERUSALEM
6 George Washington St. – Jerusalem 94187
(Opposite the King David Hotel)

Editor:
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Official Website and Open Access of Jerusalem HAJJ:
HUNGARIAN MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND INNOVATION, Budapest
www.culture.hu/en/jerusalem

Book Design, Typography, Prepress:
ISTVÁN ŐRI KISS and ANDREA SÍK

Fonts by Hungarian Designers:
Hajj, Troppauer (Oszkár Boskovitz), Tyrnavia (Gábor Kóthay)

Printed and Bound in Hungary by
DÜRER PRINTING HOUSE, Gyula

ISBN: 978-615-6195-48-7

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of the Journal

Front cover: The Holy Crown of King Saint Stephen (r. 1000-1038),
Founder of the Kingdom of Hungary (crowned on Christmas of AD 1000),
and of the Hungarian royal pilgrim house and monastery in Jerusalem (in ca. 1025).
The cover illustration depicts Christ Pantocrator in the center, and Saint Peter the Apostle,
the first Pope of Rome, on the left (a detail-photograph from above the crown).
The representation of the same Holy Crown rests on top of the ancient
royal shield in the official state coat of arms of Hungary.

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THE HUNGARIAN MILLENNIUM IN THE HOLY LAND

(CA. 1025 – 2025)

by

GYŐZŐ VÖRÖS

THE FIRST 1000 YEARS: AN HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE

The Hungarian Academy in Jerusalem officially opened its doors on 1 July 2025, after the Hungarian Government made the historical decision to establish a permanent scientific and cultural presence of the Hungarian state in the Holy City. It is the second time that Hungary established a state academy abroad, under its national flag, after the 1927 erection of the Hungarian Academy in Rome, a century ago. In 2025, we are celebrating the bicentennial of the 1825 foundation of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest as well, alongside the commemoration of the 130th anniversary of the establishment of the Hungarian Historical Institute in Rome (erected by Bishop Vilmos Fraknói in 1895).

The ancient holy cities of Jerusalem and Rome are those unique places on Earth, which were never foreign to Hungary, but provided spiritual homes to its Christian pilgrims, since a millennium. Furthermore, the presence of the Hungarian Academy in Jerusalem signals the millennium-old relationship between Hungary and the Holy City, just as the Hungarian Academy in Rome does in the Eternal City. In the meantime, our Jerusalem academy celebrates the establishment of the first official Hungarian presence in the Holy Land in the 1020s by the Hungarian king Saint Stephen, just one thousand years ago: The erection of the Hungarian royal pilgrim house and monastery near the Holy Sepulchre. In the 11th century, the chroniclers wrote about the canonized King Stephen of Hungary (r. 1000-1038) the following important note:

“For he [King Stephen] constructed a monastery of monks in that city of Jerusalem, where Christ lived according to his humanity, and he enriched it with estates and vineyards, to provide abundant daily food. At the head of the world, in Rome, he also established a church of twelve canons, abundant with all the accessories, in the name of Stephen the First Martyr, and a settlement surrounded by a stone wall with houses

and inns for those Hungarians who came to pray at the threshold of the prince of the apostles, blessed Peter.” (*Vita Sancti Stephani regis*, §11)

The time of the foundation of this royal Hungarian pilgrim hospice and monastery in Jerusalem by King Stephen could have been, according to our leading historians, right after the death of his relative in 1024, the brother of the Hungarian queen-consort Blessed Gisela, emperor Henry II, the sovereign of the Holy Roman Empire. It was right after 1024, when King Stephen started his intensive and independent foreign policy. Meanwhile, it was exactly during this period when, in 1027–1028, the Fatimids under Caliph Ali az-Zahir and the Byzantine Empire, agreed to allow the rebuilding and redecoration of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed in 1009 upon the order of the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (the father of Ali az-Zahir). The erection of the Jerusalem pilgrim house and monastery (that was later expanded for nuns as well) by the Hungarian king St. Stephen, in the newly arranged Christian Quarter, was only the beginning of the millennium-long relationship between Hungary and the Holy Land. (*Fig. 2*)

A good century later, from the period of the reign of one of the successors of King Stephen, called King Béla II of Hungary (r. 1131–1141), an extraordinary Jerusalem purchase-document survived. We are informed about two houses, next to the Holy Sepulchre, bought for the Hungarian pilgrims by a noble lady from Hungary, called Petronilla (the price was 440 Byzantine gold coins). It had to be an enlargement to the Hungarian pilgrim hospice, established by King Stephen a hundred years earlier. Among the resident witnesses of the dated, 1135 document, issued by a certain Peter, the Prior of the Holy Sepulchre, we find already three Hungarian clergymen, one of whom was an archdeacon, “Symeon the Hungarian”. It is a clear sign that the Hungarian Kingdom was not simply running a pilgrim hospice in Jerusalem, but the Hungarians were already an integral part of the existing local clergy by 1135. (*Fig. 3*)

Moreover, the son of Béla II, called King Géza II of Hungary (r. 1141–1162), not only enlarged our Jerusalem pilgrim house, but even founded a Hungarian religious and military group as well, an order he designated as ‘The Crusaders of King Saint Stephen’ (*Cruciferi Sancti Stephani Regis*), in memory of the canonized Founder of the Hungarian Kingdom and of his Jerusalem pilgrim hospice, that became their crusader motherhouse. The 1161 recognition of the Hungarian crusader order by Pope Alexander III (r. 1159–1181) is well documented in the later official bull of Pope Urban III (r. 1185–1187), which approved the order and confirmed its privileges in 1187. Similarly, the papal bull of Urban IV (r. 1261–1264), issued in 1262, was the centennial confirmation of the bull of Pope Alexander III. These precious historical documents are all treasured in Hungary, and are testifying the very deep Hungarian roots in the Holy Land, and especially in Jerusalem.

