

STUDIEN ZUR GESCHICHTE EUROPÄISCHER PERIODIKA 4  
STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN PERIODICALS 4

Andreas Golob / Ingrid Haberl-Scherk (Hrsg.)

# Zeit und Zeitgeschehen in der periodischen Presse des 17.–19. Jahrhunderts

Fallstudien zu Perzeption und Reflexion



PETER LANG

Andreas Golob / Ingrid Haberl-Scherk (Hrsg.)

## **Zeit und Zeitgeschehen in der periodischen Presse des 17.–19. Jahrhunderts**

Die Beiträge des Sammelbands behandeln innovativ und vergleichend Fragen zu zeitgebundenen Phänomenen der periodischen Presse. Der zeitliche und mediale Rahmen spannt sich von Andreas Gryphius' Perikopendichtung über Zeitschriften und Kalender sowie das im Mittelpunkt stehende Zeitungswesen des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zum Feuilletonroman des Vormärz. Geographisch liegt der Fokus auf Mitteleuropa, dessen periodisches Pressewesen im behandelten Zeitraum eine wesentliche Ausweitung und Differenzierung erfuhr. Vor allem die Berichterstattung wird im Hinblick auf zentrale Phänomene wie Nachrichtenübermittlung, Aktualität, Periodizität, Beschleunigung und Entschleunigung in ihren materiellen und immateriellen Dimensionen untersucht, aber auch Wissensvermittlung und Raisonement sowie das Anzeigenwesen und Paratexte kommen ins Blickfeld. Soweit auffindbar, werden auch archivalische Quellen in die Analysen einbezogen. Im Dreischritt Produktion, Distribution und Rezeption dominiert die erste Etappe.

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des 17.-19. Jahrhunderts

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Berlin - Bruxelles - Chennai - Lausanne - New York - Oxford

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# Vorwort

Der vorliegende Sammelband hat seine Wurzeln in einer anderen Zeit: Am 19. und 20. September 2019 fand an der Universität Graz die internationale und interdisziplinäre Tagung *Perzeption und Konzepte von Zeitgeschehen und Zeit in frühneuzeitlichen Zeitungen* statt. Gleichzeitig handelte es sich um den Evaluationsworkshop des FWF-Projekts *Participatory Journalism in Michael Hermann Ambros' Periodical Media. Communicating Politics, Education, Entertainment, and Commerce in Central Europe at the End of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*. Als Abgabetermin für die verschriftlichten Beiträge war das Ende des ersten Quartals 2020 geplant, die Drucklegung sollte am Ende dieses Jahres erfolgen. Es kam anders. Drei harte Lockdowns, um nur jene in Österreich zu erwähnen, verschiedene, staaten- und länderspezifische, Geschwindigkeiten der Krisenbewältigung führten zusätzlich zu den Konjunkturen des akademischen Jahres zu Verzögerungen in kritischen Phasen des Produktionszyklus einer gemeinsamen Publikation – stop and go, die Zeit verfliegt, die Zeit kriecht, in den kalten Jahreszeiten froren Zwischenergebnisse wie in Münchhausens Trompete ein, um in warmen Jahreszeiten wieder verflüssigt zu werden; jedenfalls stand die Zeit nicht still, aus Wochen wurden Monate, aus Monaten wurden Jahre: Projekte liefen aus, die Zeit davon. Was gerne auf sich genommenes negotium gewesen war, wurde paradoxerweise zu einem unliebsamen otium; der allzu menschliche Hang zur Prokrastination vereinigte sich mit anderweitigen alten und neuen Verpflichtungen. Besonderer Dank gilt daher allen, die zum Werden und letztendlich zum Gelingen des Bandes beigetragen haben, insbesondere den Autorinnen und dem Autor, die trotz des gnadenlos tickenden Taktes des *track records* Geduld bewiesen haben, aber auch dem Verlag und dem Reihenherausgeberduo.

