

GUARDIANS

– THE CENTRAL EXHIBITION OF THE 2014
NIGHT OF THE MUSEUMS ORGANIZED BY
THE MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION –



„GUARDIANS: guardians of letters and soul. The collections and workshops of the Széchényi Library are guardians of the complete Hungarian written culture for more than two hundred years. On this night, the visitor may not only look at the most interesting pieces of the collections, which preserved for us besides the letters also the soul of their creator throughout the ages and across chance, destiny and the storms of history, but also will be introduced into the collecting, preserving and scientific work of the GUARDIANS, of the co-workers of the national library.

Every exhibited piece carries the marks of the fragility of letters and soul. The aim of our work is to show the timelessness and magnificence in the fragility of this culture.

We expect the visitors with love, in order to become GUARDIANS together with us!”

The director of the Manuscript Collection, Ferenc Földesi introduced with these words to the public this special exhibition in June 2014. The exhibition presented pieces saved from the middle of destruction, and through them showed the complexity of the process of „safe-guarding”. The displayed documents talked about the fortuitous escape, preservation and scientific exploration (reconstruction and construction); the exciting methods of inheriting (disappeared manuscripts surviving in quotations, in copies or reproductions, etc.). There were two main parts of the exhibition: an interesting section of the Babits-legacy and the so-called medieval exhibition. Unique rarities were on display in both; they survived in the most exciting ways the ages of destruction; and appreciative eyes and hands integrated them into collections of the most recent time.

The crown-piece of the medieval hall was the Leuven Codex, „home” of the *Lamentations of Mary*, which survived wars and bombings, and such specialties surrounded it like the world-famous Minnesänger-fragment of Budapest, which survived as sleeve, or the psalm book of Orbán Nagylucsei, one of the chief

persons of Matthias Hunyadi. The Corvina binding of the psalm book was covered with velvet until the 1900's. Other works on display were the three fragments from the original version of Bonfini's Hungarian history surviving also as a sleeve; and the enormous gradual of Kassa, which got half burnt. A Corvina was exhibited also, Battista Mantuano's *Parthenice*, which preserves the marks of the heroic age of restoration on the once subtly decorated cover of the book, which can be seen today only in the black-and-white photo-supplement of the *Könyvszemle* (Book review). Thus, the overall image of the exhibition, its fragmentedness, gives us a more authentic view of the forms of preservation, the character, the style and the condition of the memorial material that survived, than an exhibition of only „beautiful”, abundant material.

Not only the experts of the Res Libraria Research Group of the NSZL, but also the experts of the Restoration and Binding Department had participated in the realization of the exhibition. One of the reasons why the latter had participated is that the freshly restored Prague Calendar was also on display.

Edina Zsupán

zsupan.edina.at.oszk.hu

PRESERVATION AND SURVIVAL: RARITIES FROM THE BABITS LEGACY

„I was always filled with devotion in the room of the Babits' [...] and the surroundings had their important role in this. If I arrived in the early afternoon, the Vérmező [Meadow of Blood] was still bathed in sunlight, but in this room, where the editorial consulting hours were kept, the floor lamp was already turned on. It stood in the middle of the room, like Pythia's vaporizer, and lit only the middle of the room, and let the rest of it in darkness. The following, medieval-looking letters flamed on the big parchment lamp-shade: „NIHIL VINCIT NISI VERITAS, NIHIL SALVAT NISI CARITAS.” Two leather armchairs - reminding one of his own set from home - surrounded the

lamp, and there were books around and below and above us. [...] (István Vas: Lost Homes - fragment)

The Manuscript Collection wished to present barely-known or unknown rarities from the rich Babits legacy to the public at large. The apropos and title-source of our exhibition was Babits' lamp-shade, which was found recently, and which is mentioned by István Vas also, citing the well-known Saint-Augustine quotation: „ONLY TRUTH WINS, ONLY LOVE SAVES.” Our colleague, Miklós Förster donated the

valued object to the Library of the Nation. We tried to place into context this unique and uniquely subsisting object. The context has three layers: the surrounding of the lamp or the apartment; the maker of the shade or the wife; and the preserver of the lampshade, the adopted daughter or Ildikó Babits.

