

SERENITY FOLLOWS GLOOM

Treasures of the 200-year-old Academy

Exhibition by the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences
From 5 November 2025 to 13 December 2026

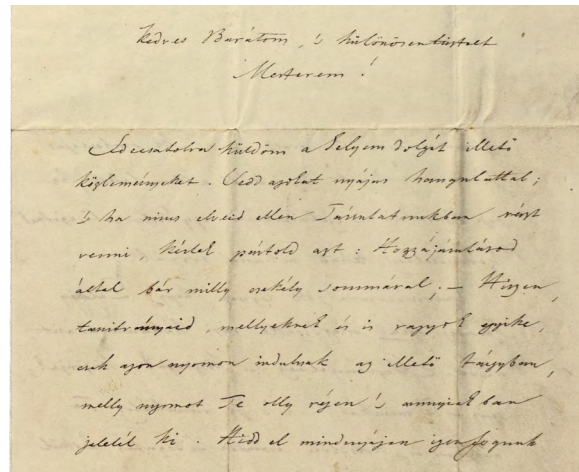
István Széchenyi, Founder of the Hungarian Learned Society

On 3 November 1825, during a session of the Lower House of the Diet in Pozsony (present-day Bratislava), Pál Felsőbüki Nagy, the celebrated spokesman of the reform opposition, delivered a speech described by Dániel Berzsenyi as “scattering thunderbolts”, in which he castigated the aristocracy for its reluctance to make sacrifices for the establishment of a learned society dedicated to the cultivation of the Hungarian language. Such an institution, he argued, was of vital necessity, since, in his words, **“Language is more important even than the constitution. A nation may create a new constitution, but it cannot create a new language, for once it loses its own, it ceases to be Hungarian.”**

Stirred by this address, István Széchenyi, who by birth belonged to the Upper House, rose to speak. Only a few weeks earlier, on 12 October, he had caused a considerable sensation there by delivering his maiden speech in Hungarian – at a time when Latin was still the official language of Hungary (until 1844) and the customary language of debate in the Upper House. On 3 November, Széchenyi made the following pledge:

“Here I have no voice; I am not one of the great men of the nation. But I am a landowner, and if an institution is established which develops the Hungarian language and thereby contributes to the raising of our compatriots as Hungarians, I shall sacrifice the income of one year from my estates.” This moment is generally regarded as marking the birth of the Hungarian Learned Society, later the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS). Széchenyi’s words were received with resounding applause, and, during that same session, three of his aristocratic associates followed his example: Ábrahám Vay, György Károlyi, and György Andrassy. These four men are considered the founding fathers of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

On 8 November 1825, in a solemn declaration addressed to the Palatine and to both Houses of the Diet,



Letter from István Széchenyi to Pál Nagy of Felsőbük, 24 November 1840
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 194/132



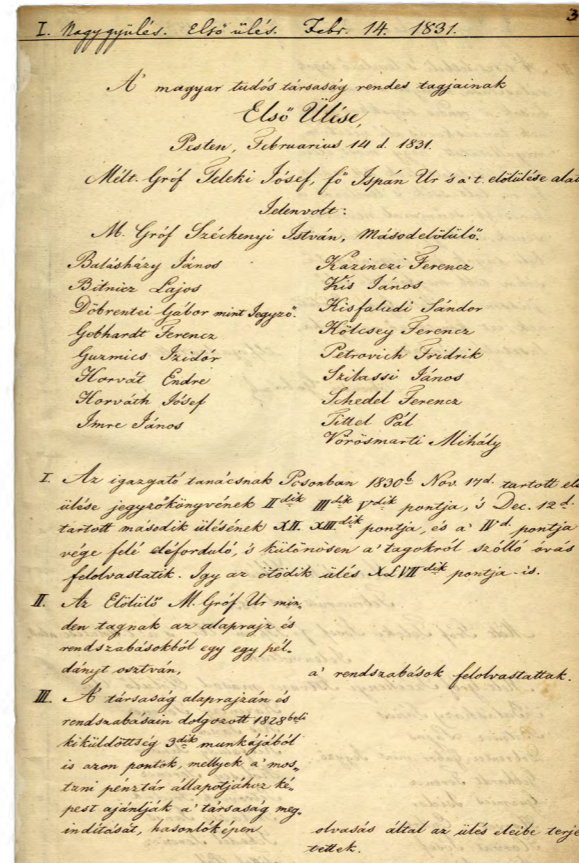
Coat of arms of the HAS, 1831
Steel engraving by Franz Stöber after Johann Ender
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 294/29

be established for the cultivation of the national language,” provided the legal foundation for the Academy’s creation.

On 17 November 1830, the governing council established by the Diet appointed the leadership and membership of the Academy, with István Széchenyi elected vice-president. Lacking its own building, the Learned Society convened its first general assembly on 14 February 1831 in the great hall of the Pest County Hall.

Széchenyi also concerned himself with seemingly minor details. He personally supervised the design of the coat of arms and the seal. The coat of arms depicts a young woman – the goddess of morals tempered by the light of knowledge – holding in her right hand a chalice symbolising humanism, while leading forth the ancient Hungarian nation, represented as an eagle, out of darkness. According to Széchenyi, the model for this figure was his future wife, Crescentia Seilern. The design was executed in drawing and painting by Johann Ender on Széchenyi’s suggestion, while the steel-engraved version was the work of Franz Stöber. The Academy’s motto, inscribed beneath the coat of arms and likewise coined by Széchenyi, reads: **Borúra derű** 1831 (“Serenity Follows Gloom”). With slight modifications, the two figures from the coat of arms were also engraved in topaz on the seal by the cameo-engraver Lajos Pichler.

Through the establishment of the Academy, devoted to the cultivation of the Hungarian language, the century-and-a-half-old aspiration of Hungarian men of letters such as Mátyás Bél, György Bessenyei, and Miklós Révai was at last fulfilled.



Minutes of the first general meeting of the Hungarian Learned Society, 14 February 1831
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 1353

they formally announced their intention to establish a Learned Society. By 21 November, they had already submitted to Palatine Joseph the “founding plans” of the society – that is, its statutes. The Palatine, founder of the “Hungarian branch” of the Habsburg dynasty and a consistent patron of Hungarian causes, gave the initiative his full support and appointed a committee to deliberate on the statutes, in which Széchenyi himself participated. Ultimately, Act XI of 1825–27 declared: **“Out of the capital amassed through voluntary and free donations, a Learned Society, or Hungarian Academy, shall be established.”** Act XI of 1827, **“On the Learned Society, or Hungarian Academy, to**



The HAS’ first rock crystal seal with a chalcedony handle
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Objects 15

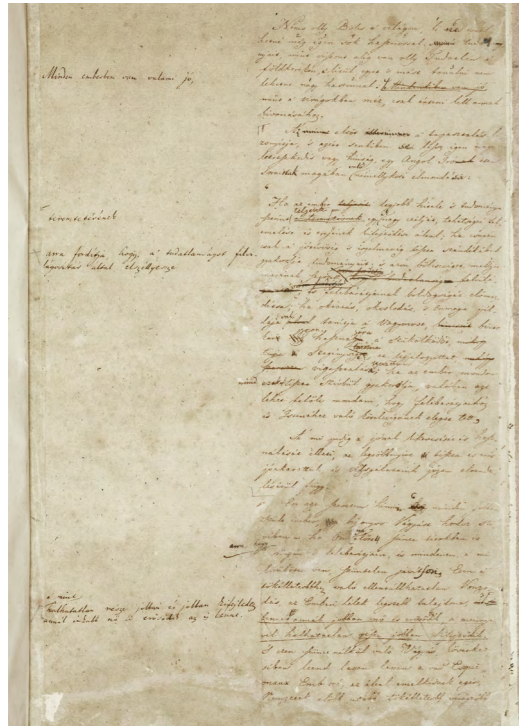
„Credit, Light and Stadium! You three – Not handwritten books,…”

Following the foundation of the Hungarian Learned Society in 1825, Széchenyi continued his reforming activity with extraordinary energy. His travels in Western Europe had convinced him that, in terms of social development, Hungary lagged far behind. Inspired by his journey to Fiume (today Rijeka in Croatia) in 1828, he began to compose *Hitel* (*Credit*), which was published on 28 January 1830. This date constitutes a landmark in Hungarian history and is now generally regarded as the beginning of the Reform Era.

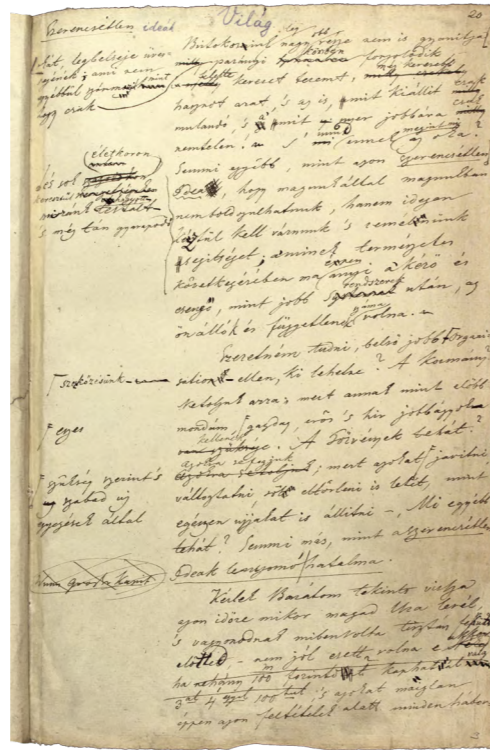
In *Hitel*, Széchenyi sought to answer the question of why the Hungarian landowner nobility was poorer than might be expected given its estates, why it failed to bring prosperity to its economy, and why Hungary lacked commerce. His response to all these problems

was the same: the absence of credit. Széchenyi wished to awaken the nobility to the realisation that its privileges were not only hindering its own advancement, but also impeding the progress of the country as a whole. The central ideas of *Hitel* may be summarised as follows: (1) it exposes the failings of the nobility, (2) it insists that reform is indispensable for national development, and (3) it urges education in self-knowledge.

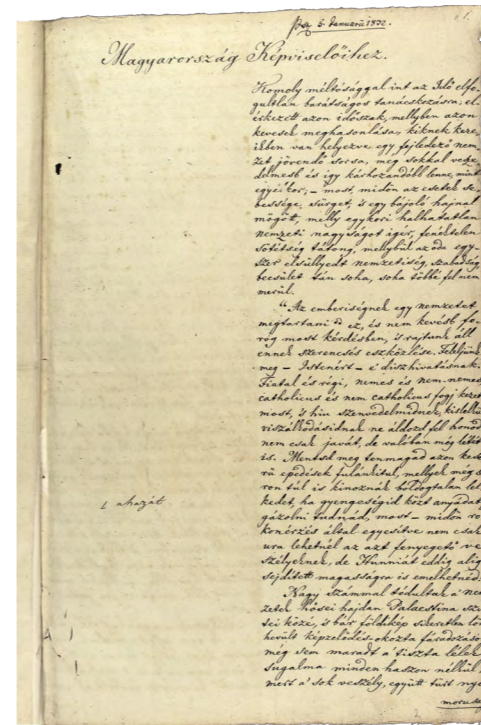
Though he recognised the gravity of the situation, Széchenyi was convinced that these ills could be overcome, and he looked to the future with confidence. The concluding thought of the work became proverbial: “Many believe that Hungary *has been*; I prefer to believe that Hungary *shall be*.”



István Széchenyi: *Credit*. 1830
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 257/1



István Széchenyi: *Light*. 1831
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 260/1



István Széchenyi: *Stadium*. 1831–1836
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 261/3

The impact of *Hitel* was immense: it became a veritable bestseller, published in three Hungarian and three German editions within a year. Ferenc Toldy characterised it aptly: “It was not only a book of genius, but a national deed, one of the greatest events of the century.”

The appearance of *Hitel* brought Széchenyi fierce criticism, the most effective of which came from Count József Dessewffy, a friend of Kazinczy, in his *Examination of the Work Entitled Hitel*. In response, Széchenyi published his polemical treatise *Világ* (*Light* – from the word enlightenment) in Pest on 9 July 1831. In this work, he elaborated in greater detail the principal ideas of *Hitel*, in a passionate and at times sarcastic tone. He stressed in particular the importance of making Budapest – a term he himself employed for the first time – the political and economic centre of the country. Here, too, he set forth for the first time his famous theory concerning *Reason* and *Heart*, which he held must always be distinguished in political life.

In his writings, Széchenyi also sought to provide his nation with moral guidance and a programme for action. Thus, in *Világ*, he declared: “If there is anything that can still raise the homeland to its own happiness, to its Lord’s eternal glory, and to its fitting height, it can be nothing other than *nationality and public enlightenment*.”

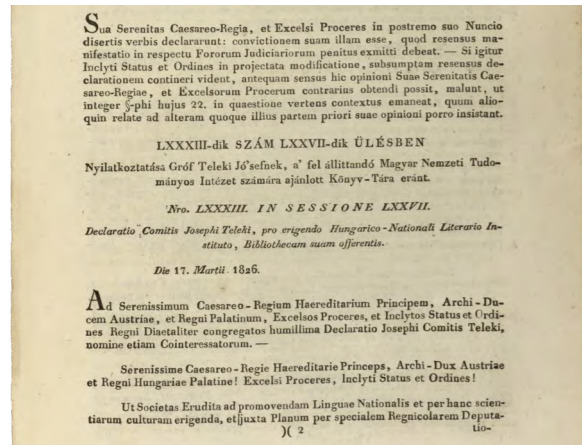
With undiminished energy, Széchenyi continued his work, completing by the end of 1831 the final volume of his trilogy, *Stadium*, which, however, appeared only in 1833. With this work, he sought to demonstrate that, contrary to unfounded accusations, he was capable not only of “destroying” but also of building. He systematised his ideas and proposed twelve legislative measures – using the English term *bill* – for adoption by the Diet. Yet censorship intervened: the printed sheets were confiscated, and the copies produced in Leipzig in 1833 were ordered to be seized. Nevertheless, the diffusion of *Stadium*’s ideas could not be prevented, and its influence proved immense: the reform diets were, in essence, debating Széchenyi’s programme. Increasingly, both the nobility and the nation at large came to recognise that the implementation of Széchenyi’s reforms was in their common interest.

In 1860, upon the death of “the Greatest Hungarian,” János Arany justly described these three works in his ode *In Memory of Széchenyi* as “three books not written by hand.”

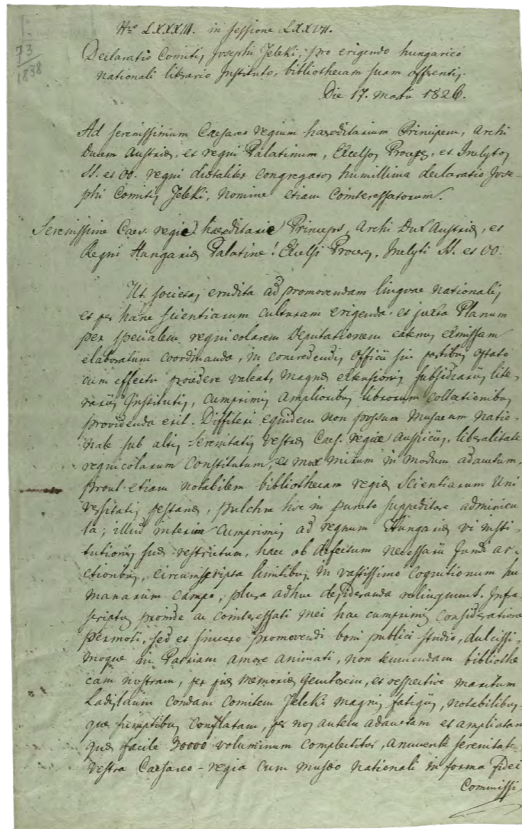


József Teleki, Founder and Benefactor of the Library

The speech and pledge delivered by István Széchenyi on 3 November 1825 not only made a profound impression on the deputies of the Diet but also ignited patriotic enthusiasm throughout the country: men and women alike, according to their talents and means, sought to contribute to the establishment of the Academy. On 21 November 1825, Ábrahám Vay, one of the four founders, had already submitted the draft plan of operation for the Learned Society to the Palatine, which the Diet debated and adopted on 15 March 1826. Two days later, on 17 March, Count József Teleki laid the foundations of the Academy's Library. On behalf of himself and his brothers, he offered to the future "named society and for the use of all citizens of the homeland" the library of some 30,000 volumes inherited from their father, László Teleki. This collection included, among other treasures, 409 incunabula and some 600 volumes of manuscripts. The significance of Teleki's announcement was universally recognised, for it was understood that without a



On behalf of himself and his family, József Teleki offered their library to the Hungarian National Scientific Institute, which was to be established, at the National Assembly of 1825–1827. Pozsony, 17 March 1826. *Acta comitorum Regni Hungariae 1825–1827*. Vol. 1, pp. 281–283
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, 526.739/1



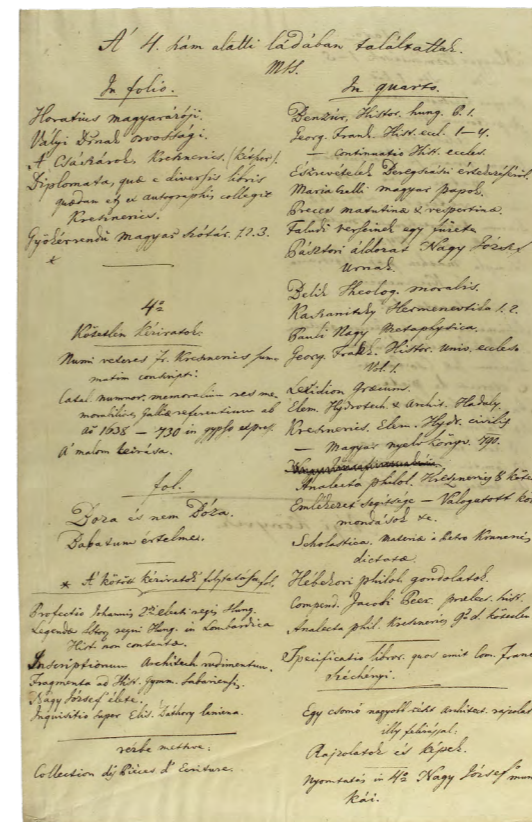
Declaration by József Teleki regarding the donation of the library MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RAL 73/1838

library to provide the requisite scholarly foundation, the Learned Society could not properly fulfil its mission.

In addition to donating the library, József Teleki also established an endowment of 5,000 forints to secure the librarian's annual salary of 300 forints. Since the deed of foundation stipulated that the books could only pass into the possession of the Learned Society once suitable accommodation was available, the Teleki Library remained for nearly two decades in the family's palace on Szervita Square in Pest, and was only formally transferred in 1844. The Library of the Learned Society was opened to the public on 23 December 1844

in its then premises – leased rather than owned – in the Trattner–Károlyi House at today's 3 Petőfi Sándor Street. It was for this occasion that Mihály Vörösmarty composed his celebrated poem *Thoughts in the Library*. The books found their permanent home in 1865, when the Academy's palace was completed.

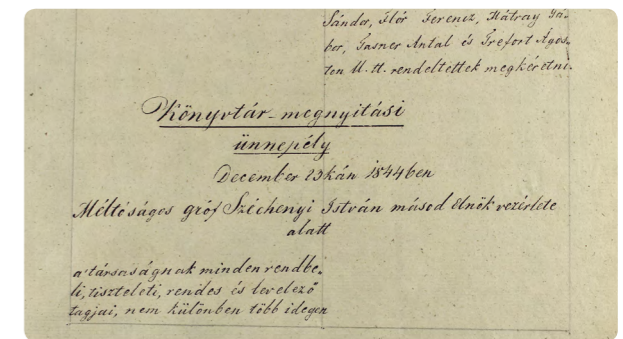
Having laid the foundations of the Learned Society's Library, József Teleki did not cease to expand its holdings. The first scholarly estate to enter the Academy's possession was acquired thanks to his financial sacrifice: in 1834, he purchased for 4,000 forints the library and 7,268-piece coin collection of Ferenc Kresznerics, Catholic priest, lexicographer, and academician. This library



Catalogue of the Kresznerics Library József Teleki purchased the collection of Ferenc Kresznerics (1766–1832), linguist and member of the Academy, for the Academy Library. MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 10.350/c

contained 88 incunabula, 76 volumes of manuscripts, and 1,060 works related to Hungarian literature. The Academy likewise owes to Teleki the acquisition of the collections of Weszerle, József Péczeli, and Imre Jancsó. The proceeds of his own work, *The Age of the Hunyadis in Hungary*, he dedicated to the purposes of the Learned Society, and it was also he who purchased the French and German dictionaries to serve as models for the compilation of the great dictionary of the Hungarian language.

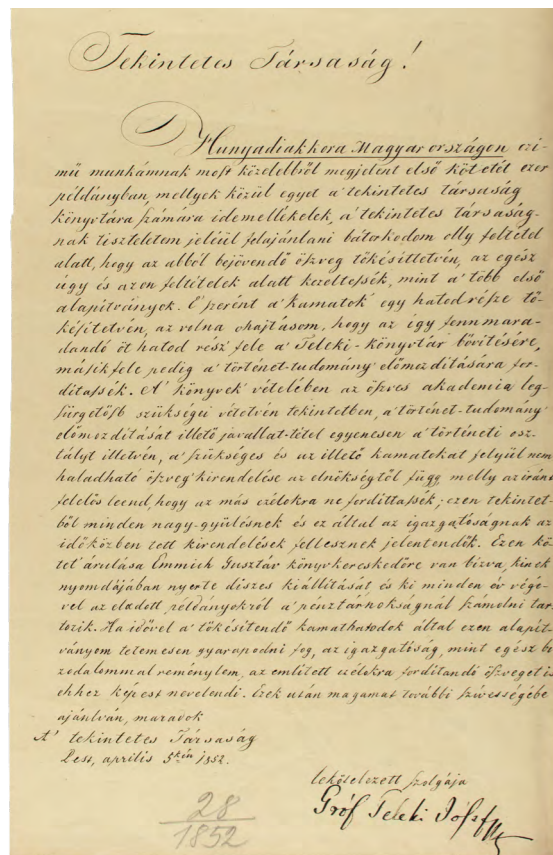
The most valuable of Teleki's donations was a *corvina*: the codex of Ludovicus Carbo, humanist of Ferrara, *Dialogus de Matthiae regis laudibus, rebusque gestis*, which he purchased for the Academy in 1840. In 1841, he presented four further codices: the Salzburg *Lectionarium*; a parchment codex copied between 1450 and 1470 containing the sermons of Pope Leo I (mistakenly identified by Teleki as a *corvina*); a fourteenth-century codex of Justinian's *Institutiones*; and a fifteenth-century codex of Seneca (*Epistolae – Liber de moribus*). Among his many other donations, particular mention must be made, owing to its great value, of a 1485 incunabulum Bible printed in the workshop of Anton Koberger. In 1850, Teleki also donated to the Academy's Library a portion of his own collection, rich in incunabula and *aldines* – the distinguished editions produced in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in the Venetian press of Aldus Manutius.



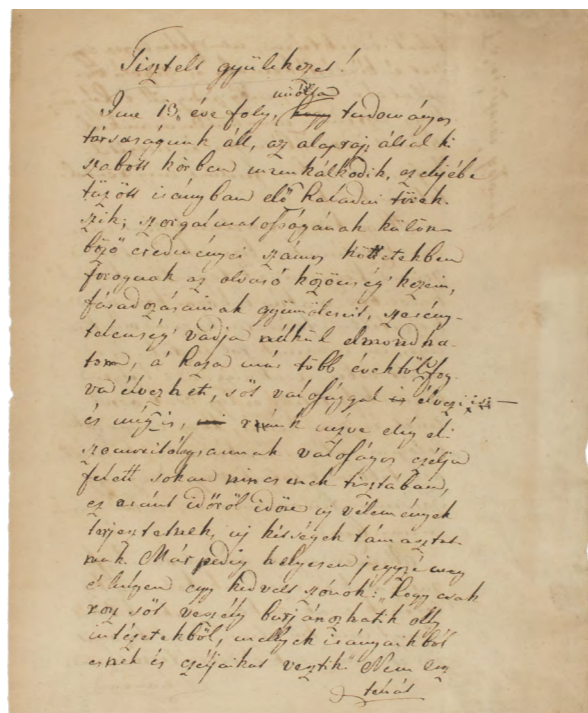
Minutes of the ceremonial opening of the Academy Library Pest, 23 December 1844 MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 1358 fol. 28r

József Teleki, the first President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, a linguist and historian

Following István Széchenyi's pledge of 3 November 1825, negotiations began immediately, with messages exchanged between the Diet, the Palatine, and the King. After two years of preparatory work, on 30 November 1827, Palatine Joseph, patron of the new institution, appointed a preparatory committee to draft the statutes of the Academy. Count József Teleki was elected chairman of this committee, whose members included the four "founding fathers," as well as twenty-two distinguished scholars and writers, among them



Letter from József Teleki announcing the donation of 1,000 copies of the first volume of his work *The Age of the Hunyadis in Hungary* to the Learned Society, 5 April 1852
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RAL 28/1852

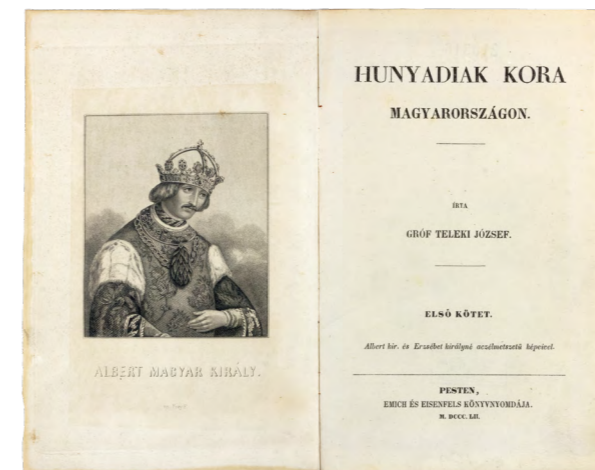


Opening speech by József Teleki as President at the Academy's general assembly, 8 October 1843
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RUI 4r. 206

Ferenc Kazinczy, Sándor Kisfaludy, István Kultsár, Gábor Döbrentei, and József Dessewffy. The statutes were completed by April 1828, and on 17 November 1830, the governing council – comprising the four founders together with representatives of both Houses of the Diet – appointed the Academy's officers and members. József Teleki was elected president, and István Széchenyi vice-president.

From November 1830 until he died in 1855, Teleki served as president of the Academy for twenty-five years. It would have been difficult to find a more suitable figure for this office, for he was a calm and respected statesman, maintained cordial relations with Palatine Joseph, who represented Vienna, and had already held

many important political positions: from 1827, he was chief bailiff of Csanád County, and from 1830 of Szabolcs County. He also played a leading role in the life of the Reformed Church, being elected in 1824 as chief curator of the Tiszamellék Reformed Diocese. In addition, he was an acknowledged and distinguished scholar. He pursued his studies in Kolozsvár (Cluj), in Pest, and between 1812 and 1814 at the University of Göttingen. His scholarly career began as a linguist: he twice won the prestigious István Marczibányi Prize. In 1817, in his linguistic-theoretical work *On the Perfecting of the Hungarian Language through New Words and New Modes of Expression*, he argued for the necessity of language reform, yet – characteristically moderate – he never ignored the unique character of the language or the importance of historical considerations. His next treatise, *On the Purpose and Method of Compiling a Complete Hungarian Dictionary*, was published in 1821. The principles expounded therein served as the foundation for the great dictionary of the Hungarian language, the Czuczor–Fogarasi Dictionary: “In preparing a dictionary for the Hungarian language, we may indeed employ as standard the labours of other nations in many respects, but we cannot bind ourselves slavishly to them;



József Teleki: *The Age of the Hunyadis in Hungary*. First volume. Pest, 1852
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, 527.391

for we must always take into account the peculiar character, history, condition, and needs of our language.” A statement that retains its validity even today.