Nearly two hundred years after the reign of King St. Stephen, in 1216, the sovereign of the royal Árpád dynasty of the Hungarian Kingdom was personally appointed by Pope Innocent III (r. 1198-1216), to spearhead the Fifth Crusade, as the only European monarch participant. It was this historical moment, a unique one in military history, when King Andrew II of Hungary (r. 1205-1235, the grandson of King Géza II) became the commander-in-chief of the united European Christian forces. (*Fig. 1*) The royal military campaign was executed during 1217-1218, under the next Roman pontiff, Pope Honorius III (r. 1216-1227), and in addition to the leadership of King Andrew II, the crusader troops included several thousands of Hungarian royal knights and their charger warhorses, ecclesiastical leaders, and kindred chiefs as well. They embarked in Split (Spalato) on 10 enormous rented Venetian ferry boats, and landed in the company of many other smaller boats from the Adriatic coasts, at the Holy Land port of Acre (Akko), in October 1217. (*Figs. 2-3*)

It was during the same autumn that the first group of the Order of Saint Francis of Assisi, led by his right-hand-man, Fra Elias of Cortona, arrived to the Holy Land, under the military protection of the royal Hungarian troops. During the next centuries, the Franciscans were entrusted by the popes of Rome as the official custodians of the Holy Places, in the name of the Catholic Church. It is a more than an 800-year-old unbroken history, in which many hundreds of Hungarian Franciscans have been involved until today. It is still an unwritten chapter of Hungarian history as well, and the current head of the Franciscan Monastery *ad Coenaculum* (familiarily known as the Little Cenacle, or *Cenacolino* in Italian), that is located on Mount Zion, near the place where the Last Supper is commemorated, is a Hungarian-Franciscan monk since 2020, Pater Jakab Várnai OFM. This convent is close to the historical place, where in 1333, the Friars Minor built their first monastery on Mount Zion.

The midway of the Hungarian millennium of Jerusalem (ca. 1025–2025) is 1525. It was the last peaceful year of the sovereign Hungarian Kingdom, as the enormous army of the Ottoman Empire arrived to its more than half-a-millennium old southern-border in the next year. The size and the strength of the Turkish imperial army was unstoppable, the Hungarian border was washed away, and after the Battle of Mohács in 1526, and the Siege of Buda in 1541, the lion's share of the kingdom went under Ottoman control. However, the same fate befell the Holy Land: After two and a half centuries of Mamluk rule, Jerusalem likewise became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1516. Our shared, imperial capital became Istanbul, and our peoples became subjects of the same Muslim empire. Suleiman the Magnificent, who erected during 1537-1541, the 12-meter-high and 4-kilometer-long, glorious, still-standing surrounding wall of Jerusalem, with its 34 towers and 7 gates, died in the Kingdom of Hungary, during the military Siege of Szigetvár in 1566.

Although both territories, the Holy Land and Hungary similarly suffered the Muslim rule of the Ottoman Empire, the Holy See in Rome did not forget her faithful Hungarian children. Pope Innocent XI (r. 1676-1689), the “Savior of Hungary”, dedicated his papacy to initiate and organize a new crusade, the military campaign of the Holy League around the Holy Roman Empire to free our Homeland: The united Christian army kicked out the Muslim-Turks from the royal Castle of Buda in 1686, and recaptured Nándorfehérvár (today Belgrade) in 1688, the key southern-border city of Hungary. The Holy Land was not so fortunate, where the Ottoman rule ended a good quarter millennium later, only in 1917. However, Hungary and the Holy Land had very close ties not only during the Ottoman rule (Jerusalem and Budapest are both in the same aerial distance from Istanbul, ca. 1100 km), but during the period of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy as well (1867-1917), when we developed over half a century very special ties with Jerusalem, probably the closest among the European nations.

It is easy to prove that among the European powers, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had a unique relationship with Jerusalem. It was His Imperial and Royal Majesty Franz Joseph I, the Austrian Emperor (r. 1848-1916) and the Apostolic King of Hungary (r. 1867-1916), who arrived as a pilgrim to Jerusalem in 1869, *en route* to the inauguration of the Suez Canal. He was the very first European monarch since the Crusades (since more than six centuries!), who was allowed by the Turkish authorities in Istanbul to perform a holy pilgrimage to Jerusalem. (*Fig. 6*) His visit was received with a great enthusiasm by the local Christian and Jewish communities, who saw him as a benevolent ruler and protector of their faiths. During his visit to the Tiferet Yisrael Synagogue in Jerusalem, he was told that the synagogue was still missing a roof. He then donated 1,000 French francs to complete the construction, and the dome became known as “Franz Joseph’s cap”. The pilgrimage of the Austro-Hungarian Sovereign similarly opened a new chapter in the history of Christian Jerusalem. Franz Joseph requested several privileges for the Roman Catholic Church in Jerusalem, including the establishment of an independent shrine adjacent to the Holy Sepulchre, which were all granted by the subsequent sultans, Abdulaziz (r. 1861-1876), Abdul Hamid II (r. 1876-1909), and Mehmed V (r. 1909-1918).

