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**BULLETIN 2010**  
*National Széchényi Library*

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## BULLETIN 2010

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**Cover 1:** Kriza Codex, p. 27. (1532, Manuscript Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, K 47)

**Cover 2: Top:** Károly Markó snr: Appeggi landscape. (1848, Hungarian National Gallery)

**Bottom:** Barnabás Földesi: Markó No 1. (2007, “adaptation” of Markó’s painting)

**Cover 3:** Special Prime Minister Award in “Beautiful Hungarian Book” competition

**Cover 4:** Alajos Györgyi (Giergl): Ferenc Erkel (1855, Hungarian National Museum)

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# RELICS OF THE OLD HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO THE EARLY 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

EXHIBITION IN THE SZÉCHÉNYI LIBRARY

29 OCTOBER 2009 - 28 FEBRUARY 2010

(Retrospection)



The Hungarian government declared 2009, the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of writer Ferenc Kazinczy (1759-1831) who was a leading figure in the movement to renew the Hungarian language, to be the Year of the Hungarian Language. On this occasion, the National Széchényi Library organised a representative exhibition of written relics of the old Hungarian language, whilst the Manuscript Department presented Kazinczy's relationship to the old Hungarian language (*Language. Memory. Creation. Kazinczy*) in a smaller exhibition. The number of visitors exceeding eleven thousand was indicative of the success of the exhibition.

The exhibition covered a period of about 500 years (1000-1526), from the first Hungarian words written with Latin letters to the complete Hungarian language codices of the late Middle Ages. The quantity of such relics was minimal compared to the spoken language of course; moreover, only a small fraction of the original number of written texts has survived. However, this collection of documents is not only significant for linguistic history; it is the sole source of the history of Hungarian literacy and the history of medieval Hungarian literature as well. The general public is only aware of the most important of them, but there they were able to see and understand them in their real historic context, whilst for specialists, from any discipline, this was a unique experience to see all these valuable resources together.

The exhibition borrowed its motto from Kazinczy: "... and our duty is to love this language, even if it was not as beautiful as it is, because it is ours." Scientific interest in the past of the nation and the language and, parallel to these, in written relics of old Hungarian emerged at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Almost all of the major documents known today were discovered within a few decades at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and their copying and publication started immediately. The 15-volume *Nyelvemléktár* (*Treasury of*



The Last Judgement  
The Érsekújvár Codex, f. 146r  
Hungarian Academy of Sciences Library, K 45

*Relics of the old Hungarian Language*) is one of the rare cases of a completed series in Hungary at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The history of research of these relics was presented in text and image by Ágnes Stemler on display boards leading to the entrance of the exhibition. On a long "timeline" between the entrance and the exit doors, the photographs of the major documents were placed in chronological order, giving a strong visual impression of the fact that while only one or two records survived per century to begin with, the number of documents increased in the 15<sup>th</sup>

century, and documents from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century had to be carefully selected from a much wider range. At the end of the exhibition, the same chronological line provided a summary overview of the manuscripts with which visitors were now familiar. Posters on the walls of the corridor to the left and computers in the entrance hall introduced contemporary scientific workshops specialised in the work on language relics. (The texts can be found on the [www.nyelvemlekek.oszk.hu](http://www.nyelvemlekek.oszk.hu) website.) Placed in the Renaissance window-holes designed by Pál Héjjas were modern publications of old Hungarian manuscripts that could be handled, and opposite this there was a monastery's manuscript-copying, painting and bookbinding workshop for young schoolchildren.