As a historian, he likewise made enduring contributions. Beginning in 1825, he undertook an intensive study of the age of the two Hunyadis, gathering and examining an immense corpus of documentary sources. His greatest scholarly enterprise was his monumental historical work, *The Age of the Hunyadis in Hungary*, planned in twelve volumes. The first volume appeared in 1852. During his lifetime, he published a total of five volumes, but the work ultimately remained unfinished.

He also excelled as an organiser of scholarship. In 1833, to secure opportunities for his colleagues to publish their research, he and others launched the journal *Tudománytár* (“Scope of Knowledge”).

Teleki was not only a generous benefactor of the Academy's Library, but of the Academy itself. In his will of 14 June 1854, he established an endowment of 12,000 forints to reward dramatic works. The Teleki Prize was awarded annually by the Academy, alternating between tragedy and comedy, each rewarded with 100 gold coins.

József Teleki never founded a family of his own; for him, the Academy was his family, to which he devoted – and ultimately sacrificed – his all.



The Teleki stamp marking the founding collection and the first seal of the Academy Library, 1836
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection

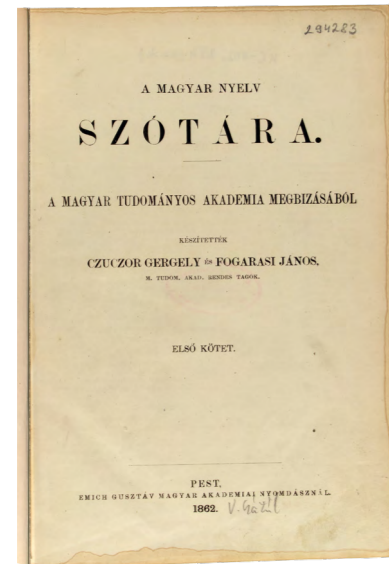
“Above all, it is the duty of this Society to cultivate and enrich the national language.”

In Hungary, until 1844, the language of legislation, the Church, and education was Latin. Consequently, the Hungarian vocabulary had not sufficiently expanded, and the language proved ill-suited for the formulation of scientific texts without recourse to Latinisms. This recognition gave rise to the language reform movement. In the first half of the nineteenth century, it also became clear that the preservation of national consciousness and independence depended above all upon the mother tongue. The question of the Hungarian language, therefore, came to occupy the centre of cultural and political struggles, and it was for this cause that the reform opposition fought for the establishment of a learned society devoted to its cultivation. Thus, §1 of the *Statutes* declared: “The Hungarian Learned Society shall devote its efforts exclusively to the cultivation of the national language in every branch of science and belles-lettres.”

Among the most urgent tasks, the Learned Society first codified and regulated Hungarian orthography. The

first official set of spelling rules, *The Principal Rules of Hungarian Orthography and Word Formation*, following the morphemic principles of Miklós Révai, was published in 1832, shaped into final form by Mihály Vörösmarty.

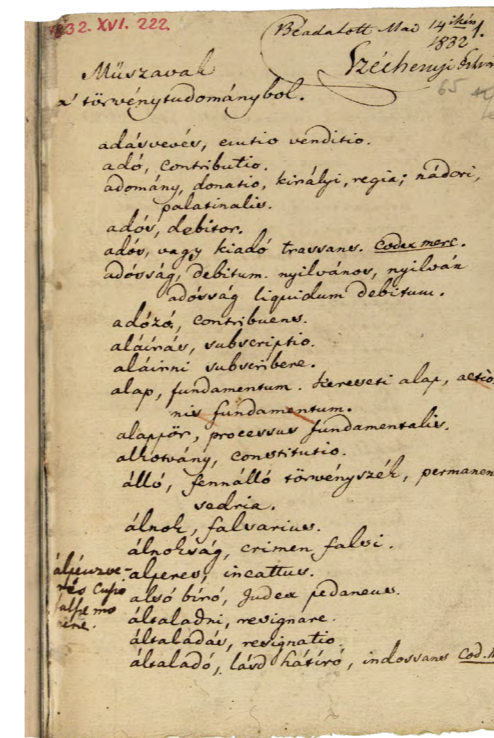
This was followed in 1834 by the Academy’s grammar, *The System of the Hungarian Language*. Already, the first General Assembly of 1831 had decreed “the preparation of a complete Hungarian Grammar and of a dictionary as comprehensive as possible.” The committee appointed to supervise the work on the great dictionary of the Hungarian language designated Vörösmarty and Ferenc Toldy to study foreign models, but they recommended József Teleki’s 1821 treatise, *On the Purpose and Method of Compiling a Complete Hungarian Dictionary* as a prototype. According to this concept, the dictionary was to include not only contemporary standard vocabulary, but also archaic words, scientific and technical terminology, and regional dialectal expressions. It soon be-



Gergely Czuczor – János Fogarasi: *Dictionary of the Hungarian Language*. Volume 1. Pest, 1862
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, 294.283



Hungarian Dialect Dictionary. Published by the Hungarian Learned Society. Printed in Buda by the Hungarian Royal University, 1838
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, 522.453



Ferenc Kölcsey: *Technical Terms from Jurisprudence*. Submitted by István Széchenyi on 14 May 1832
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 698/2. 65–79

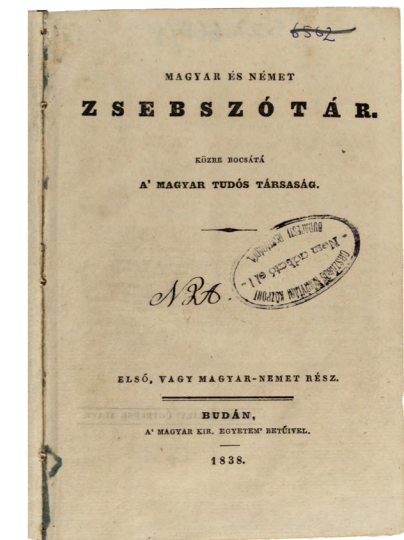
came apparent, however, that the compilation of such a dictionary was impossible, and in 1834 it was resolved that archaic words, professional terminology, and dialectal expressions should be published in separate volumes. The Academy, therefore, required all six of its sections to collect the specialised vocabulary of their disciplines. As a result, technical dictionaries were produced: the philosophical and mathematical dictionaries in 1834, the legal dictionary in 1847. In 1838, the first Hungarian dialect dictionary was published, to which Vörösmarty contributed the lion’s share. Obsolete, archaic words were likewise collected, for the Society considered it preferable to revive ancient vocabulary rather than to force upon the language awkward and irregularly formed neologisms.

Since it was evident that the great dictionary could only be realised through many years of labour, in 1831,

István Széchenyi urged the compilation of a pocket dictionary. The editors Vörösmarty and Toldy, together with their collaborators, proceeded swiftly: the Society’s *Pocket Dictionary* – a German–Hungarian dictionary – appeared in 1835, followed by the Hungarian–German dictionary in 1838.

Work on the six-volume great dictionary was begun in 1845 by Gergely Czuczor and János Fogarasi. Progress was slow, particularly because Czuczor was imprisoned in Kufstein after the publication in December 1848 of his poem *Alarm (Riadó)* in Lajos Kossuth’s newspaper *Hírlap*. The first volume appeared in 1861. Czuczor’s death in 1866 left Fogarasi to complete the work alone, which he did in 1874.

Among the Academy’s philological undertakings, special mention must be made of the series *Old Relics of the Hungarian Language (Régi Magyar Nyelvmélekek)*, four volumes of which were published between 1838 and 1846 under the editorship of Gábor Döbrentei, the first secretary of the Learned Society.



Hungarian and German Pocket Dictionary. First part (Hungarian–German). Published by the Hungarian Learned Society. Printed in Buda by the Hungarian Royal University, 1838
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, 522.665

Hungarian Language Relics and Codices

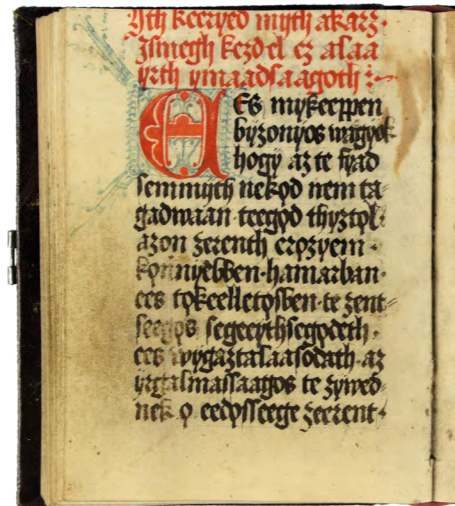


The Érsekújvári Codex
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 45

“Since many treasures of our language lie concealed in ancient manuscripts,” already at its third general assembly in 1832 – only a year after the first, held on 14 February 1831 – the Academy ordered the collection and transcription of old Hungarian manuscripts. Thanks to patriotic enthusiasm and a strong culture of donation, the Library of the Academy today holds one of the most significant Hungarian codex collections in the country, comprising 114 items. At the weekly session of 10 April 1833, on the proposal of Mihály Vörösmarty, it was also resolved to publish the language monuments in philological editions, so that linguists could trace the historical development of the Hungarian language.

After resigning from his post as secretary in 1835, Gábor Döbrentei devoted his life primarily to the publication of these linguistic relics. He travelled extensively throughout the country, conducting research in some sixty archives, and discovered numerous previously unknown monuments of the Hungarian language, among them the *Döbrentei Codex*, which now bears his name, and the Hungarian-language will of Bálint Balassi. The first volume of the series *Old Relics of the Hungarian Language (Régi Magyar Nyelvmélekek)* appeared in 1838 under his editorship. Döbrentei set the chronological boundary at the year 1550; only texts composed before that date were included in the series. This constituted the first large-scale collection and publication of Hungarian textual monuments. Döbrentei is regarded as the father of modern Hungarian philological editions, and his editorial principles remain valid to this day.

In the course of this collecting and editorial work, and again thanks to patriotic generosity, eight of the nine Hungarian codices preserved in our collections



The Czech Codex
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 42



Ferenc Wathay's songbook
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 62

today were donated to the Academy. These formed the nucleus of the earliest codex collection, known as *Magyar Codexek (Hungarian Codices)*, which now comprises 84 items.

Here, only four codices can be briefly discussed.

The most richly illustrated and most extensive codex is the large-format, 600-folio *Érsekújvár Codex*, a compilation of gospels, sermons, meditations, exempla, and legends, copied between 1529 and 1531 on the Margaret Island by five Dominican nuns, most of the work being executed by Márta Sövényházi.

The *Czech Codex* was prepared in 1513 in the Pauline monastery at Nagyvázsony for Benigna Magyar, wife of Pál Kinizsi. It is a lavishly ornamented prayer book, containing Hungarian adaptations of Latin prayers, and is adorned with numerous decorated initials. It was discovered in 1833 by János Czech in the library of the Franciscan friars of Érsekújvár, from whom it takes its

name. Both the *Érsekújvár* and *Czech Codices* exemplify the spirit of patriotic donation: through the mediation of Antal Reguly, both manuscripts were presented to the Academy by Pantaleo Golessényi, Franciscan provincial of Érsekújvár. Unfortunately, during later restoration, both manuscripts were heavily trimmed.

The *Kriza Codex*, which contains three prayers, is noteworthy for its rich decoration. This prayer book was copied in 1532 by Pál Garay, a Dominican friar, for the Dominican nuns. It received its name from the ethnographer and Unitarian bishop János Kriza, at whose suggestion the Academy purchased it in 1853.

The *Nagyenyed Codex* was originally preserved in the library of the College of Nagyenyed. Having survived the terrible devastation wrought in 1849 by the Romanian insurgents led by the priest Axente Sever, it was transferred to the Academy in 1860. Though largely in Latin, it contains the oldest known Hungarian *csizió* (liturgical calendar).

Ferenc Wathay, captain of a fortress, was captured by the Ottomans and imprisoned in Constantinople between 1603 and 1605. During his captivity in Galata, he composed his autobiography and a cycle of songs, which he richly illustrated with watercolours. His songbook was donated to the Academy in 1842.



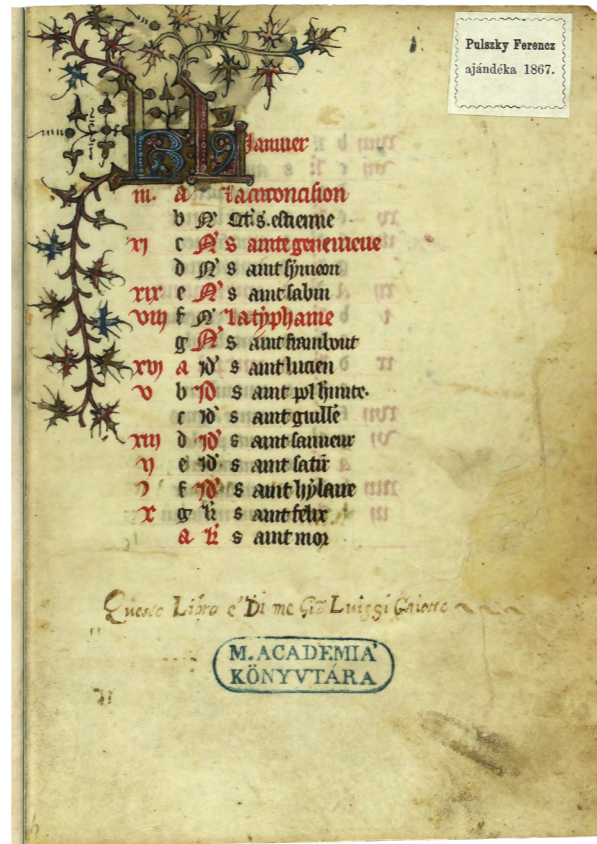
The Kriza Codex
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 47

The Age of Latin Codices

With the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476, Antiquity came to an end, and the Middle Ages began, during which Europe sank into what contemporaries later perceived as barbarism. For the next five centuries, literacy was almost exclusively the privilege of the clergy. Not only laypeople, but often rulers themselves could neither read nor write. Charlemagne, the "Father of Europe," whose reign saw the flourishing of the Carolingian Renaissance, was able to read, but his



Horarium Biturigense (Bourges Book of Hours), Jean Colombe's workshop, 1485–1490
Gift of Ferenc Pulszky, 1867
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 429



Horarium (Latin breviary), circa 1400, France
Gift of Ferenc Pulszky, 1867
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 404

writing ability extended no further than signing his own name. Demand for books was limited, and it was met by monks working in the scriptoria of monasteries. They copied onto parchment – and later paper – the works of Greco-Roman classical authors, the Bible, and the writings of Christian thinkers. The survival of classical culture is owed to their efforts, since the texts of Antiquity have reached us in their medieval manuscript copies. The handwritten books of the Middle Ages are known as codices.

The Codex Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences consists of two main groups: Latin and Hungarian codices. The Latin section currently preserves 112 Latin codices and 13 fragments of Greek codices, the latter having entered the collection from the estate of Gyula Moravcsik, the world-renowned Byzantinist.

The collection has grown primarily through donations. The first and most valuable items were gifts from József Teleki, the library's founder: in 1840, he presented the Academy with an original corvina, the *Dialogus de Matthiae regis laudibus, rebusque gestis* – also



Biblia Latina, 13th century, France
Gift of Ferenc Pulszky, 1867
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 396



Fragment of Konrad Kyeser's work *Bellifortis*. Sigismund of Luxembourg, King of Hungary, depicted as Helios.
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 465

known as the Carbo Codex. In 1841, four further corvinas followed.

For their beauty and rich illumination, the gifts of Ferenc Pulszky – archaeologist, politician, and director of the Hungarian National Museum – must be noted. In 1867, he presented the Academy with a thirteenth-century French Bible, a fifteenth-century excerpt from Plutarch, and two richly illuminated French Books of Hours. Of the latter, the *Horarium Biturigense* (Book of Hours of Bourges), produced around 1485 in the workshop of Jean Colombe, one of the most celebrated French illuminators, contains thirty-five full-page framed miniatures. (Jean Colombe, incidentally, completed what is

perhaps the most famous codex in the world, the *Très Riches Heures* of the Limbourg brothers, originally begun for the Duke of Berry.)

In 1893, Ármin Vámbéry, the noted Orientalist, donated to the Academy eight leaves from *Bellifortis*, a work by the physician Konrad Kyeser of Eichstätt (c. 1366–1405). The leaves, depicting eight planets, had been brought from Constantinople with the permission of the Ottoman sultan, and had most likely ended up there after the dispersal of the Corvina Library in 1526.

The largest single enrichment of the codex holdings is associated with Count Ferenc Vigyázó, who in 1928 bequeathed his entire estate to the Academy, including his bibliophile library of 17,000 volumes. This collection contained seventy-three codices – thirty-four in Latin, thirty-four in Italian, four in German, and one in Dutch – among them several lavishly decorated Books of Hours.



Breviarium (missal), 1440–1450, Vienna–Klosterneuburg Codex made for the Augustinian canons of Klosterneuburg. Gift of Ferenc Vigyázó, 1928
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 419



Zára Prayer Book, circa 1071–1085
This prayer book from the Benedictine convent of the Virgin Mary in Zára is the oldest codex in the collection.
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 394

More recently, in 1998, István Borzsák, classical philologist and member of the Academy, donated to the Manuscript Collection a fifteenth-century *Breviarium Romanum* on parchment, decorated with hand-painted initials, in memory of his late wife.

There are, however, pieces in the collection whose provenance is unknown. Such is the case with the library's oldest codex, the *Zára Prayer Book*. Written between 1071 and 1085 in the convent of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Benedictine nuns in Zadar, it is copied in Beneventan script. Yet how, when, and from where it came into the Manuscript Collection remains a mystery. It was first recorded in the manuscript catalogue of the Library compiled between 1876 and 1891.

The Rohonc Codex

The most mysterious item in the Manuscript Collection is the Rohonc Codex, a true rarity. Alongside the Voynich Manuscript, held at Yale University's Beinecke Library in the USA, it is one of the world's few undeciphered codices. This paper codex originated from Rohonc (today Rechnitz in Burgenland, Austria), from the library of the Batthyány family's castle, and entered the Academy Library's collection in 1838. Since then, it has fascinated both researchers and laypeople alike.

Attempts to decipher it have confounded computer scientists and cryptographers as much as linguists. We do not know what language it is written in, who wrote it, or when and where. It is also unclear whether it is written in a natural language or in some form of cypher. Today, scholars generally agree that the text should be read right to left, because the right margins are unusually straight, suggesting that lines were started from that side.

European alphabets typically have around 40 letters. The Hungarian alphabet has 40 Latin letters, and the extended version (x, y, w, q) has 44 letters. The Rohonc Codex uses just over 100 symbols, but this alone



does not prove that it is not a natural language, since Eastern languages use far more symbols; a literate Chinese person knows roughly 3,500–4,000 characters. Some believe the codex is a forgery. If so, it would be a very careful one, since the watermark shows that 16th century Venetian paper was used. Others attribute it to Sámuel Literáti Nemes (1796–1842), a known forger. Literáti Nemes contributed many charters and books to the National Széchényi Library, earning him the nickname "the library's third founder". However, he also produced a few forged "Árpád-era" charters. It is unlikely, though, that he would have had the patience and perseverance to fill 448 pages – the length of the Rohonc Codex – since this would require an enormous amount of time and labour.

The content of the codex remains unknown, but it contains 57 primitive pen drawings, many of which suggest religious themes, including Old and New Testament references, indicating that it may be a sacred text.

Many attempts have been made to decipher it; its language has been proposed as Sumerian, ancient Hungarian, Daco-Roman, or ancient Vedic. None of these hypotheses has withstood scrutiny.

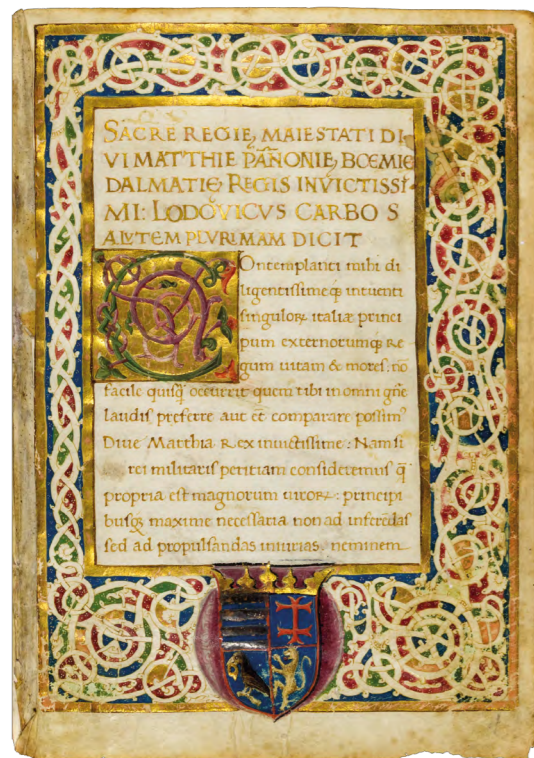


The Rohonc Codex
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 114

The Carbo Codex

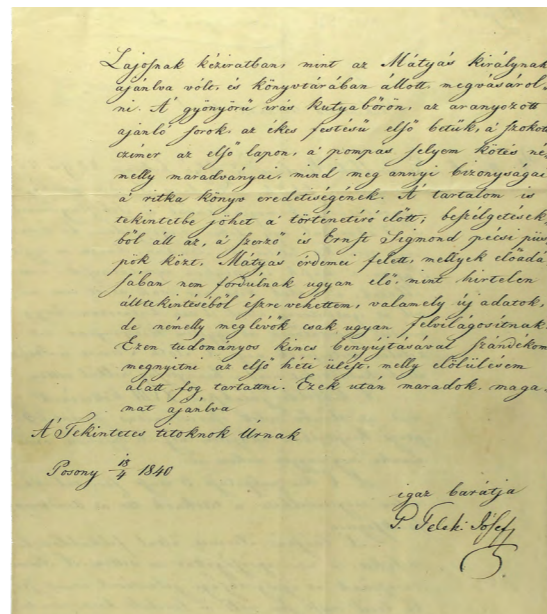
The year 1473 is a landmark in Hungarian cultural history. In that year, Andreas Hess printed the *Chronica Hungarorum*, the first book printed in Hungary, at the country's first printing press in Buda. Hess had come from Rome at the invitation of László Karai, the provost of Óbuda.

Approximately twenty years had passed since Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press and published Europe's first printed book. Hess's printing workshop was the fourth of its kind in Europe, following those in Germany, Italy, and France. King Matthias Corvinus immediately recognised the significance of this new invention and made use of it. This was by

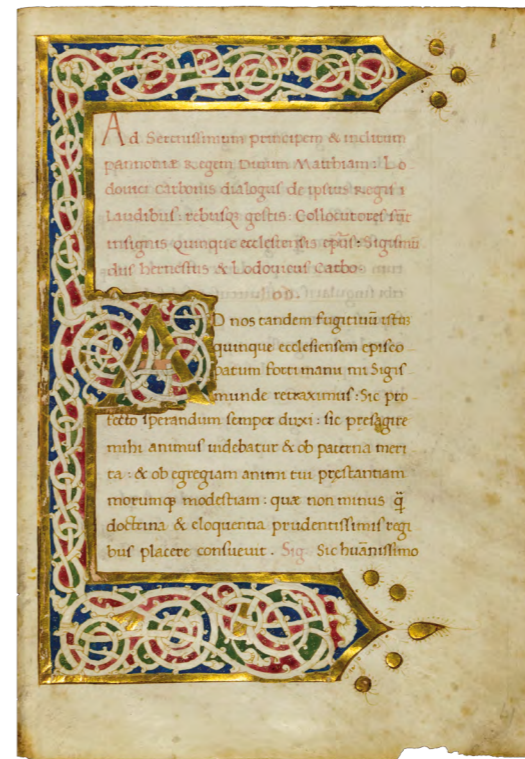


Ludovicus Carbo: *Dialogus de Matthiae regis laudibus...* Ferrara, Italy, circa 1473–1475
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 397

no means a foregone conclusion: for instance, his contemporary Federico da Montefeltro, the Duke of Urbino known from Piero della Francesca's portraits, did not admit a single printed book into his library, and in 1483 Sultan Bayezid II banned printing throughout the Ottoman Empire. For a time, manuscript-copying workshops and printing presses coexisted. Matthias maintained four scribes continuously in Florence to copy codices for his famous library, the *Bibliotheca Corviniana*. After the Pope, Matthias possessed the second-largest library in Europe, estimated at around 2,500 corvinas. Historical upheavals (1526, 1541) dispersed this rich collection. Today, 216 codices considered authentic survive, held across 49 libraries in 43 cities in 16 countries. The Academy Library owns one of these, the so-called Carbo



Letter from József Teleki to Ferenc Toldy, Pozsony, 18 April 1840. On the donation of the corvina codex *Dialogus de Matthiae regis laudibus...* by Ludovicus Carbo to the Academy Library.
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RAL 3/1840

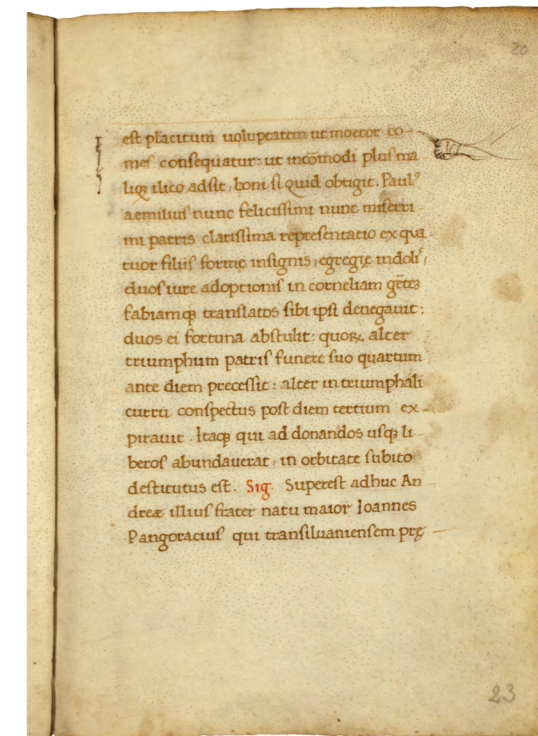


Codex, purchased in 1840 by Count József Teleki, the first president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The Carbo Codex is a parchment manuscript produced in Ferrara between 1473 and 1475. It is named after its author, Ludovicus Carbo, an Italian humanist known today mainly from literary lexicons; Carbo's own corrections in the manuscript further increase its value.

The codex presents a dialogue between two figures discussing the deeds of King Matthias. Ludovicus Carbo, writing in Latin, was a student of Janus Pannonius at Guarino Veronese's famous Ferrara school and reportedly jealous of Janus, who was more talented and widely known across Europe. The other participant is Zsigmond Ernuszt, who studied under Carbo in Ferrara until the end of 1473 and returned to Hungary to serve as Bishop of Pécs from 1473 to 1505, succeeding Janus Pannonius, who had held that bishopric from 1459 to 1472.