The Jews had a satisfactory situation in Austria-Hungary since 1867, as the Jewish population had formally received full and equal rights with the Christians, through the *Law of Emancipation*. It was in Budapest, where a little boy was born in 1860 to a humble Jewish family. This boy was later enrolled to an excellent *Christian* institution, and completed his secondary education in the Protestant-Evangelical School on the Deák square in Budapest, in 1878. The already 18-year-old freshly graduated young man was called Theodor Herzl, who stepped up to the stage of history, and became a *New Moses*, the Father of modern Israel. In Hungary, and especially in Budapest where until today one

of the biggest Jewish communities of Europe is flourishing (ca. 150 thousand, most of them seculars or converts, with a lot of mixed marriages), the Jews had a harmonious relationship with the Christian majority since the Hungarian conquest in the 9th century. Meanwhile, the German occupation during the Second World War, and the later Stalinist terror of the Russian military occupation, forced many of our Jewish compatriots to escape Hungary, and this is how we have today some 350-400 thousand Hungarian Jews from the Carpathian basin in Israel (from the geographical territory of the historical Kingdom of Hungary). It was a modern *Exodus* to the Promised Land, with a much bigger community than the one that arrived from Egypt, through the Red Sea, following the Old Moses.

The end of the First World War broke the wonderful cultural and political relationship of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Holy Land into two, not easily reparable parts. The Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman Empires were both in the military coalition of the Central Powers (together with Germany), against the Entente Allied Forces. The lost WWI resulted the collapse of both empires, and the defeated Hungary found itself in political opposition to the British Empire, which in turn took over the Holy Land (after 401 years of Ottoman rule). (*Fig. 7*) The properties of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were confiscated by the British Army, including our Jerusalem 19th century pilgrim house on the Via Dolorosa, at the Third Station. The situation during the Second World War became even worse: The Hungarian priests, monks, and nuns in the Holy Land, were interned by the British, together with our Italian and Austrian friends, from the Axis Powers. As an example, the Hungarian-Franciscan, P. Vince Juhász OFM served in the Custody of the Holy Land from 1935 to 1952, but was imprisoned by the British between 1940 and 1944, together with his fellow (mostly Italian) Franciscan friars, in the concentration camp of the Emmaus – El Qubeibeh Monastery. Pater Juhász was born in 1907 as a Budapest Jew, who had only converted to Catholicism as an adult (his family name was originally Rosenthal). Not a unique, bitter, and twisted Hungarian destiny.

After WWII, Hungary suffered the occupation of the Russian (Soviet) Army, right after the German (Nazi) one, from 1945 until 1991. Diplomatic relations between Hungary and Israel have been maintained since 1948, but were broken between 1967 and 1989. With the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, diplomatic relations were established in 1964, immediately after the Holy Land pilgrimage of Pope Paul VI (r. 1963-1978). As a freed country, in 1999 Hungary became member of NATO, and in 2004 member of the European Union. In the scientific and cultural fields, a large-scale Holy Land mission had been started by a state institution, the Hungarian Academy of Arts in 2009, at the East Bank of the Dead Sea, in the Herodian royal city of Machaerus (at modern Mukawer). (*Figs. 4-5*) The Biblical city, erected by King Herod the Great,

is the historical place, where Saint John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded. In its citadel, inside a magnificent palace, the Tetrarch Herod Antipas lived with his second wife, the Hasmonean royal princess Herodias, and with her daughter Princess Salome. The archaeological mission of the Hungarian Academy of Arts, an ongoing scientific project in its 17th year, became a solid foundation for the establishment of our Hungarian Academy in Jerusalem.

Mount Machaerus, with its direct optical link to Jerusalem over the Dead Sea, in the territory of Roman Judea, and in a 43 kms aerial distance from the Holy City, is a bridge between the peoples of the Holy Land. Machaerus is venerated as a pilgrim destination by the Christians and Muslims, as the place of martyrdom of their joint, cherished prophet Saint John the Baptist / Nabi Yahyā ibn Zakariyyā. In the meantime, it is very precious for the Jews as well, as this is the only Hasmonean-Herodian royal stronghold, outside the territory of modern Israel (and the Palestinian Authority). Furthermore, the Machaerus citadel treasures the only Greco-Roman period royal palace in the Kingdom of Jordan as well. About the fortified Herodian royal city, overlooking the Dead Sea in Transjordan, Pliny the Elder wrote that “*Machaerus, next to Jerusalem, was the most strongly fortified place in Judea*” (*Hist. Nat.* V. 15, 16). Together with Petra, it is today probably the most favored destination for the Israeli tourists in Jordan, where they can visit their own history: The last but one fortification of the Zealots against the Roman Army, before they lost their Homeland in AD 73, for nearly two millennia.

