

MAURICE BENOVSZKY AND HIS “MADAGASCAR PROTOCOLLE” (1772–1776)

VILMOS VOIGT

Chair of Folklore, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest
Hungary

The Hungarian Baron (then Count), Móric Benyovszky (1746–1786) was one of the best known European adventurers in the years before the French Revolution. As a young soldier he participated in a Polish uprising (1769) against the Russians, was captured by them and exiled to Kamchatka, from where he fled, and after a long journey at sea (via Formosa, Canton, Madagascar and Africa) he arrived in 1772 in Paris. There he proposed to the Court the colonization of Madagascar and organized his first expedition to the island (1774–1776), which turned out to be a complete failure. However, he insisted on making a second attempt, offering the island first to the French King, then to the English, and finally to rich American merchants in Baltimore. He was sailing to Madagascar again (1785–1786), but was soon killed by the French soldiers there. His *Memoirs* and other publications about him were quickly published in French and English, as were several books in German, Dutch, Swedish, Polish, Slovak, and Hungarian immortalizing him. In 2004 the Hungarian National Library published a manuscript *Protocolle* (originally an official report of exculpation to the French authorities about the first expedition). My paper describes this work, and adds some source critical remarks. Benyovszky was a typical figure of his time: hero and impostor, explorer and blind reporter of an extraordinary world. The interest in his person (not only in Hungary or Slovakia) has not flagged for over two centuries.

Keywords: Count Maurice Benyovszky (1746–1786), Africa, Madagascar, 18th century travelogues, 18th century popular literature

All his life B[enyovszky] made great things even greater.
Both his weakness and his strength lay in the power of his imagination,
because he would not have been the person he was had he not imagined
that he was someone he was not.
(Leon Orłowski: *Maurycy August Beniowski*. Warszawa, 1961, 242)

Introduction

In the autumn of 2003 the National Széchényi Library asked the British Library for a photocopy of the manuscript known by the title *Protocolle du Regiment des volontaire de Benyovszky crée en 1772*, which was soon published in Budapest 2004 – with the assistance of the Hungarian–Madagascan Society – accompanying the French manuscript with a translation in Hungarian. (For the bibliographic description see Selected Bibliography, page 237.) Although researchers of history, literature, etc. in England, Hungary and France already knew about the existence of this manuscript, and its 2004 publication does not dispel most of the doubts concerning Benyovszky’s first colonizing journey to Madagascar, it is nevertheless an important event that this beautifully printed edition makes available a previously little known source on the activity of one of the travelers (from Hungary) best known in Europe in the decades before the French Revolution. Benyovszky was an adventurer, soldier and politician blessed with exceptional abilities.

Maurice Benyovszky (the literature about him see also at the end of this paper) was well known to his contemporaries, both in the Habsburg Empire and in Hungary, and there were reports – sometimes contradictory – about his military exploits in the Netherlands, his participation in the Polish independence movement and uprising, then his captivity and exile in Russia, his escape, his ocean journey from Kamchatka to Macao and his eventual arrival in Paris – after stopping on the way in Madagascar, which at the time was not yet a French colony. Since he played an important but not yet fully known role in the following years once again in the Austrian empire of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, as well as in the German lands and later in England and even in the still young United States, we can confidently claim that he was a man known throughout the world in the late 18th century. He came to cherish a plan to colonize Madagascar, first recommending it to the king of France, but later (when he organized his second journey with the help of rich merchants interested in colonization) Benyovszky offered the island to practically anyone, not only the French but also the British and the Americans. In the course of this planning and organization Benyovszky modified the primary documents of his earlier journeys and claimed that the heads of the Madagascan native peoples had already chosen him as their “king”. It is this falsehood, which remained (and still remains) most firmly in the mind of the public, appearing even in recent Hungarian encyclopedias and works of history. Benyovszky made false claims not only orally, for the attainment of his aims; there is much deliberate falsification, distortion of the facts, exaggeration and plagiarism also in printed “works” associated with his name. For this reason it is still difficult even to list the basic facts of his biography.

However, even if we ignore the invented elements, his life was worthy of the hero of a novel. Because the most natural source for the biography recounted briefly below was Benyovszky's own claims, we are frequently obliged to "correct" the well-known data originating from him but clearly exaggerated or false. It is interesting that right up to the present researchers into the life of Benyovszky can be divided into two groups: the "malicious" who expose the adventurer's lies and the "believers" who can still be found, who strive to regard even his smallest error as authentic.

A Colorful Biography with Question Marks

Móric Ágoston Benyovszky – to use his name in current Hungarian orthography – was probably born on September 20, 1746 (and not in 1741, as he claimed in his memoirs) in Verbó, Nyitra County, Hungary (now Vrbove in Slovakia) in a noble family that had produced many military men. (Documents of the period written in various languages record both his and the family's name in numerous forms. In this article I use the Hungarian spelling, but when citing contemporary publications I give his name in the form used there.)

It is not easy to understand why he added five years to his age. It would be "understandable" if in doing so the then still young man (in about 1772) had wanted to show himself to be more mature and as having had more previous military experience, in short, as being more important. But why did he want to lengthen his youth with imagined events and years that could easily be disproved by his contemporaries? However, in his memoirs he regularly exaggerated other facts that can be easily checked. Neither he nor his father was a count, and his father was not a cavalry general but only a colonel of hussars. (It was only in 1778 that Móric Benyovszky was given the title of Count by Maria Theresa, whom he also petitioned for rehabilitation from his earlier punishment.) It is possible that as a very young man he acquired some kind of knowledge of sailing in Hamburg (or he acquired such knowledge later, though it's unclear where). Perhaps it is true that he also visited Amsterdam in his early youth, he could even have been to Plymouth, and he might have participated in the upheavals of the Seven Years' War.

Although it is not impossible that during one of his absences abroad family disputes within the extensive network of relations contributed to his exclusion from his father's inheritance (who died in 1760), compelling the young man to leave his native land, it is more likely that he was given a prison sentence by the authorities in Hungary (for two months) for his customary autocratic deeds in his own country. To escape this punishment he fled to Poland, where since 1767 Polish nobles had been fomenting an uprising against Russian rule within the frame of the liberal political movement "*Confederation of Bar*". Before that he had married a

common woman, Zsuzsanna Hönsch (she died in 1826) from the Zips region in Upper Hungary, who cared for him devotedly during his flight from the prison and gave birth to their first child in 1768. Benyovszky really did take part in the Polish struggles, although not at the rank of “leader” or even “chief cavalry commander”. He probably fought from 1768 until May 1769, and fell into Russian captivity after the Polish uprising was crushed. In November 1769 he was taken, together with his fellow officers in captivity, to Kazan, condemned to exile, and (perhaps after a real attempt to escape) the group, which included a bishop from Cracow and one from Kiev, was banished to very distant regions of the Russian Empire. In January 1770 Benyovszky reached Tobolsk and at the end of the same year the penal colony of Bolsheretsk in Kamchatka, which could be considered the end of the world. However, in May of the following year (1771) he succeeded in escaping with a group of about sixty companions in a Russian ship, the *Saint Peter and Saint Paul*, that they had commandeered, probably with the intention of reaching the Mexican port of Acapulco. But circumstances changed on the way and after a long and adventurous journey at sea, perhaps touching on the Aleutian Islands and Japanese islands, then almost certainly Formosa and Macao, in September 1771 he turned up in Canton, in China, seeking asylum. Even the European press learned of this seemingly incredible event. Separating from the ship and his companions in a rather questionable way, he contacted the French trade agent in Canton and in practice entered French service. In January 1772 he set sail again from Macao and after another long ocean journey around the coasts of Asia and Africa reached France on July 18. It was on this journey in 1772 that he first set eyes on the island of Madagascar.

In Paris in late 1772 he sought permission from the French ministry for the navy to visit Madagascar to build up local connections in preparation for French conquest. (However, the permission that was, in fact, given in March 1773, was for the preparation of settlements rather than for military conflict or conquest.) It can be concluded on the basis of Benyovszky’s memoirs that what he had in mind after what he had seen on the island of Formosa was the possibility of establishing an independent, almost state-like colony (which could then be handed over to the French king). But he did not arrive there as a French officer at the head of a professional army. His men were not regular soldiers but volunteers recruited from January 1773 who landed on the island in February 1774. No doubt they all had their own special reasons for joining this difficult and uncertain expedition. They did not number in the thousands, as Benyovszky claims in his reports; even including those recruited on the spot they could not have numbered more than a hundred and fifty. Many of them, including Benyovszky’s young son, died within a short while. (Many of the circumstances of his family life, his marriage and the fate of his children are still not clear.)

At that time the French had already had contacts with Madagascar for several decades, especially with the tribes living in the south-eastern part of the island, but it was only to the east of Madagascar that France had a permanent and officially regulated presence, on Bourbon Island and Isle-de-France (today's Réunion and Mauritius), where an intendant (not yet a governor) served and French "state" soldiers and settlers officially supported by France were living. Already in 1767 French travelers had been making plans to conquer the "big island" (Madagascar) in conjunction with regular trade, and Benyovszky must have known about these plans when he was in Paris. However, right from the start the French settlers and the intendant on Isle-de-France observed with distaste the autocratic activity of Benyovszky. The Count finally built the fortress of Louisbourg, named after the French king, in the north-east of Madagascar, in Antongil bay at the mouth of the Tingballe river, and spent long periods here himself with his group. By September 1776 the unhealthy site and the failure to generate real trade, together with his hostile relationship both with the majority of the natives and the French officials, led to the expedition having to return to Paris, a complete failure.