Graz, November 2023  
Andreas Golob und Ingrid Haberl-Scherk





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## **Journalism and the Acceleration of Time**

### **Mátyás Rát's Editorial Practice and the *Magyar Hírmondó***

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the multiethnic community of the citizens of Bratislava was mainly informed about local news and world events by the domestic and foreign German-language press. When Mátyás Rát (1749–1810) launched the first Hungarian-language newspaper in 1780, he wanted to satisfy the needs not only of the local Hungarians, but also of the entire Hungarian community living in the Habsburg Monarchy. In the *Magyar Hírmondó* [*Hungarian Courier* or *Herald*], he published the latest news and reports on current events from the country and around the world, as well as included a number of articles on scientific or cultural topics. This rich material allows to raise questions which are relevant for the general theme of the edited volume. How was Rát's editorial practice related to time, as regards the different meanings of the term? How was he able to manage the time he had as an editor for producing two issues a week? How did he present the time period that he lived in, and how did he perceive historical time? Analysing the contents published in the *Magyar Hírmondó* in 1780, the following contribution will explore how the different types of materials published in the newspaper were connected to the different dimensions of time, and in how far the newspaper met the requirements of actuality and contemporaneity (Dooley, 2010). Focusing on some remarkable articles, I also present the editorial practice of Mátyás Rát, the methods he used for gathering the news from various sources and for controlling their authenticity and accuracy.

#### **a) The Beginnings of Regular Publication of Hungarian-Language Newspapers**

In Bratislava, the first regular newspaper was the Latin-language *Nova Posonien-sia*, printed weekly in 1721 and 1722, edited by the Lutheran pastor and polymath Mátyás Bél (1684–1749; Tibenský, 1984: 104). After Bél's initiative had ended, no other local newspaper was published in the city for more than four decades. In this period, sources arriving from other places informed the largely German-speaking bourgeoisie of the city who, however, like the Hungarian bourgeoisie in

general, knew both Hungarian and Slovak, as well (Kóky, 1972; Tancer, 2008). In Bratislava and the cities of northern Hungary, many people read foreign newspapers, printed mainly in Germany and Vienna. On 14 July 1764, a German-language newspaper called *Preßburger Zeitung* was launched which opened a new era in the history of the periodical press in Hungary, although in its form it did not differ much from the Vienna official newspaper *Wienerisches Diarium*. It was published by printer Michael Landerer (1725–1795) and edited by Karl Gottlieb Windisch (1725–1793). Since the publication of this newspaper, the history of the Hungarian periodical press has become uninterrupted, and the *Preßburger Zeitung* itself turned out to become the longest-lived newspaper among its competitors, predecessors and successors: it was printed until 1929 (Seidler, 2001; Seidler / Seidler, 1988).

The first Hungarian-language newspaper, the *Magyar Hírmondó*, was established by Ferenc Ágoston Patzkó (1732–1799), a printer from Bratislava, and by Mátyás (Mathias) Rát, a Protestant clergyman and scholar. It is worth mentioning at this point that after his secondary studies, Rát travelled around the Kingdom of Hungary and Transylvania. He refers to these journeys when he mentions in the *Magyar Hírmondó* his formidable knowledge of the precise names of Hungarian municipalities and regions. After his travels, he completed his university studies in Germany. In Göttingen, one of his teachers was August Schlözer (1735–1809), and he participated in the journalism course of the renowned professor. The fragments of his *album amicorum* tell us about the network of acquaintances he built up during his years in Hungary and Göttingen. This wide network was very helpful for Rát's editorial work. He asked his acquaintances and readers to report regularly on the more notable events which happened at their places of residence. Albeit most of the articles published in the *Magyar Hírmondó* were written by Rát, he also included, to a smaller degree, letters or excerpts of various length from his correspondents. The names of the correspondents were usually not indicated; Rát only included which town or county the news arrived from. He regularly received reports from all corners of the country. For the time being, little is known about Rát's acquaintances in Bratislava. He was certainly in daily contact with the editors of the *Preßburger Zeitung*, Karl Gottlieb Windisch and Johann Matthias Korabinszky (1740–1811). In addition, the exact nature of the relationship between Rát and his professor in Göttingen, Schlözer, also remains to be explored. It is a task for researchers to examine Schlözer's correspondence as well as major German, Slovakian and Austrian archives to be able to answer the question to what extent and where pieces of Mátyás Rát's correspondence and additional records survived.