THE FIRST JERUSALEM HAJJ

In the above historical retrospect, I wanted to provide an image of an invisible millennial bridge (partly blurred in history), between Hungary and the Holy Land, which bonds the two geographical entities and their peoples together in history, cultures, religions, and more: In the merged affectional veneration and love towards Jerusalem. The name of the ***Hungarian Academy in Jerusalem Journal***, with the acronym ***HAIJ***, is a genuine, characteristic Jerusalem name. During the ministry of Jesus, the Mosaic law required every Jewish man to make three pilgrimages or three *haggim* (חגים) every year to the holy city of Jerusalem. The three yearly Jerusalem pilgrimages of the Jews were made in order to celebrate the three festivals: Passover (Pesach), Shavuot (Pentecost), and Sukkot (Tabernacles). The singular form of the Hebrew term, *bag* (meaning ‘festival’), demonstrates the linguistic link to the Arabic term *hajj* (حَجّ) that simply meant ‘pilgrimage’ in the later centuries, as the Arabs called their religious journeys by the shortened Hebrew name of the feasts: *hagg*, *hajj*. The Arab Christians likewise made their *hajj* to Jerusalem, and the Muslims of

course primarily to Mecca (but a huge number of the Muslim pilgrims from the Levant, Anatolia, and Central Asia, made their *hajj* to Jerusalem as well). Finally, throughout the western Ottoman Empire, from the Balkans to Cyprus, the Orthodox Christian and Jewish pilgrims commemorated their religious journeys to the Holy Land with the honorific title before their name called “*Hajj*” or “*Hajji*”, meaning: “Jerusalem Pilgrim”. In some areas the title has been even fossilized as the first part of the family names as well. We trust that the Hungarian publications of the yearly volumes of *HAIJ*, will be both: Jerusalem feasts and Jerusalem pilgrimages.

In the first volume of the *Jerusalem HAIJ*, the Readers will find six further, consecutive articles. The first was written by the esteemed Hungarian medievalist military-historian László Veszprémy, former head of the Museum of Military History in Budapest. As the preeminent expert and university professor of medieval military history in Hungary, Veszprémy presents the genuine historical sources, and wonderfully reconstructs the Hungarian participations in the Crusades to the Holy Land. In addition to these, he was also ready to clarify the authentic historical sources concerning the first centuries of the Hungarian presence in Jerusalem, including the foundation of King St. Stephen. The Kingdom of Hungary was indeed ***Under the Spell of Jerusalem and the Holy Land***, as he defines it in the title of his study from the 11th to the 13th centuries, since the military campaigns of the Crusades were first of all religious vows and pilgrimages for the participants, for our ancestors and predecessors. Their original aim was to free the holy places of the Holy Land, and to guarantee the peaceful Christian pilgrimages from Europe to the holy sites.

The next scientific article was written by the distinguished leadership of the revived Hungarian religious Order of King Saint Stephen (***Cruciferi Sancti Stephani Regis***, the so-called ‘Stephanites’), including the former and current Grand Masters since their resumption in 1993, Csaba Ferencz CSR and György Novák CSR; the Chancellor József Vincze CSR and his wife Anna Máthé-Balázs; the Clerk of the Order Viktória Banga CSR, and finally Fr. László Schranko CSR. It is a faithful and honest testimony of this well respected Hungarian religious community about the origins and history of their spiritual ideals and national heroes, including the original historical and archaeological sources and evidence, under the Patronage of His Eminence, Cardinal Péter Erdő, the Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest and Primate of Hungary since 2003. Through this article we may see that the identity and the charisma of the Order still lives 500 years after the Battle of Mohács, when the once famous medieval Hungarian military order vanished from history, for close to half a millennium.

The already mentioned Hungarian monk, Pater Jakab Várnai OFM, since 2020 is the head of the Franciscan monastery on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and is lecturing fundamental theology at several colleges of the Holy City. He was

previously the Franciscan provincial in Hungary (1994–2003), later *definitor generalis* of the Franciscan order in Rome (2003–2009), and finally rector of the Sapientia College of Theology of Religious Orders in Budapest (2012–2020). Similarly to the Stephanites, he writes in the most authentic way about the Hungarian-Franciscans in the Holy Land, and about his order: as a real *insider*. Originally, I asked him to write about the past 808 years of the Sons of St. Francis of Assisi in the Holy Land, especially those who arrived from Hungary, but instead of a sketched historical reconstruction, he selected only one Hungarian-Franciscan friar, **Father István Kiss OFM (1733–1798), who arrived to Jerusalem in 1766**. Through a 518-page-long Hungarian-language manuscript memoir, the journey and the contemporary Jerusalem life of Father Kiss can be perfectly reconstructed. Father Várnai painted a commemorative Late Baroque fresco through his article, and by the window of the manuscript-quotations of his protagonist, we receive an initiation into the 18th century Franciscan world in Hungary and in the Holy Land. As one of the Hungarian-Franciscan spiritual successors of István Kiss, Father Várnai collected in the Jerusalem archives the documentation of the arrivals from the Kingdom of Hungary of another 36 Franciscan Friars, his precious predecessors, between 1670 and 1781, just to remind us in the appendix of his article that there are very many unwritten stories of the forgotten Hungarian friars since 1217. The article of Pater Jakab serves as an excellent prototype and model for future Franciscan studies about the life and fate of the individual Hungarian-Franciscans in the Holy Land.