Of course, in the *memoranda* Benyovszky wrote subsequently to Paris (generally referred to as *Mémoires*) he painted a cheerful picture, exaggerating his successes as he was trying to organize a new, even bigger, second expedition to Madagascar. In Paris, however, the acquisition of the new colony was regarded as too costly and pointless. Moreover, inspections made on the spot gave rise to doubts over the success of Benyovszky's earlier colonizing efforts. The reports of the two official French inspectors (aptly known as *commissaires*) who had been sent, De Bellecombe and Chevreux, make for very instructive reading. Compared to the grandiose tableau painted by Benyovszky, they show a depressing picture: in place of fortresses, battles, grand political conferences, celebrations and construction, they found a few shabby huts and an occasional merchant who turned up for an hour or two a week to barter. At the same time it is also apparent that by then even this little known and distant place was not unknown to world trade or even politics: ships regularly appeared on the horizon, bringing salt, sugar, rum and weapons, and in addition to the native Malagasy groups there were already black people and mulattos on the island, and several distinct, African variants of Islam had appeared much earlier. (Benyovszky refers to this with the term *zafi-ramini* which he misunderstood.)

The *Protocolle* makes mention of kings, not tribal chiefs, obviously an exaggeration. But we know from other sources that there had been a lively migration of different population groups on the island for centuries with constantly fluctuating conquests and alliances. In short, all important descriptions of Madagascar at that time deserve the attention of today's reader. It was not Benyovszky's aim to describe the real situation on the island, but to present his own merits, greatly magnifying them. He does not really give a picture of his surroundings: he does not de-

scribe the different settlements or the way of life, dress, behavior or customs of the natives. He makes only brief reference to his interpreters, spies, representatives and soldiers without giving them a human face. We do not learn much about his enemies either: whether they are old, cunning, hunch-backed, what clothes they wear, etc. Nor do we read about the women, who no doubt represented a problem or challenge for the expedition. Although Benyovszky himself is always in the forefront of his writings, we do not learn much about how or where he lived, what clothes he wore, what he ate, or who he was in personal contact with. What he does write about is the kind of flag he designs, has made, and flies. The *Protocolle* does not afford us glimpses into the life of the triumphant adventurer, but offers rather the dry report of a forbidding conqueror. We read that the soil is excellently suited to the cultivation of European plants. He boasts about how quickly he dried the swamps and had roads built. But he makes no mention of the wonderful natural environment, and even the harsh climate and diseases are only mentioned when they are directly related to an event or failure. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Benyovszky lived there for years and survived all the ordeals.

Back in Europe and the Second Madagascar Expedition

Earlier, in Paris, he owed his successes in the ministries and at the court to his obvious personal charm, his unmatched powers of persuasion, and his daring plans, which held out the promise of profit. However, at a time of social and ideological crisis in France, which was on the eve of revolution, overspending and caught in a mesh of increasingly opaque personal connections, Benyovszky, who had returned unsuccessful from the colonization trip, became an increasingly unwelcome client for France's policy on Africa. They satisfied some of his financial demands (it is still not known how or through whom the quarrelsome Hungarian newcomer achieved this financial support so quickly in Paris!), but he did not receive any further official French assistance for his grand new plans. From time to time he disappeared from Paris, which could not have fostered much confidence in his person in the court, even in the absence of his "Madagascan" ill-wishers, although his "hidden departure" to other countries may perhaps have been in the interest of the French intelligence.

After 1776 came a period of long, zigzagging European and American journeys in Benyovszky's life, but we still have no precise, reliable information on many of the details. Although some of his correspondence has been published, it is not complete and often raises further questions. We do not know exactly when he planned what between 1776 and 1784, or on whose behalf he acted. We do not know for what services he was granted the title of Hungarian count, whether he really took part in the War of Bavarian Succession, how he could have taken part

in the American War of Independence in the summer of 1779, exactly how much time he spent again in Hungary (between 1780 and 1781), and whether he did in fact come forward here with dynamic plans for the regulation of rivers and his idea of transforming the small town Fiume (today Rijeka in Croatia) into a world port on the "Hungarian" Adriatic coast. In that era it is quite possible to imagine all this, especially in the case of such an unbridled, many-sided character as Benyovszky. Nevertheless, it is a little suspicious that he returned to Western Europe without accomplishing anything in his native land, Hungary. Back in France he first wanted to recruit volunteers for the American War of Independence. In 1782, armed with letters of recommendation from Benjamin Franklin (who regarded Benyovszky as an honest man), he traveled to America in this cause. But in the following year he tried to persuade the British sovereign to conquer Madagascar, obviously unsuccessfully, because in April 1784 he set out for Baltimore, where he arrived on the 8 of July, to win the support of local merchants for his old-new scheme of colonizing Madagascar. In both cases he argued without success, but the count did set sail once again on board the *Intrepid* from Baltimore on October 25, 1784 with a group recruited with funds from somewhere for Madagascar, where he now obviously wanted to conquer the island for himself. We find information about the journey in a letter he sent from Brazil. Apparently unfavorable winds took him there, and the ship was not well enough equipped either. Even if it is true that the journey was delayed by repairs to the ship between January and April 1785, it is surprising that they did not reach the East African port of Sofala until May 22, 1785. After a lengthy stay they finally arrived in Madagascar on July 7, 1785. (Of course, this was a time when the slave trade, piracy and arms smuggling flourished on the oceans. No precise records were kept on any of them.) At first the landing at the new spot, at Antagava Bay on the north-west coast of Madagascar, seemed successful. But in early August, in violation of his contract, the captain sailed away with the ship, abandoning the increasingly ill-fated expedition. Without hope of escape they faced certain death. With the help of the Malagasy natives Benyovszky attempted to capture the French posts and stores, but his plans failed and the second expedition became more fatal than the first. This much-traveled man, who was still only in his forties, perished on May 23 (or 24, or 26), 1786 in a battle waged at Cap-Est with around 60 soldiers sent by the French governor of Isle-de-France. By then his "army" consisted of only two Europeans and 30 natives.

His grave has never been found; it was most probably in the north-east coastal region of the island, to the south of the Bay of Angontsy, more precisely a few kilometers south of Cap Est on the hill beside the former settlement of Serenana/Mauritanie. Especially over the last hundred years a number of French and more recently also Hungarian enthusiasts and researchers have visited Madagascar seeking traces of Benyovszky's presence. Although official publications of

the Republic of Madagascar make mention of him, as naturally do French experts in African studies and even travel books, public opinion as yet has a vague rather than a precise picture of Benyovszky's activity in Madagascar and its consequences.

Contemporary French and English editions of Benyovszky's Memoirs

A number of widely read publications at the end of the 18th century gave information on his life. Although real travel reports were also drawn up and his letters to his French clients have survived (notes made on the spot and financial accounts are also included among the available sources), in later years it was not these primary, official documents (which constituted primary sources) that were published, but later summaries, first and foremost the *Mémoires*, generally considered to have been written by Benyovszky himself. These attempt to present the protagonist's whole life, including his youth, his exile to Kamchatka, his escape, his journey to Paris and the first expedition to Madagascar. The book ends with an account of the events of late November 1776. It contains claims so improbable that many researchers later doubted whether the *Mémoires* were written by the count at all, even though the first editions unanimously state that he did.

The two volumes of *Les Mémoires et Voyages de Maurice Auguste Comte de Benyowsky... Écrits par lui-même, et publiés d'après le manuscrit original* first appeared in London in 1790 in French. The English translation, *Memoirs and Travels of Mauritius Augustus Count de Benyowsky. Magnate of the Kingdoms of Hungary and Poland, and one of the chiefs of the Confederation of Poland, etc. ... Written in his own hand*, also in two volumes and also published in London in 1790, was obviously prepared for publication at the same time. It was edited by William Nicholson, who also wrote the foreword. As this work of 668 pages, decorated with engravings and maps, was the starting point for the illustrations of later editions, it is worth devoting a few words to it. (The English version was probably reprinted several times, there are even copies in which Dublin (1790) is indicated as the place of publication.)

Both English volumes begin with a detailed table of contents. The publisher, Nicholson, ends his foreword of more than one page with the date December 7, 1789. He says that at the end of 1784 the learned J. Hyacinth De Magellan recommended the manuscript to him for publication in three volumes, by subscription. However, nothing came of this plan. Benyovszky was absent (on the second journey to Madagascar, to which De Magellan himself also contributed a very substantial sum). Perhaps the idea of obtaining money from a subscription edition came from the count himself, who by then had no regular state income, and at the same time the publication could also have served as a kind of prospectus present-

ing the advantages of the venture. It was probably because of the failure of the second expedition to Madagascar that De Magellan sold the manuscript (or the publication rights). It was then that this bundle of manuscripts was given to the *British Museum* for preservation. After Christmas 1788 De Magellan fell seriously ill and lost his memory, so he was not able to take part in the publication of the book. Nicholson was given a manuscript in French which also included drawings. A number of the original illustrations (those numbered 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, and 27) were destroyed in a fire in the home of Heath, the artist who did the engravings, but the printing plates had already been made. However, those numbered 3, 4, 12, 23, 24, and 25 were also burnt and no copies remained. They were views and portraits and may not all have been related to Madagascar. (Since the "full" numbering of the illustrations remained in the book despite the fire, this caused confusion that is still palpable in later, foreign publications, which naturally took their illustrations from here.) In reply to my question, the British Library's expert confirmed that there is no known copy of the book *Memoirs and Travels* containing more illustrations. (Of course, other "images of Madagascar" may still be discovered, preserved by chance among Benyovszky documents somewhere.)

Nicholson raises the question of the credibility of Benyovszky's facts. In his opinion the work has the nature of a coherent narrative. As for external proof, Benyovszky did not use any instruments suitable for the precise determination of position on his travels in North-east Asia. However, the source works (mainly Russian) known at the time were not much more precise. Here he mentions the data of Erasim Gregorioff Ismyloff (or Ismaeloff, the correct name must have been Gerasim Izmailov), which was known in Europe through Captain Cook. It differs considerably from the account given by Benyovszky. Nicholson also refers to newspaper reports about Benyovszky that reached Europe from Canton in 1772. Nevertheless, taking all this into account he prefers to believe Benyovszky rather than his critics, even in the case of the illustrations.