*Magyar Hírmondó*'s first issue was published on 1 January 1780 (Poór, 1987; Lengyel, 2009). Appearing twice a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, the newspaper was printed in octavo format, in a single column, in half a printed sheet per issue. Between 1780 and 1782, Mátyás Rát wrote and edited the *Magyar Hírmondó* by himself, although heavily relying on his correspondents. In the beginning, there were more than 300 subscribers, mainly citizens of Bratislava, and the paper was also sent to subscribers in the biggest cities of the Hungarian Kingdom. Rát's main goal was to provide readers with news about public life, politics, and economics. He regularly published information regarding many kinds of events from the Habsburg Empire, other European countries, and even distant places all over the world. He also considered informing his public about domestic events more important than foreign news.

The significance of the newspaper was already explained by Rát in his subscription solicitation letter, published on 1 July 1779. He justified the need for a Hungarian-language newspaper with reference to foreign examples and domestic needs, as well as with the provincial way of life that characterised Hungarian society. Concerning this topic, he wrote that "we live our lives as worms in the nut", in a total ignorance regarding not only foreign lands, but also our own country, "and [that] we do not have any information about what is happening around us and what concerns us the most closely". In addition to the importance of being informed, he also points out the importance of informing foreigners, because in Göttingen, he had witnessed that they knew little about the Hungarians. This task had already been set as a goal by the previous German and Latin-language Hungarian newspapers, and although they could have been more suitable for this than the Hungarian-language newspaper due to linguistic reasons, these newspapers could not meet this objective, because their editors did not reflect the Hungarian reality as much as one could have expected.

Mátyás Rát also gave a detailed explanation of his intentions as editor and journalist right at the beginning. In the subscription solicitation letter, he declared that a Hungarian-language newspaper was necessary, because all the other European nations had print media in their native languages, and periodicals were regularly published even in the bigger towns of America. Although there were people in the country who read newspapers in German, Latin, French or Italian, the news relevant to Hungary should be primarily reported by a local newspaper. In his letter to the potential subscribers, he also presented the methods which he would use to fill the pages of the paper (Rát, 01.07.1779: 4–5):

11. Concerning important events and inventions from foreign countries, it is my intention, as far as it is possible, to use the sources, namely the periodicals and newspapers,

of every foreign nation. News will be presented by the editor in Hungarian with his own words, adapted to readers' common intelligence and demand, in such a way to be very comprehensible and entertaining. [...] Those things which readers are generally not expected to be familiar with, will be illustrated by the editor with short comments taken from the field of natural sciences and sciences of history. [...]

12. Therefore, anyone may assume that news can not be delivered in such a large number or as early as in German newspapers. These papers are identical in their contents as one is printed using the other. They differ only in bearing the name of different cities on their title-page. Anyhow, what news published in *Magyar Hírmondó* lack in being up to date compared to other papers, they more than make up in authenticity.

As the *Magyar Hírmondó* was the first, and for many years, the only Hungarian-language printed newspaper, it had to serve several functions at the same time. One of the characteristic features of the eighteenth-century Hungarian periodical press was that newspapers and journals were not divided sharply into two distant groups. The reason for this was that a constant group of readers who would have been inclined to subscribe to more newspapers and journals at the same time, had not yet emerged. One of the basic elements of Rát's editorial program was the method which he had gotten to know in Schlözer's newspaper-writing courses. His professor taught his students that it would be necessary to process the news to make it understandable to readers: they would have to be accompanied by brief geographical and historical explanations. He consciously tried to keep away from the dry and impartial style how the news were presented in German-language newspapers. He did not arrange the news and announcements in a specific order, but freely, depending on the topic. Although there were certain columns in the *Magyar Hírmondó* which were repeated regularly, Rát did not apply them rigidly, but adopted them according to the materials as he saw fit. This unique form, consciously developed by Rát, also externally expressed the fact that the newspaper was not a typical piece of referential journalism. News were reported mainly through the editor's reflections and comments, and it is also important to note the intrusion of topics of a kind that might have been better placed in journals. However, headlines in connection with current events were central elements of the materials selected by Rát, and in his 'agenda setting', we can always notice the effort to correspond to what readers might expect in sense of contemporaneity.