The choice of these two figures is hardly coincidental. It seems clear that King Matthias sought revenge against Janus Pannonius, who had fallen out of favour after the 1471 conspiracy in which he was implicated, by carefully selecting these participants. The codex itself supports this interpretation: "I regard as all the more reprehensible, condemnable, and accursed the depravity and wickedness of our prelates, who, elevated to high office and dignity by King Matthias, ungratefully deserted him and sought to stir up rebellion in his peaceful realm. For this reason, with the most just cause, our king's anger flared against your Italians, from whom our countrymen had learned such vile principles, and it was barely restrained from declaring by law that Hungarians should no longer go to Italy for their education."

Over time, Matthias softened toward the rebels and eventually released them, but Janus did not live to see this: he fell ill while fleeing and died in Dalmatia.



The first decades of book printing

With the rise of the bourgeoisie, the demand for reading and for books increased significantly. The monastic scriptoria, where the copying of a single text could take years, were no longer able to meet this challenge. It was Johannes Gutenberg's invention – printing with movable type – that could satisfy the needs of a mass readership. Around 1456, Gutenberg completed his principal work, the 42-line Bible, the Latin *Vulgate*. According to present knowledge, some 200 copies were produced in two volumes, of which around 40 have survived. The first volume contains 324 pages, the second 317. The Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences possesses one leaf from the 641-page work, containing



Justin: *Epitomae in Trogi Pompeii historias*, Rome, 1470
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Inc. 415

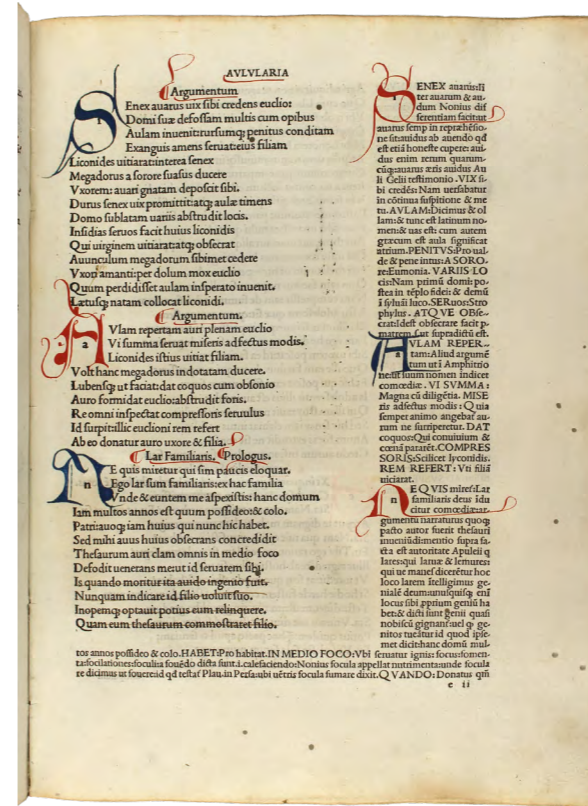


János Thuróczy: *Chronica Hungarorum* (Augsburg, 3 June 1488. Printed by Erhard Ratdolt, commissioned by Theobald Feger.)

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Inc. 843

Jeremiah 31:9. This leaf was donated in 1921 by Gabriel Wells, a bibliophile bookseller born in Hungary who had made his fortune in the United States. Wells purchased a defective copy of the Bible and sold it off leaf by leaf.

Printers sought to convince buyers that the printed book could be as beautiful as the codex. They therefore imitated codices, leaving blank spaces for initials, which were subsequently drawn in by hand. For some time, the two book cultures coexisted: the printed book and the handwritten codex. Today, we witness a cultural



Plautus: *Comoediae*, Venice, 1499
Gift of Marianne Rozsondai and Béla Rozsondai

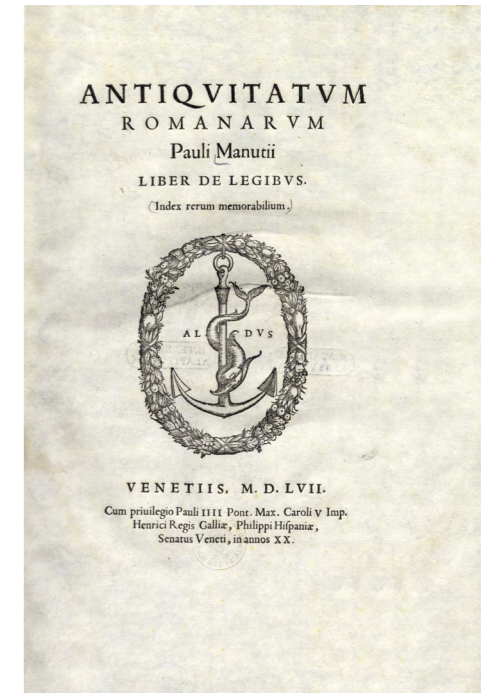
paradigm shift analogous to that of Gutenberg's age: then, the codex and the printed book stood side by side; now, the printed and the digital book. The printed book strove to evoke the illusion of the codex; the digital book, in turn, evokes that of the printed.

Codices were imitated with such mastery that often only a trained eye can detect whether one is looking at a manuscript or a printed book. A fine example is the *editio princeps* of Justinus, printed in Rome in 1470. The work of the Roman historian Marcus Junianus Justinus, *Epitomae in Trogi Pompeii historias*, is of special significance in that the universal history of Pompeius Trogus is lost, surviving only in Justinus's epitome. A second edition, printed in Augsburg in the press of Erhard Ratdolt and dedicated to King Matthias,

appeared on the commission of Theobald Feger, book-seller of Buda.

Few enriched the culture of the book to the extent of Aldus Manutius, the Venetian printer, humanist, and scholar. He introduced the pocket-sized book, italic type, and pagination. His works, the celebrated *aldines*, are masterpieces of exquisite beauty.

In 2025, our collection of rare books was significantly enriched. Marianne Rozsondai, former head of the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books (1997–2010), together with her husband Béla Rozsondai – the authors of the world-class catalogue of incunabula published in 2013 – purchased and donated sixty incunabula and three antiquarian prints to the department. Not since the bequest of Ferenc Vigyázó in 1928 had the collection grown on such a scale. Among the treasures of the Rozsondai Collection is a magnificent Venetian edition of Plautus printed in 1499, of which only one other copy exists in Hungary.



Aldus Manutius' printer's mark

The Beginning of Writing in the Hungarian Language



Benedek Komjáti: *The Epistles of Saint Paul in Hungarian* Kraków, Hieronymus Vietor, 1533

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RM I 8r 413

After the closure of András Hess's press in Buda, the second printing house in Hungary, the country remained without an operational press for approximately half a century. Domestic demand for books was met by foreign printing houses.

During the Middle Ages and the humanist period, Latin served as the language of scholarship, while the Reformation sought to make the Bible accessible in the vernacular for every nation. In terms of vernacular usage, Hungary lagged, as in Bohemia and Portugal, early printing already occurred in Czech and Portuguese. In Hungary, however, it was not until 1533 that the first entirely Hungarian-language book appeared: the Erasmus Bible translation by Benedek Komjáti.

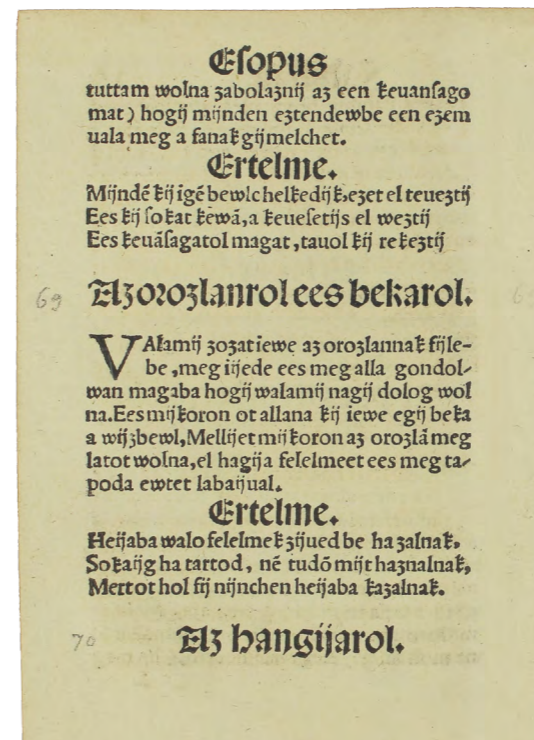
Komjáti's *Az Zenth Paal leveley magyar nyelven* ("The Letters of Saint Paul in Hungarian") was published in Kraków at the expense of Katalin Frangepán, widow of Gábor Perényi, chief bailiff of Ugocsa County, for her son János. Komjáti served as János Perényi's tutor and translated the letters of Saint Paul at the Perényi family's castle, Nyalábvár (Királyháza). This event marked a new era in Hungarian literature: Latin was replaced by Hungarian as a literary language.

Hungarian-language book production was primarily handled by printing houses in Kraków and Vienna. In Kraków, the most notable printer was Hieronymus Vietor (Jeromos Vietor), who published Komjáti's work. In Vienna, Johannes Singrenius produced the majority of Hungarian-language books.

The first book originally composed in Hungarian, rather than translated from a foreign language, was the catechetical disputation of the Protestant church writer Imre Ozorai, *Az Cristusrul és az ű egyházárul, esmét az Antichristusrul és az ű egyházárul* ("On Christ and His Church, and on the Antichrist and His Church"), published in Kraków in 1535 at the expense of Katalin Frangepán.

Singrenius also printed the New Testament – specifically, the four Gospels – in 1536: *Novum Testamentum seu quattuor Evangeliorum volumina lingua Hungarica donata*. The translator was once again an Erasmus humanist, Gábor Pesthy (Pesti, Pesti Mizsér).

Pesthy's other translation, *Esopus Fabulái* (Aesop's Fables), appeared in 1538. In the Latin preface, he argued passionately for the use of Hungarian: "When I see that nearly every person, almost every nation on earth, abounds in a marvelous multitude of translations, and diligently labors throughout the world to enhance the glory of their homeland and to refine and enrich both the language and intellect of their people, why should it not be permitted for me as well – to what



Gábor Pesti: *Aesopi Phrygis fabulae...* Vienna, 1536

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RM I 8r 348

extent I am able – to refine the language and intellect of my own people with the wisdom of the ancients, and to labor for the homeland, to which we are indebted once and for all?"

After the Battle of Mohács, the Protestants were the first to recover, and the domestic printing houses came under their control. In the absence of a strong central authority, the Hungarian nobility became the primary patrons of culture.

The first book printed entirely in Hungarian, in Hungary, appeared in 1541 at Sárvár-Újsziget, on the estate of Chief Justice Tamás Nádasdy, with his support. Nádasdy had established the press following the encouragement of János Sylvester, an Erasmus humanist educated in Kraków. The translation was undertaken by Sylvester, while the printer was Benedek Abádi.

Sylvester recognised that it was possible to compose quantitative verse in Hungarian; the first Hungarian quantitative verse appears in the preface to his New Testament translation: *Az magyar népnek, ki ezt olvassa...* ("To the Hungarian people, who read this...")

Thus, two aristocratic centres – Sárvár and Nyalábvár – and three Erasmus scholars laid the foundations for Hungarian-language printed literature.

Later, Miklós Misztótfalusi Kis further developed Hungarian printing. His fame rests on the exceptional quality of his printed works. Among his masterpieces is the printing of the New Testament in Hungarian, translated by Gáspár Károli, published in Amsterdam in 1687.



Miklós Misztótfalusi Kis: *The New Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. Amsterdam, 1687

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RM I 8r 987

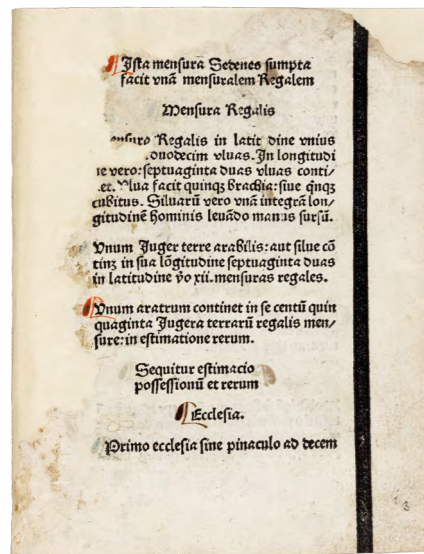
Great Figures of Our History

King Matthias's Law Code, 1486

On 25 January 1486, King Matthias ratified the laws passed by the 1485 Diet of Buda. The *Decretum maius* was printed twice, both times in Leipzig, with the first edition in 1488 being the most complete copy known today. The law code, consisting of 78 articles, incorporated the decrees of previous kings and collected the rules of domestic judicial practice. A key principle established that written law (*ius scriptum*) would replace customary law (*consuetudo regni*) with permanent authority.

In the introduction, Matthias emphasised the importance of laws. He noted the proliferation of crimes and declared his intention to restore order and peace in the country.

On folio 38 of the printed edition, the royal *span* (in Hungarian: *arasz*, a unit of length) is described and its measurement defined (1 royal *span* = 19.54 cm).



King Matthias I (Hunyadi): *Constitutiones incliti regni Hungariae*. 25 January 1486. King Matthias's civil and criminal law code, the *Decretum maius*.

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Inc. 353



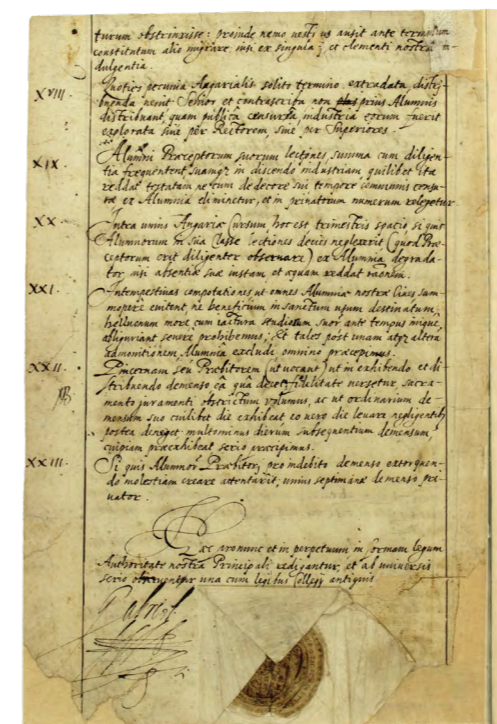
István Bocskai: *Copey eines Sendtschreibens* 1605. With a portrait engraving of Balthasar Caymox (1561–1635). MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RM IV 617

István Bocskai

During the Fifteen Years' War (1591–1606), foreign mercenaries loyal to the Habsburgs ravaged the country, killed civilians, staged fabricated treason trials, confiscated property, and persecuted Protestants. In 1604, István Bocskai led a rebellion against these abuses and was elected Prince of Transylvania in 1605 and subsequently Prince of Hungary. Bocskai issued a manifesto to the nobility of Transdanubia, which was translated into German to inform foreign audiences of the legitimacy of his struggle for freedom. A copy of this extremely rare pamphlet, *Copey eines Sendtschreibens*, is preserved at the Academy's Library. Bocskai's rebellion was ultimately successful, and the Peace of Vienna in 1606 guaranteed, among other things, religious freedom for Protestant churches, earning Bocskai widespread respect among European Protestant circles. On the Geneva Reformation Monument, inaugurated in 1917, the ten most outstanding figures of the Calvinist Reformation are represented, with Bocskai István as the only Hungarian. The monument inspired Gyula Illyés, who wrote his major poem *A reformáció genfi emlékműve előtt* ("Before the Geneva Monument of the Reformation") in 1946.

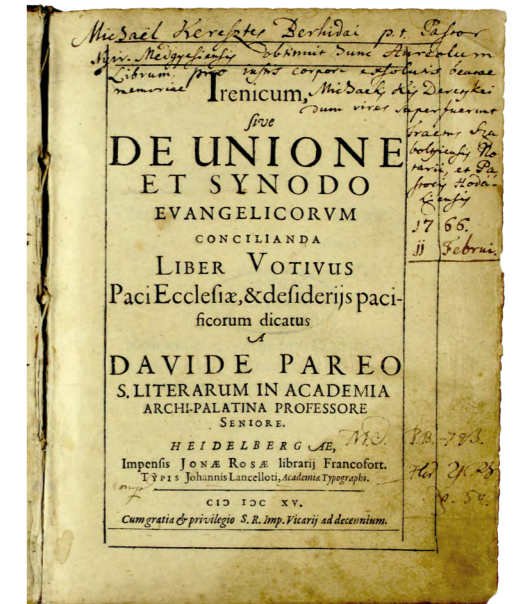
Gábor Bethlen: *Leges Collegii Albensis Bethleniani antiquae...*

Gábor Bethlen (1580–1629) ruled during the golden age of Transylvania. He generously supported education, including the foreign studies (*peregrinatio*) of Transylvanian students, but his main goal was to educate Hungarian students at home. In 1622, he founded a "common academy" in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) and invited renowned foreign professors. This was the first higher education institution in Transylvania. The laws regulating the college, bearing the prince's personal signature and seal, are preserved at the Academy's Library. In 1658, the Tatars burned Gyulafehérvár, and in 1662, Prince Michael Apafi I relocated the institution to Nagyenyed, now known as the Bethlen College.



Gábor Bethlen: *Leges Collegii Albensis Bethleniani*. The statutes of the Bethlen College in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), bearing Gábor Bethlen's autograph signature and seal.

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Church and Philosophy 21 19



David Pareus: *Irenicum, sive de unione et synodo Evangelicorum...* Heidelberg, 1615. With inscriptions by Prince György Rákóczi I and other later Hungarian owners.

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RM IV 1078/koll. 1–5

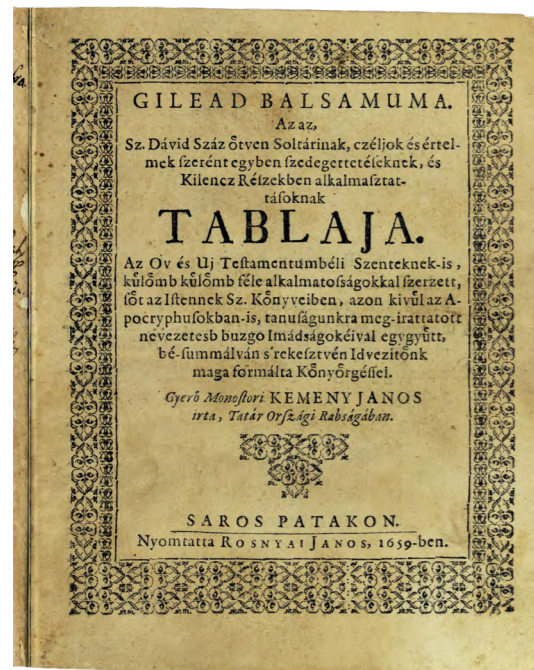
György Rákóczi

György Rákóczi I (1593–1648), Prince of Transylvania, and his wife Zsuzsanna Lorántffy worked tirelessly to promote the Reformed Church and schools and were devoted Protestants. Protestant denominations often not only opposed the Catholic Church but also conflicted among themselves. David Pareus (1548–1622), a highly respected professor at the University of Heidelberg, sought to resolve these divisions and launched the irenic church policy movement. Irenicism, or the doctrine of peace, aimed to unite Protestant confessions in faith and organisation. This movement strongly influenced Hungary. Prince György Rákóczi I read and studied Pareus's *Irenicum, sive de unione et synodo Evangelicorum*, published in Heidelberg in 1615. Our copy bears Rákóczi's *supralibrosa* – a printed ownership mark – on its front board.

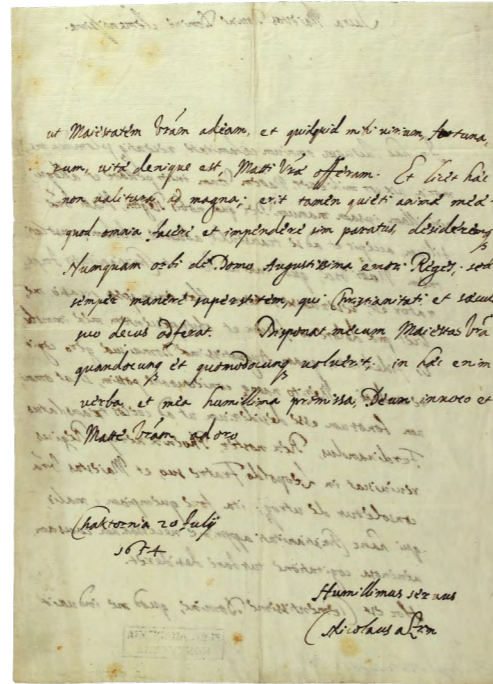
János Kemény: *Gilead Balsamuma*

János Kemény (1607–1662) was captured along with the entire Transylvanian army by Crimean Tatars during Prince György Rákóczi II's 1657 campaign in Poland and was freed in 1659 after a huge ransom was paid. During his captivity, he wrote *Gilead Balsamuma*, a collection of consolatory prayers based on Psalms. He was elected Prince of Transylvania in 1661 and continued the anti-Ottoman policies of the Rákóczi family. He died in the 1662 Battle of Nagyszőlős against Ottoman forces. Shortly before his death, he gave his prayer book to his devoted supporter, Mihály Teleki – later Transylvanian chancellor and a member of the Teleki family elevated to the rank of count – who recorded in the front flyleaf:

“This book was given to me for reading by my gracious lord, not for one who wills or flees, but by the merciful God. 4 January 1662, as he was about to depart for the land of Transylvania. Non est currentis neque



János Kemény: *Gilead balsamuma*, Sárospatak, 1659
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RM I 4r 37



Letter from Miklós Zrínyi to King Ferdinand III of Hungary, 20 July 1654
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 528

volentis sed miserentis Dei. (“It is not of the one who wills, nor of the one who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”) Mihály Teleki”

Miklós Zrínyi (1620–1664)

Zrínyi was a poet, prose writer, and military leader. During the winter of 1645–1646, he wrote his epic poem *The Peril of Sziget* about the fall of Szigetvár in 1566, commemorating his great-grandfather, Captain Miklós Zrínyi. The work was first published in 1651 in Vienna in the poet's collection *Adriai tengernek Syrenaia groff Zrini Miklós* under the title *Obsidionis Szigetiane*. Its modern title was given by Ferenc Kazinczy.

About 400 of Zrínyi's letters survive. The Academy Library's Manuscript Collection preserves one original: a Latin letter written at Csáktornya on 20 July 1654, expressing condolences to Emperor Ferdinand III (1608–1657). The emperor's eldest son, crowned as Ferdinand IV



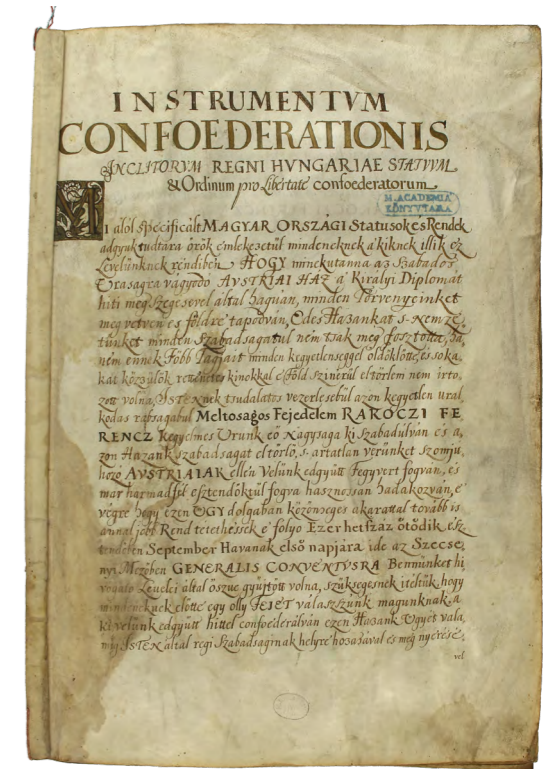
Miklós Zrínyi: *Adriai tengernek Syrenaia*, Vienna, 1651
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RM I 4r 315

of Hungary, died of smallpox in 1654 at the age of 20 without ever actually ruling.

“...Above all, I work for the good of the Homeland...” Ferenc Rákóczi II and the Confederated Estates’ Charter of Szécsény

The reign of Leopold I was one of the darkest periods in Hungarian history. Beyond the long list of grievances – Protestants were persecuted, the resistance clause of the *Golden Bull* was abolished, and so on – much more can be understood about the era from the words attributed to Count Leopold Kollonich, a devoted supporter of Habsburg absolutism and a Catholic prelate: “I will first make Hungary a prisoner, then a beggar, and finally a Catholic.” (According to Lajos Kossuth, this was Leopold I's motto.) These conditions led to the outbreak of the war of independence led by Ferenc Rákóczi II in May 1703. Leopold I died in 1705, and hope was renewed with the accession of his well-in-

tioned son, Joseph I. Rákóczi saw an opportunity for peace negotiations, which required a legal foundation. Therefore, by September 1705, he convened the estates to a Diet in Szécsény. Present were six bishops, numerous provosts, abbots, monks, and secular clergy, the nobility of twenty-five counties, and many city delegations. The Transdanubian counties were absent because they were under imperial control at the time, and counties considered part of Transylvania were not invited. Present, however, were King Joseph I's envoys, led by Pál Széchenyi, Archbishop of Kalocsa. At the Diet, on Miklós Bercsényi's proposal, the estates concluded a confederation modelled on Poland, defining the state form of the country as a noble confederation, and on 18 September, Ferenc Rákóczi II was elected Leader Prince. After Rákóczi swore the oath on 20 September, Pál Ráday,



Alliance letter of Ferenc Rákóczi II and the allied orders in Szécsény
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 781

head of the secret chancellery, read aloud the text of the confederation charter, and the present estates swore allegiance to the *Instrumentum Confoederationis Inclytorum...*, the document recording the Diet's decisions, then affixed their seals and signatures. Among the leaders of the independence movement, signatures of Ferenc Rákóczi II, Miklós Bercsényi, Simon Forgách, Antal Esterházy, and Sándor Károlyi can be seen. Since the Transdanubian counties could not participate in the Diet, their representatives swore the oath to General János Bottyán after the liberation of Transdanubia.

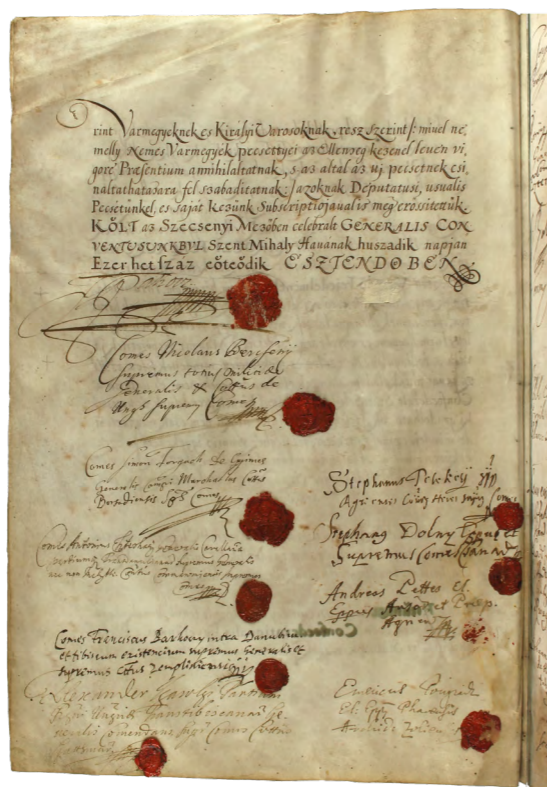
The document was produced in three copies: one for the Leader Prince, the second sent to the Primate of Poland, and the third to the Elector of Hanover, who later became King George I of Britain.

