

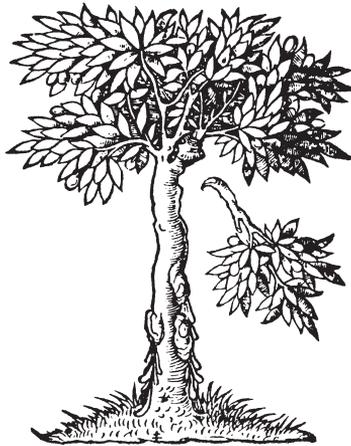
CERL PAPERS · VII

Imprints and owners:

Recording the cultural geography of Europe

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The Union Catalogue of Rare Book Collections in the Carpathian Basin: about the Expert System on Book History in Hungary

ISTVÁN MONOK

A mai Magyarország könyvtáraiban közel 1 millió 1850 előtti könyvet őriznek. Könyvtáraink a régi könyvek feldolgozását kezdettől fogva a CERL elveinek megfelelően végzik; a leírás kezdettől fogva kiterjedt a könyvek provenienciá vizsgálatára, fizikai állapotának rögzítésére, és az egyes kötetekben megőrzött rejtett művek feltárására is.

A magyar olvasmánytörténeti, ERUDITIO adatbázis (www.eruditio.hu) ma négy nagyobb egységből áll:

- *a korabeli könyvjegyzékek adatbázisa (1500–1750),*
- *az ezeken szereplő egyes könyvtételek adatbázisa,*
- *a könyvtárak tulajdonosairól készült adatbázis és*
- *a könyvtárak történetére vonatkozó szakirodalmi adatbázis.*

Ettől a négy adatbázistól függetlenül a nemzeti könyvtárban elkészült a Magyarországon 1850 előtt megjelent könyvek nemzeti bibliográfiája, az 1700-ig bárhol megjelent magyar vonatkozású könyvek bibliográfiája. Külön épül a magyarországi nyomdászok adatbázisa, és a magyar könyvtörténeti szakirodalmi adatbázis.

Mivel Magyarországon az állam azokat a projekteket támogatja, melyekben a résztvevő tagkönyvtárak száma több tucat, vagy néhány száz, javasoljuk a filozófiaváltást a CERL számára is: sokkal szélesebb körűvé kellene tennie a tagkönyvtárak hozzáférést a professzionális könyvtörténeti adatbázisokhoz.

The system of Hungarian libraries has been partially transformed since 1990 and certain units of the library network have been assigned different functions. In the new distribution of tasks, the role of the National Library has increased. At the same time, as there were no immediate state measures taken, the spread of information technology in libraries offered

excellent opportunities to IT enterprises to introduce into the processing activity a number of systems incompatible with each other. Fortunately, these systems were based on international standards both in the sense of library work and in that of informatics. As a result, establishing a shared national catalogue is not impossible, and so Hungary's 52 major libraries are building a shared catalogue, an activity which in coming years will be extended to ecclesiastical collections.

In financing library work, the most important role is given to the state, to local governments and to churches, all three of which are struggling with serious financial difficulties. Consequently, libraries cannot look forward to very positive developments in the near future. In this dire situation, the shared catalogue is of even greater significance: if we are lucky, maintaining one might be a way of saving costs.

The experience of processing older printed books using IT tools varies widely depending on the type of library. What I mean is that the attitude to them is different in the National Library, in specialist scientific libraries, in the general public and in church libraries. Accessibility through the Internet is not very welcome in ecclesiastical libraries. One reason is that it will increase the demand for their books, which they fear will disturb the intimacy of the religious community. Another explanation is that churches still remember the 1948–1952 period when their books were secularised and confiscated. What they managed to save at that time was what nobody knew existed. Therefore, serious powers of persuasion have been required so that churches would agree to having their pre-1850 stocks processed in a union catalogue. It needs to be added that in Hungary nearly half of all old books are still to be found in church libraries.

In Hungarian libraries, dealing with old books, as well as historical scholarship in general is almost a daily task for librarians. It is a tradition which did not disappear in the second half of the twentieth century. On the contrary, it was rather strengthened when a number of distinguished historians and philologists who, for political reasons, were not allowed to lecture at universities or to be active in the research teams of the Academy were 'exiled' to libraries, archives and museums. Thanks to these phenomena, scholarly work in libraries has managed to maintain its outstandingly high standards.

For the reasons outlined earlier, identifying and cataloguing old books has not always followed strictly the guidelines librarians would apply. From the very beginning, it has been much more thorough, including recording the provenance of books, the description of their physical state

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and the listing of works hidden and preserved in each volume (introducing content). The main criteria of processing have been those of cultural and book history.