Alongside information on politics, public life, economics, agriculture, health, and the true or fictive stories and anecdotes for entertainment, Mátyás Rát also included pieces on news related to the world of culture, scholarship, and natural science. The new types of communication that had been forming, and the growing market of print media provided a new framework for research, as

scientific results became more easily accessible and useable (Seidler, 2007). The rapid development of sciences became possible precisely due to the dynamic communication enabled by the regularly published newspapers and periodicals. This kind of dynamic communication, focusing increasingly on one discipline specifically, only emerged in the second quarter of the nineteenth century in Hungary. In the 1780s, Rát only had the opportunity to participate in the dissemination of scientific knowledge and the promotion of literature by occasionally publishing short news items related to these fields, or shorter works of prose or poetry. Rát gave priority to the cultivation of the Hungarian language, and to the encouragement, coordination and publication of science and literature in Hungarian. He considered all the disciplines of research to be equally important; therefore, he published news pieces and articles regarding mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, geology, archaeology, history, literary history, and so on.

In the *Magyar Hírmondó*, Rát devoted special attention also to the cause of Hungarian language and literature. He regularly published reports on books, but also his own essays on linguistics, literary history and literary theory, as well as poems by classical, earlier Hungarian and contemporary authors. He published announcements and reviews not only about the books that were printed in the Patzkó printing house, but also about works that appeared elsewhere and which were either in Hungarian or otherwise relevant to Hungary. If his time and the available column space allowed, he described the content of the book in greater detail and also discussed shortcomings and errors (Pavercsik, 2007). Poems and lyrical works also appeared regularly in *Magyar Hírmondó*.

Eventually, Rát's mission was to compile the contents of the newspaper in such a way that readers with different levels of status, occupation, and education should all find interesting articles in the newspaper. In the issue of 6 December 1780, he complained that his job was non-stop, and that much of his editorial work was "boring, difficult translation" (Rát, 06.12.1780). Even if news reading was not a daily ritual of readers (Dooley, 2010: 2), Rát did not deny that it was a great challenge for him to keep up with the ever-changing, dynamic reality. He also had great difficulty in maintaining his subscribers, let alone increasing their number. By the end of 1782, he became exhausted from the constant existential struggle, and replaced the vague journalist position with a less risky pastoral job. The *Magyar Hírmondó* which finally ceased publication in 1788, was edited year after year by new editors.

## b) The Different Types of News and the Dimension of Time

Depending on the topic of the published content, the issues of the *Magyar Hírmondó* can be considered mainly as issues of a newspaper, but some of them seem to resemble a magazine. These two distinct, but in some cases combined types of Rát's articles are related to the dimension of time in different ways. There is a difference between a newspaper and a magazine regarding the actuality of the materials published. The actuality of newspapers is mainly reflected in the speed of the transmission of the latest news, while the content of magazines is not related to daily events, but to the phenomena and problems of scientific, literary, economic and social life. We can also observe that editors of German-language magazines who only published twice a week, (re)discovered more accurate, complete and contextualised information as arguments, especially when daily newspapers occurred in the Habsburg Monarchy in the 1780s.

Taking into account the aspects of actuality and contemporaneity, the two categories of materials published in the *Magyar Hírmondó* are not related to historical time in the same way. While news on daily events becomes obsolete in a relatively short period of time and loses relevance, the content of magazines may remain valid for a relatively longer period. The latter in many cases bear a universal dimension, do not lose their relevance over time; the pieces published in magazines may even be considered relevant by people who read them even a long time after the publication. For instance, economic and medical advice may be valid until changes in these contexts of knowledge occur, and the same categories may be linked to seasons (e.g. agricultural activities in spring etc.). Considering the fact that this social discourse or political essays may have been interesting for later generations as well, the question arises, as to whether the first volumes of *Magyar Hírmondó* were read in the second half of the 1780s, in the 1790s, or later, in the beginning of the nineteenth century? The answer to this question could be given by comprehensive research, in the framework of which the copies of the magazine preserved in Hungarian or foreign collections would be examined with a special attention to readers' entries that may be found in them. Furthermore, a larger group of personal documents (correspondence, diaries) that have survived from the end of the eighteenth century, should be examined. For the time being, however, in the absence of relevant data, it is not possible to show, whether the copies of *Magyar Hírmondó* have been preserved for a longer period of time, and if so, whether they have been read by later generations.

