



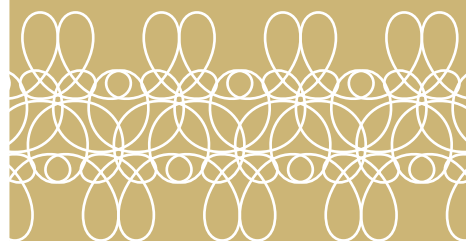
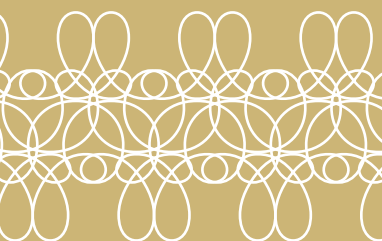
THE

Hungarian Historical Review

NEW SERIES OF ACTA HISTORICA
ACADEMIÆ SCIENTIARUM HUNGARICÆ
*Early Humanism in Hungary
and in East Central Europe*

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Early Humanism in Hungary and in East Central Europe

Farkas Gábor Kiss
Special Editor of the Thematic Issue

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Catullus on a Coat-of-Arms: A Pictorial Paraphrase of Catull. 11 from Late Medieval Hungary*

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The paper discusses the coat-of-arms of Mathias of Szente (or of Sáró) granted by Ladislaus V in 1456, the depiction of which includes—in my opinion—a pictorial paraphrase of a Catullian metaphor. This could offer a more satisfactory, but unusual answer to the emerging problems regarding the interpretation of the composition. The study attempts to reveal how Catullus' poem could reach Mathias of Szente, as well as the possible connotations it might have awoken on a broader range of the society.

Keywords: coat-of-arms, Mathias of Szente, Catullus

On January 31, 1456 in the town of Győr, Ladislaus the Posthumous (Ladislaus V as King of Hungary and Croatia) granted arms of nobility to the literatus Mathias of Szente, also appearing as of Sáró, and other members of his line.¹ The letters patent contains only a heraldic miniature, and no written description is presented for it. The heraldic achievement could be blazoned as follows: Azure, a Base Sable, over it a Plough Argent facing sinister with Handles Or, at its point a Tree raguly standing palewise with three Roses Gules slipped Vert issuant from its top.² The same tree with the roses appears as a crest on the tilting helmet mantled Gules doubled Argent.³

* I owe many thanks to Anton Avar (*National Archives of Hungary*) for giving advice in heraldic matters, especially on heraldic descriptions, to Dániel Kiss (*Eötvös Loránd University*) for resolving my sometimes misleading uncertainties in the stemmatics of the manuscripts, and to László Takács (*Pázmány Péter Catholic University*) for sharing his views and insights on this question.

1 The document is held by the National Archives of Hungary under the following reference code: MNL OL – Diplomatikai Levéltár [Archives of Diplomats] 50530 (hereafter DL). The donation's text in a critical form with a brief analysis (and monochrome reproduction) was published by Toronyi, *Sárói (Szentei)-címereslevél*, 29–31. The image itself, along with a brief description, was presented by Bertényi, *Magyar címertan*, 41. (48. image); with a somewhat more detailed description by Nyulásziné Straub, *Öt évszázad címerei*, 36. (XX. table), 121; on a monochrome image it is presented too by Balassa, *Az eke és a szántás*, 299; et al. Toronyi has published a blazon, still, in this study we give a more refined version.

2 The discovery of the existence of a base in this coat-of-arms was made by Anton Avar. In the existing blazons, this element was usually referred to as a realistic (i. e. “proper”) depiction of the ground or earth, and I thought of it this way too, despite the fact that I had an opportunity to examine the original miniature.

3 The color of the field in this coat-of-arms could not be defined using the various digital copies. Nyulásziné Straub considered it green in her brief description. As a matter of fact, it is more between blue

This unique heraldry of the Szentei⁴ family caught the attention of historians a long time ago. Because this particularly early depiction of a heavy plough on this coat-of-arms is worth examining from the perspective of historical research on everyday life, as well as on heraldry, scholars have placed considerable emphasis on these topics.⁵ They have been unable, however, to determine what could have inspired the creator or the receiver of this coat-of-arms in its making.⁶ Toronyi goes the farthest in addressing this question with her claim that in the subsequent centuries these depictions usually referred to the family's scope of activities, but she does not venture any guess as to how the Szentei family related to the item depicted, because the available sources do not touch on this.