Nicholson does not make any supplementary remarks on the section about Madagascar. However, he mentions that Benyovszky's text does not refer to the generally accepted sketch maps of the ports of Madagascar. The publisher took drawings Nos. XXI, XXVI, XXVIII, and XXIX from Dalrymple's collection, which are in turn copies made from drawings in the D'Après collection. According to Nicholson, Benyovszky made the same use of D'Après' maps, which probably originated from sailors circumnavigating the island or perhaps even from the French court.

But in De Magellan's correspondence related to Benyovszky's later journeys Nicholson saw letters so hostile to Benyovszky that he did not take them into consideration. The data referring to Benyovszky's last journey may have been part of this correspondence. It would be worth seeking these out again because even the most prejudiced contradictory opinions can be instructive.

The book's foreword is followed by a *Postscript* containing five documents. Nicholson received these from Sir Joseph Banks when he had finished preparation of the book. They concern the arrival in Macao and the events in Kamchatka. Nicholson also adds a few comments. It is here that he discusses the accuracy of the picture of the vessel *Saint Peter and Paul*. He mentions in this connection that there are two other pictures among the manuscripts sent to the British Museum: one of Benyovszky's shipwreck in Asia and the other of the coast of Formosa.

The English book also had a portrait of Benyovszky on the title-page. This too was engraved by Heath on the basis of a miniature portrait that Nicholson received from De Magellan. It is actually this portrait that appears in all Benyovszky editions right up to the present. (In a few cases the image is reversed!)

At the end of the second volume, after the sections on Madagascar (on pages 365–390), Nicholson publishes nine letters to Benyovszky from De Boynes and De Sartine drawn up by the Versailles ministry for shipping and colonial affairs between 1773 and 1777. Some of the letters have a serial number, suggesting that there were at least 21 such letters and Nicholson did not obtain all of them. The volume naturally includes (on pages 395–399) Benyovszky's later proposal for colonization, which was sent to the British ministry.

Special mention must be made of the connections between the English and French volumes published in London in 1790. The two-volume *Mémoires et Voyages de ... Benyovszky* was not only published in London by same publisher as the English volumes, it was also edited by William Nicholson. The foreword to the French volume and the *Postscript* that follows are exactly the same, including the passages on the illustrations and the portrait of Benyovszky. Since the title-page clearly states that this is a "*manuscrit original*", it seems highly likely that the two publications – the French book and the English translation – were produced almost simultaneously from a French manuscript. Nicholson's foreword and a few documents probably had to be translated from English into French. Since it would be too complicated to suppose that the whole of the French text had been copied once again for use by the person doing the English translation, it seems likely that the two volumes were prepared for printing simultaneously. Obviously it was because of interest shown by French readers that the travel report was published in French too. We do not know the names of the persons who did the translations, either from French into English or from English into French. There are no substantial discrepancies in the translations. There are a few minor mistakes, spelling and printing errors, but not many. Some are even found in the dates.

A third edition of Benyovszky's memoirs appeared in Paris in 1791 under the title *Voyages et mémoires de Maurice-Auguste, comte de Benyowsky, magnat des royaumes d'Hongrie et de Pologne etc. etc.*, published by F. Buisson. The anonymous author of the shortened foreword obviously made use of the London edition. Apart from a few technical changes (e.g., the table of contents giving a brief sum-

mary of the chapters is placed at the end of the volumes here) the difference is that this edition does not include the detailed publication of the documents. The illustrations have also been left out.

It must be assumed that the French and the English texts of 1790 with which we are familiar today are not primary texts, even though they contain (more than once) Benyovszky's "authenticating" signature, but were written subsequently in Paris and later even in London, probably after 1781, naturally before the "second" expedition, and together with the 1783 text drawn up for "His British Majesty", in other words not as a real report of the first expedition but as a justification based on confabulation. It could be that, despite the falsifications, this text was also compiled by Benyovszky himself and he probably then had it edited by someone else, a further reason why it needed to be authenticated with his signature. Tracing the precise origin of the illustrations in the early editions and the connections between them is a problem in itself.

However, before making this compilation Benyovszky must have been in possession of more original documentary material. He no doubt preserved the original credentials he had received in Paris. Probably at the time of the investigation he gave the "commissioners" not only accounts but also reports. It is unlikely though that at that time (in 1776 and in Madagascar) he had any "ethnographic" descriptions at his disposal. Perhaps he wrote them when he returned to France on the basis of works by others. (The situation must have been the same in the case of his earlier journey regarding his "ethnographic sketch" of the peoples of Kamchatka. There too, he was fortunate in that there were already "source works" in French that he could use.) In addition he must have had some kind of journal of his first long journey and later of his first expedition to Madagascar. On several occasions he reached France after a long journey at sea. It may have been on one of these, perhaps while sailing from Canton, via Madagascar, to Paris for the first time that he set down in writing what had happened to him up to that time. At the end of his first expedition to Madagascar he would have had to expect that he would be questioned in detail about his actions. Drawing on his earlier notes – perhaps already on the journey back – he may have written a report: but it seems simpler to assume that he later improvised a lengthy report for his new plans, attaching as an annex copies of a few other documents in his possession.

In the first volume of his memoirs (describing his journeys in Siberia, Kamchatka, then the Aleutian Islands and Japan) he quite freely used texts taken from others without naming his sources, even from works that had appeared in print. He no doubt had assistance in this in Paris. And since he was making plans to return to Madagascar, the same experts must have acquainted him with the descriptions of Madagascar available to the French. One of these was the plan drawn up by the Baron De Modave between 1768 and 1771 (only a few years earlier) expounding the great economic advantages that French colonization of Madagascar

would bring for the French court. The letter of commission given to Benyovszky by minister De Boynes also mentions this proposal.

Later however, the data compiled for him and “enhanced”, served as a further source for others. The maps of Madagascar too, appear for the first time in the English edition, and we can imagine how (illegally) these maps passed from French hands into the possession of the British who were at the very least rival colonizers. Actually very few illustrations, all of a stereotyped nature, appear in the early editions, and they were not necessarily based on precise sketches drawn on the spot. But these few illustrations appear very frequently in later works dealing with Benyovszky.

Taking all this into account, it seems probable that the two London books and the subsequent Paris edition of 1791 in French were based on a text in French that had remained in Benyovszky’s possession. It is strange though, that no one in Paris at the time checked the official Benyovszky documents to be found in the archives of the competent ministries. Of course, there was a revolution in France in 1790 and people had their minds on other things.

While it is obvious from the foreword to the London publications that the purpose of the book was to justify and support the second expedition to Madagascar, it is still striking that two-thirds of the publications were devoted to the earlier events in Siberia and Kamchatka and to Benyovszky’s escape. This, and not the Madagascar issue, was also the subject of the debate conducted by the editor. These two volumes do not question the report of the first expedition to Madagascar and they give only very brief information on the second expedition (although Benyovszky had died several years earlier). Of course by 1790 there was no longer any talk of organizing another conquest of Madagascar.

The *Protocolle* is not the direct manuscript source of the two books published in London, but it was one of the primary sources for them. It deals only with the first expedition to Madagascar (while all three of the previously mentioned two-volume books cover the count’s whole life). We point out on the appropriate pages of our 2004 edition the discrepancies in dating and the spelling of names that can be found between the London manuscript and the later printed texts. It can also be seen that the “documents” attached as annexes are not entirely identical either, and their order is different. All this cannot be attributed to a single careless copier. It is more likely that there were several different manuscripts concerning Benyovszky’s first journey to Madagascar.

A) Original proposals, plans, instructions and reports, documents of the investigation, accounts, maps, etc., originally in the possession of the French authorities or of Benyovszky himself. Of these, only a few official documents exist today. They can be found in French and British archives.

B) Obviously Benyovszky himself produced at least one overview using the documents in his possession as the primary source, but also drawing to a large ex-

tent on his memory and in some cases on his imagination. The *Protocolle* is one such writing. It is probable that, even if only one report was written, a number of copies were made later, always to serve some particular purpose. The narrative text of the *Protocolle* is Benyovszky's self-justification. He may have dictated it, and the scribe may even have polished the text subsequently, but even in that case it can be regarded as Benyovszky's work. The language of the text, just as in the case of the 1790 volumes, is reassuring, with occasional grammatical errors or uncertainties. Not surprisingly, the description of tropical vegetation, for example, reflects a "European" attitude and vocabulary. The spelling of names follows the French and English practice. Since the text of the *Protocolle* is not considered to be in Benyovszky's hand for proof-reading, there is little point in looking for traces of "Hungarian" or "Polish" influence in the spelling.

C) Autobiographical and travel writings drawing mainly on the B) texts and other documents. These appeared in London as soon as 1790. Since these cover the entire autobiography, it is possible that there was a general overview of the events in Benyovszky's biography before Madagascar, especially his journey from Kamchatka to Macao, similar to our Madagascar *Protocolle*. The idea for writing such a report may have arisen before 1776. Perhaps it was the investigation into the events in Madagascar and the explanation required that led to the idea of writing a detailed account of the count's life and travels. The "autobiographic story-telling" in Hungary around 1780–1781 (when Benyovszky recounted his adventures orally) could have been a good opportunity to practice narrating the more complicated events. It is worth noting that most of the famous travelers and discoverers of the period recorded the events of their journeys in book-length accounts. Benyovszky himself also used some of these sources. They include journal-like works with the emphasis on geographical data, and there are also more general descriptions of nature accompanied by maps and sometimes precise illustrations. There were "pre-ethnographic" descriptions of the lives of the peoples of particular regions which are of value to present-day ethnologists. In other cases the exciting narrative was the reason for publication. Very little of this can be found in Benyovszky's account of his life. The section on the Far East is somewhat more personal, but it is not a journal, and the account of events in Madagascar is a colonial affairs report. When "ethnographic descriptions" are inserted in these, they reflect the demand of the period in Paris rather than Benyovszky's own interest. We also know that he copied (or had someone copy) these sections from other sources into his own travel account. Nor was Benyovszky a real "discoverer" of the kind who would give names to rivers and mountains, record their length and height and make observations of the climate. In short, although the *Protocolle* is truly a personal work and takes reality only as a starting point, it is neither a work of *belles-lettres* nor an ethnological description. Besides, Benyovszky did not have the talent for either of these. Obviously he could not

draw well either, and he did not think of noting down even a short list of words from the remote and strange languages. He was really interested in only one person: himself.