In 1979, for example, a fundamental research project into literary history conducted at the University of Szeged set the aim of mapping out the intellectual field of force within which old Hungarian literature emerged (in the 16th and 17th centuries). In brief, what the team wanted to document was what the various professional, religious and social groups in the various geographical areas were reading in the Hungary of the time. This was the starting point of two research projects: firstly, uncovering the archival sources (book lists) of the history of reading, and secondly, the examination of manuscript notes in printed books. Naturally, at the same time retrospective bibliographic work continued in the National Library. That is how three complementary sets of databases have been made (1) of the books that were published in Hungary, (2) of the ones preserved in Hungary and its successor countries, and (3) of those that, according to archival documents, were available in contemporary Hungary.

Today the so-called ERUDITIO database is composed of four major units, maintained jointly by the Hungarian National Library and the Library of Szeged University: the database of contemporary book lists, (1500–1850), the database of individual book items in them, the database of owners of libraries, and finally, the secondary literature database of the history of libraries.

Independently of these four databases, the National Library has produced and regularly updates the national bibliography of pre-1850 books published in Hungary and the bibliography of Hungary-related books published anywhere in the world. In this context, a book is Hungary-related if its author, language or theme is Hungarian. The Hungarian printers' database (*Clavis typographorum regionis Carpaticae*), as well as the secondary literature database of Hungarian book history have been developed separately. By the end of the year 2006, the authority control file of authors publishing in Hungary before 1800 will be completed, and we are also elaborating the authority file for contemporary geographical names. We would like CERL to accept these as the valid authority data for the Carpathian Basin, as this material also includes the alternative versions in the various national languages (i.e. Latin, Slovak, Romanian, Croatian, Serbian, German and Yiddish). The form of classification is the way the author used his name in his day (be it a German, Hungarian or any other national language form). For geographical names, we recommend that

CERL should use the official names of the given time, which in the Carpathian Basin is always the Latin version, as up to 1844 the official language of Hungary was Latin.

Another, recently launched project is the union catalogue database of the pre-1850 manuscripts preserved in the Carpathian Basin. This database is intended to include the manuscripts that we know of but have been destroyed. For building it, in the same way as before, cultural historical criteria are applied.

Work on the National Shared Catalogue started as early as 1996, but it only began its genuine operation when the National Library as an institution undertook the tasks of organisation and professional co-ordination (2002). Today there are already 52 libraries acting together on extending this catalogue. Initially, there was no plan for a separate catalogue of old books, but it soon became clear that the standardised forms for describing modern books are not suitable for describing old books. Thus, many libraries started their processing work based on the ISBD/A standard. By 2006 we have reached the stage whereby we have created a common bibliographical worksheet and OPAC; also the new system is capable of receiving records from other software used in Hungary.

We are obtaining continually from the relevant institutions records of the 97,000 old books which feature in the shared catalogue of modern books, adding to them the National Library's catalogue of sixteenth-century imprints and are starting to prepare church libraries for joining. It is estimated that nearly one million pre-1850 books are kept in the libraries of present-day Hungary. The cataloguing practices of libraries vary, mainly as regards the depth they go into: reading manuscript notes causes a lot of difficulty in many places, as does giving a professional description of bindings.

The shared catalogue is already working interactively with the ERUDITIO databases. Our goal is that within a single unified system it should be possible to identify book items that archival sources describe in no more than a few words. This will be enabled by recording provenance notes and will contribute to the full value of a hit: For example, if an owner's inventory list features a 'Vergilius', but this is an item which it is impossible to identify and we know no more about the given book, and if today there is a work by Vergil in which the given owner's note is available, then the system will automatically identify the item. Naturally, this falls into the category of the 'ideal case'. We hope, however, that on the basis of provenance notes it will become possible to reconstruct several lost and dispersed libraries.

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One of the high-priority tasks of the Book History Research team set up within the National Library this year, will be to create the 'Libraries of the Carpathian Basin 1000–2000' database. Thus, existing databases will be complemented by documenting libraries known only from descriptions and secondary sources.

I wish to talk separately about the co-operation in describing books that has been going on between the major libraries in the countries of the Carpathian Basin since 2000. In an ideal world, the union catalogue of old Hungarian books would receive the records of Slovak, Romanian, and also partly Croatian, Austrian and Serbian libraries, because pieces from various collections in the former Hungary have ended up in other countries' libraries. We have reached a theoretical agreement on this, and hope that the technical framework will allow us to realise this joint goal.

In our co-operation with the CERL Hand Press Book Database, it would be ideal if it did not have to receive records separately from each Hungarian library, as records are kept in many different systems, and the Hungarian state has already spent considerable sums on conversion. It is vitally important that the CERL community should understand that in Hungary, and probably in the whole of the Central European region, today the state still takes a much more considerable role in such undertakings and in such types of international co-operation than a number of Western European states do, which in many is a laudable thing. The union catalogue of old books is not a business venture, as it cannot be marketed. However, it is in the interest of culture and scholarly policy in general to create it.