In the following, we present our hypothesis concerning this coat-of-arms' importance in literary history, as well as supporting the idea, that the heraldic symbols are connected—with a minor twist—to the family's scope of activities. Finally, we also offer an explanation as to why this instrument appeared so early on a piece of heraldry.

Our discussion begins with the fact that during the process of submitting a petition for a coat-of-arms, the would-be bearer of this heraldry could present a draft of his design or one already in use by him to the chancellery.⁷ This is a well-documented custom from the Sigismund era of Hungary, because the letters patent inform us of petitioners providing drafts for the monarch.⁸ Unfortunately

and green. The plough's body could be described as spotted pale grey (which is actually the base color of the painting in its flawed state), a color which could also be the product of the oxidation of silver paint. The plough's share and the rose tree's bark are gold mixed with brown. The inner side of the mantling has no distinctive color, aside from the one resembling that of butter, which was used as a base for the whole, and a blackish discoloration similar to the one on the plough's body. Thus, in contrast to Toronyi's description of the colors as red and golden they are more likely red and silver.

4 This is the common Hungarian adjective form used as their family name given after the village where they owned properties.

5 Because a depiction of an instrument used in everyday life from such an early period is very rare (Nyulásziné Straub, *Öt évszázad címerei*, 121.) and, furthermore, the turning plough depicted here is similar to the much later ones used at the beginning of the nineteenth century, meaning that it hasn't changed much during the centuries. Balassa, *Az eke és a szántás*, 300–1, quoted by Bertényi, *Magyar címertan*, 121. n. 32.

6 In addition to the aforementioned: Kálmán, *Középkori magyar armálisok*, 147–48, 155–56.

7 R. Kiss, *Természetes ábrázolás*, 50, 170. We do not have a supplication of this kind from the Middle Ages. For more information on the method of submitting other petitions: Szilágyi, *Írásbeli supplicatiók*.

8 A better known example with the words of the Cook, Franciscus of Eresztvény's grant of arms from September 16, 1414: *arma seu nobilitatis insignia in praesentium litterarum nostrarum capite depicta maiestati nostre exhibendo, ab eadem maiestatis nostre celsitudine eadem arma seu nobilitatis insignia sibi [...] hereditibusque et posteritatibus univ[er]sis ipsorum, ex liberalitate nostra dari et conferri humiliter et devote supplicavit*. Fejérpataky, *Magyar czimeres emlékek I.*, 35. This is also present with other wording a year later in Michael Bor's grant of arms, who was Vice-master of the Horse: *Proinde ad univ[er]sor[um] tam praesentium quam futurorum, notitiam harum serie volumus*

the letters from the years of Ladislaus V and the later ones skip this formula, and they only refer to the act of the supplication. We cannot presume the absence of this custom, however, because we know from later texts that it was common practice in the sixteenth century.⁹

Individual concepts unquestionably played an important part in the creation of the coat-of-arms for Mathias of Szente. This is confirmed indirectly by the document too, because it reveals that the petitioner requested a granting of a coat-of-arms from the king by his supporters.¹⁰ The seemingly marginal information, namely that in the letters patent Mathias of Szente is referred to as a *litteratus*, becomes decisively important in this case. In our assessment, his literacy was not simply a condition of his selection, but also an explanation for it.

What is depicted on this coat-of-arms? Its most significant attribute is the unity of the composition. A plough and a rose on a single shield are depicted on a Bavarian coat-of-arms from a much later period, but in this case they are separated on two different fields.¹¹ The connection of these motifs in this manner is unique. The creator of this illustration evidently wanted to capture an idea: the moment when the share cuts into the roots of the rose. Why else would the tree's stem be so clearly positioned behind the plough's share, and why would it otherwise need a base connecting the two elements into a united composition?¹² Last but not least, why is there a rose tree—or any plant—in the

pervenire, quod coram celsitudine nostre maiestatis personaliter constituto nobili famoso ac egregio Michaelae dicto Bor [...] pro eo et eius nomine ac in personis nobilium virorum [...] exhibuit nobis quandam cartam, arma seu nobilitatis insignia [lacuna] clarius continentem [...]. Supplicavitque ob hoc celsitudini nostre maiestatis predictus Michael dictus Bor, [...] vicemagister agazonum regaliū nostrorum, [...] humiliter atque devote, ut predicta arma seu nobilitatis insignia sibi [...] ex plenitudine potestatis nostrae regie maiestatis atque liberalitate regia dare et concedere dignaremur. Fejérpataky, *Magyar czimeres emlékek* II, 14.