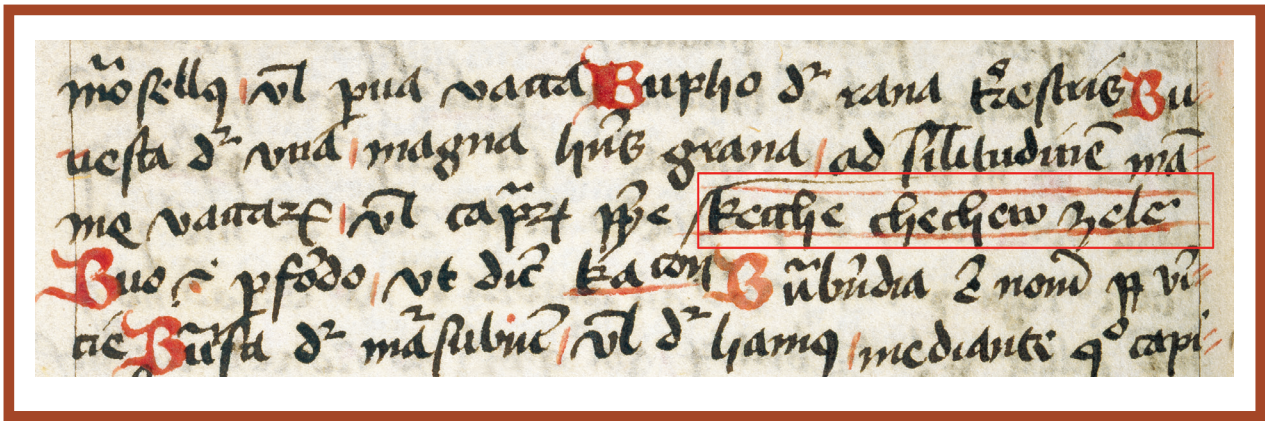
The outside world ceased as one entered the twilight of the first hall. In the centre stood the fine statue of the Madonna composed of the fragments from the Gothic find in Buda Castle (1974). In the background stood the half-figure of an apostle holding a “hooded” book, from the same set of statues. The most valuable documents were in display cases around the room: the *Letter of Foundation of Tihany Abbey* (1055), the earliest Hungarian charter surviving in the original, and the earliest surviving historical work, the *Gesta Hungarorum* by an anonymous notary (roughly 1210/1250), as examples of the Hungarian word sporadically appearing in Latin texts; a *Funeral Oration* (roughly 1200) as the first continuous Hungarian text and the *Lamentation of Mary* (roughly 1300) as the first poem in the Hungarian language. Beside them were Latin codices – schoolbooks, volumes of sermons, legal codices – with simple marginal or inter-linear notes in Hungarian, traces left by Hungarian-speaking users up to the end of the Middle Ages. As a written language, Hungarian was born within the framework of and closely linked to medieval Latinity. St. Stephen committed to the Latin Church, and this brought with it the introduction of the Latin script as well as the assumption of written Latin literary genres used in the running of the church and state. Some Hungarian words had to be written from the start, e.g. names of places and individuals in charters and historic works. During sermons, school lectures, and the administration of justice, members of the congregation, pupils, or litigants who did not understand Latin had to be addressed in the Hungarian language, although the model-sermons and the schoolbooks were themselves in Latin, as were documents issued in connection with trials. For centuries, Latin literacy co-existed with this spoken Hungarian tradition that was dependent on Latin, and words and short texts crossed the borderline between the two languages from time to time. During the Árpád era (1000-1301), extensive



1. The Gyulafehérvár Lines, f. 125r  
Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) Bathyaneum, R. III. 89.

Hungarian texts were only written down in certain clearly-defined cases of an exclusively personal nature; everybody who could read knew Latin anyway. The *Funeral Oration* became an integral part of the Latin funeral rite. The *Lamentation of Mary*, as good sermon material, became part of the *Leuven Codex*, which contained Latin model-sermons. The *Gyulafehérvár Lines* were easy-to-memorise Hungarian rhyming divisions that were connected to Latin sermons. Latin-Hungarian glossaries like the *Schlägli Glossary*, the *Hortularium Schlägi*, which was exhibited here for the first time, and the *Esztergom Schoolbook*, were made for use in schools. Hungarian words can be found in the main text of the 15<sup>th</sup> century *Sermones Domicales*, which contains Sunday Sermons. One of the sermons at first sight looks as if it used the *Lamentation of Mary* as its source, but the similarity is actually explained by the fact that they drew on a common prototype. Together with the *Königsberg Fragments*, this was the third text devoted to Mary in the Madonna room. It was not possible to display the original of the *Königsberg Fragments* because of the high insurance premium. To compensate for this, Péter Tóth found photographs by Emil Jakubovich in the Academy Library, which provide the only documentation of the now lost codex, though the fragment was discovered in its binding in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Péter Tóth's study appearing in the catalogue provides convincing evi-