The Hungarian Academy of Sciences received its copy as a gift on 21 February 1870 from Prince László Czartoryski of Poland, a devoted friend of the Hungarian

people. (Czartoryski not only supported the Academy with this gift but also made a substantial endowment in 1869.)

By the 18th century, the genre of elaborately hand-written books had largely disappeared. Still, for the rare, ceremonial occasions, documents were produced on parchment with decorated, painted letters. A fine example is the Szécsény Confederation charter, bound in cardinal-red leather, consisting of eight parchment leaves, with text on three and a half leaves and 152 signatures on the remainder. The most important words, such as "prince," were written in gilded letters. (The copy in the Bibliotheca Polonica in Paris consists of twelve parchment leaves and bears additional signatures.)

The Szécsény Diet ended on 3 October 1705, but the war of independence continued, and it would be another six years before the Treaty of Szatmár in 1711 concluded the conflict.



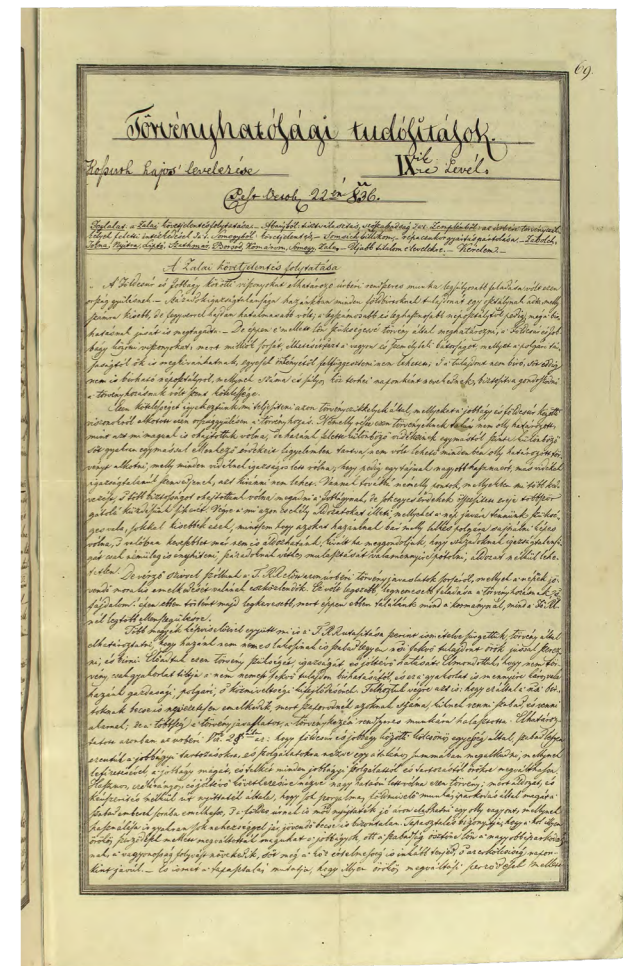
Lajos Kossuth

Kossuth arrived at the 1832–36 Diet in Pozsony (Bratislava) as a representative of the absentee magnates. On 17 December 1832, just one day after the opening, he launched his handwritten publication *Országgyűlési Tudósítások* ("Parliamentary Reports"), a milestone in the fight for freedom of the press and political transparency. Law students and young deputies sent by the counties acted as copyists. These juratus supported the liberal opposition vocally in public sessions, organising protests alongside Miklós Wesselényi and Ferenc Kölcsey.

After founding the *Társalkodási Egylet* (Discussion Society) in the summer of 1834, where speeches in a democratic spirit were delivered, the Viennese court arrested its leaders in May 1836 after the Diet closed. Kossuth reported the event to the public in his new handwritten journal, *Törvényhatósági Tudósítások*

("Municipal Reports"). He also played a major role as a lawyer defending László Lovassy, the most prominent young deputy arrested, drafting a petition to prove the innocence of István Lovassy's son. The protest failed, and Lovassy was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment, later pardoned in 1840, though by then his mind had deteriorated.

Following the arrests, the *Törvényhatósági Tudósítások* was banned, and in 1837, Kossuth himself was also detained.

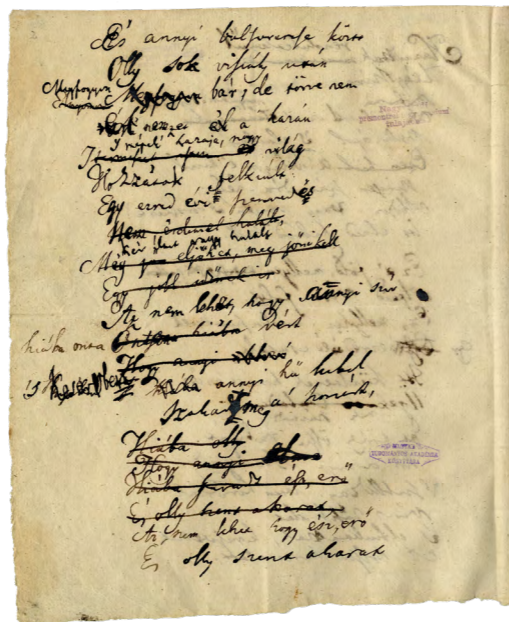


Lajos Kossuth's journal *Municipal Reports* (*Törvényhatósági Tudósítások*)
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Legal Studies, County 2r 41

Szózat (Appeal)

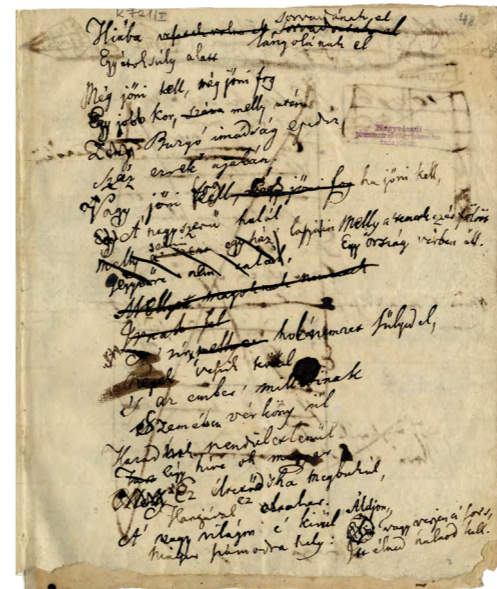
Mihály Vörösmarty wrote the first two stanzas of *Szózat* in 1835, completed the poem in 1836, and it was first published at the beginning of 1837 in the literary almanac *Aurora*, edited by József Bajza. The poem was a response to the political turbulence of its time. In the mid-1830s, Metternich's absolutist policies intensified the conflict between the Viennese court and the reform-minded Hungarian nobility. In 1835, the Habsburgs dissolved the Transylvanian diet and prosecuted Miklós Wesselényi; in 1836, after the closure of the diet in Pozsony, the leaders of the parliamentary youth were arrested. Royal decrees forced chief bailiffs to suppress opposition in their regions.

After its publication, Vörösmarty's ode spread like wildfire, quickly becoming widely known throughout Hungary. It was frequently quoted, and it was considered shameful not to know it. By 1846, it was included in the *Hármas kis tükör*, the most important general

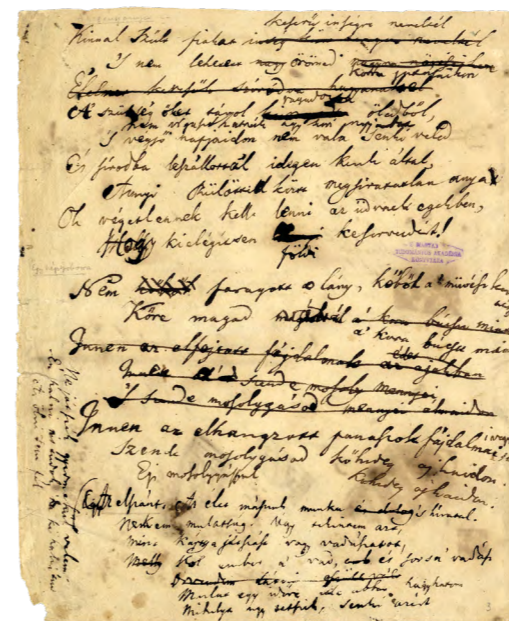


school textbook of the Enlightenment and Reform Era, where the chapter on patriotism began with the first two stanzas of *Szózat*.

Politicians often cited the poem, including Kossuth and Deák, but none more than Széchenyi. Scholars traced almost every line and word to its sources, comparing its historical perspective to Berzsenyi's *Ode to the Hungarians*, Kölcsey's *Zrínyi's Song* and *Zrínyi's Second Song*, and his *Hymn*. While Zrínyi's influence is evident, there is general agreement that the spirit and vocabulary of *Szózat* owe the most to István Széchenyi. For example, in 1835, Széchenyi wrote that "The Hungarian has his homeland only here," and in the same year, Vörösmarty penned: "In the great world outside of here / There is no place for you". Széchenyi deeply identified with *Szózat*, as he, too, wrestled with the vision of national decline the poem evokes, repeatedly reproaching himself that his policies might bring it about.



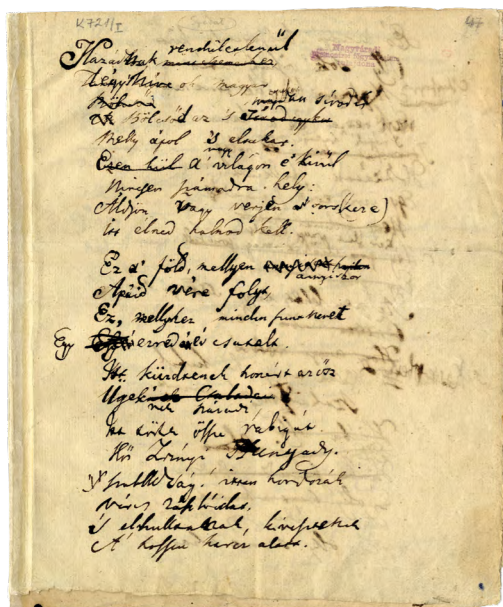
The same lines about national demise troubled Vörösmarty. After the surrender at Világos in 1849, people often remarked to him that the "prophecy of a glorious death" had come true. Pál Gyulai reported that Vörösmarty would irritably respond that "the prophecy



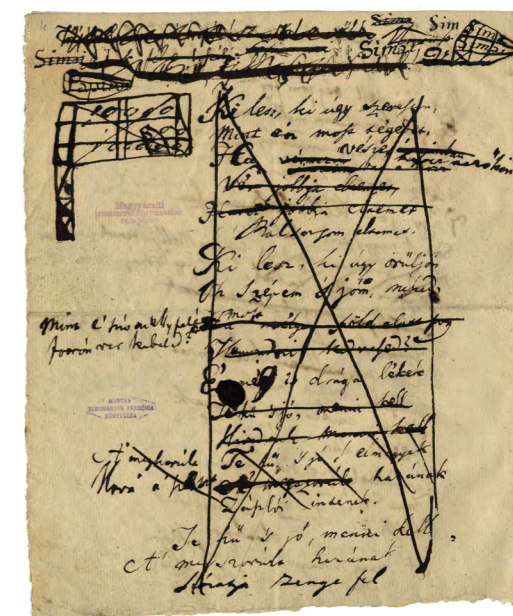
has not yet been fulfilled; this is not death, this is not the death I meant." Vörösmarty's children learned the poem without stanzas 11–12, which referred to national death. The Academy Library's Manuscript Collection preserves a Vörösmarty volume (shelf mark 540.083) in which the poet himself crossed out these two stanzas and wrote a note: "*Had I only foreseen that such times could come upon us, I would not have written these stanzas.*"

In 1843, a competition was held for a musical setting of *Szózat*, won by Béni Egressy. The musical version further popularised the poem. From that point on, it was performed at all major state celebrations and school events, and during the 1848–49 War of Independence, soldiers sang it even in battle.

The "great word" of *Szózat* – *rendületlenül*: immovably, without fail – became a sacred national word, known and reverently spoken by everyone. Like few poems, it became the property of the entire nation, a national song. Alongside Kölcsey's *Himnusz* (*Hymn*) and Petőfi's *Nemzeti dal* (*National Song*), it is one of Hungary's most famous poems. Its message remains relevant today.



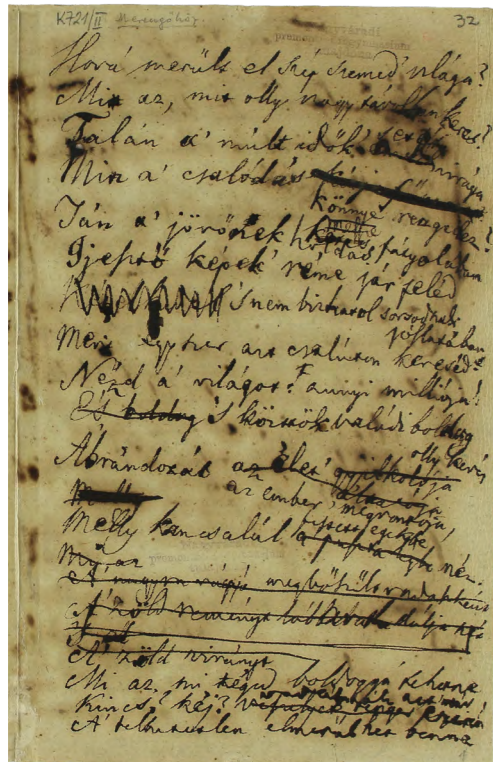
The first manuscript of *Appeal* (*Szózat*), 1836
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 721/I. 47–48. fol.



The Pinnacles of Mihály Vörösmarty's Life Work

Even the most consistent body of work has its peaks. In Vörösmarty's case, today we consider his love lyrics – particularly a few selected poems – and his major philosophical poems reflecting on the history, fate, and future of humanity as his masterpieces.

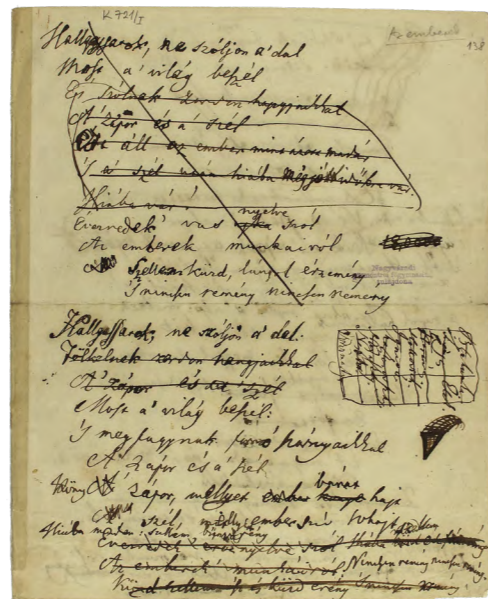
After his fortieth year, Vörösmarty fell in love with Laura Csajághy, twenty-six years his junior. He felt that at his age, “reason forbids love,” and reproached himself for daring to love a young woman with “so many bright prospects in life”. Laura herself was torn by conflicting emotions: she admired the famous poet but doubted whether she would find happiness with him. These inner struggles gave birth to the poem *To the Dreamer*



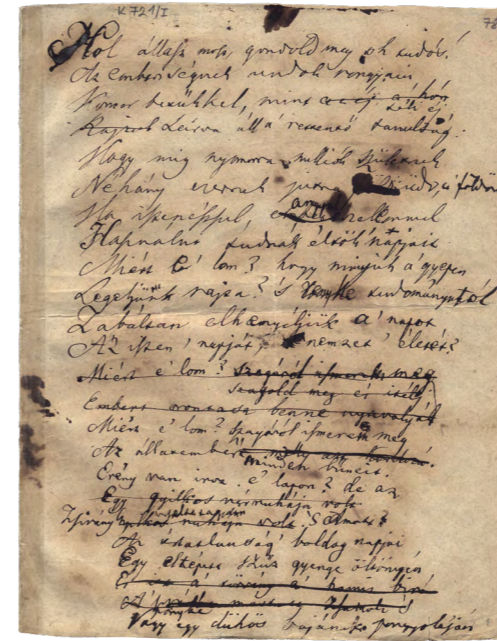
Manuscript draft and copy of Mihály Vörösmarty's poem *To the Dreamer*, 1843
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 721/II. 32–34. fol.

(*A merengőhöz*). Due to his limited financial means, Vörösmarty could not present his fiancée with a lavish wedding gift. Two months before their wedding, in March 1843, he gave her *To the Dreamer*. Laura was enchanted by the poem, asking decades afterwards, “Has any bride ever received a more beautiful wedding gift?”

His major philosophical poem *Thoughts in the Library* (*Gondolatok a könyvtárban*) was written in December 1844 on the occasion of the opening of the Academy's Library. In it, Vörösmarty meditates on the utility and futility of science and books, asking a troubling, almost blasphemous question: *Have books advanced the world?* The poet, building on contrasts and showing the shadow side of all that is good, ultimately overcomes doubt and expresses his credo: *What is our task in the world? To fight / For the noblest, as far as our strength allows.*



Manuscript draft and first copy of Mihály Vörösmarty's poem *On Mankind*, 1846
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 721/I. 138–141. fol.



Mihály Vörösmarty: *Thoughts in the Library*, 1844
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 721/I. f. 78

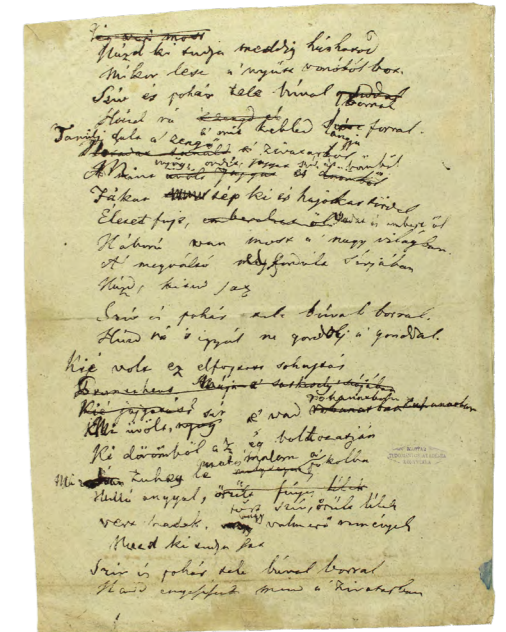
In February 1846, a noble uprising broke out in Kraków, declaring and implementing the liberation of Galician serfs and the abolition of feudal dues (tithe, forced labour) without compensation. However, Vienna deceitfully convinced the peasants that the rebels intended to exterminate them, turning the revolution into a revolt against the nobility. The peasants burned noble manors and massacred their lords. Under the influence of these bloody events, in May 1846, Vörösmarty wrote the poem *On Mankind* (*Az emberek*). From the immediate political events, he draws a conclusion for world history and humanity that could hardly be more pessimistic: *The human race is a dragon's sowing: there is no hope! there is no hope!*

The Preface (*Előszó*) was never published in Vörösmarty's lifetime, and his contemporaries were unaware of it. It is unclear whether the poem, traditionally dated to 1850, was a preface to a completed work or merely a planned one. Scholars agree, however, that it reflects the years after the failed revolution and mirrors the po-

et's mental state. Vörösmarty's romantic imagination magnifies the revolution into a cosmic catastrophe and depicts its defeat with fantastic, apocalyptic imagery.

After the suppression of the 1848–1849 revolution, Vörösmarty's spirits darkened, and he sank into a profound creative and emotional crisis, compounded by illness. Yet in the year before his death, 1854, his creative imagination flared one last time, and he completed his final poem, *The Old Gypsy* (*A vén cigány*). This rhapsody is not only one of Vörösmarty's crowning achievements but also one of the most brilliant works of European Romanticism.

The poem was inspired by world political events. In the autumn of 1853, the Crimean War broke out between Russia, France, and England, stirring hope in the poet that his homeland's fate might improve. His soaring imagination expanded the war into a catastrophe for the entire world, yet ultimately his pessimism was overcome by faith in humanity's future: *There will once again be celebration in the world.*



Manuscript of Mihály Vörösmarty's poem *The Old Gypsy*, 1854
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 721/I. 176–177. fol.



Memorial of Sándor Kőrösi Csoma in Darjeeling
Oil painting with lines by István Széchenyi, 1858
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 211

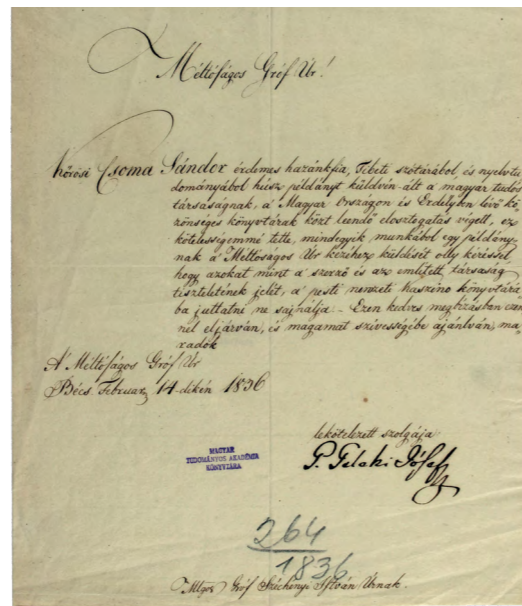
Sándor Kőrösi Csoma (1784–1842) made a vow as a student at the Bethlen College in Nagyenyed that he would search for the ancestral homeland of the Hungarians in Asia. The decisive encouragement came from one of his professors in Göttingen. His patron, Mihály Kenderessy, a government councillor, provided him with an annual support of 100 forints for the realisation of his dream. In November 1819, with only a small sum in his pocket, Csoma set out alone on foot.

In the summer of 1822, in Ladakh, Kőrösi met the English scholar William Moorcroft, who encouraged him to compile a Tibetan grammar and dictionary. From 1823 to 1830, living an ascetic life in remote lama monasteries, he studied and conducted research under harsh conditions. He read a 320-volume collection of Tibetan sacred texts and collected over 40,000 Tibetan words. In 1831, he travelled to Calcutta to process the results of his work, and in 1834, the Asiatic Society of Bengal published his two main works: *A Grammar of the Tibetan Language in English* and *Essay Towards a*

Dictionary, Tibetan and English. With this, Csoma laid the foundations of Tibetan studies.

The Hungarian public learned of Csoma’s journey from the pages of *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* (“Scientific Collection”), edited by András Thaisz, lawyer for the Teleki family, with József Teleki serving as chairman of its advisory board. Thaisz urged compatriots to contribute funds to support Kőrösi. Although a significant sum was collected, Csoma’s conscience troubled him; he felt he had not yet earned the support because he had not found the ancestral homeland of the Hungarians. In 1835, he returned 200 of the 300 gold coins. Gábor Döbrentei, secretary of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, refused to accept the donation and instead returned it to Csoma, who lived in extreme poverty.

On the recommendation of Bajza, Vörösmarty, and Toldy, Csoma was elected a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1833.



Letter from József Teleki to István Széchenyi
Vienna, 14 February 1836
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RAL 264/1836

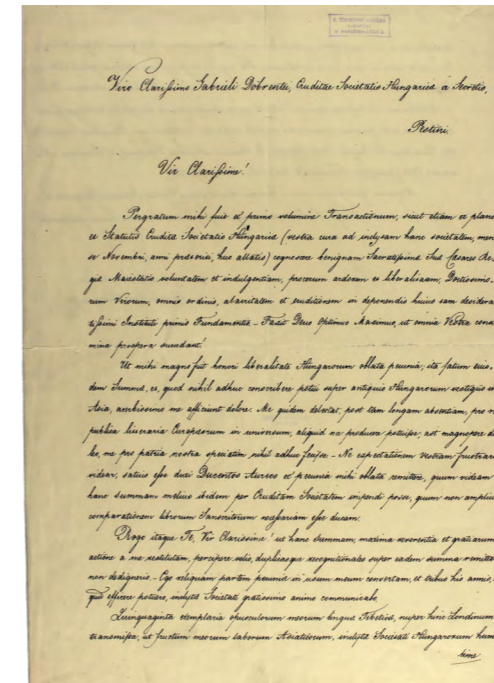
He reported on his Tibetology research in a Latin letter to Gábor Döbrentei. Ten copies of each of his pioneering Tibetan works were allotted to Hungary and Transylvania, with distribution overseen by József Teleki. The Academy’s library also received a copy.

At the beginning of 1842, Csoma travelled to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet and the seat of the Dalai Lamas, to continue his search for the Hungarian ancestral homeland. He then went to the land of the Dzungar people, where he hoped to locate the original homeland. Crossing a marshy region, he contracted malaria. On 11 April 1842, he died of tropical fever in Darjeeling. He was buried there, and the Asiatic Society of Bengal erected an octagonal column above his remains.

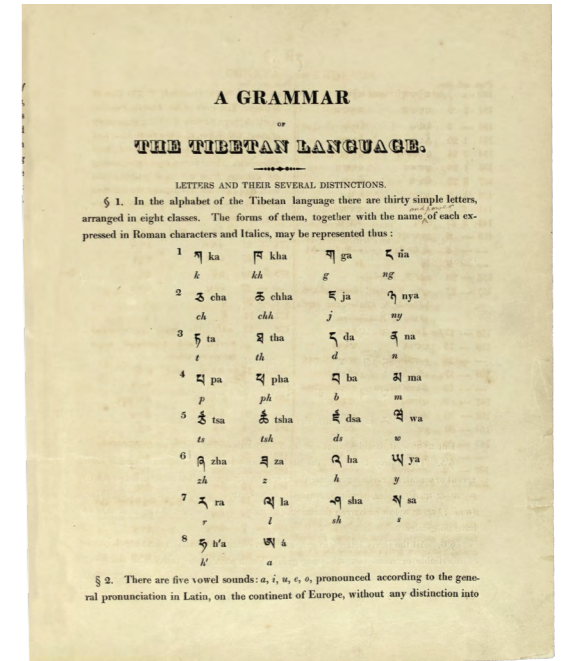
In 1858, Béla Széchenyi brought home a small painting of the tomb from one of his trips to London. István Széchenyi had a copper frame made for the painting, which he kept on his desk in Döbling, with inscriptions

he composed encircling it. These inscriptions were also placed on the marble plaque installed by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences at the Darjeeling memorial in 1910:

“A poor orphan Hungarian, without money or applause, yet inspired by steadfast patriotism – Sándor Kőrösi Csoma – sought the cradle of the Hungarian people, and finally collapsed under his labours. Far from the homeland, he sleeps his eternal sleep, yet he lives in the spirit of every better Hungarian. The tombstone shown here covers his ashes. Erected by the British Society in honour of his scientific merits. Not high rank, not wealth, but unbreakable love for the homeland, ascetic self-denial, and iron will are the nation’s true protectors. Take example, great and wealthy of our homeland, from one poor boy, and be faithful Hungarians in deeds, not mere words, with readiness for sacrifice and not cheap ostentation!”