It is also important to note that the term 'actuality' has a multiple meaning. From the point of view of its value in journalism, the term can be applied with reference to events that actually happened, yet also to topics actually popular



for a smaller or larger public (Xavier / Pontes, 2019). In this sense, newness is not an obligatory element of actuality: “Newness [...] is not exactly a temporal concept, but only means that the subject did not know about it. Everything that the subject did not know and comes to know is new. It is, therefore, a relationship of quality between the cognizant subject and the known object” (Xavier / Pontes, 2019: 44). For journalists and especially for an editor of a magazine, it is therefore always a compelling task to raise his public’s awareness of not only the present, but also the past. There is also the opportunity to become actual by meeting the very interests of the public, even if the reported events happened in the past. Consequently, on the one hand, a newspaper’s actuality is related to its simultaneity. An editor or a journalist of a newspaper is pressured to publish the news on a fact as closely as possible to its occurrence. On the other hand, an editor of a magazine is not forced to pay attention to the space of time between the moment of occurrence and the moment of publication. As a magazine’s actuality is always determined by the cultural conditions of the public it is intended to communicate with, the content of the publications can be adapted to the editor’s personal preferences.

Against this background, the *Magyar Hírmondó* represents an interesting case. The paper’s special feature is that items with interesting stories are prevalent compared to other kinds of items in some issues. As it is a newspaper edited and written by only one person, every issue and most of the printed items correspond to the particular taste and preferences of Mátyás Rát. As in the common practice of every journalist, the dimension of time played a very important role also in Mátyás Rát’s everyday work. In delivering various news, one of his major concerns was always being actual. By closely studying the different types of news he published, we can discover different levels of being up-to-date. Reports on current events, economy or the weather may have acquired or may have lost their actuality in different ways, influenced by many circumstances and the dimension of time. We can also observe that in many cases it is only time that can help the editor’s desperate search for accuracy and authenticity.

In his paper entitled *Big Theories and Humble Realities: Censorship and Public Opinion in the Eighteenth Century*, Edoardo Tortarolo argues that the period between the beginning and the end of the eighteenth century can be fundamentally characterised by capturing two interrelated phenomena. One phenomenon is the compression of time, while the other is the expansion of space. Both phenomena are closely related to the growing prevalence of print media: by the end of the century, news flowed to the average person in a particularly large amount and frequency, not only from its narrowest environment, but from all over the world (Tortarolo, 2015: 120–121). Concerning the sources used by Rát to get

informed, it is clear that he primarily relied on local and foreign newspapers when compiling the contents of the columns on internal and foreign affairs. His most often used sources were the *Ephemerides Vindobonenses* and some magazines from Germany, for example *Anton Friedrich Büschings Wöchentliche Nachrichten*. In the first place, he always delivers news from foreign lands, because he considers they have a particular impact on Hungarian politics and economy. For example, if tobacco producer countries are at war, Hungarian producers can take advantage (Rát, 08.01.1780):

How much profit could the country make from the tobacco trade, if the citizens did what the Queen ordered! This would be the time to do so, while there is war in America. We need to show foreign countries as soon as possible that this commodity is good and cheap, because if the war is over, American traders will overtake us.

As for the geographical scope, we must bear in mind that from the second half of the eighteenth century the news published in European periodicals was no longer so dominated by the affairs of Europe. Britain was at war with France, and not winning: the press was dominated by the conflict and by its ramifications, for its impact was global. We can observe a similar tendency even in the *Magyar Hírmondó*. Instead of news from countries around Hungary, Mátyás Rát preferred to discuss colonial affairs and those of the newly independent United States of America. As he wrote in the 23<sup>rd</sup> issue (Rát, 18.03.1780: 181):

The leaders of the new North American empire would suffer, if they were not mentioned by journalists in every newspaper. We should be grateful to them, because there is always this topic to write about. War events supply most of the news to papers. No wonder that I always write about this topic.

Obviously, a journalist living and working in Bratislava followed the flow of news with a few weeks distance. Nevertheless, he was keen to inform the readers of every important data regarding the events reported. For example, on 12 January 1780, he printed the latest news on some important battles at sea. In his essay, he paid special attention to specify the exact dates and facts of the referred affairs. He informed his public that rich Spanish ships were taken by the Royal Navy on 17 October 1779. He also added that the report of William Dalrymple (1736–1807), the British Army's brigadier general, had arrived in London on 17 December in the same year. In addition, he also explained to readers why the news from overseas came to Europe so slowly (Rát, 12.01.1780): "Nobody should be surprised by the fact that there is a delay on arrival of this report. Ships take at least four weeks to arrive from America to Europe."