The German, Dutch, Swedish, Polish, Slovak Publications

Notwithstanding these limitations, the books published in London and Paris suited the tastes of readers of the period. It is an indication of the interest shown throughout Europe that an edition of the *Mémoires* translated from the English version appeared in Berlin in 1790 in German (published by Voss): *Des Grafen Moritz August v. Beniowski Reisen durch Sibirien und Kamptschatka über Japan und China nach Europa. Nebst einem Auszuge seiner übrigen Lebensgeschichte*. It included a foreword by the renowned German traveler Johann Reinhold Forster, in which he mainly drew attention to errors in the section on Siberia. The *sixto* volume of more than 400 sheets gives the section on Madagascar in very abbreviated form. The illustrations were also taken from the English edition. (The next editions by Voss were published in 1794 and 1806.)

In the following year (1791, Leipzig, Dykisch printing house) an *octavo* two-volume work appeared in German: *Des Grafen Moritz August von Benjowsky, Ungarischem und Pohnischem Magnaten, und Eines von den Häuptern der Pohnischen Conföderation, Schicksale und Reisen; Von ihm selbst beschrieben*. This too traces Benyovszky's life precisely, mainly up to his escape from Kamchatka. The volume lists Georg Forster, the renowned travel writer and writer, as the translator. The debate mentioned at the end of the second volume over the rights to the Benyovszky portrait on the title-page (where it is reversed) gives a glimpse into the rivalry among German publishers. Several of them wanted to bring out a translated edition of the successful book as soon as possible.

In 1791 the Cotta publishing house in Tübingen also brought out a small *octavo* book with the same title as the Leipzig edition (but different spelling): *Des Grafen Moriz August von Benjowsky Ungarischen und Pohnischen Magnaten Schicksale und Reisen von ihm selbst beschrieben*. This book, less than 200 pages long, gives an account, although very brief, of Benyovszky's first expedition to Madagascar and also of his death.

The two-volume work translated by G. D. Ebeling and J. P. Ebeling forms the second group of German editions. This was printed by Benjamin Gottlob Hoffmann in Hamburg in 1791 under the title of *Des Grafen Moritz August von Benjowsky Begebenheiten und Reisen, von ihm selbst beschrieben*. This is the lengthiest edition: it also includes the report by Hippolitus Stefanow on his own journey from Kamchatka to Macao. Since his data differs from that in Benyovszky's text, many people at the time debated which travel account was au-

thentic and which was either imprecise or simply an outright sham. In the foreword G. D. Ebeling gives a detailed report of the works written on the question and also mentions that the Germans not only published the various translations but also dealt in detail with the journeys of Benyovszky in reviews and articles.

We know from a number of contemporary sources that the Benyovszky volumes soon reached Vienna and were quickly sold there. Here the first volume of Benyovszky's travel account ending in Kamchatka appeared as an octavo volume printed by F. A. Schrämbl in 1792 as *Magazin von merkwürdigen neuen Reisebeschreibungen*. This was naturally based on the earlier German translations.

Altogether we know of seven early Benyovszky editions in German. In addition to the places mentioned, they were published in Braunschweig and Reutlingen. A feature they all share is that although they refer to the count's entire life and his death, they reflect interest principally in the parts related to Poland and Kamchatka. There is hardly any discussion of the events in Madagascar and their authenticity is not discussed. The German editions are all based on the English. The French texts were not used. Although it would have been possible to find witnesses who knew Benyovszky personally and could have commented on his statements (especially in the case of the Vienna edition) no effort was made to do this.

Benyovszky soon appeared as a hero in literature. The first person to use his figure was Goethe's brother-in-law Christian August Vulpius, author of a biography of the robber chief Rinaldo Rinaldini. He wrote a play entitled *Graf Benjowsky. Ein original Trauerspiel in fünf Aufzügen* (Leipzig, 1792), first performed in 1788. Much better known was the five-act drama *Graf Benjowsky oder die Verschwörung auf Kamtschatka* by August von Kotzebue, one of the most renowned and very prolific German dramatists of the period, performed first in 1792 and published in Leipzig in 1795. (It is interesting to note that Kotzebue entered the service of the Tsar and later was himself exiled to Siberia, so he must have had a personal interest in the story.) Kotzebue's work also appeared in popular, cheap editions. We know not only of new editions of the work and translations (Dutch, 1796, Amsterdam – French, 1798, Paris – English, 1800, London) but also of critical reviews, sequels and parodies in English and German. It was performed many times in Hungarian too. The Hungarian translation was first published in Hungary in 1835 and again in 1839. A 1796 Hamburg edition of Kotzebue's play even included the score of a "serenade" in the play. It is hardly necessary to mention that here too it was the Kamchatka episode (which is for the most part fictive) that the audience found the most interesting. It would have been possible to present a dramatized version of the Madagascan stage of Benyovszky's career, but the German writers made no effort to do so.

In 1866 Louise Mühlbach wrote a four-volume novel about Benyovszky, which was available in Hungarian in the same year.

The first Benyovszky opera, however, was not German but French. The music was written by one of the most popular composers of the time, François Adrien Boieldieu, to a libretto by Alexandre Duval (1800). It was performed in 1804 in German and in 1813 in Polish. As soon as 1800 not one but two parodies of this “serious” opera were produced in Paris, which is after all a certain sign of success. William Render’s play *Count Benyowsky* was printed in Cambridge (as early as in 1798) but we do not have records about its actual performance. An English opera following the plot of Kotzebue’s drama (with Thomas Simpson Cooke, Charles Edward Horn, Michael Kelly, John Andrew Stevenson and others, the librettist was James Kenney) *Benyowski, or the Exiles of Kamtschatka* was on the stage of Drury Lane in London, March 16th, 1826. An Italian opera (1831) is also known from the sources. In Hungary a similar opera titled *Benyovszky vagy a kamcsatkai száműzöttek* [Benyovszky, or the Kamchatka exiles] with a libretto by Rudolf Köffinger and music by Ferenc Doppler was performed from 1847 in Pest. (Later there was also a German version on stage.)

The Dutch translation of Benyovszky’s memoir, *Gedenkschriften en Reizen des Graaven van Benyowsky* ... appeared in four volumes in Haarlem, between 1791 and 1792. Only the fourth volume deals with Madagascar. This edition was also based on the English book and even the portrait of Benyovszky was taken from that source. Another edition also appeared in Amsterdam.

An *octavo* Swedish edition appeared in 1791 in Stockholm with the title *Grefwens Mauritz August von Beniowskis Lefnadslopp och Resor af honom sjelf beskrefne*. The editor, Samuel Ödmann, was aware of the various other European editions.

In 1797 an edition in four *octavo* volumes appeared in Warsaw, printed by Lebrun, with the title *Historya podrozy y osobliwszych zdarzen sławnego Maurycego-Augusta hrabi Beniowskiego szlachcica polskiego y węgierskiego zawieraiąca w sobie*. Naturally the most interesting thing here was Benyovszky’s Polish connections, as the order in which his two noble titles are listed shows. The four volumes cover the whole of Benyovszky’s life, and here too only the very end of the third volume and the whole of the fourth volume deal with Madagascar. The edition was based on the French book (not on the English or one of the German editions). We know of a number of its reprints (e.g., 1802, 1806). It is interesting that the parts dealing with events in Poland were not corrected here either, even though there must have been many witnesses still alive. However, lengthy passages boasting of Benyovszky’s exploits were left out of the stories (perhaps for this reason).

In Polish literature the great poet Juliusz Słowacki returned a number of times to the figure of Benyovszky, considering him to be practically Polish and devoting

a poem and later a drama to him. The adventurous life of Benyovszky appeared in Polish popular literature and belles-lettres in both the 19th and 20th centuries.

The earliest Slovak edition of the biography appeared a decade later than these early translations, in 1808 in Bratislava, printed by Simon Peter Weber in octavo, under the title of *Pamatné Pŕihody Hrabéte Beňowského ...*, translated by Samuel Čerčanský. As the translator and Jiří Palkovič, who wrote the publisher's foreword, mention, this brief overview followed the French edition. The manuscript was finished in 1805 and was given to the publisher in 1807. The small book includes the few pictures that then appeared in most European editions. The interest of the Slovaks is obvious, and on the last page of the book the publication mentions that Benyovszky later entered the service of Emperor Joseph II, then of the King of England, and that from there he went to America, this being followed by his second journey to Madagascar, which led to his death. His wife returned from America to Hungary, where at the time of publication (1807) she still lived (with her two daughters) in the village of Vieszka/Vieska (near Beckó/Beckov). The "new" information was obviously obtained locally and corresponds to the sentences that can be read in Hungarian in Gvadányi. It is an interesting circumstance that the translator and editor were Slovak intellectuals, the publisher and printer were Germans from Bratislava.

