



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF FOLKLORE
AND ETHNOMUSICOLOGY
College of Arts and Sciences
Bloomington

Theo Meder, Committee Chair
Linda Dégh Lifetime Achievement Award for Legend Scholarship

March 12, 2021

Dear Awards Committee,

We write to you to enthusiastically nominate Elissa R. Henken for the Linda Dégh Lifetime Achievement Award in Legend Scholarship from the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research. Elissa has dedicated her scholarly career to the study of legendry and has also helped to further the work of the broader community of legend scholars through her longtime service as secretary for ISCLR, ISCLR Conference Coordinator, member of the Brian McConnel Book Award Committee, and member of the David Buchan Student Essay Prize Committee.

Elissa's work is constantly crossing boundaries. Spanning time and space, Elissa is a medieval Welsh specialist who has published extensively on medieval saints legends, Arthurian legends, and legends of Owain Glyndŵr. Moreover, she has also worked on legends of the American Civil War that can be found in her article "Taming the Enemy: Georgian Narratives about the Civil War" (2003) and on contemporary topics such as legends of the Illuminati (2015), gender shifts in contemporary legend (2004), and escalating danger in contemporary legends (2002). She has expanded scholarly understandings of legends as they relate to sexuality, as highlighted in her book *Did You Hear About the Girl Who...? Contemporary Legends, Folklore, and Human Sexuality* (co-authored with Mariamne H. Whatley, 2000) and her article (also with Whatley) "Folklore, Legends, and Sexuality Education," published in the *Journal of Sex Education & Therapy*. Eleanor Wachs writes about this collaboration in *Western Folklore*: "Written by two sisters, one a folklorist and the other a health educator, this book is an excellent example of applied folklore, in which "too good to be true" sexual claims described in contemporary legends are analyzed for their practicality and biological truth" (2002, 119). Wachs continues, "The authors 'want this work to be a model of how two seemingly unrelated fields can connect and inform each other' and in this endeavor they succeed admirably" (119).

In addition to *Did you hear About the Girl Who?* Elissa's authored books include *National Redeemer: Owain Glyndŵr in Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff and Ithaca: University of Wales Press and Cornell University Press, 1996), *The Welsh Saints: A Study in Patterned Lives* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), and *Traditions of the Welsh Saints* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987). Her scholarship has been recognized nationally and internationally with her election to the Fellows of the American Folklore Society and her position as a finalist for the Katherine Briggs Award of the UK Folklore Society.

Elissa has served on multiple editorial boards of folklore publications such as *Medieval Folklore Studies* (for Hisarlik Press, 1997–2000) and the *Journal of American Folklore* (2010–

2014). She has made constant connections with her academic colleagues by presenting regularly at ISCLR annual meetings, annual meetings of the American Folklore Society, and conferences devoted to Celtic studies. Her service to the field of legend studies is unequivocal, highlighted by the many roles she has played in the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research, her organizing work related to legend panels within the American Folklore Society, and her legend presentations at Medieval and Celtic Studies conferences. As a student of Linda Dégh, Elissa has worked hard to constantly bring attention to the importance of legend studies. As such, we think it is entirely appropriate that Elissa be nominated for this award. She is a truly deserving candidate.

Sincerely,

Diane E. Goldstein,
Professor of Folklore, Indiana University

Jesse A. Fivecoate
PhD candidate, Indiana University