Compared to other contemporary newspapers, for example to the *Prefßburger Zeitung*, we cannot avoid noticing how remarkable Mátyás Rát's style and writing

techniques are. Even if the bigger part of articles is short, without explanation and introduction, there are many pieces where the editor is providing background information. Mátyás Rát not only transmitted the news, but was keen to comment on them. For example, in the first issue of the *Magyar Hírmondó*, he recounted the most important facts of the Independence War from the last months of 1779. He informed about some major attacks between the Americans and the British, and introduced the reader to the famous French general and admiral Jean Baptiste Charles d'Estaing (1729–1794). In addition, supposing that not all the readers would have been familiar with the history of the earlier years of the war, he gave a longer explanation and turned back in time so far as to include the story of the Boston tea party (1773) and his personal opinion about it (Rát, 01.01.1780):

From then on, the rebellion kept fuming until it was ignited by herb tea (a grass called tea in China; what can it not do?). The mother country, Britain, which had previously protected and nurtured America as an unfortunate child, began to impose such a tax that it could and should only buy tea from the English. The Americans threw a part of the tea to the sea, and burned the other part. Forced to pay for the damage, they took up arms.

It is also worth mentioning other, non-political groups of news printed in the *Magyar Hírmondó* which deserve to be interpreted from the point of view of time in its different meanings. Two groups are weather news and various stories connected in some way to this topic. When compared to the consideration of foreign news for economic information, they occupied a larger and more prominent proportion of the papers. Based on letters he received from different parts of the country, Mátyás Rát regularly reported on weather phenomena and how they related to agriculture. He covered the most serious cases of insect damage, data on crop yield and changes in crop pricing. He often included his own commentary: he complemented the reports with further data and explanations based on his own knowledge. At times, his comments included his own experience. Similarly, a lot of exceptional geological phenomena are recorded only by newspapers, creating a kind of database for scientific observations. These are specific reports, because Mátyás Rát in some cases also gave information about the very exact time of the event. For example, he reported on the earthquakes in Germany in February and March 1780 (Rát, 18.03.1780: 183):

On the 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of the last month, at several places in Germany, among others in Koblenz, there was an earthquake for four times within the space of 34 hours. In Marburg [an der Lahn], on 26 February, there was an earthquake 7–8 minutes before 7 o'clock p.m., and also the next morning, a few minutes before 5 o'clock.

These bits of information have special importance, given the fact that many of the events narrated are available only in the pages of the *Magyar Hírmondó* today.

### c) A Challenging Task: How to Fact-Check Different Sources?

In some periods, news were rushing so fast that the editor could only decide very hardly what to print in his own newspaper and what to leave out. However, the opposite situation could be more difficult and confusing. Mátyás Rát was aware of the fact that he had to take into account the dimension of time while he was searching for reliable news sources. Trying to defend his own publishing strategies against readers' criticism, he argued that time would be the only factor that could help journalists to decide which news turns out to be authentic as well as accurate and which does not. On 14 January, Rát was forced to publish “[a] few things from foreign lands, because I have [he had] no bigger news” (Rát, 15.01.1780):

I can not tell you why foreign papers are not arriving this week. The Danube can not be the reason of the delay as river transport is operating, albeit hardly. It could be the post office that is playing a trick on Magyar Hírmondó, if we are able to tell anything without those papers. – They should never believe that we would fall in desperation. We might tell enough what you don't find either in this or in that paper, but we would not do that for the sake of anybody. That is, because readers demand items on new and remarkable things. We prefer to deny and confute false news and not to present them as true. Occasionally, we deliver untrue news, but it is not us who make them up, we are simply receiving them from those foreign papers which do not want to come to us this time.

In an other issue, printed on 18 March, Mátyás Rát also responded to the accusations of readers who complained that they could hardly find real news in the *Magyar Hírmondó* (Rát, 18.03.1780: 177–178):

“Well, maybe this time he's going to tell us some important and up-to-date news! There has been nothing like that in the latest issue.” I don't know what this gentleman calls important news. If he expects some fight again, he will find even less in this issue than in the previous one. But are we really happy when people kill each other? I wish it was, as some people say, that the enemies, after having made preparations for war, by the intervention of some power, would shake hands and reconcile themselves. “Well, there are no other memorable news stories?” I have to admit the truth: there is nothing. I will not sell fiction as it was true. But do not throw away the newspaper immediately before reading what is written in it. Maybe I'll find something to fill up half a sheet, even if I never make up fake news.