Letter from Sándor Kőrösi Csoma to Gábor Döbrentei,
18 July 1835
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 530



A grammar of the Tibetan Language in English. Prepared ...
by Alexander Csoma de Kőrös. Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1834
MTA KIK Oriental Collection, Csoma 20/1

“I Created a Whole New World Out of Nothing.” János Bolyai, Creator of Non-Euclidean and Absolute Geometry

Farkas Bolyai, a polymath professor at the Reformed College in Marosvásárhely, was an outstanding mathematician. In 1832–1833, he published a two-volume work entitled *Tentamen* (“Experiment, Attempt”), in which he presented in Latin his own and contemporary mathematical results. At the end of the first volume, he appended, in Latin (*appendix*), his son János Bolyai’s *Scientiam Spatii...* (“The Science of Space”), which would become world-famous under the title *Appendix*.

In the *Appendix*, János Bolyai concisely and logically developed non-Euclidean geometry. He recognised that a coherent geometric system could be built even if the parallel postulate – debated for nearly two millennia –



Portable travelling sundial of Farkas and János Bolyai
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Objects 75

was ignored, a concept known as absolute geometry. If the parallel postulate is denied altogether, the result is non-Euclidean, also called hyperbolic, geometry.

In June 1831, the *Appendix* was also published as a separate offprint, a special copy of which is preserved in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Both in the *Tentamen* and in the offprints, the *Appendix* has a printed title page with the long Latin title. Our copy lacks the printed title page but contains two handwritten versions of the title: one by Farkas Bolyai, the other by János Bolyai himself. This small book was János Bolyai’s working copy, as evidenced by his handwritten notes, pencil corrections, and ink sketches and geometric constructions on white paper pasted over the printed diagrams.

The volume’s red-ink annotations were made by Ferenc Schmidt, an architect from Temesvár. He was one of the few to recognise the significance of the *Appendix*, passionately collecting manuscripts and relics related to the two Bolyais, and was largely responsible for making their work known to the world. In 1907, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences purchased this unique copy from

him, which preserves the handprints of both Farkas and János Bolyai.

Another interesting detail about the offprint: starting from the back cover, several pages were pierced in multiple places with a fine needle. One might assume these are traces of János Bolyai’s compass, but this is not the case. In 1831, a cholera epidemic raged in northeastern Hungary, and the pages were pierced so that smoke could pass through them more easily during disinfection.

Although the *Appendix* brought a Copernican revolution to geometry, for many years the creator of non-Euclidean geometry was thought to be Nikolai Lobachevsky, rector of Kazan University. Modern research has disproved this. In 1826, Lobachevsky reached con-

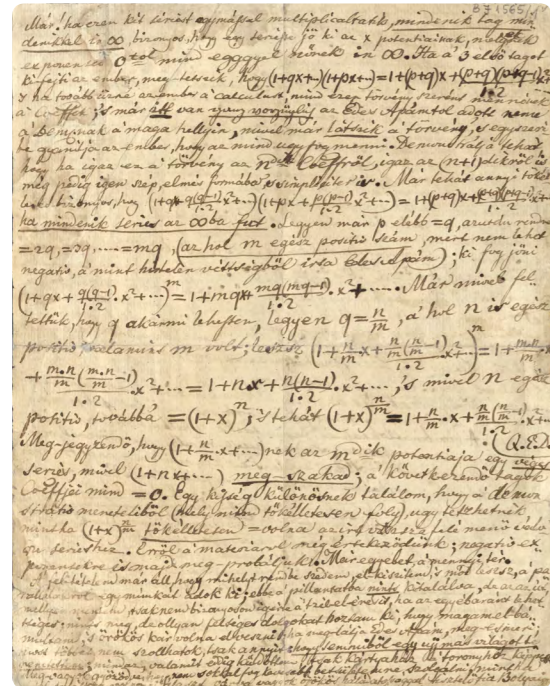
clusions similar to Bolyai’s, and he published his hyperbolic geometry results in the Kazan University journal in 1829–1830, slightly after János Bolyai. However, Lobachevsky’s publications were still somewhat confusing and referred to his geometry as “imaginary” rather than hyperbolic. János Bolyai, by contrast, had already reached groundbreaking insights. While serving as an engineer officer at the Temesvár fortress command, he wrote to his father on 3 November 1823:

“I created a whole new world out of nothing.”

He presented his fully developed theory to his father in 1825 and to his mathematics teacher in Vienna in 1826, but these manuscripts were lost.

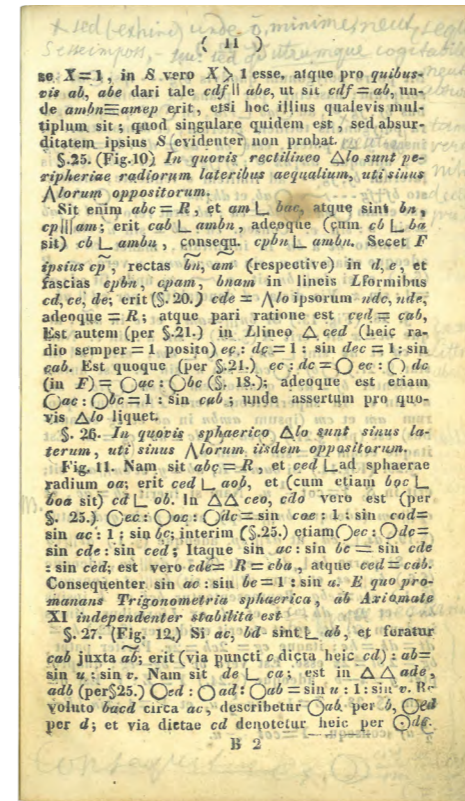
This is a characteristic and poignant Hungarian fate: world-changing achievements are not always recognised or known in the world at the right time or in the way they deserve.

In 2009, the volume was inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.



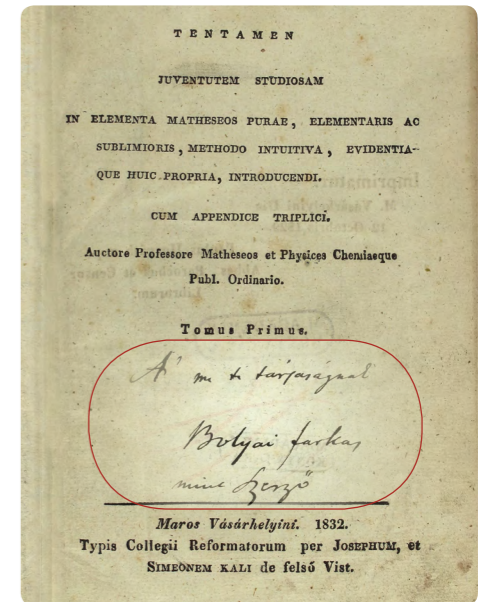
Letter from János Bolyai to Farkas Bolyai on 3 November 1823, announcing: “I created a whole new world out of nothing.”

Original letter: Târgu Mureş, Teleki-Bolyai Library Manuscript Collection, BJ 1565



János Bolyai: *Appendix*. Offprint with handwritten corrections by János and Farkas Bolyai.

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, 545.091



Copy of the *Tentamen* sent to the Academy by Farkas Bolyai, corresponding member, with his autograph dedication: “To the Hungarian Learned Society, from Farkas Bolyai, as author.”

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, 542.012/ 1. köt.

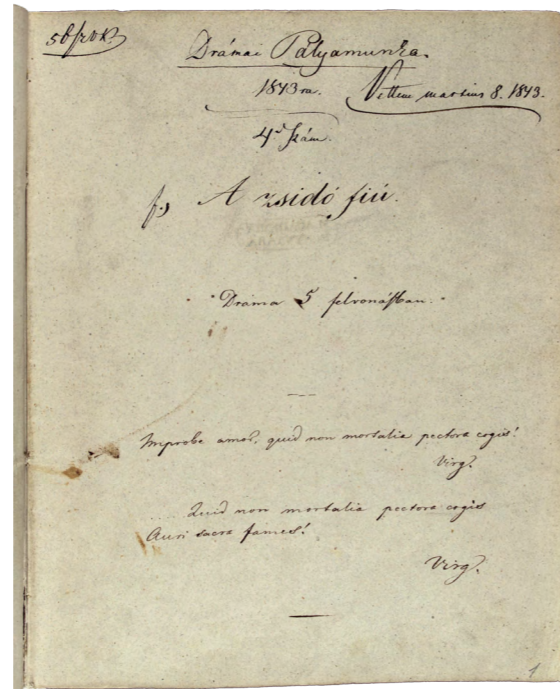
Hungarian Academy Drama Competition of 1843

In the 19th century, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Kisfaludy Society guided and organised Hungarian literary and scientific life. Both regularly announced competitions, which led to the creation of numerous classic works of literature, for example, *Toldi*.

In 1832, the Academy decided to establish a *Drama Prize* for original Hungarian dramas, awarding 100 gold coins alternately to a drama one year and a comedy the next. To prevent favouritism, the rules required that submissions be anonymous, bearing only a pseudonym, with the author's name enclosed separately in a sealed envelope. After the results were announced, only the envelopes of the winners were opened; the rest were destroyed, and the works were preserved anonymously.



Károly Obernyik: *Master and Commoner* Tragedy in five acts. Buda–Pest, 1844
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, 564.004

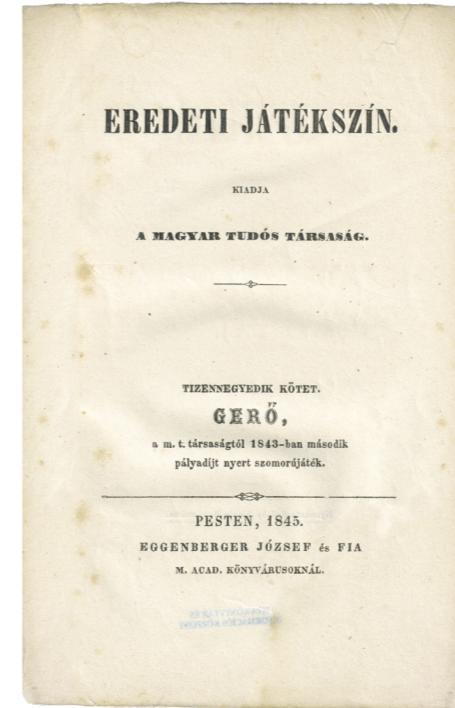


Mór Jókai: *The Jewish Boy*. Manuscript in the handwriting of Sándor Petőfi.

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 522

In January 1843, Mór Jókai, an eighteen-year-old law student in Kecskemét, was working on a drama he planned to submit to the Academy's competition. At that time, a travelling theatre troupe arrived in town, which included Sándor Petőfi, Jókai's friend from the 1841–1842 school year at the Pápa Reformed College. Petőfi's arrival was doubly fortunate for Jókai: someone could copy his drama, and the poet could also earn money from the copying. Although poor, Petőfi acted with true gentlemanly spirit: he meticulously copied Jókai's drama *The Jewish Boy* (*A zsidó fiú*) but refused payment.

Jókai reciprocated by painting a miniature oil portrait of Petőfi in a violet frock coat with yellow buttons. Unfortunately, this portrait has been lost. Jókai counted the



Ede Szigligeti: *Gerő*. Tragedy in four acts with a prelude. Pest, Eggenberger József és fia, 1845

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, 527.600

start of his literary career from *The Jewish Boy*. The title character, the Jewish boy, Imre Fortunatus (Fortunate), plays a foreboding role in the years before the 1526 Battle of Mohács as the treasurer of King Louis II, yet Jókai's work is also an enthusiastic defence of Jewish emancipation.

Although it is not fully documented, tradition holds that Petőfi personally took the copied drama to Pest, and according to the inscription on the title page, it was received on 8 March by Ferenc Toldy, the Academy's secretary at the time.

The judging committee – composed of András Fáy, József Bajza, Gergely Czuczor, Ferenc Toldy, and Mihály Vörösmarty – announced the results on 5 October 1843. Among the thirteen submitted “tragedies,” the prize and the accompanying silver cup were awarded to Károly Obernyik's *Master and Commoner* (*Főúr*

és pór). Obernyik belonged to Petőfi's circle of friends, the *Tízek Társasága* (“Society of Ten”). Ede Szigligeti's *Gerő* was deemed suitable for publication. The awarded works were published in the *Original Playhouse* (*Eredeti Játékszín*) series, volumes 13 and 14.

Other works that “received praise” included Jókai's *The Jewish Boy* and *The Last Days of Csák* (*Csák végnapjai*). Petőfi informed Jókai of the competition results in a letter and also described a conversation he overheard in a theatre box, in which Vörösmarty and Bajza praised *The Jewish Boy*. *The Last Days of Csák* was written by Imre Madách, who had submitted two works. His other drama, *Man and Woman* (*Férfi és nő*), was a less original piece – a romantic adaptation of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*.

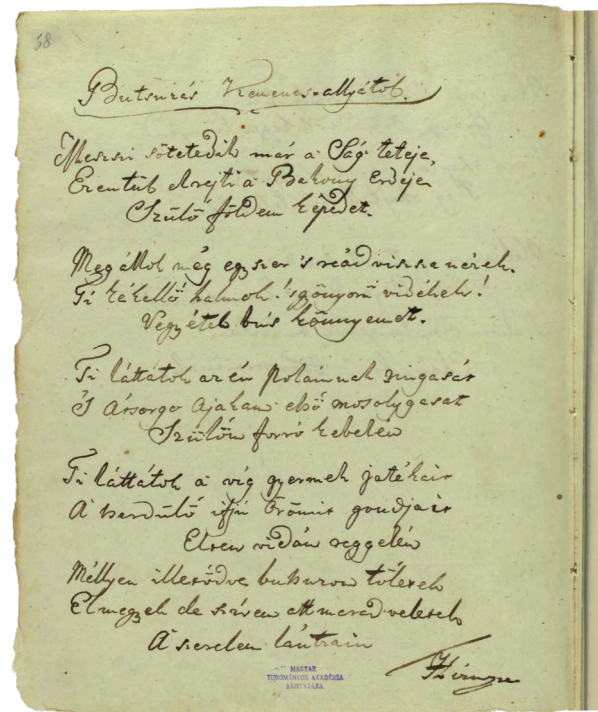
Naturally, one might ask how researchers identified these works if the envelopes containing the authors' names were destroyed. Jókai revealed his authorship himself less than a year after the announcement, while the authorship of Madách's works was determined later by scholars.



Károly Obernyik's Academic silver cup, 1843
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Objects 88

19th Century Hungarian Literary Classics

The Hungarian Learned Society was founded by aristocrats, but writers and poets acted as its midwives, shaping its intellectual spirit and the selection of members during its first half-century. The first academician was a poet, Károly Kisfaludy, and among the first 23 full members elected on 17 November 1830, several were writers as well. The first provincial full member was also a poet, Dániel Berzsenyi. Since the Academy did not yet have a poetry or literary section, the “hermit of Nikla” was assigned to the philosophy section. He took his seat in 1833 with his final work, the aesthetic treatise *Poétai Harmonistika*. However, Berzsenyi’s immortality rests not on this treatise but on poems such as *Approaching Winter (A közelítő tél)* and

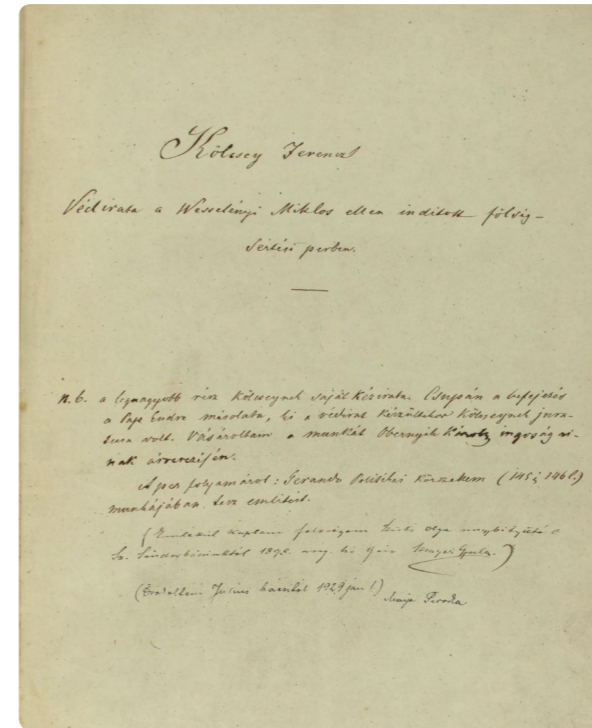


Dániel Berzsenyi: *Farewell to Kemenesalja*
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Hungarian Literature,
Correspondence 4r 44/38

Farewell to Kemenesalja (Búcsúzás Kemenesaljától). Although Ferenc Kazinczy was the leading figure of the language reform, in 1830, he was elected not to the linguistic but to the historical section of the Academy, which caused him resentment. Kazinczy was also a member of the committee that drafted the Academy’s statutes, and in 1831, József Teleki, chairman of that committee, wanted Kazinczy to become the Academy’s secretary. Ultimately, however, the choice fell on Gábor Döbrentei, nominated by Széchenyi. Kazinczy felt offended, and the Academy could not remedy the situation, as he died half a year later during a cholera epidemic. His vast manuscript legacy and extensive correspondence were purchased by the Academy from



Ferenc Kazinczy’s drawing of Kufstein Castle in *The Diary of My Imprisonment*
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 614



Ferenc Kölcsey’s defence brief in the treason trial against Miklós Wesselényi
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 789

his heirs in 1868 and remain a fundamental source for literary-historical research of the period. In 1794, Kazinczy had been arrested for his involvement in the Martinovics conspiracy and sentenced to death, but was eventually pardoned and spent almost seven years – 2,387 days – in various prisons, including Kufstein Fortress. He recorded these years in his work *Fogságom naplója (Diary of My Imprisonment)*.

In 1830, Ferenc Kölcsey was elected a provincial full member of the linguistic section. On 8 September 1832, at the Academy’s first general assembly, in the presence of the Palatine, he delivered a eulogy for Kazinczy, who had died the previous year. With this speech, Kölcsey created the tradition of Academy memorial addresses. When Gábor Döbrentei resigned as secretary in 1834, Kölcsey considered applying for the post but ultimately decided against it. Ferenc Toldy was appointed instead,

and he went on to hold the position for a record 26 years. Kölcsey died three years later, at age 48; upon hearing of his death, Miklós Wesselényi famously remarked, “He was not one of us”.

Gergely Czuczor, co-author of the great Hungarian dictionary *Czuczor–Fogarasi*, was not only a linguist but also a poet and Benedictine monk. On 21 December 1848, his poem *Alarm (Riadó)* was published in Kossuth’s newspaper, for which he was sentenced to six years in prison. Thanks to the intercession of József Teleki, president of the Academy, his sentence was reduced to three years; he was imprisoned in the same place, Kufstein, where Kazinczy had been. He was released in 1851, and even during imprisonment, he was permitted to work on the dictionary.

Mihály Csokonai Vitéz had no direct connection to the Academy, having died in 1805, twenty years before its founding, but a substantial portion of his correspondence survives, along with manuscripts of famous works such as *Love Song to the Foal-hide Flask (Szerelemdal a tsikóbőrös kulatshoz)*, *Tempefői*, and *Dorottya*.



Gergely Czuczor’s handcuffs from his imprisonment in Kufstein
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Objects 5

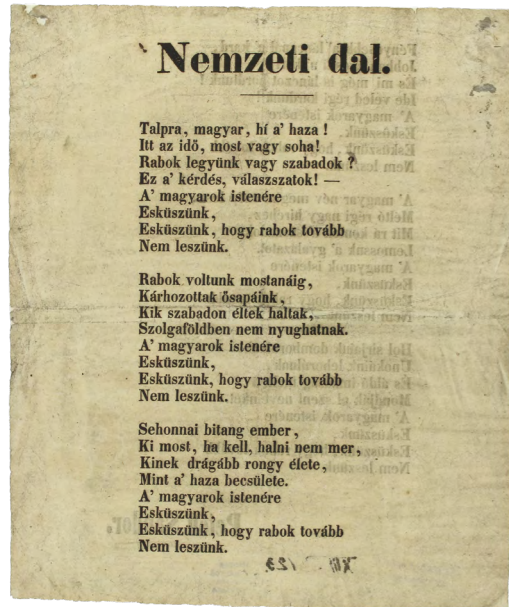
“I Have Read, Fellow Poet, I Have Read Your Work...” The Friendship of Sándor Petőfi and János Arany

In 1846, the Kisfaludy Society announced a literary competition: “Compose a poetic narrative in verse, whose hero is a historical figure known among the people, for example King Matthias, Miklós Toldi, Vitéz Kádár, etc. The form and spirit should be popular and folkloric.” János Arany submitted his *Toldi* for this competition. The work so impressed the judges that they increased the first prize from 15 to 20 gold coins. Yet the greatest reward Arany received was far beyond the monetary prize: he won the friendship of Sándor Petőfi. Petőfi was among the first to read *Toldi*, and on 4 February 1847, he sent a verse letter to the notary in Nagyszalonta:

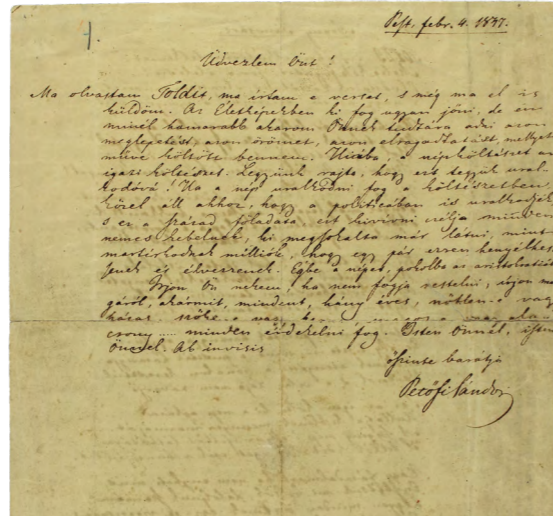
“I have read, fellow poet, I have read your work,
/ And it is a great delight to my heart.”

Arany responded in verse on February 11:

“...why this great reward? / I do not yet deserve
PETŐFI as a friend.”



Copy of *The National Song* printed on 15 March 1848
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 521/17



Letter from Sándor Petőfi to János Arany
Pest, 4 February 1847

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 513/1

Thus began the legendary friendship between Petőfi and Arany, preserved in 34 letters – including the above verse letters – and numerous relics housed at the Academy Library’s Manuscript Collection.

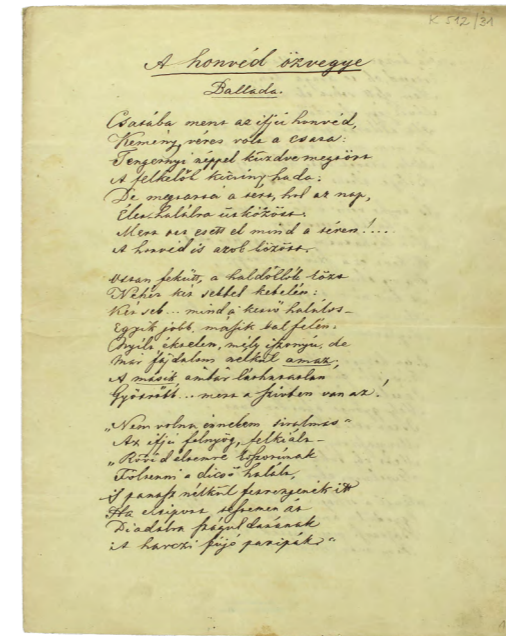
Shortly after the correspondence, they met in person. Between 1 and 10 June 1847, Petőfi visited Arany’s home in Nagyszalonta, forming a close friendship that Petőfi later considered one of the happiest weeks of his life. During this visit, he wrote the charming poem *To Laci Arany (Arany Lacinak)*.

Petőfi visited Nagyszalonta a second time between 25 and 31 October, this time with his wife, Júlia Szendrey, following their wedding “honeymoon” in Koltó. In May 1848, at Petőfi’s urging, Arany travelled to Pest, where he was warmly welcomed by the couple. Yet Arany did not move to Pest permanently, nor did he take over the editorship of the popular newspaper *Nép Barátja* at Petőfi’s request. In October 1848, Petőfi trained recruits as a captain in Debrecen. Between 4 and 9 December,

Arany visited him and his pregnant wife there. In February 1849, Julianna Ercsey, the co-godmother, took Júlia Szendrey and Zoltán Petőfi to Szalonta. Petőfi arrived on 16 March, recovering from illness, and stayed until the 27th. In May, Petőfi, acting as Bem’s courier, travelled to Debrecen, stopping in Szalonta on 4 May and continuing with his wife the next day. Zoltán Petőfi and his nurse stayed with the Arany family until 25 May, when the poet of *Toldi* returned to Debrecen to work as a clerk under Bertalan Szemere. Arany arrived in Pest on 4 June, where he reunited with Petőfi, but upon hearing news of approaching Russian troops, he returned to Szalonta on 1 July. Petőfi and Arany never met again.

When Arany learned that Júlia Szendrey had remarried before the end of her year of mourning, he composed the poem *The Widow of the Soldier (A honvéd özvegye)*, though it was never published in his lifetime.

Arany possessed many of Petőfi’s relics: the poet’s cockades, armband, buttons from his military uniform, a pink ostrich plume he wore during the 1848 elections,



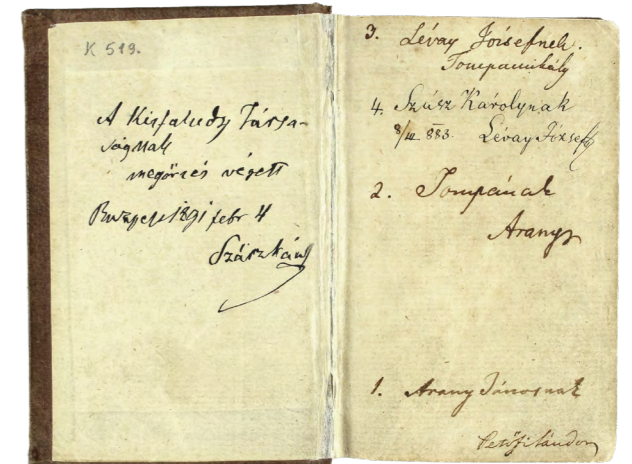
János Arany’s manuscript of the poem *The Widow of the Soldier*
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 512/31



One of Petőfi’s cockades gifted to János Arany
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Objects 25, 26, 27

a spice spoon made from a 20-kreuzer silver coin given to the co-godmother, and, perhaps most precious, a tiny French-language *Béranger* anthology. The ownership inscriptions in the volume testify to its other distinguished owners.

Although Petőfi had no official connection with the Academy during his lifetime, his 1847 collection *Complete Poems (Összes költemények)* was posthumously awarded the Academy’s most prestigious prize in 1858, given every six years at that time.