Benyovszky in Hungarian Public Opinion

It could be asked why no Hungarian translation was made at the same time of Benyovszky's prose biography, which by then was world famous. One of the reasons obviously must have been that Benyovszky's adventures were already known by then, although in a different form, on the Hungarian market for popular books.

First of all those directly concerned, the family, relatives and acquaintances, naturally knew about the adventures of this extraordinary man: his flight to Poland and his participation in the struggles of the Confederation of Bar. News of his exile must have reached them too. Nor can we doubt that the newspaper reports from Canton in 1771 must have reached Hungary in some manner. Since Benyovszky soon called his wife to join him after his arrival in France in the summer of 1772 – and he was assisted in this by relatives living in France – the news (and rumors) reaching Hungary must have become more detailed.

In 1780–1781 the count entered the service of the Hungarian queen Maria Theresa (and later the king Joseph II), and no doubt he was not reluctant to recount his adventures. When he departed from America in 1784 on his second, fatal journey to Madagascar he did not take his pregnant wife with him. He must have sent her home, but we do not know when Zsuzsanna Hönsch reached Vieszka, nor do

we know when she learned of her husband's death. In short, when the first Benyovszky biographies appeared abroad in 1790, the hero's name and the whole of his adventurous life were already familiar in Hungary. There must have been plans for a Hungarian edition as well.

First in 1790 the journal *Magyar Kurir* published Benyovszky's biography. Later, other publications in Hungarian, German, and Latin reported on his deeds.

However, a work of literature played the most important role in popularizing him. Count József Gvadányi (1725-1801) studied humanities in Nagyszombat, then joined the army, took part in several wars, was captured by the French, retired as a high-ranking officer, and resumed his activity as a writer. He was a conservative and populist poet and a champion of ancient Hungarian values. *Rontó Pálnak egy Magyar lovas Köz-Katonának és Gróf Benyovszki Móritznak életek', Földön, Tengeren álmélkodásra méltó Történettyeiknek, 's véghez vitt Dolgaiknak Le-Írása, a' mellyeket Hazánk Dámáinak kedvéért Versekbe foglalt Gróf Gvadányi József Magyar Lovas Generális* [Account of the life of Pál Rontó, a Hungarian cavalryman, and Count Mórítz Benyovszki, their amazing deeds on land and sea, told in verse for the benefit of the ladies of our country by Count József Gvadányi, Hungarian Cavalry General] was published in 1793 by the printing house of Simon Péter Weber in Pozsony/Bratislava (and Komárom/Komarno), where the Slovak book about Benyovszky also appeared 15 years later. The two-part verse narrative first describes the life and incredible adventures of Pál Rontó, an early Hungarian *miles gloriosus*. In his foreword, Gvadányi claims that Rontó served together with him in the army and spent nine days recounting his adventures to the writer. However there is a great deal of exaggeration. Although it could be thought that the incredible adventures of this "common soldier" are intended as a parody of the subsequent stories of the count, Gvadányi's approach is not so simple. He wrote both parts of his poem as an entertaining work for "ladies".

What Gvadányi wrote about Benyovszky himself is of special interest:

As regards the life of Count Mórítz Benyovszki, he himself wrote it down in the French language, while he was making merry in London, and it was printed there; the English then translated it into their own language, and finally this work also came out in the German language: and so in part I have followed this German edition, but even more the things that I myself have heard and been told; because, as I have included in my work, when Count Benyovszki returned to our country from Paris he spent four days with me in Nagyszombat in the Golden Crown Inn, and as my dear and old friend and also a distant relative, he recounted to me all his adventures and vicissitudes. As for Pál Rontó, he was in the same Regiment with me and I was his sergeant, and discharging my duty I also rescued him from the gallows during the Prussian War that lasted seven years. When the Diet

assembled in Buda in the year 1790, learning of my presence there he sought me out and I did not let him go for nine days. On that occasion he told me the story of his life and all that had befallen the Count too; indeed, as I said to him some of his deeds that are set out in the book are falsified, and he recounted them to me as I have set them down. (Foreword to the 1793 edition: pages X–XI.)

Gvadányi knew indeed about the French publication in London, and also about its English and later its German translation. He was especially indignant about the falsifications in the latter regarding Benyovszky's origin. He therefore wrote an account of the count's life himself, right up to the Polish uprising and his arrival in Cracow. (According to the poem it was here that Benyovszky met Pál Rontó.) Gvadányi also made further corrections concerning the parts in Kamchatka at the end of the fifth section of part two (through the narrative of Pál Rontó). (There is perhaps no need to note that the Pál Rontó figuring in the poem was an invention of the author, he never lived in Hungary, and naturally was never in Siberia!) In the second part Gvadányi traces events up to Benyovszky's death in Madagascar. He too says (on page 548) that when the Countess learnt of this she returned to Hungary, where Mrs. Benyovszky continued to live an "exemplary life".

The remark made at the end of the eleventh section of part two is also of special interest. Here Benyovszky, driven back from the first expedition to Madagascar, bids farewell to the island. In his publication of 1807 Gvadányi makes the following remark on this (on pages 529–530):

The book translated into German reaches this point and goes no further in its description of the life of Count Mórítz Benyovszki, but I shall continue it in this humble work, as he himself recounted to me and also to Pál Rontó in Buda after his arrival in our country from Paris, with what befell him in Paris; and while he was in our country not only I but countless others also heard his stories, consequently I have included these too, with an account of where Pál Rontó parted from the Count and where he went. But I do not stop here either: I conclude my work with the account given by the English writer Nicholsson of how he traveled from our country to London, the capital city of England, why he went from there to Madagascar, and how his life came to an end there.

Then follows the "twelfth section" of the poem in which Gvadányi claims that Benyovszky had many enemies in Paris. Then however (in 1777) the crown prince, the later Joseph II appears in Paris to visit his younger sister, Marie Antoinette and naturally, he too knows about the famous Benyovszky, whom he summons, "pardons", and calls on to return to his homeland. Benyovszky sets out immediately and is given an audience by Maria Theresa, to whom he recounts his adventures. The queen makes him a colonel of the *Székely* hussars. On his way to take up this post, he stops in Pozsony, where he has to tell the story of his life to

many people. (The poem then continues with the farewell from Pál Rontó.) Then Benyovszky travels to Nagyszombat to inspect his estates. It is here that he meets Gvadányi and spends four days telling him about his adventures. According to Gvadányi's poem Benyovszky then fights against the Rumanian rebel, Hóra/Horea in Transylvania, travels to Silesia in 1778, from where he returns to Vienna, where he asks to be relieved of his commission and travels to Fiume to set up a wholesale business there. This is not successful, so he leaves for England. There he requests an audience with the king and promises to conquer Madagascar for him. But the English Parliament does not give the support requested, so he sails to America and, with the support of merchants there, again leads an expedition to Madagascar. The verse narrative ends with a description of Benyovszky's death. (Naturally Gvadányi could not have heard of these events on the occasion of their meeting in Nagyszombat; he took them from foreign publications.) The information presented briefly by Gvadányi is, of course, not precise even concerning the dates. (For example, the Horea-Cloșca uprising began in the autumn of 1784, i.e., at the time Benyovszky was on the journey from Baltimore to Madagascar!) And just as the writer's meeting with Pál Rontó is fictitious, perhaps the days spent with Benyovszky in Nagyszombat also belong in the world of poetry.

In 1807 in Pozsony/Pressburg Simon Péter Wéber issued the book again. By then Gvadányi was no longer alive either, as the publisher notes. Otherwise the new edition is the same as the old one, in fact, the two-part poem was printed with the same typographical composition (!). The book was published again in 1816 without any further changes.

The following generations showed the same interest. In 1857 József Gaal published a novel (today we would call it a novel for youth) entitled *Gróf Benyovszky Móric élete és viszontagságai* (Life and adventures of Count Móric Benyovszky). This was linked to *Rontó Pál élete és viszontagságai* (Life and adventures of Pál Rontó, 1857), which can obviously be traced back to Gvadányi and was also published again later. Other even later popular publications include the book by Vilmos Radó: *Benyovszky Móric élete és kalandjai* (Life and adventures of Móric Benyovszky, Budapest, 1889). It was reissued again and again for decades). The figure of Benyovszky also continued to attract the attention of belletrists. Besides the works of Pál Pados (1940) and Tibor Bevall (obviously a pen-name!), Dénes Barsi's *Madagaszkár királya* (King of Madagascar, Budapest, 1943) gave emphasis to adventures capturing the imagination of youthful readers. Works of better quality include Miklós Rónaszegi *A nagy játszma* (The big game), a novel for youth (Budapest, 1955), which focused on the events in Kamchatka. Árpád Thiery's novel *Benyovszky gróf* (Count Benyovszky, Budapest, 1993) covers the adventurer's entire life.

However, none of these publications included or drew directly on the text of Benyovszky's *Mémoires*.

As we can see from the above, there were already proposals in 1790 for a Hungarian edition of Benyovszky's memoirs, particularly since the foreign editions were familiar in Hungary. However, the Hungarian translation was not done until much later, thanks to Mór Jókai (who, as he himself claimed, was given his first name in honor of the count). *Gróf Benyovszky Móricz életrajza, saját emlékiratai és útleírásai* (The life of Count Móricz Benyovszky, his own memoirs and descriptions of his travels) originally appeared in four volumes (Budapest, 1888–1891, in book form – and not in the same order as the numbering of the volumes! – before that it was published in fascicles, between 1887 and 1891). A new, second edition appeared at the same time in 1891. This was used almost a century later for the critical edition of the complete works of Mór Jókai (as volumes 52 and 53 – Budapest, 1967), at which time it was edited and supplemented with detailed notes by György Radó, a polyglot literary scholar who was well acquainted with the Slavic aspects of Jókai's work. (The literary advisor for these volumes of the critical edition was Lajos Tardy, a man well acquainted with the curiosities of Hungarian cultural history.) In the introduction to the work Jókai himself recounted that Count Sándor Benyovszky, grandson of Benyovszky's younger brother, had himself proposed that the *Mémoires* finally be published in Hungarian. Jókai made his translation from the 1790 English edition. However, as the editor of the critical edition points out, Jókai also drew on the German translation of Benyovszky's "memoir".