9 One of the best examples is the petition submitted by Sebastianus of Tinód (MNL OL - R 64 - 1. - No. 14/b) and his grant of arms published in Vienna on August 25, 1553 (MNL OL - R 64 - 1. - No. 14/a). His coat-of-arms is painted on his supplication, though it wasn't painted on the grant itself, probably because of a lack of money or other reasons, but its blazon is found in the text. I would like to thank Mihály Kurecskó (*National Archives of Hungary*) for bringing this example to my attention.

10 *Ad nonnullorum fidelium nostrorum humilime supplicationis instantiam [...] ipsa arma seu nobilitatis insignia [...] dedimus et contulimus, ymmo ex habundantiori plenitudine nostre specialis gratie concedimus et presentibus elargimur, [...] Toronyi, Sárói (Szentei)-címereslevél, 29.*

11 The Oeder line (1784): a plough and a rose, Seyler, *Bayerischer Adel*, 165. (Taf. 102.); Julius Pflug (the last bishop of Naumburg 1547–1564): a share and a stem, Seyler, *Bisthümer und Klöster*, 38. (Taf. 66.); Pflug von Rabenstein: a plough and a stem, Graf Meraviglia-Crivelli, *Der Böhmisches Adel*, 247–48. (Taf. 112.)

12 This realistic depiction on arms paintings and correlating with this the depictions of acts in motion are identified by R. Kiss as specifically Hungarian elements. For this reason, the notion that the base appears as a supporter is acceptable in our assessment: this idea does not interfere with the crucial parts of our hypothesis.

middle of a depiction of ploughing, when this act is the turning of soil which has already been cleared of plants?

Our questions seem instantly answered when we consider them from a different angle. This composition obviously corresponds to one of the most beautiful metaphors of classical Latin literature, the metaphor with which Catullus, deceived by the unfaithful Lesbia, captures the state in which he finds himself and depicts it in his farewell message to the girl who cannot even understand her misdeed and the extent of the loss and the value of the thing squandered.¹³

nec meum respectet, ut ante, amorem,
qui illius culpa cecidit velut prati
ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam
tactus aratro est.¹⁴

(Catull. 11. 21–24)

Looking at this obvious parallel, we might well ask how this man of the lower nobility from Nógrád County was familiar with the abovementioned poem by Catullus?¹⁵ Because we do not know of a manuscript or florilegium from this period from which he could have learned of this poet's work, which had been rediscovered one and a half centuries earlier.¹⁶ At first glance, we might conjecture that he must have studied abroad. Indeed, this was the case. The lists of the peregrini who studied in Vienna include a certain Mathias de Saro from 1443 who was probably our nobleman from Upper Hungary.¹⁷ Unfortunately, Mathias seems, on the basis of the sources at least, to have ventured no further. There is no indication of him having studied in Italy or Prague.¹⁸ However, in

13 Mayer, *Catullus' divorce*, 297–98; Wiseman, *Catullus & His World*, 144–46.

14 [L]et her not look for my love as before, she whose crime destroyed it, like the last flower of the field, touched once by the passing plough. Kline, *Catullus. The Poems*, 27.

15 On the Renaissance reception of Catullus in general see: Haig Gaisser, *Catullus in the Renaissance*; Haig Gaisser, *Catullus and His Readers*.

16 Works of Catullus can be found among the preserved Corvinas of King Mathias I, which is the first known Catullus text from Hungary. Today it is held in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ÖNB Cod. 224.).

17 Tüskés, *Diákok a bécsi egyetemen*, 162. 2924th line (1443. 10. 15.).

18 Veress, *Matricula et acta Hungarorum*. Haraszti, Kelényi, and Szögi, *Magyarországi diákok*.

Vienna, students studied the scholastic curriculum.¹⁹ New trends only began to develop in the 1450's.²⁰

Based on all these, one can hypothesize a certain degree of indirect influence, which narrows the possibilities. We do not contend that Mathias of Sente necessarily knew of Catullus's work, nor are we arguing that he had read the 11th carmen in its original form. We can only be certain of this metaphor from Catullus having reached him through some medium, perhaps without him having been aware of its origin. This doesn't lessen the importance of the metaphor: the works of Catullus seemed to have been enjoying some influence in Hungary somewhat earlier than has been thought.