Thus, we could form an image of Babits as a private person, besides the image of the poet, while we tried to present that interior which integrated the lamp, as several photos illustrate. In the second part,

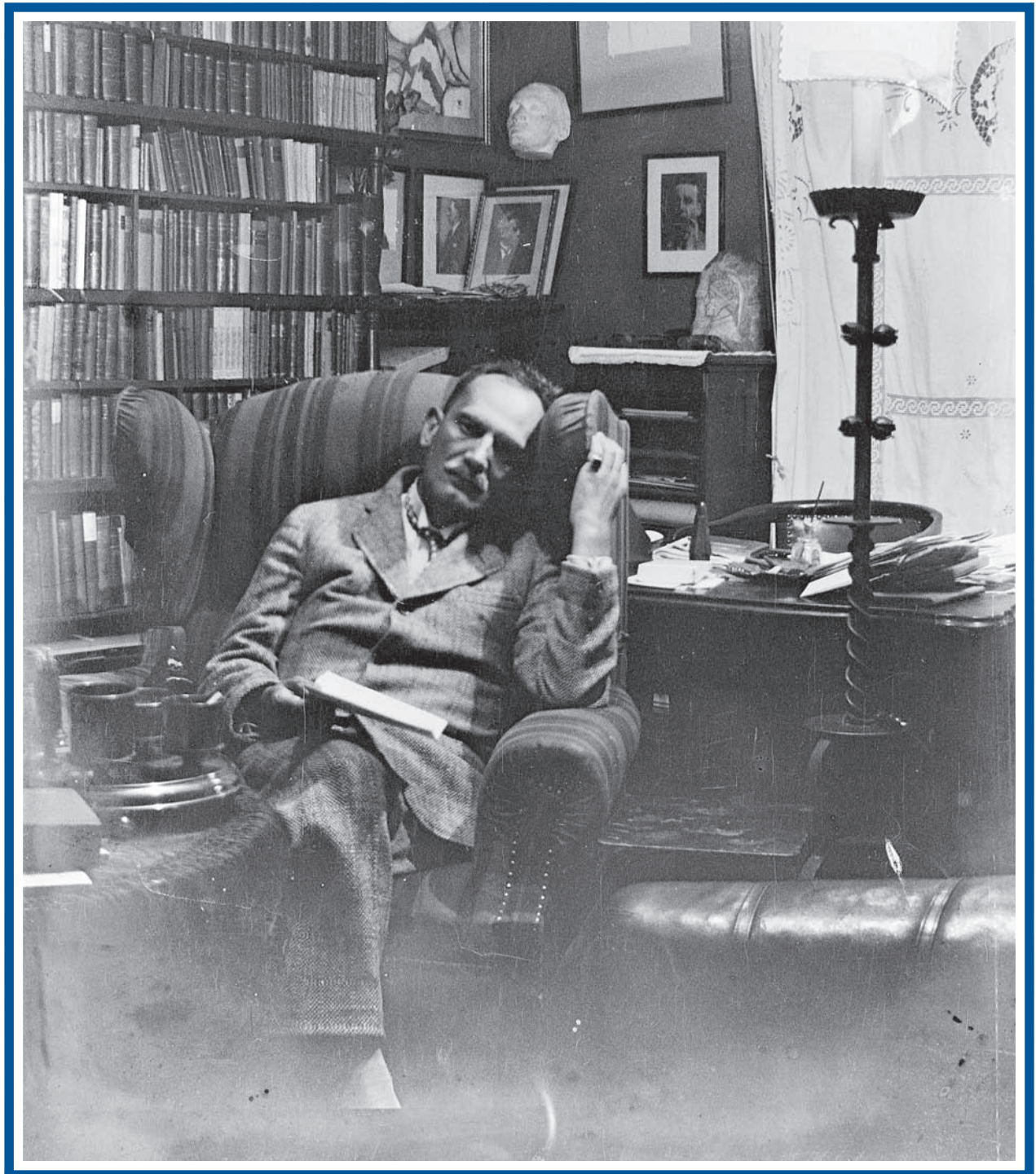


Photo of Mihály Babits with the surviving lamp shade



The lamp shade



Making photos with Babits' lamp shade on the Night of the Museums

Sophie Török, the maker appeared to us, since Babits' wife was a passionate photographer and collector of different notes and other memorabilia. Thanks to Ilonka Tanner, the internal milieu of the Babits family is richly documented. „I was recklessly making notes in my invisible booklet and collecting all that material which belongs not only to me, but to everybody, and about which I will have to report one day.” – wrote in her diary. She painted and draw also besides making photos – she was the maker of the lampshade as well as of the cover of the collection of handwritten materials known as the „Book of Angels”, exhibited here also.

Many photos give us insight into intimate moments of the Babits family, which are parts of the photo-collection – mostly unpublished as of today yet – that is the legacy of the wife and the adopted daughter. We can witness the intimacy of the family life, happy moments of the childhood of Ildikó Babits; and see photos of

friends, artists, philosophers belonging to the editor's circle of friends, and of our best writers and poets. We tried to present from the unknown part of the legacy few, small objects, like the solitaire cards, with which Babits loved to entertain himself; different drawings; small toys from Ildikó's childhood world. There were audio documents on display also, like a radio emission from the 1930's, a recording of the poems read by the poet himself; and that exciting collection of x-ray films, which preserve the voice of Babits and Sophie Török.

In the last unit of the exhibition, we could have a look at the studio of our colleague, Judit Papp, who is working on the long-term project of the conservation of photos and negatives belonging to the Babits legacy.

Ildikó Beöthy
beothy.ildiko.at.oszk.hu