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DIGITIZED CULTURE AND ERUDITION
THE LIBRARY OF FARKAS SZÉLL
(KNIHOVNA KUBELÍKOVA-SZÉLLOVA)
AVAILABLE ON GOOGLE BOOKS

Réka LENGYEL

It is a well-known fact that Google Company is planning to digitize basically all the books ever printed. The experts estimate that about 140 million books have been printed to date and the American company has managed the digitization of about 25 million books up to now. Scientific research has made only the first steps towards the applying of the new methods offered by the data revolution. For example, in Germany “ever more universities are offering courses in Digital Humanities”, but only “10% of German humanities scholars are active digital humanists”.¹ Meanwhile there are new softwares and programmes which can be used as the most efficient research tools ever. There is a programme called Google Ngram Viewer developed by two researchers of the Harvard University. This programme makes possible to conduct researches in the Google Library by calculating how frequently certain words occur in the texts selected by the user.² Although data mining and big data are familiar terms to most of us there are scholars how have to surmount their reluctance to make best use of the digital turn. As Péter Dávidtházi writes: “the new digital world no longer looks as formidable as it used to”, but “its pace of development is still frightening enough for many a traditional-minded scholar”.³

Unfortunately, Hungarian libraries cannot join the great initiatives at the field of the digitization mainly due to a lack of financial support. None of the big libraries has started to systematically digitize old prints. Therefore, Hungarian, Latin and German language books and journals relating to Hungary which have been digitized by foreign libraries are extremely valuable for Hungarian scholars. For example, the Austrian National Library and certain English and American university libraries have a number of 16th – 19th century prints of Hungarian relevance, a good part of which have been scanned and made digitally available.

Another important collection of printed books, the collection of the Hungarian Farkas Széll, is in the National Library of the Czech Republic today, and as the result of a large-scale digitization project conducted between 2007 and 2009, it is now available on the internet. “The Libraries of Leading Czech Personalities – Knihovny významných českých osobností digital library has been established under the framework of a project entitled Information Systems to Make Accessible Libraries of Leading Personalities as a Part of the National

Cultural Heritage. The project implemented by the Institute of Information Science and Librarianship of the Faculty of Philosophy of the Charles University Prague has been funded by the Czech Ministry of Culture. The project started in March 2007 and terminated in December 2009. The main purpose of the project is to offer, via a publicly accessible digital library, wide access to information about the existence of personal libraries of leading personalities located in collections of libraries and museums or in private hands. These libraries embody the memories of the life and work of their owners and can therefore be perceived as part of the national cultural heritage, which should be preserved and protected.

As an outcome of the digitization project, the major part of the Szell-collection, the old printed publications, has become part of the public domain since its online, digital version is available to anyone, anytime. As far as we know, this is the largest collection of documents connected to Hungary that has ever been almost completely digitalized. Thus, the invaluable treasure is easily available for Hungarian researchers, and it serves as an extremely important and unique source for research on the cultural, literary and book history of the 16th – 19th centuries.

Farkas Szell, founder of the collection (1844, Hódmezővásárhely – 1909, Budapest) was a lawyer, employed by the state as a judge from 1878, later Chair of the Council of the Debrecen court between 1891 and 1907. Besides his official work, he conducted research on historiography, genealogy and archaeology, and directed excavations in Central- and Southern-Hungary. He was a member as well as the president of several scientific societies. He wrote poems, which he published in journals and in an omnibus volume. He regularly published research articles on archaeology and cultural, linguistic and literary history, and he wrote the history of Debrecen judicial traditions in smaller monographs as well. He collected and published historiographic and literary sources, exceptionally important of these being the manuscripts of the Debrecen-based poet, Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, along with the documents of György Bessenyei, who was a maternal relative of Farkas Szell, as well as a prominent personality of Hungarian literature and academic management at the end of the 18th century. Szell was a passionate collector of books and antiquities, too. He donated to museums the findings of excavations and the old items he collected, part of which can be found in Déri Museum in Debrecen today. There were more than 3000 volumes in his library, some of which were rare prints or the only surviving copies of old printed books. He often published the bibliographic data and observations he made while examining these documents in journals of literary and book history. He reported on one of the most valuable pieces of the collection in 1884: a handwritten codex containing six Hungarian narrative poems from the 16th century. The volume is an exceptional source of Hungarian narrative poetry.