The *Custos of the Holy Land* is the official Roman Catholic guardian of the holy shrines, appointed by the popes of Rome, a highly respected historical rank and office, first held by Fra Elias of Cortona OFM (1217–1220). In the meantime, the Custos is also the superior of all Franciscans within the territories of Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Cyprus, and in Rhodes. The previous long-term Custos of the Holy Land was the Most Reverend Father Francesco Patton OFM (2016–2025), a close friend of Hungary, who gave a wonderful speech in the Hungarian Academy in Rome **On Saint John the Baptist**, in February 2022. He kindly agreed to publish his conference paper in the *Jerusalem HAJJ* 1, that presents the several historical and traditional places, where the Precursor is venerated in the Holy Land. In this context, he also describes the archaeological excavations of the Italian-Franciscan fathers of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Machaerus, during 1978–1981 and 1992–1993, who preceded the scientific mission of the Hungarian Academy of Arts in the Transjordan field, on this highly important historical mountaintop at the Dead Sea.

As it has already been mentioned in the initial paragraph, behind the 1927 foundation of the Hungarian Academy in Rome was the 32-year-long journey of the Hungarian Historical Institute in Rome (erected by Bishop Vilmos Fraknói

in 1895). A kind of modest, Holy Land version of a similar 32-year-long journey can be found behind the 2026 publication of the *Jerusalem HAJJ* 1, but a century later, and in a much humbler way, that started on 1 February 1994. Since that day, the founding-director of the Hungarian Academy in Jerusalem (the writer of these lines) has been living in the Levant, and works in Hungarian colors: For the first 10 years in Egypt (1994–2004), later in Cyprus (2004–2009), and since 2009 here in the Holy Land (in Machaerus and Jerusalem). The 32-year-long pilgrimage went through the stations of four archaeological excavation sites: The first four years in Luxor (Thebes, the Mortuary Temple of Pharaoh Sankh-kara Montuhotep III on Thoth Hill), another six years in Alexandria (inside the seaside acropolis of Taposiris Magna, erected by Ptolemy II Philadelphos), and additional five years in Pafos (in the Nea Paphos peninsula, the Lighthouse Hill Temple), and finally the last 17 years already here in the Holy Land (in Machaerus, overlooking the Dead Sea). The latest archaeological mission is still ongoing, and a humble overview presents it in the article, titled: ***The Hungarian Archaeological Excavations in the Herodian Royal City of Machaerus at the Dead Sea, Where Princess Salome Danced, and Saint John the Baptist was Imprisoned and Beheaded***. This scientific project, with several international accolades (including the Gold Medal of the Pontificate, awarded in 2022 by the late Pope Francis in the Vatican) provided a solid base and groundwork for the Hungarian Academy in Jerusalem.

RETURNING TO JERUSALEM

The Holy City, the “Gate of Heaven”, was always *the* spiritual center of Judaism and Christianity, and the *third* holiest site of Islam. For the Roman Catholic Kingdom of Hungary (1000–1945), the administrative religious center was obviously Rome, but the spiritual center always remained Jerusalem. (Fig. 2) From Hungary, this magnetic gravitation was started by the Jerusalem monastery and pilgrim-hospice foundation of King St. Stephen in ca. 1025, and continued through the Christian pilgrimages and the Crusades. The Budapest birth of Theodor Herzl and his Zionist philosophy with the gravity of Jerusalem affected a particular group of Hungarians, more and more: Our Jewish brothers and sisters. However, most of them wanted to make their Aliyah pilgrimage to the Holy Land for good, in one-way direction, as a permanent migration. The word Aliyah (אֲלִיָּה) means “ascent” or “an act of going up”, i.e. to the holy city of Jerusalem, as the Jews did during the previously mentioned three annual Jerusalem *haggim* (festivals), until the end of Second Temple Judaism, in AD 70. Meanwhile, “making Aliyah” today means to immigrate to the Land of Israel. During the 20th century, as mentioned above, around 300

thousand Hungarian Jews immigrated to Israel from the Carpathian basin. A May 2025 interview with Ron Lustig, the director of *The Hungarian-Speaking Jewry Heritage Museum in Safed, Galilee* will open a fantastic window to experience a contemporary understanding about our former cherished compatriots, the Hungarian Jews in Israel.

Obviously, the nature of a Jewish Aliyah to Israel is in many ways different from the millennium-old Holy Land pilgrimages of the European Christians. However, there is a common phenomenon between the two, and this is the magnetic power of Jerusalem. Theodor Herzl was a nine-year-old little boy in Budapest, when he had to hear about the 1869 Jerusalem pilgrimage of the Habsburg Emperor Franz Joseph I, King of Hungary. During the 1898 Jerusalem pilgrimage of the German Emperor William II, King of Prussia, Herzl was already 38 years old, and had published two years earlier his principal Zionist testament, *The Jewish State: Proposal of a modern solution for the Jewish question*, where he envisioned a future independent Jewish State in the Christian Holy Land, that is geographically identical with the Jewish Promised Land. It was during this imperial pilgrimage, that Herzl visited Jerusalem for the only time in his life, with the intention to meet the German emperor. He personally asked the Christian pilgrim William II in Jerusalem, to provide a German protectorate for the Jews in the Holy Land.