As we see, it was a crucial point of Rát's editorial practice to not transmit or even less to create fake news. Of course, however, he also reported news that had to

be corrected later, although he had taken them from authentic sources, because more recent sources revealed that the previous data was inaccurate or incorrect (cf. Golob, 2015: 31).

Even if Mátyás Rát was aware of the dangers to act fast, in some cases he was not able to avoid printing false news. On 1 January 1780, he reported the main facts of the famous siege of Savannah. But English newspapers, printed in London and used by him, were not informed well about the events, and so Rát transmitted the information that the city of Savannah had been retaken from the British by the Franco-American army in October 1779. In the next issue of the newspaper, he had to correct himself: he had reproduced false news, because he had been misled by others. In fact, the attempt in Georgia had failed. Similarly, in an other issue (12 January), Rát published the false rumour of the death of George Washington (1732–1799), but the most interesting case is that of James Cook.

One of Mátyás Rát's favourite topics was the journey of Captain Cook (1728–1779). Right at the beginning, in the first issue of *Magyar Hírmondó*, he published a short report with the latest news regarding the big challenge. In this article, Rát wrote that, based on the information given by Danish sailors, Mr. Cook had been away since three years and had safely reached China (Rát, 01.07.1779: 4–5):

I could write nice things about the fifth continent, if Cook had arrived in his homeland from there. This famous captain of the English navy is now sailing for the third time with some scholars all around the earth: their purpose is to discover unknown parts of the world and let us know about them. It is the third year since he left England. Last summer, whole Europe awaited his arrival at home so eager that the King of France, though now (as well as we know well) he is at war with the English, still harshly forbade his navy captains to hurt Cook and the ships under his control. And as there was no news or trace of his whereabouts until now; they had already begun to fear that he might have been lost somewhere at sea. Luckily for us, some Danish sailors have recently brought news about him. He is said to have reached fortunately the shores of China and is about to make his way home from there soon. Until he arrives, we will only report on the continents we already know about.

To illustrate Mátyás Rát's personal style and rhetoric, it is worth quoting the following part of this article. Here, the journalist interrupts the report in favor of less informed readers, and adds an explanation concerning the latest discoveries in the Pacific Sea region (Rát, 01.07.1779: 5):

It is no longer possible to divide the world into four parts. We know that beside Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, there are a lot of large islands to the south which cannot be considered to belong to any of those four parts. Therefore, the entirety of them is called

by some people Polynesia ('Many Islands'), by other people Australia or the Southern Land. Only New Holland and New Guinea are nearly the size of Europe as a whole.

In this particular case, Rát was much more behind the events than usual, but it was not his fault. At that time, in January 1780, large parts of the world could not have heard from the captain's death which had happened on 14 February 1779. However, no more than three weeks passed until the news reached Bratislava. Rát may have been still shocked by the news when he prepared the next report on this topic for the issue of 22 January. His report shows how touched he was by the pitiful case (Rát, 22.01.1780):

Every good journalist should mourn now, if the news printed in Saint Petersburg Papers is true. To tell the truth, it would be a duty of all journalists to get to know and keep up to date with different parts of the world. Therefore, they should regard as their leaders those men who travel all around the world and explore areas previously unknown. Such a distinguished man was the English captain, Mr. Cook, of whom I had previously written that he had been fortunate enough to sail around the world, came to China, and from there was on his way back to Europe. The Petersburg Papers write that it was not him, but his fellow, Captain Clerke, because Mr. Cook's life ended with a tragic death while sailing between Asia and America.

Later on, Rát printed a more detailed description of the circumstances of the captain's death. This description contains an other point in time, the June of 1779, when the letter of James Cook's fellow, Captain Clerke (1741–1779), was dated (Rát, 26.01.1780):

Again, I begin the newspaper with a report on that well-remembered Captain Cook. [...] According to a letter from Mr. Pallas (who himself went to some obscure parts of Russia and informed the scientists of many things), sent from Petersburg to Berlin to Mr. Büssing [Anton Friedrich Büsching (1724–1793)], there is no longer any doubt that Cook was killed on an island called Ouaihi [Otaheite, today Tahiti]. And the data in that letter are certainly authentic, because their sources were the reports, sent by Captain Clerke from Kamchatka in eastern Russia to the British ambassador at the royal court in Petersburg five weeks earlier.