Farkas Szell lived in Debrecen until 1907, then in Budapest until he died in 1909. After his death, the book collection was presumably inherited by his wife, Mária Vály (Szeged, 1850 – Opatija, 1924), and she was the owner of it until the end of her life. The couple did not have children of their own, but in 1881, they adopted the niece of Farkas Szell.

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Marianne Széll (1880? – 1940?) was the daughter of Lajos Széll (1851 – 1881), the deputy chief medical officer of Budapest, her mother presumably was the actress and opera singer of Polish origin, Anna Laborszky (1858 – ?). Farkas Széll and his wife raised Marianne as their own, and in 1898, she married Count Kálmán Csáky. Their marriage, however, did not last long, it was interrupted by a passionate new love. The Czech violinist, Jan Kubelík toured Hungary for the first time in 1900, when he met Countess Csáky-Széll (who herself was a good violinist) at the time of his concert in Debrecen. According to his account, he fell in love the first time they met, and they got married after the Countess’s divorce. Their wedding, a social event of high importance was hosted by the The Eastern-Hungarian town of Debrecen on 25th of August 1903. The famous event was a turn not only in the couple’s life; it bore implications on the fate of one of the greatest Hungarian private libraries as well. Through this marriage, the library of Farkas Széll, who was one of the best-known Hungarian book collectors of the 19th century, was transferred to Czech lands in the 1910s or 1920s.

The young couple settled in Czech lands, first in their castle in Býchory, but they often went on long journeys throughout Europe, America and Australia. Later they bought mansions and houses, for example in Orova, in Piešťany in Slovakia, and in Opatija on the Croatian coast. Of their eight children, seven lived to adulthood, they all made careers in music, and one of them, Rafael became a world-renowned conductor. It is assumed that they became owners of the library in 1924, after the death of Marianne Csáky-Széll’s adoptive mother.

The family decided to part with the valuable collection a few years later, probably due to financial reasons. The Countess handed the Farkas Széll-library over to the Czech Ministry of Culture and Education in 1928. The manuscript volumes were deposited in the National Library in 1929, the printed publications were taken from the Ministry to The State and University Library of the time. Today the whole collection is in the National Library in Prague: the 333 handwritten volumes are on the 22nd shelf of the Manuscript Library, and the printed publications can be found in section 66 called Bibliothek Kubelík (Széll).

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We do not have information on any catalogues of the library's content from before 1932. That year the Czech librarians made a detailed description of the collection, whose main data can be summarized as following:

The manuscript collection offers rare and unique sources of the Hungarian literature history. The collection contains manuscript volumes of poetic compositions, theological, philosophical and historical works, family papers, letters etc. from the 16th – 19th century.

The imprint collection contains over 2700 titles in about 3350 volumes. Most of the items were printed in Hungary and Germany. There are 21 items from the 16th, 179 from the 17th, 1528 from the 18th and 1503 from the 19th century. Until his death in 1909 Farkas Széll collected 52 more items printed in the early 1900s while 96 volumes have no publication date. The collection includes 1667 titles in Hungarian, 512 titles in German, 435 titles in Latin, 49 titles in French, 39 titles in English and 7 titles in Italian. There are also 1 or 2 volumes in Czech, Slovak, Greek, Spanish and Romanian language. Material relating to Hungarian literature, history, language etc. predominates in the collection. The titles include fictional and non-fictional works, dictionaries, encyclopedias, historical sources, theological, philosophical and scientific works etc.

The value of the collection, which was extremely important for Hungarian cultural, literary, and book history, had not been unknown to Hungarian scholars before that either. In the 1960s, part of it was microfilmed, and the copies are available to researchers in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The study of the manuscripts and volumes started in the 1960s – 1970s, with the help microfilms, and – during research trips to Prague – through the originals. Unfortunately, through examination of both, the manuscripts and old prints have only yielded partial results. As far as we know, no catalogue of the Farkas Széll-library has been written or published in Hungarian, Czech, or any other languages, despite the potential value of such a work as an essential tool for research.

We think that an exhaustive catalogue for the Kubelfik-Széll collection should be compiled as soon as possible. Cataloguing the handwritten volumes can be conducted according to the index cards of the National Library in Prague. In the 2000s, new tools became available; the electronic library catalogues available on the Internet, for example, make the compiling process of old prints much easier. When entering the keyword “Kubelfikova”, the database of Národní knihovny ČR (STT – Databáze prvotisků, starých tisků a map 1450 – 1800) does not show the entire collection, but it offers a list of about 1797 items of

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it. Furthermore, a recent project, started a few years ago allows us to aspire for more than a compilation of a mere catalogue of the Széll-collection. With the help of this service, we can place the digital copies of the volumes into our own personal libraries, and we can also arrange the data of the items or their entire texts into a single online database or corpus.