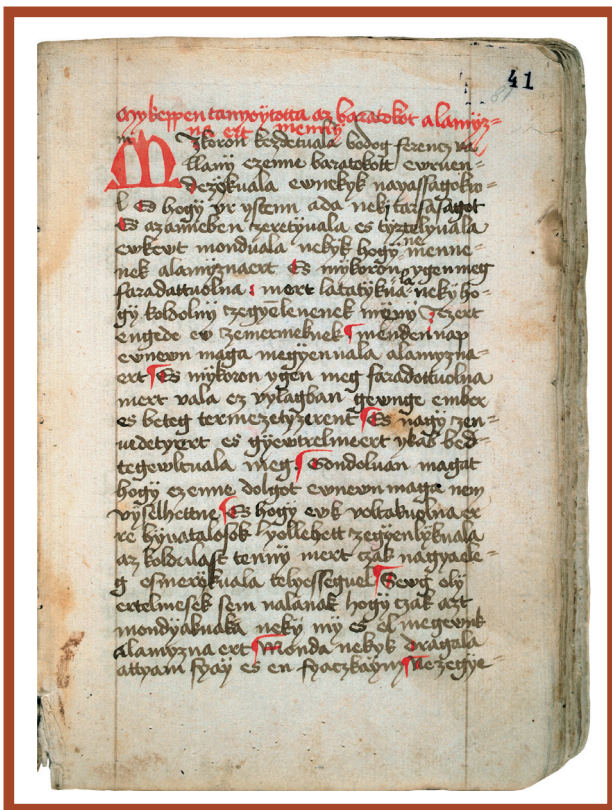


2. "goat-teat grape" Schlägli Hortularium, f. 38v  
Schlägl (Upper Austria), Prämonstratenser Stiftbibliothek, Cpl. 156.

dence that this fragment, which was used as book-binding material in Poland, was originally part of the Codex. The fragmentary nature of the text on *Angelic Greeting* has so far prevented the identification of the genre that it represents.

The atmosphere of a convent was created in the second room with decorations depicting a cloister and a courtyard garden. Most of the codices on display here were prepared in convents for nuns and lay sisters who did not know Latin. About 50 codices of Hungarian language have come down to us from the period

The Jókai Codex, f. 41r  
National Széchényi Library, MNy 67

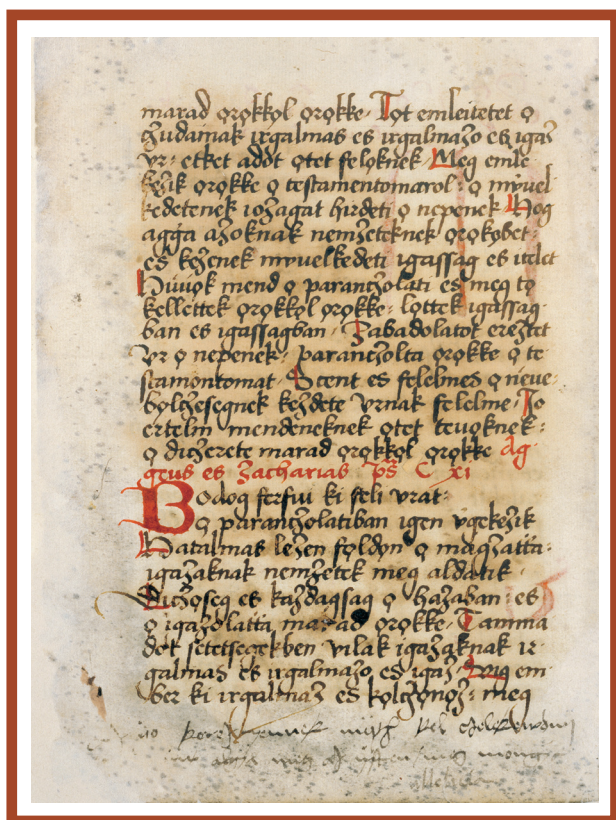


between 1440 and 1530, but mainly from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The significance of these modest-looking manuscripts is enormous: they played a defining role in the development of literature in the Hungarian language.