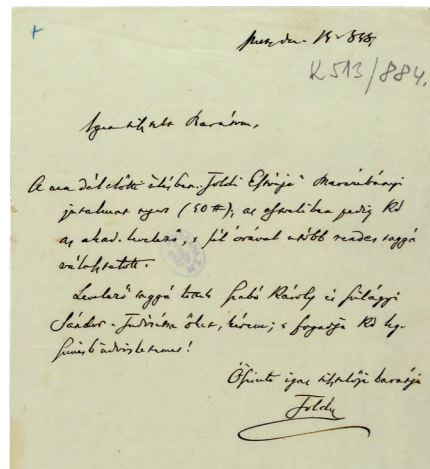
“Wandering Béranger” – Poetry Collection. Oeuvres complètes de P. J. de Béranger. Paris, 1844. With the following inscriptions: 1. To János Arany, from Sándor Petőfi; 2. To Tompa, from Arany; 3. To József Lévay, from Mihály Tompa; 4. To Károly Szász, from József Lévay, 8 March [1883]; 5. For safekeeping to the Kisfaludy Society, from Károly Szász Budapest, 4 February 1891

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 519

János Arany: Poet and Secretary

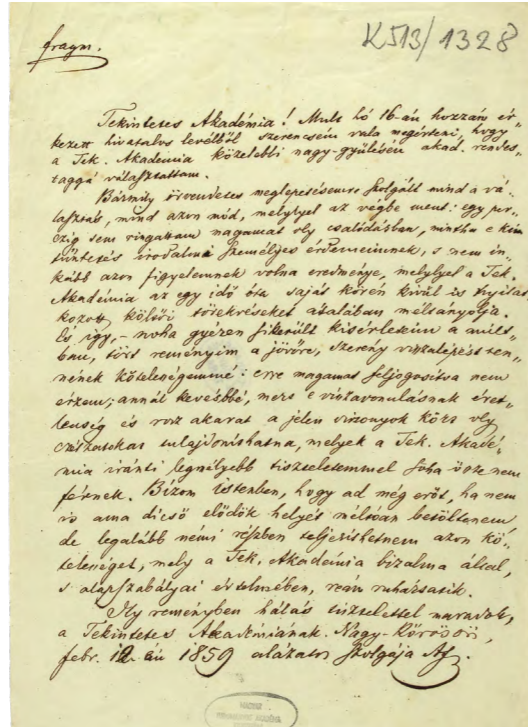
After the suppression of the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence, János Arany lost his position as notary in Nagyszalonta and, from 1851, took up a teaching post at the Reformed Gymnasium in Nagykőrös. At the end of 1858, he received a letter from Ferenc Toldy, secretary of the Academy: “At this morning’s session, Toldi Estvéje won the Marczibányi prize (50 gold coins); in the evening, Your Excellency was elected corresponding member, and half an hour later, a full member of the Academy.” Because roughly half of the Academy’s members had participated in the Revolution, Vienna had punished the institution, and it was only on 15 December 1858, that the Academy could hold a general assembly and elect new members. On that day, János Arany received the unprecedented honour of becoming first a corresponding and then a full member within half an hour – a distinction for which others often waited years or decades.

Although the Reformed Gymnasium in Nagykőrös had a distinguished faculty of seven academicians, Arany did not feel comfortable in the city. His friends in Pest



Letter from Ferenc Toldy to János Arany
Pest, 15 December 1858

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 513/884

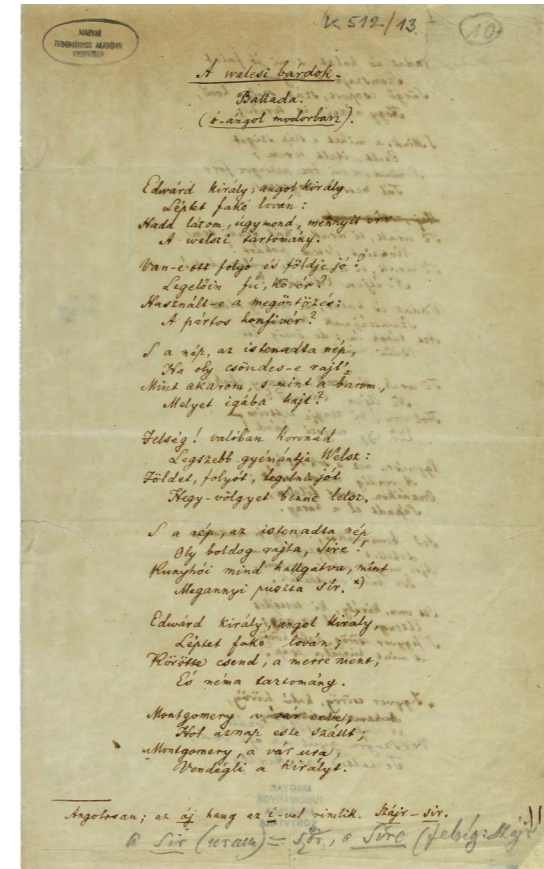


Letter from János Arany to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
Nagykőrös, 12 February 1859

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 513/1328

knew of this, and in 1860 – thanks largely to the influential intervention of Antal Csengery – one of Hungary’s brightest minds – was called to the capital. On 1 August 1860, Arany assumed the vacant directorship of the Kisfaludy Society. He immediately made his mark, recognising the value and significance of *The Tragedy of Man* (*Az ember tragédiája*) and publishing it in 1861.

In the summer of 1864, shortly before the inauguration of the new Academy building, the historian László Szalay, secretary of the Academy, unexpectedly passed away. János Arany was elected as his successor. Upon his election on 26 January 1865, he declared, “I consider this position only temporary on my part. One, at most two years will show whether I am



János Arany: *The Bards of Wales*

MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 512/13

capable of fulfilling this important office...” Those “one or two years” stretched to nearly fourteen.

According to the Academy’s 1858 statutes (the 1869 statutes renamed the post “secretary general”), the secretary was responsible for managing the Academy’s official affairs. Arany participated actively and conscientiously in organising the Secretariat and later the Office of the Secretary General, and he did not consider day-to-day administration beneath him.

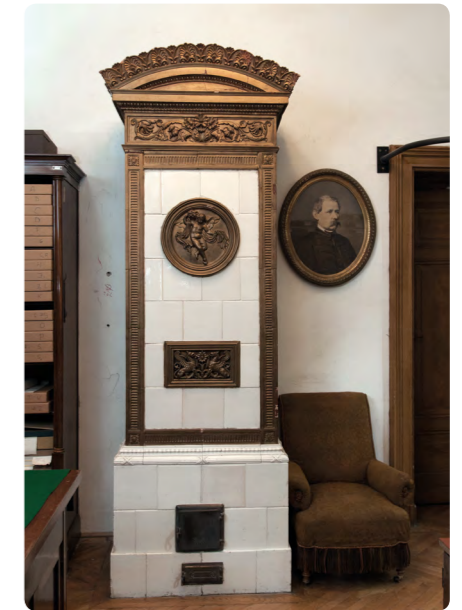
He edited the Academy’s journals and publications, opened the mail himself, and managed correspondence in Hungarian, German, English, and French. He attended the meetings of various Academy sections, keeping their minutes – 339 of which survive today. He prepared an-

nual reports, adjudicated seventeen Academy competitions (five of which are preserved), and the Manuscript Collection preserves a total of 4,100 official Arany drafts.

The Academy was fully aware of Arany’s merits and his stature as a poet. He received the highest Academy prize – the Great Prize, awarded annually to a single individual – four times, a record in the institution’s history: in 1861 for the two volumes of *Smaller Poems* (*Kisebb költemények*), in 1873 for the second edition of *Collected Poems* (*Összes költeményei*), in 1880 for *Toldi’s Love* (*Toldi szerelme*), and posthumously in 1894 for *Poems Left Behind* (*Hátrahagyott versei*).

Due to his administrative responsibilities, Arany had little time for creative work, and his health deteriorated. After three attempts, the Academy accepted his resignation in May 1879.

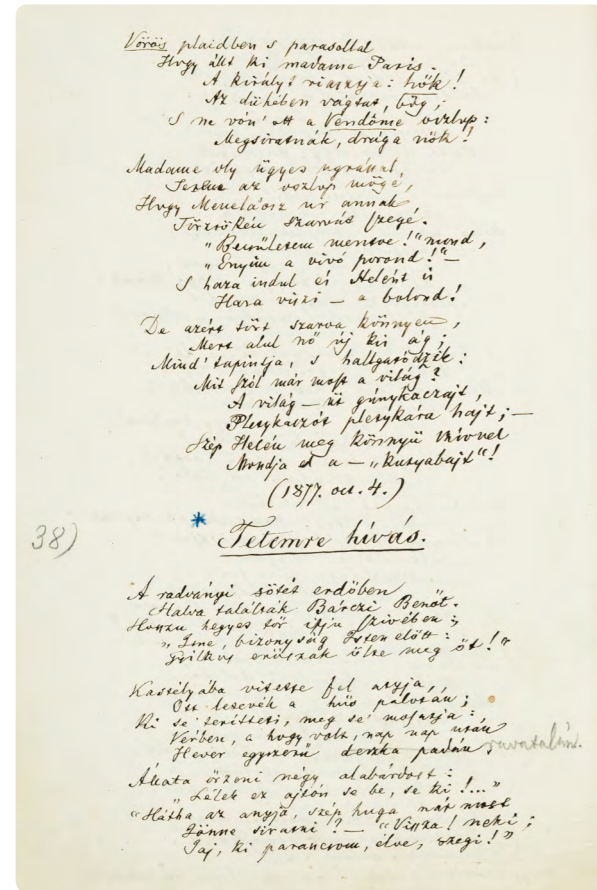
When he finally stepped down from the demanding position of secretary general in 1877, he spent the summer under the cool oaks of the Margaret Island, took out the *Kapcsos könyv* (Clasped Book) given to him by Pál Gyulai in 1856, and began composing his late masterpieces, the *Őszikék* (Autumn Flowers).



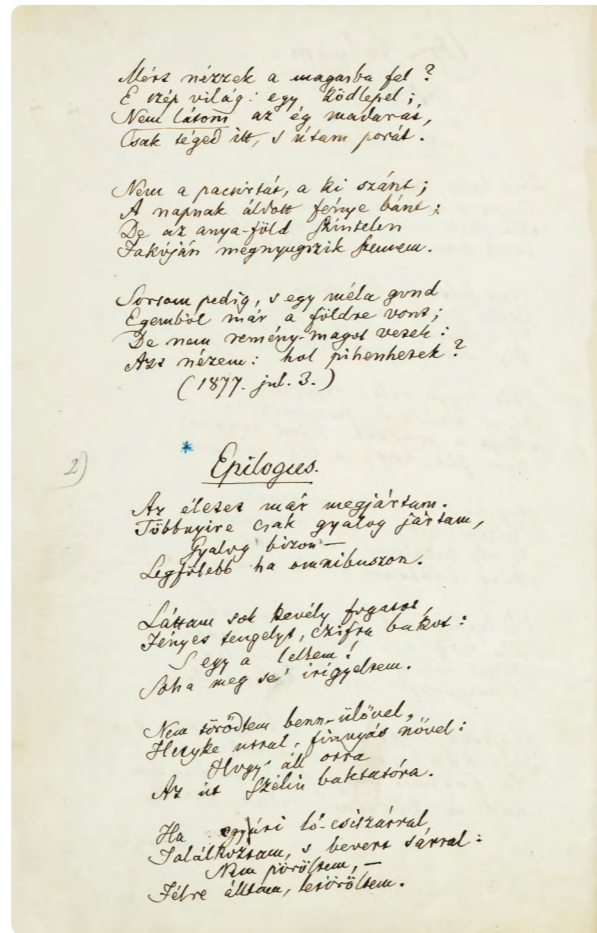
János Arany’s tiled stove and armchair at the Academy

The Clasped Book (Kapsos könyv)

In 19th century Hungary, it was customary in aristocratic families to send young adults on extended study tours across Western Europe to broaden their worldview. In 1855–1856, the eighteen-year-old Count Tamás Nádasdy (1837–1856) was accompanied on his European tour by Pál Gyulai, an eminent editor, poet, and prose writer of the time. As a token of gratitude, the student presented his mentor with a leather-bound book that could be closed with a brass clasp: the later Clasped Book.



János Arany's Clasped Book
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 510



Between 1851 and 1860, János Arany taught at the Reformed Gymnasium in Nagykőrös. In the summer of 1856, Pál Gyulai visited him and presented the Clasped Book with the following words:

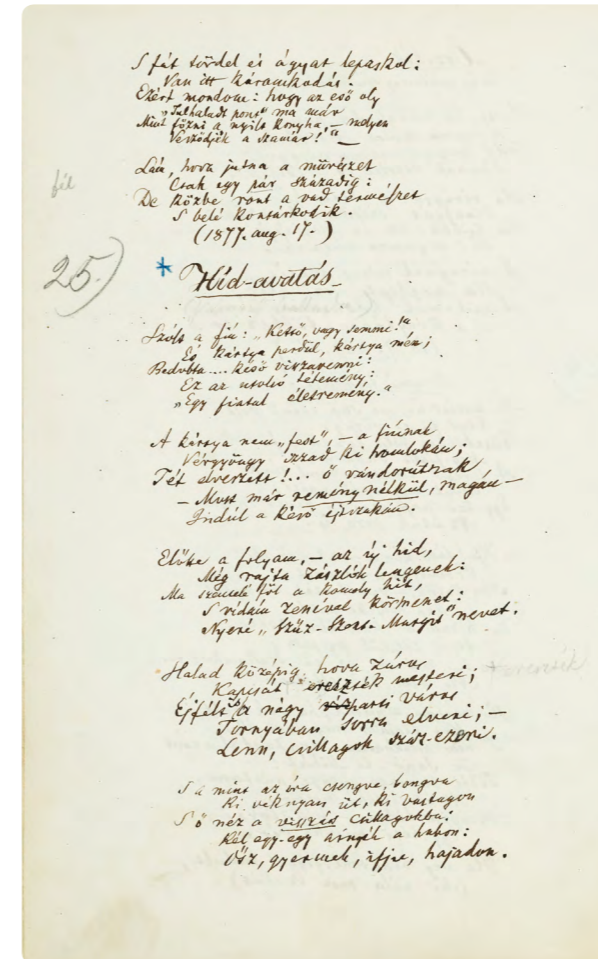
"It shall be yours, János; you have finer writing, you compose more beautiful poems than I do."

The front flyleaf also bears the date: 20 August 1856.

In public perception, the Clasp Book is associated with the *Őszikék* (Autumn flowers) cycle, and there is a basis for this connection. After Arany resigned

from the burdensome position of secretary general of the Academy in the summer of 1877, he often walked on the Margaret Island, where, under the trees, he composed his late masterpieces, including the poem *Under the Oaks*. However, it should be noted that the volume contains not only his well-known late poems but also numerous other immortal works, such as *Consecration of the Bridge*, *Corn Husking*, *Epilogue*, and so on. The first poem Arany wrote into the fresh, empty book he received in 1856 was *The Two Pages of Szondi*.

After János Arany died in 1882, the Clasped Book passed to the poet's son, László Arany, who used it to



compile the first edition of *Őszikék* in 1888. After László Arany's early death, the Arany estate, including the Clasped Book, was inherited by his widow, Gizella Szalay, who in the same year of her husband's passing donated it to the Kisfaludy Society. The generous gesture is understandable, as the Society was the most important literary association of the era, and between 1861 and 1865, János Arany had served as its director. This connection had also brought the poet from Nagykőrös to Pest.

In 1905, Gizella Szalay married literary historian Géza Voinovich, who became a member of the Kisfaludy Society in 1912, its secretary in 1925, later vice president, and from 1936 its president. He also enjoyed a distinguished career at the Academy, serving as secretary general from 1935 to 1949.

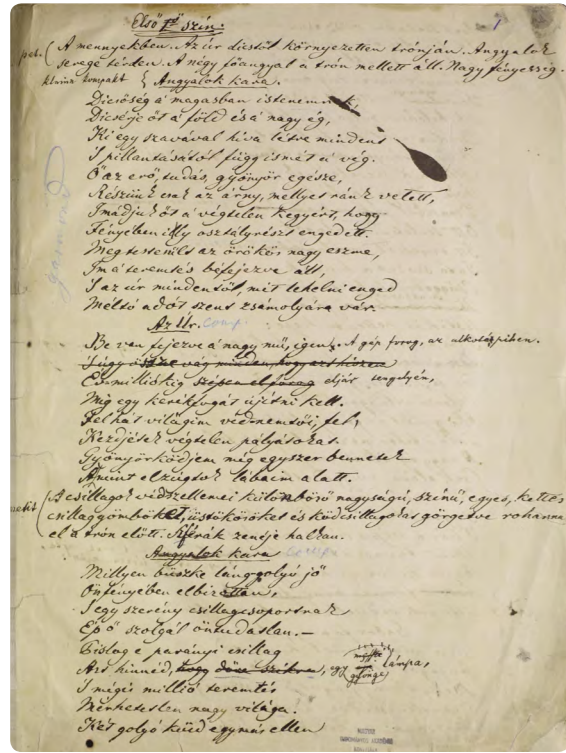
Between 1929 and 1938, Géza Voinovich published a three-volume biography of János Arany. Allegedly, he took the Clasped Book home to have it at hand while working, keeping it with other Arany manuscripts in his villa. However, the Voinovich villa at 23 Ménesi Street was struck by a bomb in January 1945 during World War II. Not only were János Arany's manuscripts destroyed, but Gizella Szalay also lost her life. The Clasped Book, under unclear circumstances, survived the devastation caused by the incendiary bomb. Since there are no traces of soot, burning, or damage on the pages, it is possible that Voinovich, then secretary general of the Academy, had already placed this extremely valuable volume in the Academy's cellar along with other irreplaceable manuscripts, or the rumour may be true that, together with *The Tragedy of Man*, he kept it in his coat pocket, and miraculously both Voinovich and the manuscripts were saved.

In 1952, the communist regime dissolved the Kisfaludy Society, and its collections, manuscripts, and relics, including the Clasped Book, were taken over by the Manuscript Collection of the Academy Library, where they have been preserved ever since.

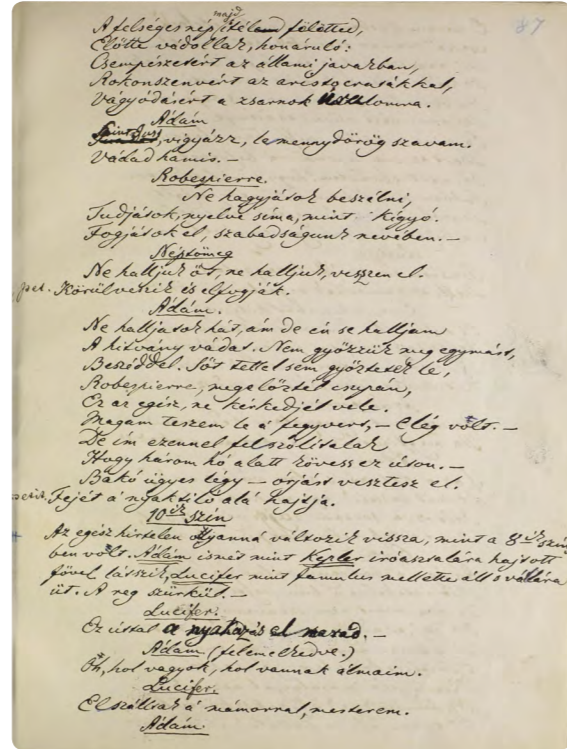
Imre Madách: The Tragedy of Man

Madách began working on *The Tragedy of Man* almost secretly on 17 February 1859. After completing it on 26 March 1860, he first showed the sole manuscript to his friend, Pál Szontagh, who urged him to give it to János Arany for review. In early April 1861, Madách, as a deputy of Nógrád County, arrived in Pest for the Diet and brought with him the only manuscript of the Tragedy, which he probably handed personally to Arany.

János Arany began reading the Tragedy, but it did not immediately please him; he suspected it of being an imitation of *Faust* and set it aside after the 16th line – "...And a new cog be needed..." Encouraged by his friends, however, he took it up again, and in a letter to Mihály Tompa on 15 August he expressed unre-



Imre Madách's manuscript of *The Tragedy of Man*, 1861
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 531



served enthusiasm: "I have one manuscript with me: *The Tragedy of Man*. A Faust-like dramatic composition, yet it walks entirely on its own feet. Full of mighty ideas. First talent since Petőfi, who has shown a completely independent direction."

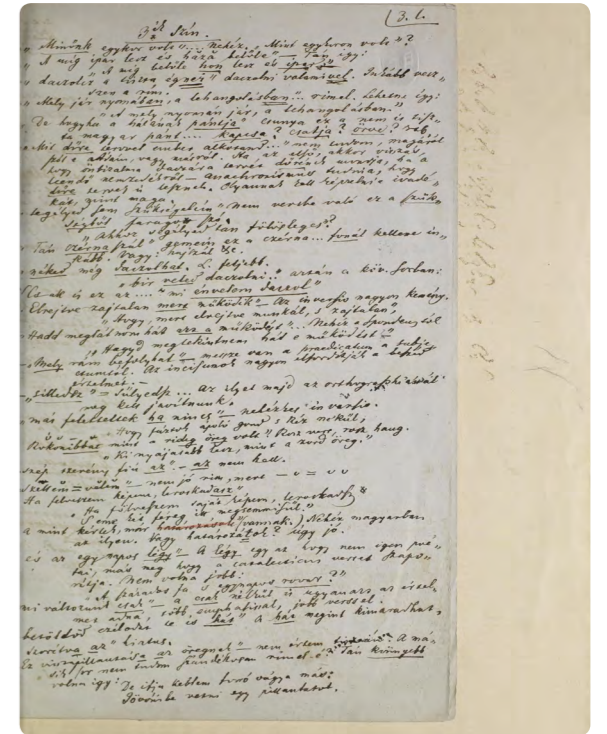
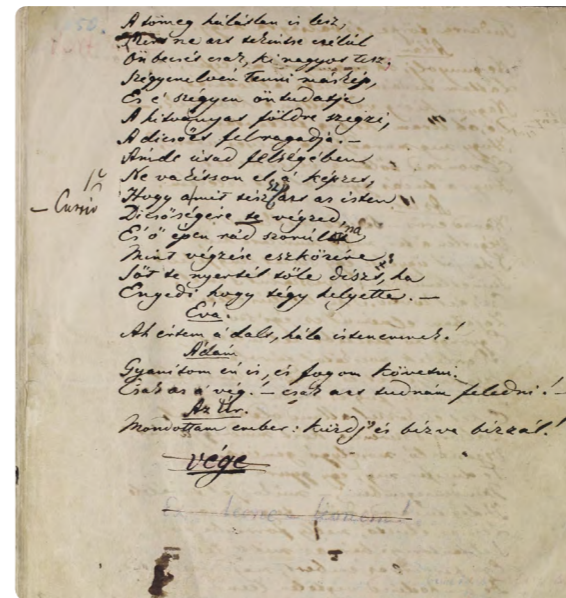
After the dissolution of the Diet, Madách returned home to Alsósztrégo and awaited the older poet's response. Arany sent his first letter on 12 September stating: "*The Tragedy of Man*, both in concept and composition, is a very remarkable work. Only here and there in the versification – and in the language – do I find some slight awkwardness, especially in the lyrical parts, which are not resonant enough. (...) Regarding publication, I would wish for it to be done through the Kisfaludy Society... (...) I would mark, line by line, the places

where I would consider minor, non-essential changes appropriate; or, if you consent, I would make a few pen strokes myself, and then present it to the Society."

Madách granted Arany full freedom regarding corrections. Arany set to work and, in his letter of 27 October, sent Madách a list of corrections. The "eternal" question in Madách scholarship concerns what and how much Arany actually corrected in the Tragedy.

Arany mainly corrected spelling errors. The Hungarian Learned Society had issued the first spelling rules in 1832, the first attempt to unify the various local forms of Hungarian orthography. Madách, born in 1823, had, according to family tradition, learned to read and write at age five in 1828, but not according to the 1832 rules. For example, Madách wrote verbal prefixes separately; Arany corrected these, joining them with the verb. Arany's corrections, however, affected only the surface of the Tragedy.

It is a fact that some of the Tragedy's lines that became proverbial were finalised by Arany, such as the famous line from the Egyptian scene: "Yours a poor sum, to me a world..." which in Madách reads: "Yours a *mean* sum..."



Arany was extremely tactful toward his fellow writer: "If my modifications do not please you, or if you do not wish to modify anything at all (except where spelling is concerned, as that must be corrected in any case), please let me know."

The first edition of the Tragedy was completed in record time, leaving the press on 12 January 1862. Arany worried about what Madách would think of his corrections, but Madách dispelled his concerns:

"For your changes, I am only more grateful; the printing errors are astonishingly few."

The second, substantially corrected edition appeared in 1863, and this was the last edition published during the poet's lifetime. This text is regarded as the definitive version of the Tragedy.

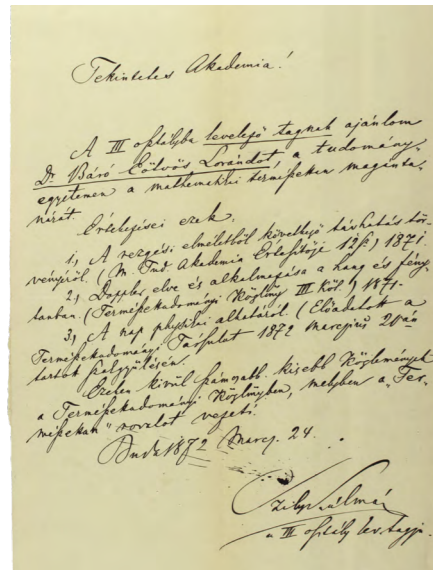
The original manuscript of *The Tragedy of Man* came to the Manuscript Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences after the dissolution of the Kisfaludy Society in 1952.

Loránd Eötvös: The Academy's First Scientist President

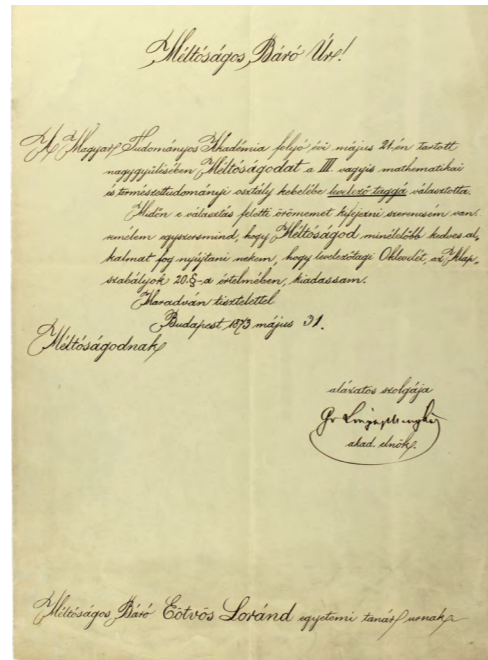
The Hungarian Academy of Sciences began with six scientific sections: four in the humanities and social sciences, and the remaining two in mathematics and natural sciences. Among the first 23 full members elected on 17 November 1830, only two were mathematicians and four were natural scientists. The prestige of natural scientists only began to grow in the 1880s, as the natural sciences experienced explosive development.

Sensing the times, in 1889, the Academy elected Baron Loránd Eötvös, a physicist, as its sixth president. He was the first scientist to hold the office and the first to actively continue research while serving. He remained president until 1905, a total of sixteen years, being re-elected six times.