As a research fellow of the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in the recent years, my research has been mainly focusing on 18th century Hungarian literature and its foreign connections. Between 2009 and 2015, my colleagues and I published a two-volume anthology of about 2,500 pages, in which we collected excerpts of writings form the field of Humanities (philosophy, literature, linguistics, history, religion, ethics, social history, art history) with a detailed commentary, word list and index. The texts in the anthology were mostly taken from 18th century printed documents and manuscripts, works never before compiled in annotated editions. The annotating process required extensive research, throughout which we explored data unknown before. Besides the traditional methods, we used a more recent one as well: we ran searches in the database of Google Books, the biggest library that has ever existed. This collection consists of more than 30 million volumes, but the founders of the project aim at digitalizing every book ever printed and still in existence, the estimated number of which is about 140 million volumes. The most attractive and valuable feature of this ever-growing collection is its easy searchability: searching this database is far more simple and efficient than the traditional, paper-based archives. In Google Books, it is possible to find otherwise marginally detectable or hopelessly inaccessible data within a few seconds.

In 2016, we started a new initiative in the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Based on the digital version of the Farkas Széll-collection, the compilation of an online database and corpus has started. In the first phase of the project, we are making a corpus of translated literature, since in 18th century Hungarian literature the number of works translated but not written by Hungarians is very high. The majority of the masses of translation literature is yet to be examined; scholars of the period have tended to limit their attention only to smaller domains within the voluminous translation materials. The literature available even on these smaller fields requires further refinements or updates. The tasks to be completed include the exploration and collection of the texts to be studied, as well as their classification, comparative analysis and a comprehensive evaluation of the data. Until the end of 2016, we are planning to publish the text of at least a hundred volumes on a website dedicated solely to this purpose. Our work will be based on the digital copies of the Széll-collection, which we are converting into plain text that could be published on the web. We are also planning to publish the original source texts of these translations in a text or pdf format.

The compilation of the text corpus makes it possible to handle a large amount of data in one piece. From its applications, concordance analysis of the vocabulary of certain texts, or of smaller or bigger groups of texts can produce particularly interesting results. Statistical analyses can enrich the study of a certain work or even of the sum of texts from a longer literary period by providing great amounts of data and new perspectives. Not only does this allow us to analyze the vocabulary, style or educational background of certain

authors with great accuracy, but it can also reveal tendencies with impacts on a longer run, as well as identifying spatially and temporally widespread phenomena. The simple or comparative analysis of given authors’ work can even lead to solving insoluble riddles: unknown authors might emerge from their mystery, while others might leave the lair of their pseudonyms.

LIST OF BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES


Digitalizovaná kultúra a vzdelenosť. Knížnica Kubelíkova-Szelöva

Maďarsky, latinsky a nemecky písané knihy a časopisy so spojitostou s Maďarskom, ktoré sú digitalizované zahraničnými knižnicami majú pre maďarských vedcov nesmiernu hodnotu. Dôležité zbierky tlačí sú uložené v Národní knihovně ČR a vďaka projektu digitalizácie, ktorý prebiehal v rokoch 2007 až 2009, sú v súčasnosti dostupné na internete. Tieto hodnotné zbierky, hlavne pre oblasť kultúrnej a literárnej histórie a dejín knižnej kultúry, boli doteraz maďarským vedomi neznáme. V roku 2016 sme sa začali v Inštitúte literárnych štúdií Maďarskej akadémie vied zaujímať o tieto zbierky, konkrétne o knižnicu Farkasa Szélla (známa aj pod názvom Kubelík-Szell). Na základe digitalizovaných kníh z tejto knižnice sa snažíme vytvorit súpis kníh a v prvej fáze tohto projektu sme sa zamerali na prekladovú literatúru

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V roku 2012 získala doktorát z literatúry na univerzite v Segedíne. Venuje sa výskumu maďarskej literatúry 18. storočia, renesančnej literatúry, talianskej a maďarskej neo-latinskej literatúry a latinských diel Francesca Petrarcu.