The oldest surviving book in Hungarian, the *Jókai Codex*, is a series of short accounts of the lives of Saint Francis and his companions, and of his miracles (c.1380/1440). Bible translations were displayed in the courtyard garden. Systematic bible translation began within the spoken language with the interpretation of gospel pericopes in the frame of preaching. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the ability to read slowly began to separate from knowledge of Latin, and this is when the first written *Bible* translations appeared. No complete Hungarian language bible has been saved from the Middle Ages. In the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called *Hussite Bible* was written. Its parts are preserved in copies of different ages: the *Vienna Codex* (c.1450) contains the smaller books of the Old Testament, the *Munich Codex* (1466) is the translation of the four gospels and the *Apor Codex* (end of 15<sup>th</sup> century) contains the book of Psalms. One of the great merits of the exhibition was that it actually brought the three texts together for the first time. A more lasting result than that was that the National Széchényi Library had the opportunity to restore the *Apor Codex* (Székely National Museum, Sepsiszentgyörgy [Sfântu Gheorghe], Romania), which was in very bad condition. Zsuzsa Tóth performed outstanding work, and an exciting documentary about the process and the result of the restoration can be found on the [www.nyelvemlekek.oszk.hu](http://www.nyelvemlekek.oszk.hu) website.

The sudden increase in the number of Hungarian language codices was closely linked to the reforms in the mendicant orders of the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century: common reading and private devotion played an important role alongside Latin liturgy in religious life.





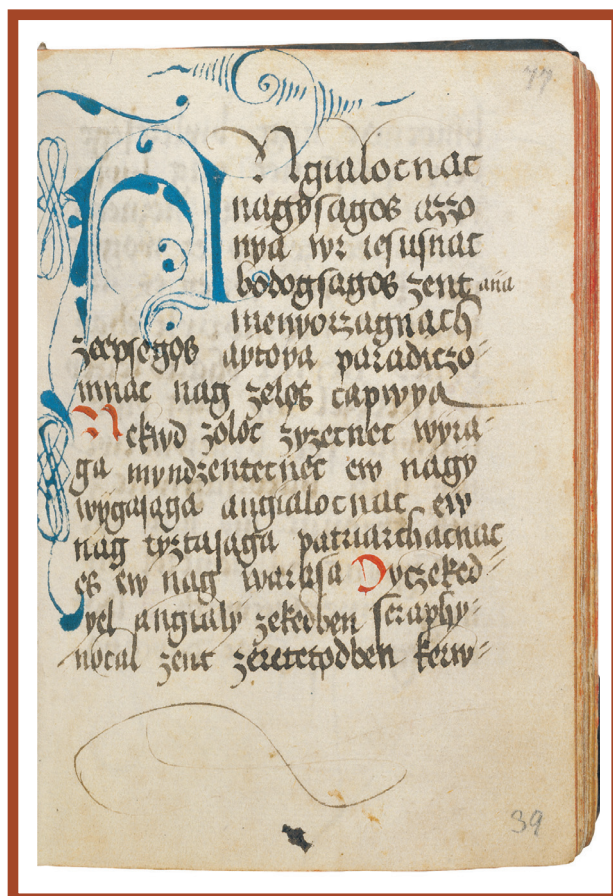
4. The Apor Codex, p. 84.  
Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe),  
Székely National Museum A. 1330

Among the nuns who did not know Latin, there was an increasing number who could read and write Hungarian. It was for them that a relatively extensive collection of writings was produced: legends, parables, contemplations, prayers. The texts were translations that had been written by friars, but there were many nuns among the copyists. The Dominican Convent of the Blessed Virgin on Margaret Island and the Convent of the Poor Clares in Óbuda (both within the boundaries of modern-day Budapest) had the most codices and they gladly lent these to each other. The nuns were strongly attached to their books, and they took them along when they fled from the Turks to Upper Hungary (today Slovakia). For this reason, many of them survived the storms of history. Lea Ráskay who came from an aristocratic family was the most important codex copyist soror and a cultivated and dedicated guardian of the island convent's books. Five of these codices have survived: the *Legend of Saint Margaret* (1510), the *Book of Parables* (1510), the *Cornides Codex* (1514–1519), which contains legends and sermons, the *Life of Saint Dominic* (1517) and the *Horváth Codex* (1522), which contains prayers. The quality of writing is high, with clearly legible “bastarda”. The books were written for public use such as reading aloud. Her name was immortalised in