When he became president, Eötvös was only 41 years old, yet he already had a brilliant scientific career behind him. In 1872, at the age of 24, he was appointed full professor, and a year later, the Academy elected



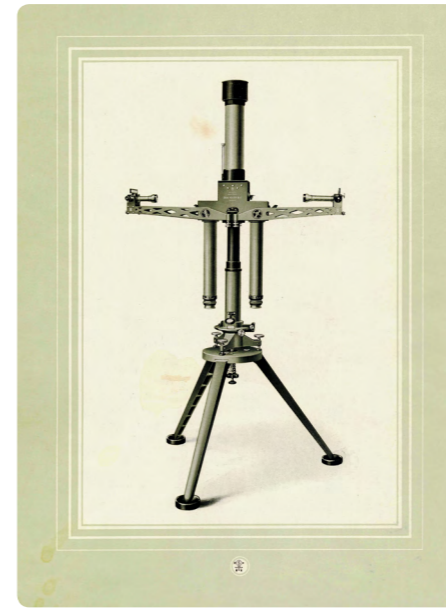
Kálmán Szily recommends Loránd Eötvös for corresponding membership, 24 March 1872
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RAL 366/1873



Menyhért Lónyay, President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, informs Loránd Eötvös of his election as a corresponding member, 31 May 1873
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 5089/11

him a corresponding member. In 1883, at 35, he became a full member.

His presidency achieved numerous milestones. From 1889, he ensured that the *Academy Bulletin* (*Akadémiai Értesítő*) was published monthly, and that each of the three scientific sections (reduced in 1870) could operate with two sub-sections. During his tenure, Hungary's largest biographical-bibliographical project began: József Szinnyei's *Lives and Works of Hungarian Writers* (*Magyar írók élete és munkái*, 14 volumes). Work also began on the *Great Dictionary of the Hungarian Language* and the *Charter Collection of the Reign of Sigismund*, while the *Dictionary of Latin in Hungary* was completed. Under Eötvös, the decoration of the Academy's ceremonial hall was



The Small Original Eötvös Torsion Balance. Ferdinand Süss. Precision Mechanical and Optical Works Limited. Budapest I. 1928
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 5890/67

completed, with a secco painted on the eastern wall by Károly Lotz. On the centenary of István Széchenyi's birth, Barnabás Holló's relief was placed on the Akadémia Street wall of the building – a project initiated by Eötvös himself. During these years, the Goethe Room (1896) and the Széchenyi Museum (1905) were also opened.

Loránd Eötvös made numerous scientific contributions. These include the Eötvös law, the Eötvös constant, the Eötvös effect, and the Eötvös correction, but he is best known worldwide for the torsion balance that bears his name. In 2015, three documents related to the Eötvös torsion balance used to measure variations in the gravitational field were added to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. One of these, Ferdinand Süss's extremely rare 1928 publication *The Small Original Eötvös Torsion Balance*, is preserved in the Academy Library's Manuscript Collection.

Eötvös also played a significant role in science policy. By birthright, he was a member of the House of

Magnates from 1885. He considered the development of science education a personal mission. In 1891, he co-founded the Mathematical and Physical Society, presiding over it until his death, and launched the *Mathematical and Physical Journal*.

From 1894 to 1895, he served seven months as Hungary's Minister of Religion and Education, during which he founded the Baron József Eötvös College in 1895. Among its students, two – Zoltán Kodály and Domokos Kosáry – would later serve as presidents of the Academy.

Eötvös was not a “chair-bound” scientist. He was an excellent horseman and a passionate mountaineer; a 2,837-meter peak in South Tyrol bears his name.

His colleagues knew well the magnitude of the loss when he died. Tradition holds that in 1919, upon hearing the news of Eötvös's death, Albert Einstein simply remarked: “*One of the princes of physics has died!*”

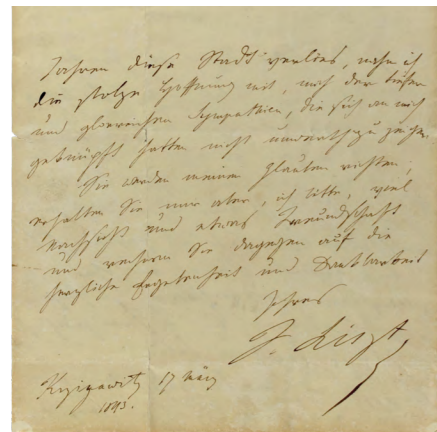


The Hungarian Teachers' Tourist Association elects Loránd Eötvös as its patron, 18 February 1897
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 10.710/29

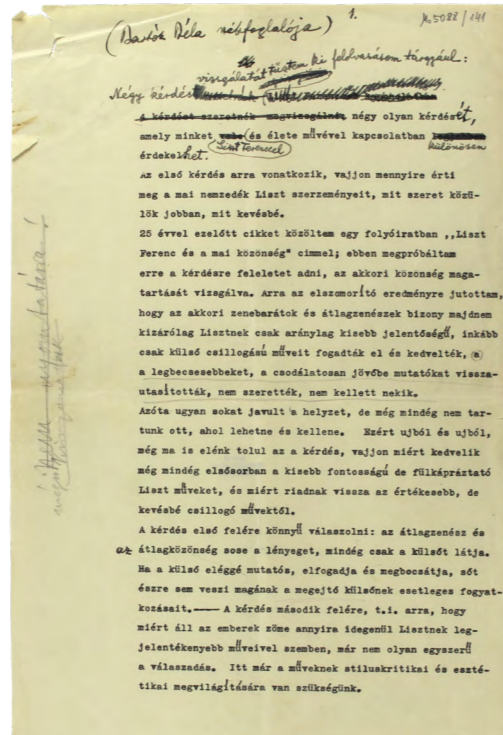
“The World’s Famous Musicians...”

Until 1949, before the communist reorganisation of the Academy, artists could become members, and many were indeed elected. Yet two major composers, Ferenc Erkel and Franz Liszt, were never made members. Not because Liszt was “German” – he considered himself Hungarian, travelled the world with a Hungarian passport, and cared deeply about his homeland – but simply because musicians were not elected. In 1838, Liszt gave several benefit concerts in Vienna for the victims of the Pest flood, and in 1839, he performed seven times in Pest. Vörösmarty paid tribute to his genius with the ode *To Ferenc Liszt*, which Liszt thanked him for in a letter: “You wrote a poem to me, one of the kind you usually write, beautiful, exquisite.” In 1846, they met in person, and Vörösmarty made a deep impression on Liszt.

The Academy had already decided in 1833 to publish Hungarian folk songs, and in the same year elected Gábor Mátray, a music historian, as a corresponding member. Mátray later published the *Universal Collection of Hungarian Folk Songs* in three volumes. However, scholarly collection of folk music had to wait until 1906, when Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály pub-



Letter from Franz Liszt to Mihály Vörösmarty. Kryizawitz, 17 March 1843
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 1/110



Béla Bartók: *Franz Liszt*. Academy inaugural lecture, 1936
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 5088/141

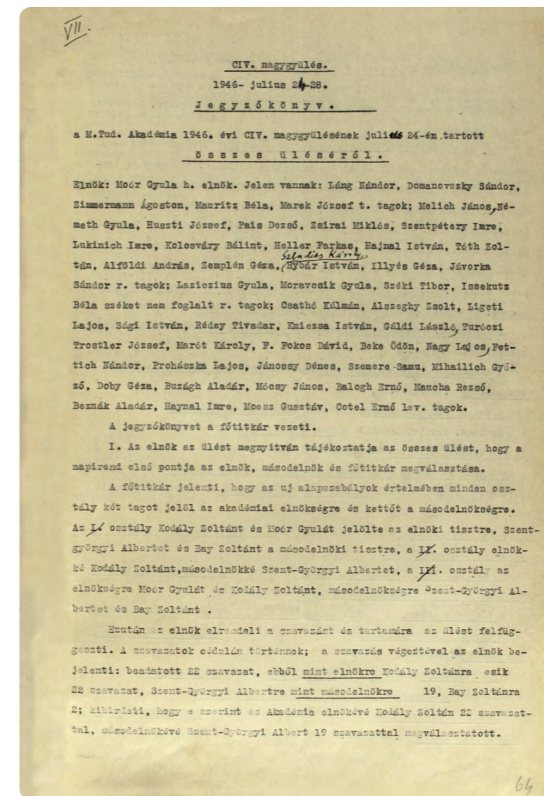
lished their *Hungarian Folk Songs* booklets, boldly aiming to bring Hungarian folk music into concert halls. The breakthrough came 100 years after the Academy's first decision: in 1934, Bartók was relieved of his teaching duties at the Academy of Music and began organising his folk music collection in the Horseshoe Room of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences building. Already world-famous, Bartók was elected a corresponding member in 1935; his inaugural lecture in 1936 on Franz Liszt critically assessed the aristocracy that disparaged true Hungarian music, the peasant music.

Bartók worked in the Horseshoe Room until 1940, when he left for the United States. Afterwards, his friend and collaborator Zoltán Kodály and the Folk Music

Research Group he led took over the space, producing the *Collection of Hungarian Folk Music*.

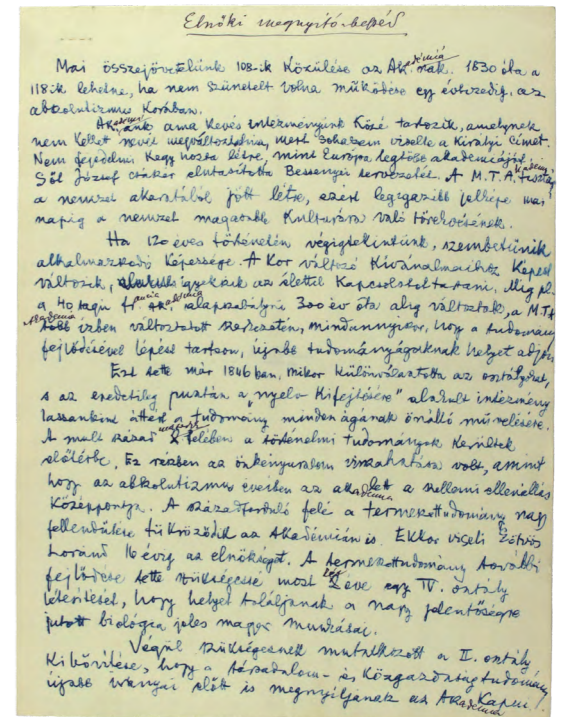
Kodály was first proposed as a corresponding member in the spring of 1940. Despite already having composed works including *Psalmus Hungaricus*, *Székelyfőnök* (The Spinning Room), *Háry János*, and producing numerous studies in folklore and literary history, he was not elected. By 1943, however, he was elected with a large majority, and in 1945, together with Bartók – then in America – he became a full member.

After 1945, the Academy entered a period of crisis, as it lost its properties, financial assets, and rental buildings, and faced the potential for a split. Nobel laureate Albert Szent-Györgyi, dissatisfied with the “dogmatic” humanities-dominated Academy, founded the Academy



Zoltán Kodály, elected president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Minutes of the general assembly, 24 July 1946
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 1483. 64. fol. recto

of Natural Sciences. In this crisis, the Academy needed a president of exceptional authority who could keep the institution united: Zoltán Kodály was elected in 1946. His vice president was his rival, Albert Szent-Györgyi, who would leave for the United States a year later. In his inaugural address, Kodály emphasised reconciliation among disciplines: “*Let there be peace among us!*” and urged his colleagues, not without subtle warning, “*Do not be the followers of any nation...*” Despite his unprecedented authority, Kodály was unable to prevent the Academy's 1949 communist reorganisation. After his presidential term ended, he did not run again and from 1950 focused only on music and linguistics matters at the Academy. Nevertheless, the Academy remained close to his heart: in 1951, based on his expert recommendation, the Eleonóra Lányi Codex, an exceptionally valuable music manuscript, was placed in the Academy Library.



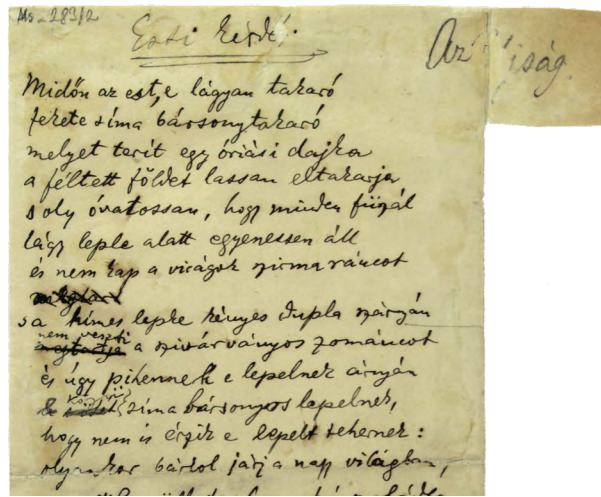
Zoltán Kodály's presidential speech at the general assembly, 1948
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RAL 183/1948

20th Century Classic Poets

At the beginning of the 20th century, Hungarian poetry, which had fallen into the epigonism of Arany and Petőfi, was revitalised by the first generation of *Nyugat* (1908). This voice was foreign to the conservative Academy and the Kisfaludy Society, which shared not only the same building but also the same value system. Over time, however, the Academy's assessment of these poets of "new times with new songs" changed, and today we preserve many manuscripts from them.

Endre Ady famously said, "*I was the Lord, the Verse only a fanciful servant; / My duty is to fall with my body: this is the servant's task,*" and he truly "condemned to death" his own manuscripts, not keeping them. The manuscript of *Elbocsátó szép üzenet* (A graceful message of dismissal), which closed the Léda love affair in 1912, would have ended up in the *Nyugat* editorial wastebasket, had his brother, Lajos Ady, who brought it to the office, not rescued it. It eventually came to our collection via Lajos Ady's widow.

During his life, no book played as important a role for Ady as the *Book of Books* (the Bible). Yet only its



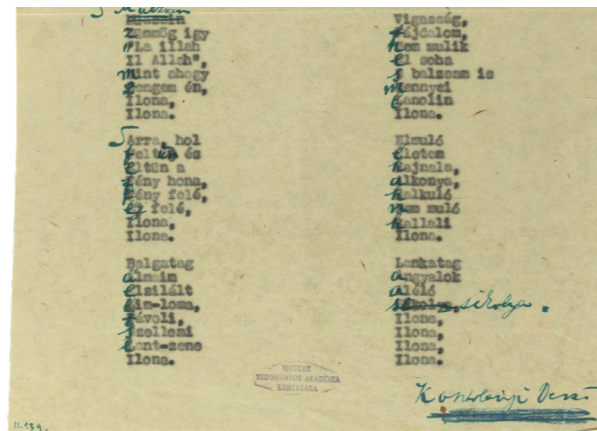
Mihály Babits's manuscript of the poem *An Evening Question*
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 2283/2

back cover survived, inscribed with the phrase and date: "*Eli, Eli Lama Sabaktana (sic!), 23 Oct 1918*". Wrestling with God and himself, he tore apart his beloved Bible on this dreadful night. (According to Lajos Ady, the tragic event actually occurred one month later, on 23 November, following the poet's birthday.)

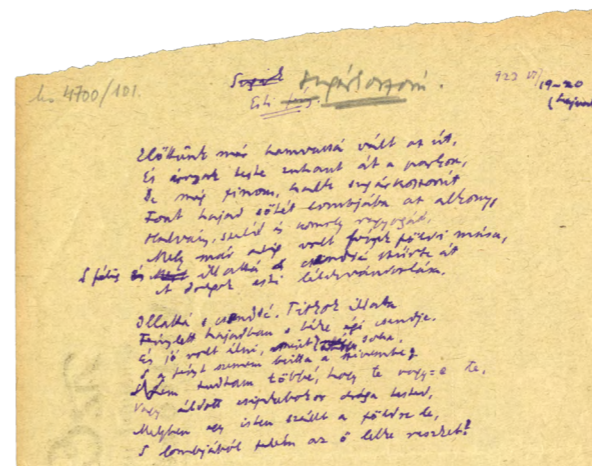
Among the *Nyugat* poets, the Ady collection in our holdings is the largest and richest, acquired in several stages, including poems, letters, and personal relics.

Mihály Babits, the most learned and philosophical poet of Hungarian literature, completed one of his greatest poems, *An Evening Question* (*Esti kérdés*), on the Fogaras mountains in 1909. In this work, he astonishingly combines deep philosophical thought, knowledge of ancient Greek culture, musicality, and lyricism. The fifty-three-line poem, seemingly a single complex sentence, explores the meaning of existence and life, pondering the nature of Time. The manuscript survived in the estate of Lőrinc Szabó and later entered our collection.

Dezső Kosztolányi, a master of the Hungarian language and one of its most virtuosic versifiers, wrote his famous poem *Ilona* in 1929, inspired by his wife Ilona Harnos's name. He was motivated solely to enchant



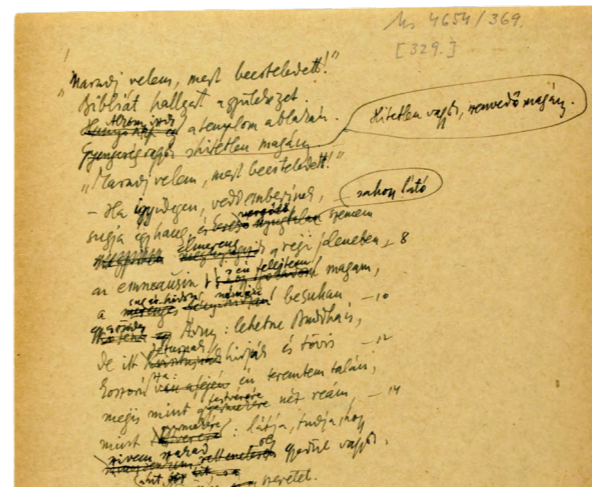
Dezső Kosztolányi's manuscript of the poem *Ilona*
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 4612/35



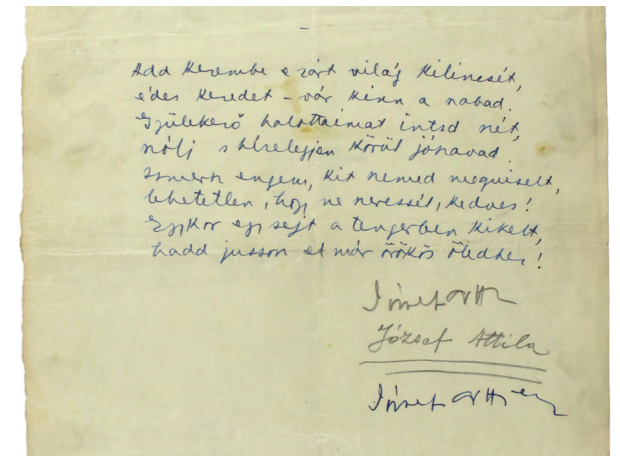
Árpád Tóth's manuscript of the poem *Evening Halo*
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 4700/101–105

readers with the soft sounds of the name Ilona, in a playful, musical, and lilting rhyme scheme.

Árpád Tóth, also of the first *Nyugat* generation, composed *Evening Halo* (*Esti sugárkoszorú*) for his wife, Anna Lichtmann. The poem exudes tender, idyllic, otherworldly beauty, capturing the moment when time ceases in love: "*And minutes passed and thousands of years came...*" It boasts one of the most beautiful opening lines in Hungarian literature: "*The path ahead has become velveteled...*"



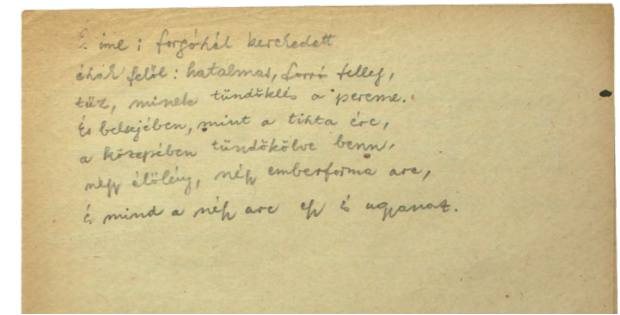
Lőrinc Szabó's manuscript of the poem *The Hand of the Shadow*
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 4654/369



Attila József's manuscript of the poem *Whoever is Afraid to Love*
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 10714/3

Lőrinc Szabó, the most talented lyric poet of the second *Nyugat* generation, left a vast and rich literary legacy. His original manuscripts of poems, translations of verse, prose and drama, essays, lectures, correspondence, and shorthand notes are all preserved in the Manuscript Collection of the Academy Library.

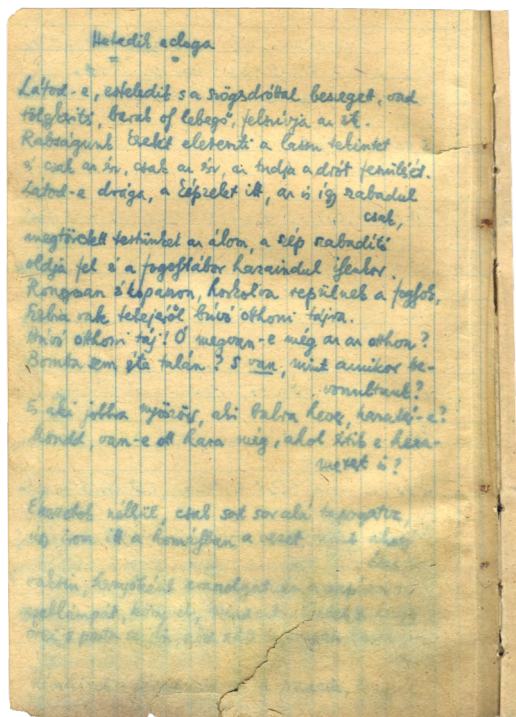
In 1935–36, Edit Gyömrői served as Attila József's therapist, and the poet fell in love with her. He wrote one of his most beautiful and moving poems, *It Deeply Hurts* (*Nagyon fáj*), for her. Their relationship later deteriorated, and unrequited love inspired the harsh 1936 poem ...*Aki szeretni gyáva vagy* (... *Whoever Is Afraid to Love*).



János Pilinszky's manuscript of the poem *Apocryph*
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 5933/21–23

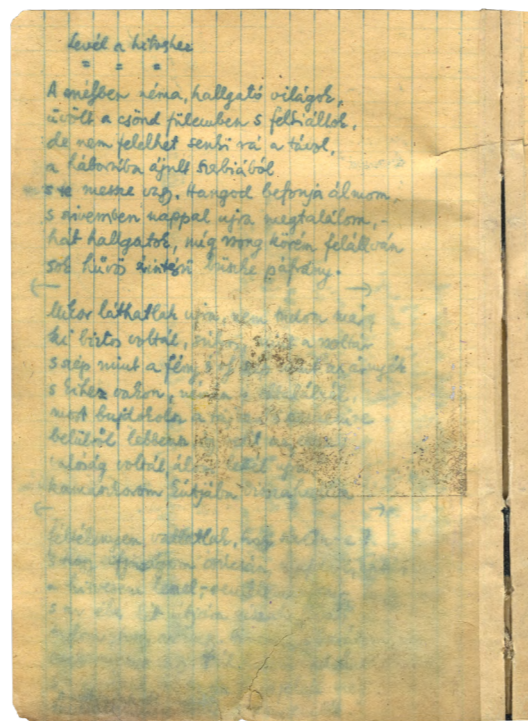
The Bor Notebook

Miklós Radnóti's march column set out on 17 September 1944, on foot from Serbia, from the camp of Bor, and, among other locations, dragged itself through Belgrade, Mohács, and Szentkirályszabadja, heading toward the western border of Hungary. Along the way, several of the prisoners fell victim to the brutality of the accompanying military detachment. Those who collapsed were shot. By early November, Radnóti was completely weakened, and on 9 November 1944, he and twenty-one physically and mentally broken companions were shot in the back of the head near the village of Abda, close to Győr. The execution became known among the local residents, and following their report, the mass grave was uncovered at the end of June 1946. During the exhumation, alongside numer-



Miklós Radnóti's *Bor Notebook*

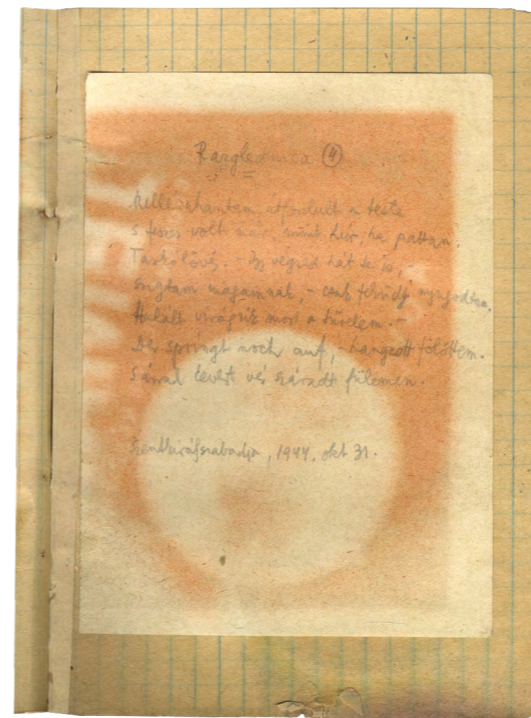
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 2642/25



ous documents, photographs, and letters from Radnóti's clothing, a 14.5 x 10 cm, thirty-page notebook was also found, containing ten poems written in the Bor camp and during the forced march. This notebook, exposed to underground decay for twenty months, is known as the *Bor Notebook*. The notebook contains the following poems in order:

Seventh Eclogue. The date of the poem's creation is illegible, and it is not indicated on the separate sheet handed to Sándor Szalai. Nevertheless, scholarly literature dates it, like the other poems, as: "Lager Heidenau, above Žagubica in the mountains. July 1944."

Eighth Eclogue. Lager Heidenau, above Žagubica in the mountains. 22 July 1944. Radnóti crossed out this version and, a few pages later, with the date 23 August, recopied it into the notebook, now supplemented.



Letter to the Wife. Lager Heidenau, above Žagubica in the mountains. August 1944. Scholarly literature gave it the date "August–September," although the notebook clearly shows that Radnóti wrote only the month "August" under the poem.

Root. Lager Heidenau, above Žagubica in the mountains. 8 August 1944.

À la recherche. Lager Heidenau, above Žagubica in the mountains. 17 August 1944.

Eighth Eclogue. Lager Heidenau, above Žagubica in the mountains. 23 August 1944.

Razglednica. 30 August 1944. In the mountains.

Forced March. Bor. 15 September 1944.

Razglednica (2). Cservenka, 6 October 1944.

Razglednica (3). Mohács, 24 October 1944.

Razglednica (4). Szentkirályszabadja, 31 October 1944.

The last poem was not written on a notebook page, but on the back of a torn advertising slip for cod-liver oil. The slip was almost certainly later glued into the notebook.

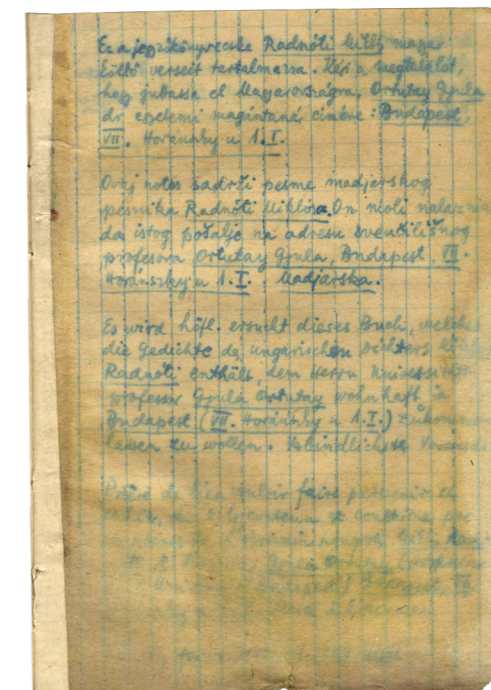
Fortunately, the pages of the notebook that suffered the least damage – and the poems are best preserved – are those containing the four *Razglednica* poems, which survive only in the *Bor Notebook*.