There were noticeable Christian claims as well. It is important to note that there was a serious German imperial plan, until 1917, to reestablish the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem: It was not a coincidence that Herzl approached the German emperor in Jerusalem. Besides this, among the *officially used* imperial and royal titles of Franz Joseph I, we can find his designation: ‘König von Jerusalem’, the King of Jerusalem. A very clear statement and straightforward claim! (Fig. 3) Furthermore, Zionism was not a Jewish movement at the beginning, but a Protestant-Christian one. Just to have a look at the other side of the coin, and the globe, the second American president, John Adams already in 1818 wrote down, that “*I really wish the Jews again in Judea, as an independent nation.*” A hundred years later, the Balfour Declaration famously stated in 1917 that “*His Majesty [King George V - r. 1910–1936]’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.*” Finally, the Israeli Law of Return, passed on 5 July 1950, gave to the people with one or more Jewish grandparent, and their spouses, the right to relocate to Israel and acquire Israeli citizenship.

As I wrote at the beginning of this essay, there is an invisible millennial bridge (partly blurred in history), between Hungary and the Holy Land, and several hundred thousand of Hungarians (Christians and Jews) went across it

throughout history, from the Carpathian basin to the Holy Land. However, just before the 7 October (2023) War, there were 45 airplanes leaving Budapest to Israel, and *vice versa*, weekly. Today, only a minority of the travelers are Christian pilgrims or secular Hungarian tourists, who are arriving to pray in, or discover the Holy Land. The majority are Israelis, who are visiting Hungary, most of them with Hungarian ancestors, and some with living relatives and very many friends. As it is everywhere on Earth in diasporas, the third generation of Hungarians are losing their language, and after several mixed marriages, the Hungarian ancestors eventually become an exotic island on the CVs.

THE SECOND 1000 YEARS: A NEW BEGINNING

Nevertheless, the personal, communal, or religious memories are *not* identical with the national memory of a state. The state of Hungary, as a nation in the Carpathian basin since our conquest in AD 895, and as a Christian kingdom for nearly 10 centuries, does not want to forget its millennium-old relationship with the Holy Land, but would like to start an even more successful one: The Second Millennium. This is why the Hungarian Academy in Jerusalem officially opened its doors on 1 July 2025, after the Hungarian Government made the historical decision to establish a permanent scientific and cultural presence of the Hungarian state in the Holy City. As it was told at the beginning of this introduction, this is the second time that Hungary established a state academy abroad, under national flag, after the 1927 erection of the Hungarian Academy in Rome, a century ago. Jerusalem and Rome are both blessed by the millennial royal Hungarian legacies of the Founder of our precious state, King Saint Stephen. His genuine, original crown, the Holy Crown, treasured today under (and in the focal point of) the cupola of the Budapest Parliament building (the seat of the National Assembly of Hungary), is the cover illustration of the *Jerusalem HAJJ* 1, a photograph from above, depicting Jesus Christ the Judge in the center, and Saint Peter the Apostle, the first Pope of Rome on the left. The same Holy Crown of King Saint Stephen is on the coat of arms of the state of Hungary, the official logo of the Hungarian Academy in Jerusalem.

In 2025, we are in an entirely different situation than in the previous millennium. In its history, the Holy Land was part of empires, and was always a complete, singular entity: during the Roman, Byzantine and Sasanian rules, under the Rashidun, Umayyad, Abbasside, and Fatimid Caliphates, during the Seljuk period and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, under the Ayyubid,

Mamluk and Ottoman rules, and finally for three years during the British Mandate, until 1922. Naturally, the Jordan Valley was similarly one entity, and the Holy River was an excellent and unifying waterway for transportation and travel. Historically, the last time the Jordan River was a border, happened during the Tetrarchy of Herod Antipas, from AD 6 to 39, just two millennia ago. For most Hungarians, the meaning of the ‘Holy Land’ (Hung. ‘Szentföld’) is identical with the ‘Land of Jesus’, but today it is divided into several parts. (*Figs. 3-5 and 7*) It consists first of all the Jewish state of Israel (with the Palestinian Territories), secondly the Muslim state of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (with Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan, Machaerus, Mount Nebo, Madaba, and the cities of the Decapolis), and finally the southern part of Lebanon (with the seaside regions of Tyre and Sidon). Jerusalem, the beating heart of the Holy Land has to be considered in this context, the current political borders cannot divide its multiple cultural and historical legacies. The Holy City has to be understood as the Eternal Capital of the Holy Land. Those, who deny its complex cultural and religious backgrounds, do not understand history, and the unique legacy of Jerusalem. Those, who believe that the Holy Land is a military buffer zone, or simply a battlefield, do not comprehend the power of scientific, cultural, and personal bonds. Reconciliation and friendship have to characterize the holistic and inclusive approach of all Jerusalemites, including the pilgrims.