Although this publication consisting of several volumes actually gives the well known life history of Benyovszky, as it has remained the source of knowledge on the count up to the present in Hungary, it is worth listing what we can read about in Jókai and where.

The first part of the critical edition (volume 52) presents the first part of the count's life, up to his escape from Kamchatka, in 32 chapters. At the same time Jókai regards this as his own "novel", even giving it a separate title: *Afanázia*. The second volume contains the last six chapters (33–38); these were written by Jókai himself, who – following what we have seen to be a century-old tradition – defends the statements made on geography, ethnology and the history of discovery in Benyovszky's memoir. (Even in the earlier parts of the "novel" Jókai consistently tries to confirm even Benyovszky's boldest claims.) The next volume (volume 53 in the critical edition) is even more interesting for our subject. Its title is: *Gróf Benyovszky Móricz életrajza, saját emlékiratai és útleírása* [Biography of Count Móricz Benyovszky, his own memoirs and descriptions of his travels], which Jókai himself calls a "translation". (It originally appeared in 1888, as volume III.) This includes the foreword by the English publisher, Nicholson, dated December 7, 1789, then Benyovszky's "memoir" (from his birth up to his banishment to Siberia), and Benyovszky's "memoirs" in 29 chapters (after a very brief introductory text this actually contains his escape from Kamchatka and the events

leading up to it). The “continuation” first describes his travels in the ocean around Kamchatka, then the journey via Japan and Formosa to Canton. A number of memoranda, agreements and military reports can be read in this part. According to the text, Benyovszky sailed on a French ship on January 22, 1772 and arrived on March 16 in Isle-de-France. (This had earlier been in Portuguese and then Dutch possession, it passed to the French in 1715 and was taken by the British in 1810. It is now known as Mauritius.) According to the text Benyovszky was a guest of the “governor” there. After about two weeks they set sail again and dropped anchor on April 12 at Madagascar, where Benyovszky went ashore at Fort Dauphin. They were able to spend two days on the island. They then sailed to France, landing on July 19, 1772. Benyovszky first drew up a proposal for the French for the colonization not of Madagascar but of Formosa. However, he soon recommended Madagascar to the French court which was eager for money but by then was no longer capable of colonization on a large scale and was in an increasingly disorderly state. Benyovszky called on his wife and children in Hungary to join him in France. The second volume of the *Mémoires* ends at the point in December 1772 when he was commissioned in the name of the French king to establish a French colony on the island of Madagascar.

The next part (volume IV, pages 79–100) is even more interesting. It bears the title “*Memoir of the expedition to Madagascar*”. According to this, Benyovszky was commissioned on September 15, 1772 to lead an expedition to Madagascar. The practical preparations began in early 1773. The text gives a brief plan drawn up by Benyovszky for the French minister. He made his farewell visits in France at the end of March and they arrived at Isle-de-France on September 22, 1773. They wished to set out very soon for Madagascar, but the leaders of Isle-de-France did everything to put obstacles in Benyovszky’s way, and it was only on February 14, 1774 that they dropped anchor off Madagascar.

“*Detailed description of matters concerning the royal colony ... established in Madagascar*” is the title of the next part (volume IV, pages 101–262). Here we learn from journal-like notes about the fate of the colony, contacts with the natives, revolt, sicknesses, even a rough record of accounts. In an entry dated March 1776 a brief account of the natives’ “Seclave” “kingdom” precedes a description of the “war” that was soon conducted against them. This is again followed by a description of the plots against Benyovszky, in which we can read about meetings and the speeches he made there. On August 16, 1776 the tribal chiefs elected him as their leader and promised to protect him from the French. But the commissaries De Bellecombe and Chevreau arrived from France on September 21 to investigate the circumstances of Benyovszky’s colony and, if necessary, to take him back to France. Benyovszky drew up a number of reports and handed over these texts. On September 29th the delegates ordered that Benyovszky’s functions not extend to anything beyond the colony. In early October Benyovszky informed the native

chiefs that he had left the service of the French king. At that point Benyovszky actually wanted to organize an independent state. He also records the text of the native leaders' oath of loyalty, the composition of the government to be formed, etc. Nevertheless, he wished to return to Europe and on December 14, 1776 he set sail. He hoped that this journey would be of great benefit for the future of the Madagascan colony. The *Memoirs* ends with this sentence.

As a kind of appendix the book also includes a number of documents (volume IV, pages 265–369): resolutions of the officers' meetings and rules for the general administration of the colony drawn up in the form of question and answer and including a description of the inhabitants of the island. A separate document discusses the diseases common on the island. There is also an economic proposal concerning the potential and profits of the colony. An appendix to the appendix describes the way of life of the peoples of the island. There are copies of nine letters and instructions sent from Paris. This is followed by a "Declaration by Count Móric Benyovszky" (dated December 25, 1785), in which he presents and offers the island of Madagascar to the king of England.

At the end of the work (volume IV, pages 379–381) Jókai points out that he is also publishing some letters of Benyovszky never before published, throwing new light on previously unclear details of his life. He also expresses the hope that we will obtain more reliable information on the period of Benyovszky's life after the first expedition to Madagascar.

This hope was realized, but not exactly in the way Jókai had thought.

For justifiable reasons György Radó did not include the sections from chapter 39 to chapter 60 of the second volume (Budapest, 1891) of *Gróf Benyovszky Móricz életrajza* in the Jókai critical edition (Budapest, 1967). As the publisher notes on page 66 of the 1891 edition, "The publisher commissioned Mr. János Jankó Jr. to write the parts of this work requiring geographical knowledge and research, a difficult task that he willingly undertook; the following chapters are from his pen." It is understandable that it is not the task of a complete Jókai edition to publish texts by Jankó. However, these passages may also be of interest to us. János Jankó (1868–1902), one of the leading representatives of Hungarian ethnology, was at the beginning of his career at the time. He had training in geography and also in African studies. Obviously, when he did research in French and English ethnological institutions, museums and archives in 1890 he must have made a special point of checking for material on Benyovszky in view of the request to write commentaries. He wrote his commentaries in 21 chapters (close to 250 printed pages) covering the chapters of the *Memoirs*. He begins (in chapters 39–50) with commentaries that on the whole confirm and even show enthusiasm concerning the events in Siberia, Kamchatka and the journey to Japan, and the stay in Canton. (For example, he even writes (on page 202) that the island of Mauritius was later named after Benyovszky, which would be an exaggeration even if

intended as a joke!) Beginning in chapter 51 Jankó deals with Benyovszky's activity in Madagascar (see pages 204–310). He presents the discovery of the island, the first French attempts to colonize it and their failure. Jankó drew on Louis Pauliat's *Madagascar* (Paris, 1884), in places simply translating passages from it. He characterizes Benyovszky's plans for colonization in the same way. Jankó even shows prejudice in attacking the governor of Isle de France (De Ternay), his intendant (Maillard) and the merchants there, who impeded Benyovszky's efforts whenever they could. Taking the reports in the *Mémoires* at face value, he comments briefly on Benyovszky's return to Europe, then on the plan for his new expedition and his subsequent early death. Jankó devotes three chapters to the history of the island from 1816 to the 1890s. Finally, he describes the changes in customs, morals and cultural relations. He also mentions the questions that need to be cleared up in future research on Benyovszky.

Jankó also provided appendices. He gave the text in Latin (and in Hungarian translation) of Maria Theresa's diploma of April 3, 1778 raising Benyovszky to the rank of count, which refers to Benyovszky as colonel and appointed governor of Madagascar (*"nec non provinciae Madagascar nominatae gubernatori"*). He traced the history and genealogy of the Benyovszky family. He also reproduced some of the notes made by Sándor Benyovszky, containing all the main elements of the count's legendry. Further family recollections contain even more fantastic details (for example, that Benyovszky married in America, fathered another three children there and was murdered in 1809 in Texas). Jókai and Lajos Kropf refuted such preposterous ideas with a touch of irony, and Kropf gave a detailed account of all that is known of Benyovszky's death on the basis of more authentic sources. Finally, he published seven letters from Benyovszky to his younger brother Emánuel (in French and German) written in April 1780 (from Vienna) and in the summer of 1781 (from Fiume), followed by a report on his military activity, his appointment as "k. k. General", and his journey to France. Unfortunately, the latter letters are not dated.

The apologetic tone of these communications follows the solutions of the "well-intentioned" Benyovszky commentators. At most he adds new source material, and there is a note of Hungarian pride.

But it seems that the discovery of new "authentic" sources on Benyovszky only leaves more biographical facts in obscurity and makes their explanation more difficult.

Some Remarks and Some Source Criticism

S. Pasfield Oliver's book: *Memoirs and Travels of Mauritius August Count Benyowsky* (London – New York) was published in 1893; it was a new, updated version of the English edition of 1790. In this Oliver, who was a colleague and

friend of Lajos Kropf, tried to give a more credible picture of Benyovszky with the help of new data that had come to light. It is a pity that this book appeared after the Jókai version, too late to influence it, and at least in Hungary not everyone later took into account the new facts that it presented.