In this "small Serbian school notebook", as Gyula Ortutay described it, not only Radnóti's handwriting is visible, but on the cover in Cyrillic letters, there is also a printed word in Serbian: **Авала** (Avala). Avala is a mountain south of Belgrade, and perhaps a paper manufacturer chose this beautiful, melodic name for itself. Beneath the word **Авала**, the number 5 is visible, and its significance remains a mystery.

On the recto and verso of the first page, Radnóti wrote the same text in five languages. The Hungarian, Serbian, and German texts are clearly legible, while the French and English are blurred and difficult to decipher.

The Hungarian text reads as follows:

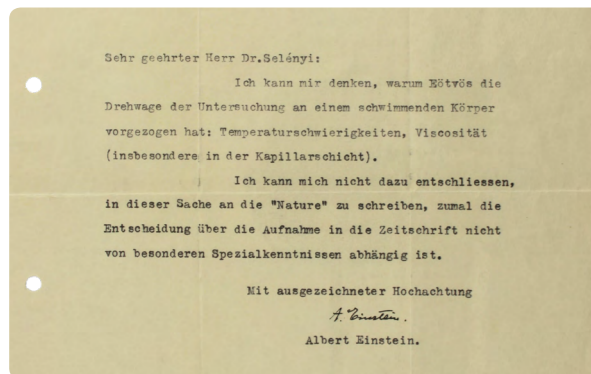
"This small notebook contains the poems of the Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti. The finder is requested to send it to Hungary, to the address of Dr. Gyula Ortutay, university private lecturer: Budapest, VII. Horánszky Street 1. I."



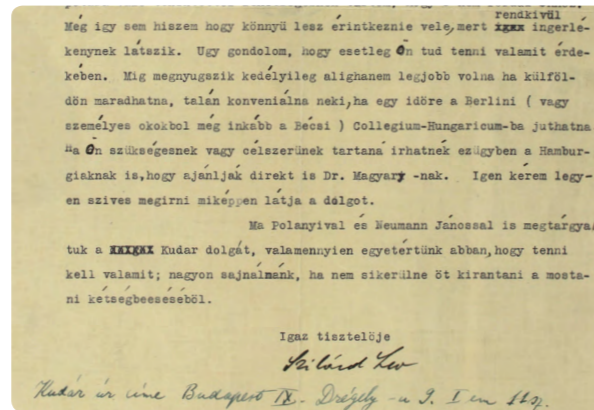
Martians from Budapest and Their Colleagues

Newton's laws of mechanics remained foundational in physics for three centuries. While important discoveries emerged – and Maxwell's equations even pushed the boundaries of Newtonian frameworks – the development of physics largely followed the path Newton had set. The great renewal and the golden age of physics began in the first third of the 20th century with Albert Einstein's theory of relativity and Werner Heisenberg's quantum mechanics. Hungary takes great pride in the fact that scientists of Hungarian origin played a significant role in this renewal.

One of the most revolutionary branches of 20th-century physics was nuclear physics. The harnessing of atomic energy, for both military and civilian purposes, opened new horizons for humanity. Hungarian-born physicists also played a part in the creation of the atomic bomb in the USA. Leó Szilárd was the first to recognise the theoretical possibility of a nuclear chain reaction (1934). He introduced the concept of critical mass, and later worked at the University of Chicago with Enrico Fermi on the design of the atomic reactor ("atomic pile"), realising the first controlled chain reaction. Edward Teller also contributed to the Manhattan Project, first helping to build the experimental atom-

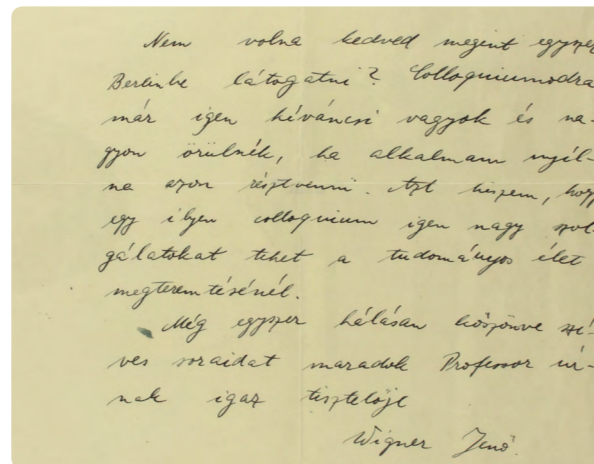


Letter from Albert Einstein to Pál Selényi, 1 October 1948
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 5452/67

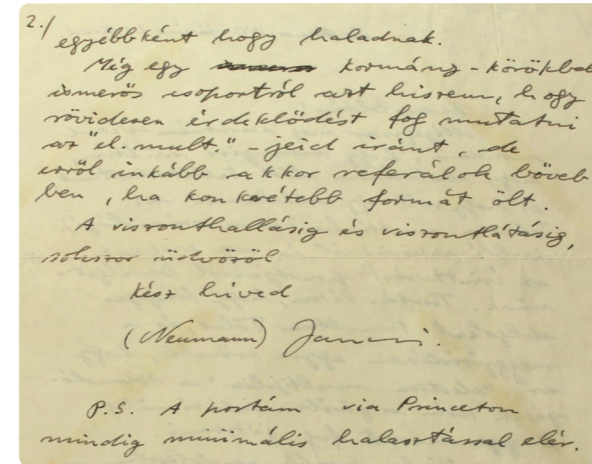


Letter from Leó Szilárd to Rudolf Ortway, Berlin,
7 November 1927
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 785/538

ic pile and initiate the first chain reaction in Chicago, then continuing his work at Los Alamos, where his ideas later led to the development of the hydrogen bomb. Eugene Wigner led the theoretical group that laid the foundations for building the first nuclear reactor. Wigner received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1963. In 1939,



Letter from Eugene Wigner to Rudolf Ortway,
2 December 1929
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 785/117

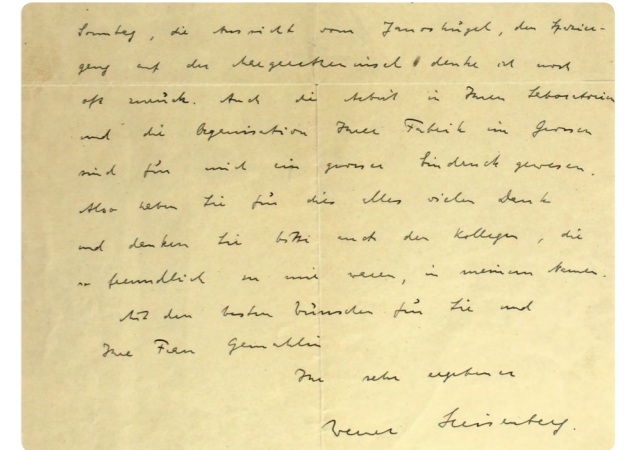


Letter from John von Neumann to Zoltán Bay,
Los Alamos, 21 June 1949
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 4109/141

Szilárd, Teller, and Wigner persuaded Einstein to write a letter to U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt, warning him of the dangers of Nazi Germany's nuclear program. This appeal launched the U.S. nuclear weapons research programme in 1942 – the Manhattan Project.

Mathematician John von Neumann also contributed to the Manhattan Project, but his most important achievement was laying the theoretical foundations for the operation of electronic computers. The 21st century's greatest technological and scientific achievement – the computer – would not have existed without von Neumann's work. Many of his letters are preserved, including those to Zoltán Bay. Bay, together with a scientific team he led at the Budapest United Incandescent Lamp Factory, sent the first microwave radio signals to the Moon in Europe in 1946 and successfully received the reflected signals – marking the beginning of radar astronomy. In 1948, Bay moved to the U.S., where, on his recommendation, the new definition of the meter based on the speed of light and the unit of time was adopted.

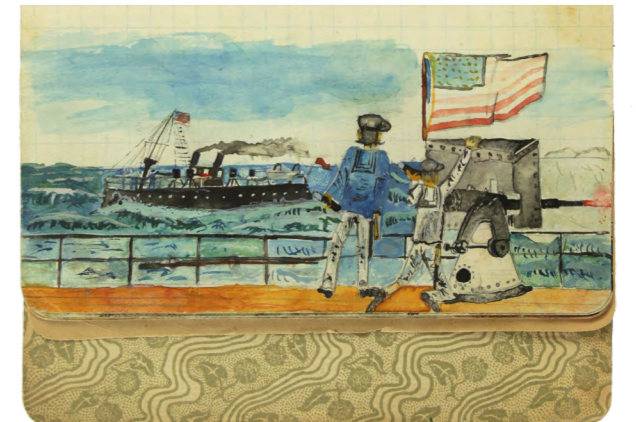
Dennis Gabor's (Dénes Gábor) electrical engineering career flourished in England. He received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1971 for the invention of holography. Nevertheless, the document we display from him is not



Letter from Werner Heisenberg to Zoltán Bay, 5 May 1941
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 4109/154

a scientific work, but a childhood sketchbook, gifted to us in 2008 by his descendants, which testifies to his early talent. Von Neumann, Szilárd, Wigner, and Gabor were connected not only by scientific interest but also by personal friendships originating in Budapest.

It is sad that, except for Zoltán Bay and Albert Szent-Györgyi, these "Martians" achieved their greatest successes abroad. In 1937, Szent-Györgyi won the Nobel Prize in Medicine and Physiology for his experiments on vitamin C while a professor at the University of Szeged. Yet ten years later, he too moved to the United States.

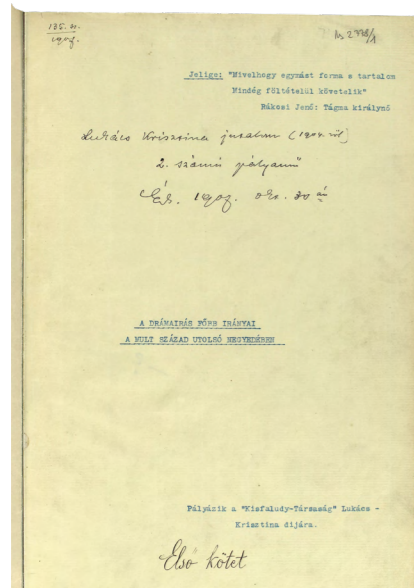


Dénes Gábor's childhood sketchbook, 1908
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 793

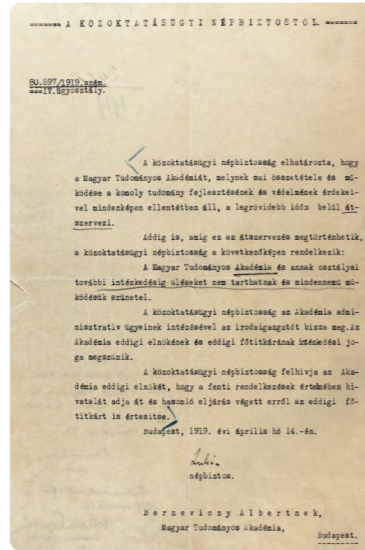
An Academician Who Suspended the Operations of the Academy: György Lukács

György Lukács won the Kisfaludy Society's prize in 1908 with the first version of *The Development of Modern Drama*, which suggested to him the possibility of a career within the conservative, academic, university frameworks of Hungary. After his academic career in Budapest failed, he tried to establish himself in Germany, but when he could not secure a professorship there either, he returned to Budapest in November 1917.

Around him, the *Sunday Circle* formed, whose "house saints" were Meister Eckhart and Dostoevsky. However, Lukács soon turned away from mysticism: in December 1918, he joined the Hungarian Communist Party, and on 14 April 1919, as the deputy head of the People's Commissariat for Public Education of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, he suspended the operations of the "reactionary" Academy, and its president, Albert Berzeviczy, was arrested and held for several days. The Academy's assets were confiscated, and its

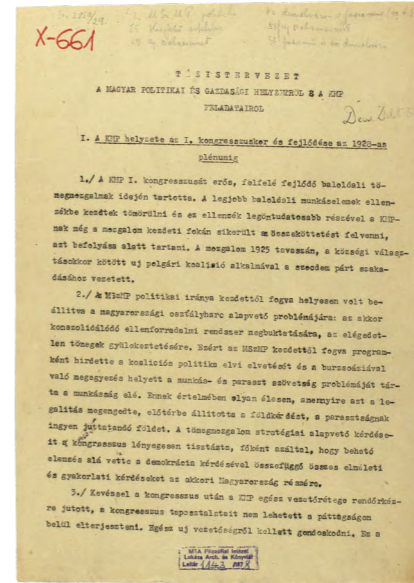


György Lukács: *The Main Trends of Playwriting in the Last Quarter of the Past Century*. Budapest, 1907
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 2778/1



György Lukács's letter as People's Commissar for Public Education to Albert Berzeviczy, President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, notifying the suspension of the Academy's operations, 14 April 1919
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, RAL 291/1919

palace was placed at the disposal of the Red Guard. On 1 August 1919, the Hungarian Soviet Republic fell, and Lukács fled first to Vienna, then to Germany, participating in communist factional debates with works that stirred major controversy, such as *History and Class Consciousness* and the *Blum Theses*. He spent the 1930s in the Stalinist Soviet Union, earning a doctorate for his monograph *The Young Hegel*. Lukács returned to Hungary permanently in August 1945, becoming a leading figure in communist cultural policy and playing a significant role in the Sovietization of the Academy. The communist party's tactic was the "slow death" of the Academy. Through land reforms, it was stripped of its main sources of income, the Vigyázó estates, and its securities and bank deposits were frozen. The Academy thus lost its financial independence. The Hungarian Communist Party considered its most urgent task to rid



György Lukács: *Draft theses on the Hungarian political and economic situation and the tasks of the Hungarian Communist Party (Blum Theses)*, 1928. Contemporary copy with Lukács's autograph pencil notes.
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 2850/29

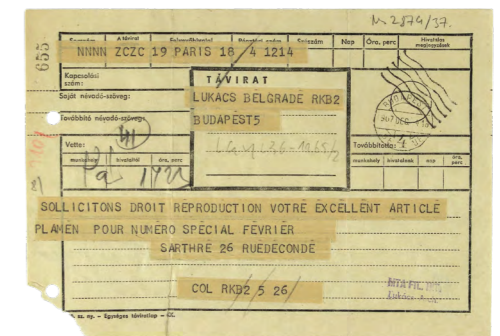
the Academy of its "reactionary" members. In 1947, on behalf of the Communist Party, György Lukács submitted the names of fifteen ideologically reliable social scientists – including himself – to the Academy's Board of Directors, intending that they be jointly elected as members. This attempt failed, but Lukács was appointed an honorary member in July 1948, a full member in October 1949, and between 1949 and 1958, he served on the Academy's presidium. In February 1949, the Hungarian Scientific Council – intended as an alternative to the Academy and directly under the prime minister's supervision – began its work, directed by a six-member Communist Party committee including Lukács, with Ernő Gerő as its president. In November 1949, the Academy's statutes were changed, its public body character ceased, and its nationalisation was completed.

During the 1950s, Lukács published large, dogmatic works, including *The Destruction of Reason*. In 1956, he served as Minister of Culture in Imre Nagy's second government. After being interned in Snagov,



György Lukács's photographic ID as ordinary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1 March 1951
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 2834/91

he returned to Budapest in April 1957. His international reputation protected him from reprisals, and a chapter from his aesthetic magnum opus, *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*, entitled *Singularity as an Aesthetic Category*, was published separately by the Academy Publishing House. Nevertheless, he retired in 1958. By 1968, he had completed the first version of *The Ontology of Social Being*. Despite translations of his works into a dozen languages and correspondence with leading philosophers worldwide, his academic career had ended. He received no Academy awards; his 85th birthday was celebrated only in a small, private ceremony. He passed away in 1971, leaving his manuscripts and books to the Academy. However, his last wishes were not fulfilled; they were placed in the newly established Lukács Archive.

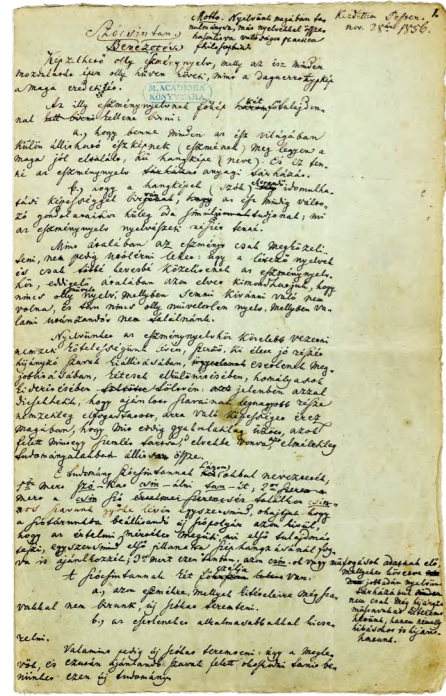


Jean-Paul Sartre's telegram to György Lukács. Paris, 4 December 1964
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 2874/37

Doctors at the Academy

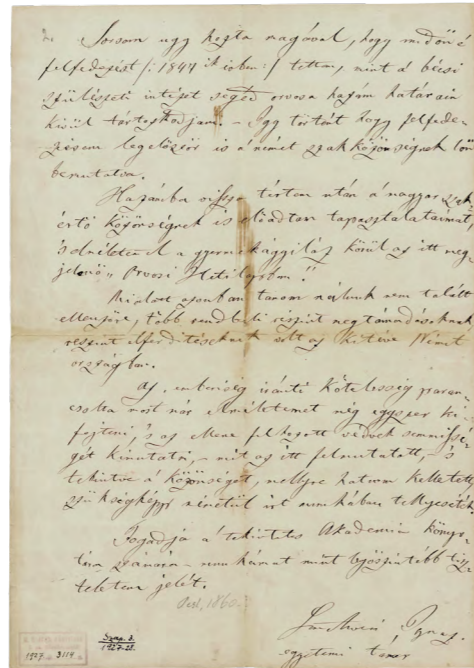
Doctors have played an important role in the Learned Society from its foundation. Ferenc Toldy, the Academy's second and longest-serving secretary (1835–1861), was originally a physician before turning to literary history. Interest in the Hungarian language and literature was characteristic of the era of the foundation. Pál Bugát, chief physician of the Defence Committee during the 1848–49 War of Independence, was not only a healer but also made significant contributions to the development of Hungarian medical terminology; we owe to him, for example, the Hungarian words for nerve, fever, pus, and abscess.

János Balassa (1814–1868), founder of the first Hungarian surgical school, initiator of the *Orvosi Hetilap* (Medical Weekly), and one of the greatest figures of

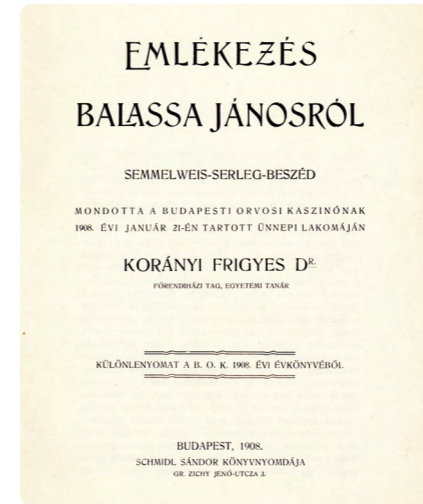


Pál Bugát's language reform work entitled *Szócsintan*, 1856
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Hungarian Linguistics, 4r 8

Hungarian medicine, also took part in creating Hungarian medical terminology. During the War of Independence, he directed the military hospital and was among the first in Europe to use general anaesthesia. Balassa's friend, Ignác Semmelweis, discovered in 1847 that puerperal fever was caused by infection, which could be prevented by washing hands with chlorinated lime, though his discovery was only accepted by the medical profession some twenty years later. The "saviour of mothers" reported his results to the Academy in a letter in 1860 and sent his German-language book on the subject to the library. Balassa's memory was faithfully preserved by his student, Frigyes Korányi, the internist who founded a medical dynasty. In 1908, he delivered the Semmelweis Goblet Speech about Balassa at the Medical Casino.



Ignác Semmelweis's letter to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Pest, around 27 November 1860
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 529



Frigyes Korányi's memorial speech about János Balassa at the Doctors' Casino, 1908
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 5237/25

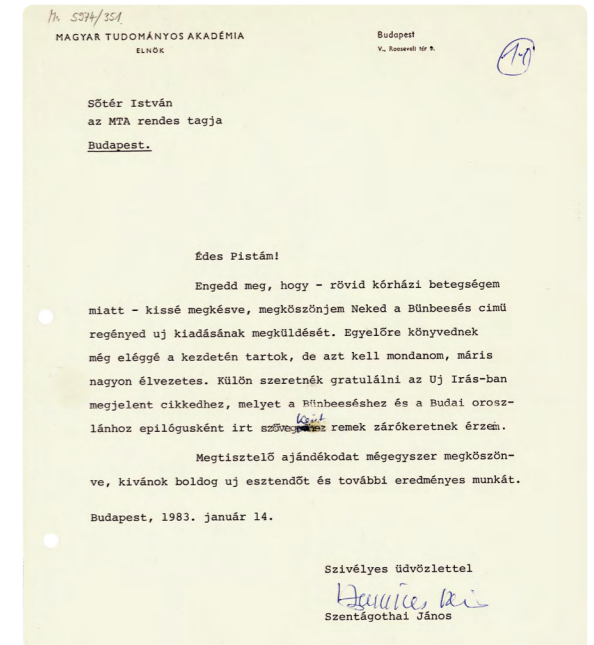
The explosive development of medicine in the 20th century was reflected in the position doctors occupied within the Academy. Since 1949, the Academy has had three presidents who were doctors: István Rusznyák, János Szentágothai, and Szilveszter Vizi E.

Internist István Rusznyák, the Academy's first president after its communist reorganisation, had an unprecedented career. In 1946, he became a corresponding member, ordinary member, and member of the Board of Directors within half a year, and between 1949 and 1970, he served as president of the Academy. During his presidency, the Academy's research institute network was established; between 1954 and 1970, he himself headed the Institute of Experimental Medicine. He willingly served the communist regime: in 1951, at a closed meeting of the Medical Section, he was the first to propose the exclusion of Kálmán Sántha (1903–1956), the world-renowned and morally impeccable neurologist and psychiatrist, from the Academy. Sántha had remarked in a lecture that certain mental illnesses occurred more frequently among Stakhanovites, and as a result, he was stripped of his Academy membership, his university chair in Debrecen, and was sent to Balassagyarmat. His rehabilita-

tion in 1956 came too late; the persecutions had ruined his health, and he died the same year at the age of 53.

The easing of ideological pressure under the one-party system was indicated by the election in 1976 of János Szentágothai, a member of a multi-generational medical dynasty, as president. A world-renowned neuroanatomist who studied the cerebellum and cerebral cortex, he co-authored *Atlas of Human Anatomy* with Ferenc Kiss, illustrated with his own drawings. The book went through eighty-five editions and was translated into more than thirty languages. He held office until 1985 despite never concealing his religious faith. He was a school-founding figure, and many of his students went on to hold important positions at the Academy.

The next physician-president did not come until the early 21st century. Szilveszter Vizi E., a pharmacologist who discovered the brain's non-synaptic (analogue) communication system, served two terms as president of the Academy between 2002 and 2008.



Letter from János Szentágothai to István Sötér. Budapest, 14 January 1983
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Ms 5974/351

Contemporary Greats of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

It is widely agreed that one of the finest mathematicians of our time is László Lovász, president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences from 2014 to 2020. He made lasting contributions to many areas of mathematics, but his pioneering work in discrete mathematics and computer science is most frequently highlighted. Among his most outstanding achievements are the proof of the Weak Perfect Graph Conjecture, the proof of the conjecture concerning the chromatic number of Kneser graphs, and the solution to Shannon's pentagon problem. He is also known for the Lovász Local Lemma, a famous combinatorial theorem particularly useful in the study of random structures, the Lenstra–Lenstra–Lovász lattice reduction algorithm, and the development of graph limit theory.

Although there is no Nobel Prize for mathematics, three prestigious international awards are often referred to as the “mathematical Nobel”: the Fields Medal,



László Lovász's Abel Prize, 2021



László Lovász's Kyoto Prize: medal and diploma, 2010

awarded by the International Mathematical Union (IMU) every four years at the International Congress of Mathematicians; the Wolf Prize, presented by the President of the Israeli Knesset; and above all, the Abel Prize, awarded by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters. László Lovász has received two of these: the Wolf Prize in 1999 and the Abel Prize in 2021. He also received the Kyoto Prize, the Japanese equivalent of a Nobel, which has been awarded annually since 1985 in philosophy, arts, science, and technology – Lovász was the recipient in 2010. It is exceptionally rare for someone to receive three “Nobel-equivalent” awards.

Hungarian mathematics is further distinguished by the fact that another Hungarian mathematician has also



Endre Szemerédi's Abel Prize, 2012

won the Abel Prize: Endre Szemerédi in 2012. He was recognised for his fundamental contributions to discrete mathematics and theoretical computer science, as well as for the profound impact of his work on additive number theory and ergodic theory.

The year 2023 was unprecedentedly successful for Hungarian science. Two Hungarian scientists received Nobel Prizes from the King of Sweden: Katalin Karikó, a biochemist, received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, and Ferenc Krausz received the Nobel Prize in Physics.

Katalin Karikó is credited with the development of synthetic mRNA-based vaccine technology. Her discovery played a decisive role in combating the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2019. She is now undoubtedly the most widely known Hungarian scientist in the world, and her pioneering work has been recognised with numerous other awards.

Ferenc Krausz received the Nobel Prize for “experimental methods generating attosecond light pulses to study electron dynamics in matter.” A year earlier, he also received the Wolf Prize in Physics.

Biologist Éva Kondorosi researches plant–bacteria symbiosis, symbiotic nitrogen fixation, developmental biology, and chemical ecology. She was awarded the prestigious Balzan Prize in Chemical Ecology in 2018. The International Eugenio Balzan Prize was established from the estate of a former editor and co-owner of *Corriere della Sera* by his daughter, and it is awarded in multiple fields.

In 2011, three Hungarian neuroscientists – Péter Somogyi, György Buzsáki, and the current Academy president, Tamás Freund – received the Brain Prize, awarded for the first time that year and often called the “Nobel Prize of neuroscience.”

The bittersweet aspect is that, similar to the “Martians” of the mid-20th century, many of today's Hungarian scientific luminaries are dual citizens and achieved their world-class results abroad.



Tamás Freund's Brain Prize, 2011

Mihály Vörösmarty's Personal Relics



Mihály Vörösmarty's white pocket knife
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 2/118. p. 25, item 21



Laura Csajághy's silver coin purse set with pearls
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, Objects 13



Mihály Vörösmarty's Writing Desk
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 2/118, p. 23, item 4



Mihály Vörösmarty's paper knife with a bone handle
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 2/118, p. 35, item 6a



Mihály Vörösmarty's ivory chess set
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 2/118, p. 23, item 10



Mihály Vörösmarty's tobacco pouch made with silver thread
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 2/118, p. 23, item 14



Mihály Vörösmarty's Goblet-shaped glass cup
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, item 14



Mihály Vörösmarty's silver academic cup
Inscription: "To Vörösmarty, for his New Works, from the Hungarian L[earned] S[ociety], 1842, with 200 gold coins."
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 2/118, p. 23, items 5–6



Mihály Vörösmarty's Table clock
MTA KIK Manuscript Collection, K 2/118, p. 23, item 8

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