But where and how did Mathias find this metaphor? Aside from the abovementioned letters patent, we have no other sources concerning his life, thus we can only rely on assumptions. The most probable place would have been the country's capital, Buda. The schools of Pest and Buda offered outstandingly high practical knowledge of Latin in the region before King Mathias I, and this knowledge was a precondition of admittance to any institution of higher education.²¹ Moreover, Buda was the place where Pier Paolo Vergerio (1370–1444)²² resided, one of the initiating figures of Humanism in Hungary, who served at the late king Sigismund's chancellery but retired in 1426 and unquestionably knew of the neoteric poet's work. Thus, Mathias may have come across this metaphor in some form in a fortunate coincidence before having even begun his studies in Vienna, one precondition of which was the completion of studies he most likely pursued in Buda, since his family owned land in the area.²³ Vergerio's

19 Not a single one of the Catullus texts held in Vienna today was created there, and even the earliest one of the three is from around 1460. Dániel Kiss brought to my attention the fact that the view has been disproved according to which the anthology piece held in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek's collection, contained in its unabridged form also the 11th carmen's text beside the 62th and which anthology could be traced back to the same source as the Codex Thuaneus, which contains the oldest Catullus manuscript (the one held in Vienna in its current state does not contain either one of the texts). This false belief was based on a faulty source recognition of a scholion by Isaac Vossius on the 11th carmen, according to which Vossius read a variant of the text (*fractus* instead of *tactus*) in the Codex Thuaneus (Kiss, *Isaac Vossius*, 344.). On disproving this thesis: Kiss, *Editions and Commentaries*. Nevertheless, this was either not available in Vienna during the period in question. Lowe, *Codices Latini*, n. 1474. On the place and time of writing these manuscripts see the online conjecture-repertorium created by Dániel Kiss. http://www.catullusonline.org/CatullusOnline/?dir=edited_pages&pageID=11.

20 Aschbach, *Geschichte der Wiener Universität*, 353–54.

21 Kubinyi, *Polgári értelmiség*, 606–8.

22 Huszti, *Pier Paolo Vergerio*; Kiss, *A magyarországi humanizmus kezdeteiről*, 121.

23 The distance between Buda and Sente is 55 kilometers. The distance between Buda and Sáró is less than 75 kilometers.

Humanist erudition without doubt made a mark on intellectuals in Hungary after his death too.

Though the university in Vienna offered students no opportunity to familiarize themselves with the work of Catullus, this does not mean that Mathias did not come across the writings of Catullus in some other context in the city. It suffices to note that Enea Silvio Piccolomini served in the chancellery of Frederick III between 1442 and 1455,²⁴ during which time Mathias of Szenté was a student (1443–1444).

If we place the time of at which Mathias coming across this motif right before the granting of arms, we come to another possible connection, this time with Janus Pannonius,²⁵ who visited his home twice during his student years in Italy (in 1450–1451 and for a longer period in the end of 1454 and the first months of 1455) and resided in Prague since the beginning of October 1454,²⁶ followed by a short stay in Várad and Buda in January 1455 and a visit to the imperial assembly in Wiener Neustadt²⁷ (where he met with Enea Silvio Piccolomini in person too) before returning to Italy. If we consider Mathias' loyal services to Ladislaus V mentioned in the letters patent, in theory he could have been part of the king's or his chancellor's entourage and thus may have met Janus Pannonius on the latter's arrival in Prague on October 2, 1454 or during his stay later in Wiener Neustadt.²⁸ If he was a member of the chancellery, they could have met in Buda too.

24 Szilágyi, *Vitéz János mecénatúrja*, 26–27.

25 Although László Török proved that Janus Pannonius knew the neoteric poet thoroughly, we find no traces of this in his poetical language among the Catullian syntagms and the tools of depiction in poetry unveiled by Török. Török, *Catullus-batások*.

26 Kiss, *A magyarországi humanizmus kezdeteiről*, 127. n. 31.

27 Ritoókné Szalay, *Janus Pannonius és Várad*, 173. Ritoókné Szalay explained his return home as a mandatory visit to Várad to report on his studies every three years in order to obtain financial aid from the capitulum.