*Codex Cornides* (f 184v). The other copyist from the convent who is known by name is Márta Sövényházi. The *Érsekújvár Codex* contains gospel pericopes, contemplations, prayers, sermons, legends and parables. Particularly worthy of note in the codex is the 4074 line legend in verse of Saint Catherine of Alexandria.

The third room was dedicated to the work of the end of the period. From within the homogenous religious literature emerged writings by the first independent creative individuals who, with defined goals, compiled works of their own. An example of this is the *Érdy Codex*, an enormous collection of sermons and legends edited by Anonymous Carthusian. Besides nuns, there were also some secular women who learnt to read. The prayer book of Benigna Magyar Kinizsi, the richly decorated *Festetics Codex* (c.1492) primarily differs from the modest-looking convent prayer-books in its appearance. What have also survived from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century

6. The Song of András Vásárhelyi  
The Thewrewk Codex, f. 39r  
Hungarian Academy of Sciences Library, K 46



are the first independent poems. This does not mean that there was no earlier poetry, but since they were only preserved orally we do not know about them. Now that they could expect readers, there was reason



to write them down. The *Szabács Battle* written in 1476 is the earliest extant example of secular poetry, and, according to Iván Horváth's latest research, might have been the work of someone whose mother tongue was German. *Mary's Song* by András Vásárhelyi was the first Hungarian language poem, the author of which, although he was a Franciscan friar, recorded his name at the beginning of the verses and wrote the time writing (the city of Pest, Saint Peter Street, fifteen hundred and eight) in the colophon. The use of written Hungarian penetrated everyday life at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. András Vér issued a receipt in Hungarian in 1493, and husbands who were on military service often added personal closings in Hungarian to their Latin letters to their wives.

The number of Hungarian language documents quickly increased as literacy spread, but the chances of their survival (in the middle of the country at least) decreased. What has survived is enough for us to follow the broad developments, but the number of items are limited enough to make each one of them an invaluable treasure. At the exhibition, 68 manuscripts and 42 valuable artefacts were on display. Substantial contributions to the success of the exhibition were made by József Hapák with his photography, Olga Imre with her visual planning, and the exhibition organiser, Kiáll Ltd.

Relics of the old Hungarian language require the cooperation of experts from many fields. Linguists, historians, literature historians, codex specialists, an art historian, and a bookbinding historian all took part in the preparatory work and the writing of the catalogue. The exhibition had to be dismantled after it

closed in spring 2010, but the catalogue contains many valuable studies and a precise description of every exhibited record accompanied by a photograph („*Látjátok feleim...*” *Magyar nyelvemlékek a kezdetektől a 16. század elejéig*. Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár kiállítása. Szerk. Madas Edit. Budapest, OSZK, 2009, 400 p., ill.) The other lasting result is the website mentioned above, [www.nyelvemlekek.oszk.hu](http://www.nyelvemlekek.oszk.hu), produced by Annamária Sudár, Jolán Mann, Máté Török, and Balázs Kertész, which provides a treasury of relics of the old Hungarian language and thus carries on the work of the exhibition.

Many individuals worked selfishly and devotedly together to provide the exhibition with adequate finances as well as ensure permits, domestic and foreign loans, the opening ceremony with President of the Republic, László Sólyom, open days, and dozens of guided tours.

**Edit Madas**  
madas.at.oszk.hu

#### **Year of the Hungarian Language Memorial Medal for the National Széchényi Library**

In December 2009 the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Balassi Institute awarded our library with the Year of the Hungarian Language Memorial Medal for its part in the series of events during the Year of the Hungarian Language, the “Relics of the old Hungarian Language” exhibition and the restoration of the *Apor Codex*. The medal had been placed in the Library's museum. (The editor)