The Holy Land is a Sacred Bridge. Jerusalem is not only a city, but a world. Yes, the Holy City is the meeting point of three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe), the three monotheistic religions (of the Abrahamic faiths), and several peoples, languages, and cultures. For the religious, in addition to the horizontal relations, it has a vertical dimension as well: Jerusalem is the meeting point between Heaven and Earth. There is a shared belief among the Christians and the Muslims, epitomized in the saying, that “*Jerusalem is the Gate of Heaven.*” As Cape Canaveral in Florida was designated to be the launch site for human spaceflights from where the command modules of space crafts were rocket-launched to the Moon, so does Jerusalem have a similar function in history. This is the city from where the Founders of Christianity and Islam, Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammad left the Earth to Heaven. Jesus did it twice, after his Resurrection from His tomb (unacknowledged by Muslims), and after forty days for the second time, from the top of the Mount of Olives (a shared conviction of Christians and Muslims). The latter was first commemorated by an Early Byzantine (sixth-century) octagonal basilica, which was later replaced by a beautiful Crusader chapel. It is today (since Salah ad-Din) under Muslim control and ultimately under the authority of HM King Abdullah II of Jordan. However, the Muslims allow Christians to celebrate there, by letting them have the keys of the former chapel, now turned into a mosque, for the night of the Feast of the Ascension, forty days after Easter Sunday. For

Muslims, the Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Sakhrah) encloses the rock from where Prophet Mohammad left the Earth on his winged horse with Archangel Gabriel, and ascended to the Seventh Heaven during the Night Journey (a belief rejected by Christians). All three places of heavenly ascents are in Jerusalem, next to each other, in one line (the last one in the middle). Naturally, for the Jews, the Temple Mount or the Mount of Olives have been parts of their religious landscape over the past three millennia. For them the Temple Mount had the Holy of Holies, inside the Temple, where the presence of God appeared: the *Axis Mundi*.

The Hungarian Academy in Jerusalem through its journal (*HAIJ*), monograph series (*HAIMS*), and in-person academic and cultural programs, would like to serve the Holy City and its peoples with a permanent scientific and artistic presence, through a Hungarian perspective. The founding-director is a Jerusalem research professor at the Pontifical University Faculty since 2009 (although he arrived for the first time to the Holy City in August 1990, already 35 years ago). As the *Jerusalem HAIJ* 1 appears, the scientific, cultural, and religious landscape of Jerusalem is shattered to pieces. Neighbors like an Orthodox Jewish community, a Russian Orthodox Christian nunnery, or a Sunni Muslim *madrassa*, are not only divided by beliefs, languages, and cultures, but they are representing centuries of history. Unfortunately, politicians often use these diverse ethnic groups for their selfish interests and intentions (*divide et impera*), however such an attitude will not result in peace, only blood. Meanwhile, the goals of the Hungarian Academy in Jerusalem with its millennial historical background are honest and straightforward. It is not a religious establishment, but an academic and national one, a secular European state institution, under diplomatic protection. As it had to be clear from the above essay, we Hungarians, have very deep roots in Jerusalem, and we have our rightful place on its historical, scientific, and cultural landscape, like a piece of mosaic among the colorful tesserae pieces of a beautiful scene: In the Living Icon of Jerusalem. We returned in peace with an enormous respect, and we trust that we will be received joyfully.