28 Ladislaus V was in Prague between October 2 and November 19, 1454 according to his seals and with the lack of an archontology by his letters patent published: September 30 (MNL OL – Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény [Photograph Collection of Diplomats] 237481, DF in the following), October 4 (DF 263383), October 9 (DL 29081), October 11 (DF 246958), October 12 (DF 245878), October 26 (DF 210022 [the seal was lost or isn't visible]), November 10 (DL 39295), November 14 (DL 44750, 81185, 81186, 81187, DF 244803), November 15 (DL 72492), November 17 (DL 81188), November 19 (DL 14856). On December 18, he was already in Wrocław (DL 14892). The letters we looked into did not provide any information on his whereabouts in the time between. All this is compatible with Ebendorfer's account on his arrival in Vienna (Wiener Neustadt) February 16, 1455 (Lhotsky, *Ebendorfer*, 424.8–425.15.) which is confirmed by a letter published by Ladislaus V on February 17 (DL 14971). I would like to thank Iván Kis for the source.



The coat-of-arms of Szentei (or Sárói) family, 1456.
Parchment, 98 × 122 mm.
National Archives of Hungary, State Archive.
Archives of Diplomats, 50530.
(MNL OL - DL 50530.)

In our research, we had to exclude the possibility of the painter being responsible for the composition. The art historian Dénes Radocsay found, among the preserved pictures of arms, one from three years earlier (Leóvey grant of arms, May 3, 1453) and one from barely twenty days later (Bethlenfalvy Szepeszy grant of arms, February 19, 1456) which bear affinities with the Szentei grant and thus may have been works by the same painter. This relationship, however, is only stylistic and has nothing to do with the content of the compositions. Neither of the two grants mentioned above is a complex composition depicting an action in motion. The earlier one is connected through the ornament style used in the square background of the miniature and the later one through its flat drawing. The attributes of the depiction examined thus far cannot be explained by the (in Radocsy's judgement mediocre) painter's artistic perception and style.²⁹

²⁹ Radocsay, *Gótikus magyar címereslevelek*, 281a.

It is worth mentioning one of the picture's motifs, the three red roses. Aside from some other appearances,³⁰ these are the ancient symbols of the Szentemágócs line and as such are the symbols of prestigious families who likewise got their name after their land-holdings, which is almost identical with the one part of the petitioner's names. We cannot ignore the fact that the connection is only between these motifs. Thus, this offers further evidence in support of the view that the petitioner was a man of erudition, as he probably sought to connect his family with a line possessing a coat-of-arms from ancient times.

Finally, I would like to add a comment. If the supposed allusion was not clear (or could not have been clear) for the contemporary beholder, then the hint of the grant's beneficiary being a literatus is also presented on a simpler level. Formal use of the participium perfectum of the verb *exaro* (*litterae exaratae*) was frequently used as a synonym of *scribo* in the Late Medieval and Early Modern period.³¹ Thus, a viewer versed in the language used by that administration could also easily recognize a simpler layer of this reference hidden in the depiction.³²

If the abovementioned parallel is accepted, this suggests two conclusions. First, it provides further support for the notion, according to which the depiction of this unique coat-of-arms can be interpreted as a reflection of the petitioners scope of activities indirectly, because its core is a text by a classical author.³³ Second, and this is of greater importance, this pictorial paraphrase is the first sign of Catullus's reception in Hungary, as far as we know. It thus proves that Catullus was not entirely unfamiliar (if also not widely familiar) in Hungary before Janus Pannonius' return in his home country.

30 Csoma, *Magyar nemzeti czímerek*, 158–59.

31 *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. Vol. 5. (E) Lipsiae, 1931–1953. s. v. *exaro* I. B. 1. In the Latin used in medieval Hungary its meaning was confined to this only. *A magyarországi középkori latinság szótára*. III. köt. S. v. *exaro*, -are [Déri].

32 Szilvia Somogyi brought to my attention the verb *peraro*, which is similar in meaning to *exaro* and also expresses the act of writing primarily, along with the phrases in which it was used (*TLL Vol. X. (P–PORRIS)* s. v. *peraro*, 1. a, b [Werner]), for which I am thankful.

33 We consider it possible that the grant of arms for the literatus Ambrus Mernyei of Nezd by Vladislaus II on December 8, 1498 (DL 50538), which features a green parrot with a white ribbon issuing from its beak with the word AVE repeated three times on it, was inspired by a text by another classical author and Macrobius nonetheless (Macrobius *sat.* 2. 4. 29–30). However, the uncertainties surrounding this hypothesis are too great to discuss.

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*Early Humanism in Hungary
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