At present, there are six Hungarian member libraries in the CERL organisation, but the high membership fees pose a serious difficulty for them. Referring to the fact that compared to the cost, very few people can use the CERL database, the state is torn between subscribing for services that provide information to many and the CERL subscription, which may be seen as a luxury. State sponsorship of cataloguing church libraries, familiarity with which is a priority to CERL as well, is a major investment in itself, while the profit will be shared by the CERL community. For this reason, we recommend that CERL should modify its philosophy: for the same subscription fee we could gain far more records if access were extended. According to our estimates, if we had access to 500 IP addresses, the state would be willing to contribute more funding to the union catalogue of old books, which in turn, would mean more records and more associate libraries for CERL. For church libraries, CERL is of special importance, as they rarely have paper-based reference books, which makes

cataloguing even more difficult for them. Thus, they have to rely on freely accessible large catalogues with large numbers of old books records (i.e. the Austrian national library, ICCU, GBV and the BNF catalogue, as well as the South German shared catalogue, etc.). I think that the view is shared both inside and outside Hungary that the realisation of the wonderful mission of CERL is often aggravated by a highly materialistic attitude.

Thus, from the very beginning, Hungarian libraries have applied the CERL principles in processing old books, applying the criteria of cultural history as their main guiding principle. Their processing serves more than just the purpose of information provision; they do more than trying to ensure free access to information: In fact, they are creating a professional system of book history that is suitable for introducing the book history of the whole region of the Carpathian Basin.

APPENDIX

Bibliotheca Eruditionis

A Database of Old Hungarian Written and Printed Materials

(1500–1800/1850)

This database system is of fundamental importance for studying sixteenth- and eighteenth-century cultural history in Hungary, processing the results of basic research, and using quantitative methods, which is quite rare in our discipline. As a unique supplement, a large part of the corpus will be presented in multimedia images as well (i.e. books, bindings and illustrations).

In practice, this means that the databases will answer the questions of who read what and when in the Carpathian Basin of the 16th and 18th centuries. In the system, all this is linked to access to the visual image of the main archival sources of book history and to the illustrative material of the most characteristic volumes. In addition to being of use to scholarship, the interdisciplinary presentation gives a personal experience of Hungarian scholarly life in the 250 years following the protestant Reformation, as well as of the full reception of European intellectual movements and reading material. All this can meet many different users' needs, starting from researchers' primary needs to those of secondary students.

PARTS OF THE PROJECT

Book history databases

The actual goal of the project is to reconstruct the books available (the potential reading material) in the 16th and 18th centuries in the Carpathian Basin, which is done in the *Virtual Library of Old Hungarian Prints*. Digitization of

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the 16th- to 18th-century sections of the Hungarian national bibliography. This database is comprised of three parts:

- bibliographical descriptions supplemented by the full list of existing copies
- the publishing history of individual texts (only up to 1700)
- title-page photos, dedications and forewords to individual editions (in the second stage of development, we wish to present them in their totality).

The shared catalogue recording pre-1850 books in the Carpathian Basin (MOKKA R) will serve as background database for the book history databank. Its model has been completed, today containing some 97,000 records. The catalogue of the National Library's sixteenth-century books is also made up of two parts:

- Bibliographical descriptions, of which it is an internationally unique feature that in every case the contents of volumes are recorded (*contenta*)
- The title-page photos of the collection, its dedications, forewords, the most frequent and the least frequent *in extenso* (at full length)

In addition to a detailed description of individual copies, it is our intention to supplement the full catalogue with visuals.

Reading history databases

Based on the two decades of foundation work mentioned before, an SQL database comprising Hungarian reading culture in the entire period from 1526 to 1750/1800 has been completed. This databank contains the following:

- Between 1750 and 1800 archival sources, which in the given period say whether certain people owned books in the Carpathian Basin, and how they described them.
- In this database, some 150–200,000 books are mentioned, which means about 60,000 definitely identifiable Hungarian and foreign items.
- The other database contains the full texts of documents, as well as facsimile copies of the main ones.
- The third database contains the titles of actual works identified with the help of considerable professional tools and on the basis of contemporary descriptions. Initially, this was uploaded according to the frequency of occurrence, thus the most frequently featuring books were the first to be included at the beginning of the project.
- The fourth database contains the secondary literature related to sources, to the owners of the books for which data is available, to collections and to individual books.

The four databases are searchable at the SQL level; and on the hypertext interface they are interlinked, thus fully integrated.

Experts' system of Hungarian book history
1500–1850