Jerusalem,
Christmas 2025

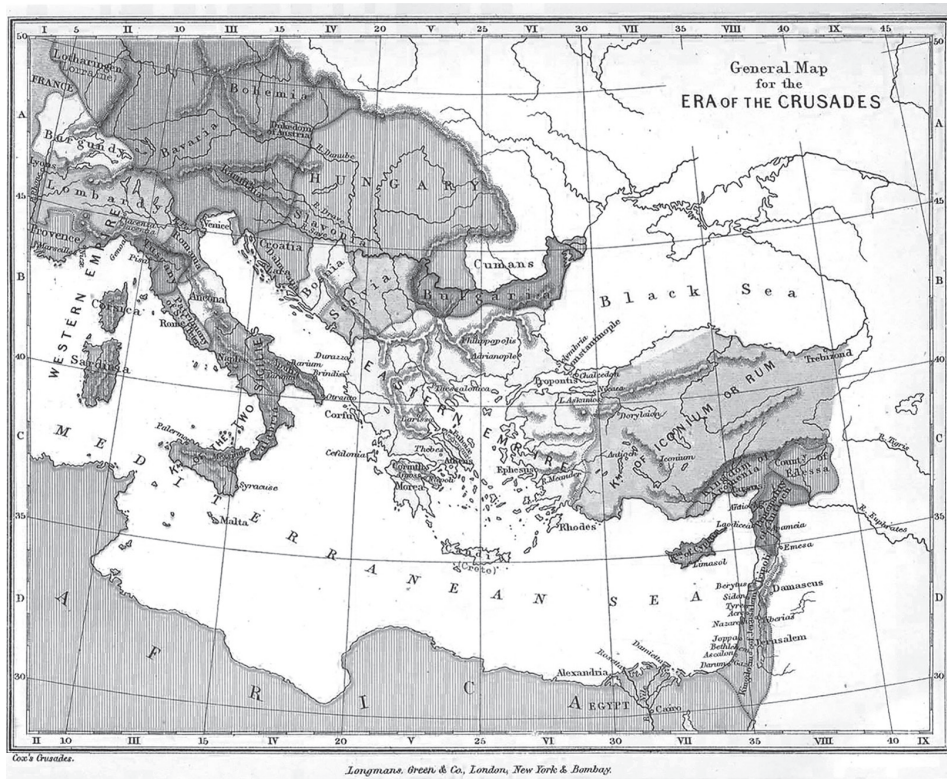


Fig. 2: The peoples of Hungary had two principal pilgrim destinations over the last millennium, throughout our wonderful history: Jerusalem and Rome. In both holy places King St. Stephen (r. 1000-1038) erected churches, monasteries, and pilgrim hospices for the Hungarians during the 1020s. The geographical relations between the Kingdom of Hungary, Jerusalem, and Rome, are clearly observable on the above historical map, which also depicts the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem during the 12th century.



Fig. 3: The ca. 1115-1187 territories of the Latin (Crusader) Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099-1291), superimposed on the current political borders (© Encyclopædia Britannica).



Fig. 4: The Holy Land during the Hasmonean kingdom of the Jerusalem Queen regnant Salome Alexandra (r. 76-67 BC).



Fig. 6: The joint arrival of two Hungarian kings to Jerusalem: King Andrew II (r. 1205–1235) on the left, and Franz Joseph I (r. 1867–1916) on the right. The 1907 anachronistic mosaic scene is decorating the pilgrim-chapel of the former Austro-Hungarian Hospice at the Third Station on the Via Dolorosa, in the Old City of Jerusalem. It has a cryptographic, but straightforward message: The 1869 pilgrimage of Franz Joseph I (the mosaic commemorates the approaching 40th anniversary) was a spiritual continuation and political legacy of the Fifth Crusade (1217–1218) that was led by Andrew II, with his royal entourage. The Hungarian king returned to the Holy Land after 651 years "in the company" of his great predecessor! We may see the unmistakable royal attributes of both sovereigns. King Andrew II wears on his chainmail armor a gold cloak with ermine-collar, his shield is decorated with the Hungarian royal Árpád dynasty's striped coat of arms, and depicts the personal symbols of the monarch: the seven lions with the three hearts. King Franz Joseph I is represented as the Grand Master of the Order of the Golden Fleece, and his kneeling herald is lifting up his two crowns: the Habsburg imperial crown and the Holy Crown of Hungary.

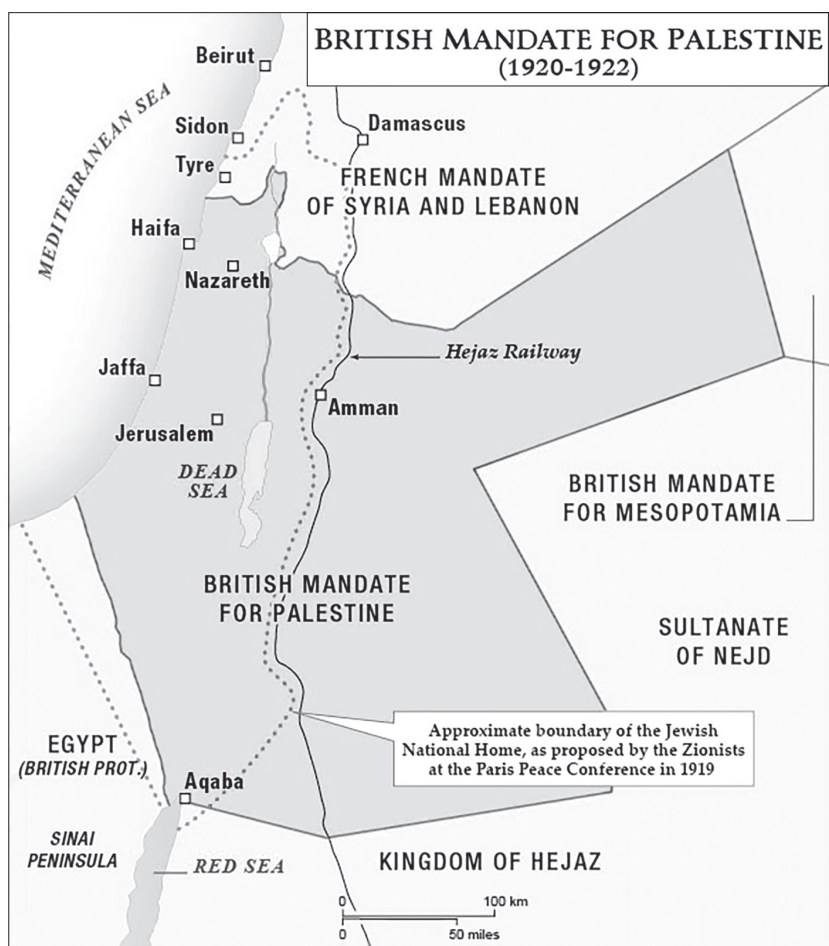


Fig. 7: The British Mandate for Palestine, before its partition by the subsequent political concessions.