As mentioned above, Mátyás Rát primarily relied on local and foreign newspapers in gathering news. In this stage of research, it was not my purpose to make a detailed comparative analysis of the contents of the *Magyar Hírmondó* and the eventual sources of its editor. However, in this case, it is not difficult to identify Mátyás Rát's exact source: Mr. Pallas' letter, mentioned by Rát, was printed on 10 January 1780 in *Anton Friedrich Büschings Wöchentliche Nachricht*. The story of the publication of Clerke's dispatches presents clearly the characteristics of travelling news in the eighteenth century, a journey which features time as one of its

most important elements. To see how the news on Captain Cook's death reached the different places of Europe, it is worth putting the facts in chronological order:

- 14 February 1779, Tahiti: date of the death of Captain Cook
- June 1779, Kamchatka: posting of Captain Clerke's dispatches, containing the description of Cook's death
- January 1780, Saint Petersburg: arrival of the dispatches at an English diplomat, Sir James Harris (1746–1820), who allows Simon Peter Pallas (1741–1811), professor of the Imperial Academy, to copy extracts from the letters
- January 1780, Berlin: extracts in German translation printed in *Anton Friedrich Büschings Wöchentliche Nachrichten*
- 22 and 26 January 1780, Bratislava: Mátyás Rát prints extracts in the *Magyar Hírmondó*
- 25 January 1780, Paris: extracts printed in French translation in *Gazette de France*
- January 1780, London: English translation of the German version of Captain Clerke's letter printed in *The London Chronicle*

The news of Captain James Cook's death was obviously a great sensation, and many of the European newspapers and magazines reported on his voyage (Forbes, 1999: 1–44). Mátyás Rát was among the first journalists to transmit the pieces of information he read in the *Wöchentliche Nachrichten*, including in the report his usual explanations about, among other things, the island of 'Otahtiti', the measuring of latitude or the extent of North America. This way, as mentioned above, Rát also used the transmission of this very popular and current news as an opportunity to expand the scientific and geographical knowledge of the Hungarian people which was a huge challenge, given the state of education of the contemporary readership.

## d) Conclusion

In *Magyar Hírmondó*, Mátyás Rát provided his readers with domestic and foreign information which was rarely published in the earlier foreign-language newspapers in Hungary. For those Hungarian newspaper readers who did not have access to foreign newspapers, almost a completely unknown world opened up through Rát's eyes. The articles, completed with explanations and subjective comments, made domestic economic and cultural initiatives known, disseminated views against superstitious beliefs and enlightened ideas in general; and at the same time, they opened a window to more developed Western societies. Ferenc Kazinczy (1759–1831), when he presented Mátyás Rát in his memoirs, emphasised the great importance of his pioneering work, a breakthrough which was actually short-lived, but which had long-term implications. Describing the

general state of erudition of Hungarian people in the time before the publication of the *Magyar Hírmondó*, the famous writer wrote: “What else was the main goal of our meetings in the countryside than to discuss which hunting dog is better, the yellow one or the black one? And how many of us knew where to find the Atlantic Sea, to the east of us or to the west (Kazinczy, 2009: 488)?”

Compression of time and expansion of space, the two fundamental phenomena described by Tortarolo, can be well perceived when we examine the content of the *Magyar Hírmondó*. As we have seen, it was a challenge for Mátyás Rát both when the news arrived too fast and in a quantity too big to be processed properly, but also when they arrived too slowly and in a smaller number. In many cases, he complained that he could hardly fill the issue with a sufficient amount of content, while in other cases, he was forced to distribute the larger amount of news arriving at the same time into several issues. As his sources were, on the one hand, other newspapers and, on the other hand, letters from Hungarian and foreign readers, their arrival was sometimes delayed, and even longer delays of several weeks were not uncommon in the case of letters. This factor also contributed to the fact that in many cases Rát reported on events that had taken place long before the publication of the paper, but still kept some of their relevance, whether it were political or war events, or news on economic, agricultural, meteorological or cultural events, facts, innovations. Obviously, his major concern was to meet the demands of his public. The exploration of the pieces written by him shows clearly that he applied various strategies and combined the conceptionally overlapping elements of newspapers and magazines to fulfill the requirements of actuality and simultaneity. Therefore, the editor-journalist published a large amount of various material in the columns of the newspaper that could serve as a basis for further research in the fields of intellectual history, literary history, and the history of science.

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