

RETURN OF THE RESTORED APOR CODEX

FORMAL RECEPTION AND SUBSEQUENT ACADEMIC
SYMPOSIUM ON 22 APRIL 2010 AT THE SZÉKELY NATIONAL MUSEUM
IN SEPSIZENTGYÖRGY (SFÂNTU GHEORGHE)



Among the programmes for the Year of the Hungarian Language the National Széchényi Library presented the *Vienna*, *Munich* and *Apor Codices* together as an academic curiosity at the highly successful Hungarian Language Relics exhibition. These three codices preserve independently made copies of parts of the first Hungarian Bible translation, the so-called *Hussite Bible* (c.1416-1435). The *Vienna* and the *Munich Codices* were so named from the cities where they are now kept, whereas the *Apor Codex* is named after its first known owner, the writer Baron Péter Apor (1676-1752). The *Apor Codex* was formed by binding three independent manuscripts together. It contains the *Hussite Bible* psalm book in a later copy (late 15th to early 16th century) together with hymns from the Divine Office and biblical canticles. The copy was presumably written for Premontrean nuns but was definitely used by them to understand the psalms recited in Latin during the Divine Office. The psalm book was complemented by the two parts with Premontrean origins, which were attached later: the *Three Excellent Services* for members of the order, a listing of times of prayer for its benefactors, and a Lamentation of Mary in dialogic form - the Saint Anselm Passion dialogue.

The renaissance binding of the *Apor Codex* is identical to the binding of the *Lányi Codex* written for the Premontrean sisters, which was made in Buda in a workshop that was perhaps Dominican. It is likely that Premontrean nuns from Szeged based in Somlóvásárhely had the two volumes bound together in Buda. Buda nuns fleeing from the Turks took both the codices with them to Bratislava or Trnava. The *Apor Codex* later came into the hands of the Cserey family as a gift. In 1875 it was placed in the Székely National Museum founded in Imecsfalva by János Cserey's widow, Emilia Zathureczky, and then in 1880, together with the museum, it found its way to its current location in Sepsiszentgyörgy. This codex, which contains valuable language relics but was in very bad condition, was subsequently taken to Budapest, where it was prepared for the exhibition after months of meticulous work by Zsuzsanna Tóth, restorer at the National Széchényi Library.

On 22 April 2010 the Székely Nemzeti Museum in

Sepsiszentgyörgy celebrated the homecoming of the restored *Apor Codex*, one of the most valuable items in its collection. Mihály Vargha, the institution's director, received the Codex from László Boka in the Bartók Room of the Székely National Museum, thanking the director of academic affairs for the invaluable work of the NSZL. Mihály Vargha passed on the greetings of Elena Tîrziman, director of the Romanian National Library, a partner in the lending and restoration programme. Sándor Tamás, leader of the Kovászna county council, read out greetings from Hunor Kelemen, Romanian Minister of Culture.

After the public handover in front of the media, the event was enhanced by a series of lectures. The first speaker to address the audience was László Boka, Director of Academic Affairs, who highlighted the great importance of knowledge of Hungarian language relics to those who wish to fully understand our past. By way of introduction to the exhibition arranged by curator Edit Madas, he outlined the process over many centuries by which the written form of the Hungarian language developed. This process started with the first Hungarian words found scattered in Latin texts and continued up to the birth of the written literary language, including the parallel increase in use of written Hungarian for everyday purposes. At the end of his highly successful lecture he presented the referred language relics exhibition in a virtual tour of each exhibition room. The audience, the majority of whom had not been able to see the original exhibition, greatly appreciated this gesture and gave the lecture a hearty ovation.

The lecture by restorer Zsuzsanna Tóth, in which she gave a richly illustrated presentation of the process of restoring the Codex and the discoveries she had made relating to the history of bookbinding, with the aid of a slideshow, was a great success. The lecture entitled *The Restoration of the Apor Codex* gave a detailed account of the damage to the book – especially by water – which occurred over the centuries. The most striking damage was the buckling caused by a space left by missing pages which had been ripped out. The most dangerous damage, however, was caused by badly mixed ink. The ink corrosion led to the fading of the letters, and the paper at the edge of the



Mihály Vargha received the restored codex from László Boka with words of profound gratitude, thanking the NSZL for their invaluable cooperation.

letters broke up and split open. Whole rows and letters fell out of the written text of the Codex. It was possible to stop this destructive process during restoration, and, with very meticulous work on each individual letter, most of the damage could be reversed. The audience made up of people unfamiliar with restoration listened to the lecture with great enjoyment and rewarded it with thunderous applause.

In their joint lecture entitled *The Apor Codex and genres found in late Medieval Hungarian Codices* Csilla Gábor and Ágnes Korondi, teachers of the Department of Hungarian Literature at Babeş-Bolyai University, approached the psalms of the oldest surviving Hungarian Bible translation and the literary history problems associated with them by examining them in comparison to late Medieval Hungarian Codex literature. In their enjoyable lecture rich with data during which even the so-called Hussite origin theory was questioned, they gave their audience of academics a comprehensive view of the relationship between the *Apor Codex* and other codices in the context of Hungarian Bible translations.

Finally, University of Cluj professor, Emese Egyed, in her fascinating lecture entitled *Shocking Hungarian Language Relics of the Enlightenment*, analysed how a community comprised of those who saw themselves as patriot-

ic, identifying with the traditions of Hungarian nobility, and were educated or more or less uneducated, received the language relics that were put into print in the 18th century. Behind the objections expressed in private correspondence and in pamphlets there were not just reactions against the new science but also a defence of the symbols of Hungarian nobility and the prestige of the Hungarian language. The latter was threatened by the Germanising imperial politics of that time, and the still strong traditions of Latinity in the region. At the same time, the growing interest in the origin of the language and the roots of national identity led to an increase in the amount of linguistic, literary, and historical research. The study of old texts became well-known among an increasingly wide public, which raised a series of new questions of a literary, philosophical and even legal nature.

At the reception organised to celebrate the homecoming of the *Apor Codex*, Hunor Boér, the leading librarian of the collection preserving the codex, announced that the National Széchényi Library had not only restored the volume, but also digitised it, thus creating an opportunity for our valuable language relic to appear in a critical edition as part of the series of Hungarian Codices, and opening it up to a wide audience.

Szilvia Bánfi
banfi.at.oszk.hu