Lajos (Louis) Kropf (1852–1939), who first published an account of the precise circumstances of the count's death in the March 23, 1888 issue (No. 83) of *Egyetértés*, and later János Jankó, who published *Gróf Benyovszky Móric mint földrajzi kutató* (Count Móric Benyovszky as geographical researcher) in a separate booklet (Budapest, 1890) and his survey of the literature on Benyovszky in the columns of *Századok* (1891, 718–735, 797–808), both recognized the importance of manuscript sources. It is a pity that they did not make greater use of them at the time and did not publicly adopt a position on the matter of the falsehoods in the *Mémoires*. Perhaps they both knew that the British Museum preserved another manuscript in addition to the one published here: *Benyovszky Mauritius Augustus: Memoirs and Travels with maps and drawings* (MSS. Fr. 5359–5362, in French). It is worth noting that the British Library today knows of further, previously unpublished documents on Benyovszky under the manuscript reference numbers 18.128 to 18.139.

György Radó (1912–1994) himself lists no less than 124 manuscripts or archive sources (critical edition of Jókai's works vol. 52, pages 472–479), quite a few of them in the National Széchényi Library. Since then we have probably learned of further surviving documents in France or England. It would be worth publishing a full list and at least a register of these. The brief overviews made on special occasions or lists referring to new sources do not make up for this lack. (See, for example, the proceedings of the conference held on the 200th anniversary of Benyovszky's death – *Földrajzi Múzeumi Tanulmányok* 3. Érd, 1987.)

It is obvious that people still show interest in Benyovszky's adventurous life (not only in Hungary but also in Slovakia, Poland and naturally Madagascar and elsewhere). This is evident not only from the highly successful Slovak–Hungarian TV film series (1975, Hungarian title: *Vivát Benyovszky!* director: Igor Ciel). (However, this eight-part series once again concentrated mainly on the path leading to Kamchatka; Madagascar appeared only in the final part.) A slim volume entitled *Benyovszky Móric: Madagaszkár* appeared in Budapest in 2001. It essentially contains Jókai's Hungarian text (with minor publishing differences) without a single word of commentary. (See the Jókai critical edition, volume 53, pages 261–370.) This publication did not include any of the "Documents" found in the Jókai edition, but it did take two of its illustrations. The same publisher brought out Benyovszky's French text too, based on the 1791 Paris edition. Recently (in 2004) the Hungarian TV channel Duna-Televízió broadcast a documentary on Benyovszky's Madagascar.

Although I have not attempted to assemble a complete survey in this respect either, it should be noted that biographies of Benyovszky in numerous contemporary editions and the more recent editions based on them can be read in major libraries in Hungary. The Budapest University Library has both the 1790 English and the 1791 French editions. It has the German travel account of 1790 and 1791, its new edition of 1797 and the Vienna edition of 1815. The Academy Library in Budapest still preserves copies of the 1790 Berlin edition and the 1791 Hamburg edition. Naturally, the National Széchényi Library has the most complete Benyovszky collection. Unfortunately, the most recent works, mainly those on contemporary Madagascar, and at least copies of the manuscripts preserved abroad are missing even here.

It would therefore be good to see all these source works together at last, to enable us to form a more precise picture of what is fact and what is merely fiction in the old documents. However, it is not our task to make a moral judgment on Benyovszky's person or on the credibility of his memoirs. Rather, we should show the cause of this phenomenon, the process whereby texts containing false statements came into being.

The Budapest Edition of the *Protocolle*

In the autumn of 2003 the National Széchényi Library in Budapest obtained a photocopy of the carefully restored manuscript No. *Additional Ms. 18.844* from the library in London. (Ms. Lynne Brindley, chief executive of the British Library, is to be thanked for making it available.) In the following year we printed the manuscript in full, supplemented with illustrations taken from the old English edition of 1790. Naturally these are not found in the original manuscript. They come from other contemporary sources considered to be authentic. The Budapest 2004 publication contains a facsimile of the manuscript that is written in a clearly legible hand. However, since in places it is difficult to read and at times also contains unfamiliar linguistic forms, we also included a faithful French transcription of the manuscript. Naturally, no changes have been made to the original text. Wherever the wording of a passage (or its meaning) is doubtful, this is indicated. The very late 18th century French manuscript has been transcribed faithfully. Present orthography was taken into account only for the spelling of proper nouns as one or two words. The original articulation of the text was retained. The paragraphs, punctuation and emphases also follow the original manuscript.

Although the text of the 2004 Budapest edition is not the desired "original" source, it is nevertheless the closest thing to it. It has been known for more than a century that the manuscript of the *Protocolle*... exists and is to be found in the British Library. János Jankó already reported on this in an article published in

1891 (although he confused the later printed sources). In his notes for the Jókai critical edition György Radó also refers to this, but he had not seen the London manuscript. Győző Lugosi, a historian of Africa, wrote in his dissertation (1981) about the history of Madagascar before colonization. In his work he had access to a dissertation written in 1970 at the University of Tananarive (Paule Vacher: *Contribution à l'histoire de l'établissement français fondé à Madagascar, par le baron de Benyovszky (1772–1776), d'après de nouvelles sources manuscrites*), which gave a scathing critique of Benyovszky's falsifications and at the same time tried to point out genuine source works on the early history of the island. Vacher and subsequently Lugosi assume that in Paris there may be a further copy (or facsimile) in French of the manuscript preserved in London. They also mention the archives or publications in France and Madagascar (and elsewhere) where further authentic documents on the Benyovszky expedition could be sought. Unfortunately, as far as we know, this work has yet to be done.

Manuscript No. *Additional MS. 18.844* of the British Museum (British Library) is a very elegant, beautifully handwritten document comprising 102 folio sheets. (Corrections can be seen in only a few places). According to a hand-written inscription on the last page it was inventoried in 1870. The short title on the red morocco binding is: *Protocole du regiment des volontaire [!] de Benyovszky créée en 1772*. The manuscript has no summary table of contents, but the different sections have titles.

On the first page a description of the subject, which is then expanded at the top of page 2, is inscribed: *Mémoire sur l'expédition et l'isle Madagascar*. There is a preliminary introduction (*Preliminaire*) and then from the next page (with the title *Exposé*) there are instructions concerning the expedition to Madagascar issued by the French naval minister (secretary of state) De Boynes and dated December 15, 1772. The manuscript contains precise dates and the years are shown separately in the left-hand margins. Then follows the text of Benyovszky's seven-point draft and a mention of the negotiations that took place in connection with this. After this comes a description of the journey to Isle de France and the preparations there. Although the manuscript is almost identical with the text of the *Mémoires*, it is striking that the spelling of names is not always consistent and there are discrepancies of not only days but even months in the dates. The figures in the "accounts" do not always coincide either, although the rules applying to the addition of the accounts published earlier were not always clear. In this case the cause seems to be inaccuracy on the part of the copyists rather than any intention to mislead readers. The division of the seven texts into paragraphs is not the same either.

From the top of page 12 we are given a "detailed description" of matters related to the colony (*Mémoire détaillé...*), beginning on February 14, 1774.

The first substantial discrepancies between the text of the *Protocole* and the *Mémoires* can be found from February 1775, when in the "memoirs" Benyovszky

begins to give the story of how he was “elected as king”, doing so in the form of precisely dated journal entries. These passages are not found in the *Protocolle*. Here, however, we find the text of the “proposals of the Sambarives” (*Proposition et Discours des Sambarives*), dated April 30, 1775 and a description of the subsequent clashes in June and then the talks, again followed by armed conflict. By the end of the hostilities (in mid-August) Benyovszky was ill with a fever. His condition did not really improve until October. Of course, both the intrigues of the colonial officials and the conflicts continued. In early March 1776 a “description of the kingdom of the Seclaves” (*Notion du royaume des Seclaves dites Boyana*) follows in the manuscript, running to around two pages, but then without any further remarks the journal-style entries continue. These present in detail the aggressive behavior of certain chiefs, or the help others request from him, and above all the speeches made by Benyovszky. It is here (on pages 56–57) that he gives a description of the structure of his army. It is interesting to note that he does not mention the 1,129, 1,882, 1,088 and 12 individuals, altogether 4,113 people listed in the *Mémoires*, but only 49, 50, 46, and 4, a total of 147, which was, alas, probably closer to the truth (even despite the error in addition). The history of the campaign waged against the Seclaves, which began on April 30, 1776 (*Historique de la campagne contre les Seclaves*), follows from page 57. Towards the end of this campaign Benyovszky received the news that *La Syrène*, the corvette sent from Paris to “support” him, was shipwrecked and sank. He received a message from the ministry that he was to restrict his activity to the colony. On June 8, 1776 Benyovszky returned to Louisbourg from his military expedition, abandoning his native allies. Peace talks with the Seclaves began on August 14. This is a short section in the *Protocolle*, which then continues with Benyovszky’s inspection made near the colony on August 23, followed the arrival of the *S. Vincent* (dated early September). In contrast, the *Mémoires* report that between August 16 and 22 the island’s chiefs came to visit Benyovszky, fearing that the French king would recall him, and in essence made him the ruler of the whole island. This is followed by speeches and mutual vows. It is only then that he returns (taking up the thread from August 23) to an account of the ever more rapid events. It hardly needs to be said that the colorful description of how he was made king is all the work of his imagination. The reality was that General De Bellecombe and Chief Commissioner Chevreau, entrusted with conducting the investigation, arrived on September 21. They handed over a document containing 25 questions to which Benyovszky drafted a written reply, also in 25 points. By then Benyovszky was already preparing to leave the island. On October 3 at an assembly of the chiefs he said that he had left the service of the French and would soon write a report on the state of the Madagascan colony. The chiefs assured him of their support.

The *Protocolle* gives only a very brief account of the events of the last days on Madagascar and makes mention of October 1776, where we find the remark (at

the bottom of page 65) "*fin du mémoire*". In contrast, the *Mémoires* give a veritable novella recounting how the tribal chiefs asked him to take an oath as ruler, which he allegedly did on October 4. The long and detailed description ends with a list of those present and their ranks. The sections describing the organization of the new state are also missing from the *Protocolle*. According to the *Mémoires* Benyovszky did not leave the island until December 11, 1776. Although the last days are again recorded in journal form, we learn nothing about what Benyovszky did on the spot during the period of around ten weeks after he "left the service of the French king" (around September 28).

The last third of the *Protocolle* manuscript contains documents (similarly to the *Mémoires*). There are actually five documents. One, marked X, contains the resolutions of the assembly held by the officers of the volunteers on September 22, 1775 (on pages 66–71). A second marked XX contains the resolutions of a similar gathering of officers held on April 1, 1776 (on pages 71–74). In the *Protocolle* this is followed (on pages 74–77) by notes (*Observations...*) on diseases in Madagascar, a text that comes later in the *Mémoires*. Then follow, under the heading *X a*, the 25 questions of De Bellecombe and Chevreau, presented with the questions in the left column and Benyovszky's answers in the right column (on pages 78–98). Almost without exception each question was signed by the two Frenchmen, and each answer was signed separately and authenticated by Benyovszky; this is also shown in the London manuscript. The text of the questions and answers is not entirely identical in the two source texts. Naturally, Benyovszky gives an answer more favorable to himself to the two most important questions (the first and the last) in the version found in the *Mémoires*. It is characteristic that the answer given to the 20th question (how many inhabitants are there on the island) is 250,000 in the *Protocolle*, while the *Mémoires* give "two and a half million". In his answers Benyovszky mentions further documents and accounts, but these have not been passed on in either source (although some of them could perhaps still come to light in some archive somewhere). Finally (on pages 99–101) we find the draft titled *Projet pour fonder une Colonie à Madagascar*, which first sets out ten general conditions, then answers them in 22 points for the case of Madagascar. It concludes with a detailed list of considerations for the colonization of the island.

The manuscript does not contain figures, sketches, references or other documents. There is no indication of who had it made and for whom, who was the copyist, or in whose possession it was.

Since this text gives the best picture of Benyovszky's first expedition to Madagascar and contains more sober information than what appeared later in the *Mémoires* (although the exaggeration, self-praise and overestimation of the results are striking in these texts too), it deserved to be published. The observant reader will be able to spot the inaccuracies in dates and names in the original manuscript by comparing them with the transcription and the English or Hungar-

ian translation. We did not wish to correct, explain or supplement Benyovszky's geographical, ethnological or historical data or to compare them with the present data. This and similar research will be the task of a scholarly biography of Benyovszky when one is finally written.

Considering that the commentaries in the Jókai critical edition (1967, in volume 52, particularly between pages 470 and 490) gave what was at the time a quite complete international bibliography, we have not repeated that here, mentioning only the most important and the most recent publications. We have not mentioned the overviews or lexicon entries (although some of them also refer to the most recent literature).

Conclusion

While it seems quite clear to me from the foregoing what we can believe from Benyovszky's writings and what not, I do not consider it superfluous or defamatory but merely a fact to mention the lies. Of course, these must be pointed out in scholarly criticism, but there are articles in the most recent literature whose authors continue to defend every claim made by Benyovszky.

Both the *Protocolle* and the later *Mémoires* are typical products of the last quarter of the 18th century. The places of Benyovszky's incredible adventures were real places. Of course, he drew on the works of others in describing peoples, battles and events, and he falsified names and events and exaggerated the facts. This has always been the case with great travelers. The account of the "Siberian" stage of his life and his journey around the world also begins in the manner of a boastful tale. Later, when he arrived in France, the need must have arisen for him to draw up a more detailed plan for the establishment of a big, independent colony, and to write "travel reports" providing the evidence required. It was not solely the fault of the already existing but tiny French "colonial administration", powerless and greedy, in the region, the countless more pressing problems of the mother country as it drifted towards revolution, or even Benyovszky's contradictory personality that nothing came of the grand plan. England and later the Americans also showed very limited interest in this plan of colonizing a far away island. In reality, the social conditions of the people of Madagascar at the time would not have made it possible to create a uniform colony there. After sporadic attempts at colonization by the Portuguese, Dutch, English and French from the second half of the 16th century, then the attempts at conquest around the turn of the 18th-19th century, which were doomed to failure from the outset, in the second third of the 19th century the natives united almost the whole of the island into their own kingdom. Initially they were under English influence, then between 1885 and 1895 the country became a French colony. It can be said that Benyovszky "arrived a century too early" to become the "ruler" of the whole island.

Clearly, there is still interest in Benyovszky and his deeds in Madagascar. Occasionally this has even reached scholarly circles. Editions published as early as the late 18th century attempted to explain, reinterpret or correct the incorrect and incredible parts of Benyovszky's descriptions of his travels. Nicholson's introduction to the 1790 English edition served as a source in this respect for a number of later editions. Pasfield Oliver's new London edition of 1893 goes even further in this direction. On the part of the French, in works published approximately 100 years ago Prosper Cultru, a researcher on Madagascar, deals in detail with the falsifications to be found in Benyovszky's descriptions of the island and its peoples. He also writes that the count simply "copied" his description of the "state organization" of the Malagasy people from a work by Flacourt, forgetting that more than a century had passed since it had been written. Moreover, Benyovszky placed the borrowed data in a different region. (Flacourt gave a detailed report of great scholarly value of the state of affairs existing between 1642 and 1660. We do not know when Benyovszky came across this book, but the Appendix to the *Protocolle* draws on it.) The dissertation written in 1970 by Paule Vacher, a historian specializing in Madagascar, criticizes the false descriptions given by Benyovszky more strongly than any previous author. Her negative opinion was fully accepted by the Hungarian expert on the question, Győző Lugosi, who in fact is constantly struggling to deflate Benyovszky.

On the other hand the mass media and tourism in Hungary nurtures the "cult" of Benyovszky. He has always been popular in Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland and recently studies on him have appeared in France, the United States, Russia, etc. Conferences and meetings have been devoted to him. Opera, film, and TV-programs feature him. For tourism and even for "national identity" his name has often been used. We will not enter into a discussion of this phenomenon. Several web-sites and home pages collect "actual information" about him, thousands of items in fact. His *Memoirs* and the other "first" publications regularly appear on rare bookseller's lists and at auctions. In recent years Japanese and Chinese Benyovszky books have been published. In certain circles Madagascar popularizes his fame. In the United States his eventful contacts with America have been increasingly studied. In June 2000 there was an exhibition in the Library of Congress, Washington D.C. (in the James Madison Memorial Building – European Reading Room) entitled *Count Maurice Benyowsky. An 18th century World-traveler from Slovakia*, with a seminar in which both the Slovak and Hungarian ambassadors praised him. It is typical that in 1996, in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of his birth, a silver coin in the amount of 200 Slovak crown was issued by the National Bank of Slovakia with the following text: "Count Moric Beňovský, a typical representative of the period of the Enlightenment, the development of transport and trade, exploration of unknown regions, French colonel, Ruler of Madagascar, the first Slovak author of a best-seller, involved in the his-

tory of various countries.” Miroslav Musil’s novel *Madagascar Diary* (1997) was a great success, and was followed by the Czech film: *Benyowsky and the World*. On August 13, 2006 Richard Randrianasolo, the honorary consul of the Republic of Malgash, presented his credentials in Budapest, stressing the importance of the “Madagascan–Hungarian friendship”. The latest Benyovszky program in the mass media was on February 17, 2007, when Duna Television repeated a film entitled *Benyovszky Móric és a malgasok földje* (Maurice Benyovszky and the land of the Malgash). The 2004 edition of *Protocolle* won prizes both in Hungary and abroad.

It would be easy to enumerate recent similar events, but this was not my aim.

Both international research and African historiography in Hungary have formed a sober and very critical opinion of the Hungarian “king” of Madagascar.

Of course, this is not what determined the respect he was shown by subsequent generations. Even if we remove the layer of falsehoods from Benyovszky’s memoirs we are still left with an incredibly colorful and varied life. It is a fact that Benyovszky lived and fought in Europe, was a prisoner in the Russian Empire, and escaped on a voyage around the world that took him back to Europe. He saw Madagascar three times, spending altogether years there. Even if he did not see the “kings” and other dignitaries he listed, even if there were not 40,000 natives in attendance on the evening of his farewell, Benyovszky was nevertheless on the island, he saw Madagascar and the Madagascans. The “texts of oaths” and the drafting of a constitution are both familiar products of the age of enlightenment, and if we do not regard Haiti’s “revolution” as merely a caricature of the French Revolution, then we cannot regard Benyovszky, the “civilizer and city founder”, as a parody of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau or the social contract. Even in the primary sources he himself wrote, his “volunteers” are sometimes true and selfless friends and valiant soldiers and sometimes petty, lazy, corrupt and cowardly nobodies. Of course, in that age volunteers fought in the same way for Polish liberty, in the American War of Independence, and later on both sides in the wars that lasted for decades after the French revolution. Benyovszky is a representative of his age, even in the fact that he was more an adventurer than a military leader and he lived more from the sale of (enslaved) servants than the production of goods. He was a great risk-taker and all we know of his family relations is drawn from sources he himself shaped. His learning could not have been very deep, if for no other reason than the great deal of time he spent on his journeys. But he undoubtedly had an exceptional ability to take stock of a situation and to win friends and influence people. At the same time he was a strict, cruel man who longed to rule, who always wanted to be first, always wanted to be in charge, and as a result often came into conflict with those around him. Especially in his youth he was not only restless but also often reckless. Later he became an obsessive planner and organizer. He was bold, tireless, and had great endurance. He was able to withstand

even the infamous climate of Madagascar for some time. He was boastful and did not feel at all constrained by reality. He was not so much a complex as a striking personality. All this brought him world fame at the time and today continues to draw the reader's attention. The manuscript of the "Ampansakabé" (as he named himself) finally published in 2004 in Budapest introduces us to a segment of European cultural history.

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