

Media and Literature  
in Multilingual Hungary  
1770–1820

Edited by  
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# Contents

Gábor VADERNA Language, Media and Politics in the Hungarian Kingdom between 1770 and 1820 .....	9
István FRIED Mehrsprachigkeit in den ersten Jahrzehnten der ungarischen Zeit- schriftenliteratur .....	17
Suzana COHA History of Journalism in the Croatian Lands from the Beginnings until the Croatian National Revival .....	41
Eva KOWALSKÁ Die erste slowakische Zeitung <i>Presspúrské nowiny</i> zwischen Journalis- mus und Patriotismus .....	55
Andrea SEIDLER Höfische Berichterstattung in der <i>Preßburger Zeitung</i> Reflexionen über die mediale Präsenz des Kaiserpaares Franz I. Stephan und Maria Theresias in den frühen Jahren des Periodikums .....	69
Réka LENGYEL The Newspaper as a Medium for Developing National Language, Literature, and Science Mátyás Rát and the <i>Magyar Hírmondó</i> between 1780 and 1782 .....	87

Annamária BIRÓ Siebenbürgische Präsenz in der Presse Westungarns Die Korrespondenten Johann Seivert und József Benkő .....	101
Gábor VADERNA Möglichkeiten der Urbanität in der ungarischen Zeitschrift <i>Mindenek Gyűjtemény</i> .....	123
Rumen István CSÖRSZ The Literary Program of István Sándor and the Periodical <i>Sokféle</i> (1791–1808) .....	143
Olga GRANASZTÓI The Paper <i>Hazai Tudósítások</i> and the Beginnings of the Cult of Monuments Through the Lens of Ferenc Kazinczy's Articles (1806–1808) .....	155
Béla HEGEDÜS Literary History as an Argument for the Existence of Literature Miklós Révai's Call in <i>Magyar Hírmondó</i> and <i>Költeményes Magyar Gyűjtemény</i> .....	165
Margit KISS <i>Magyar Hírmondó</i> and Dictionary Proposals .....	181
András DÖBÖR Sándor Szacs vay's Underworld Dialogues as Political Publicisms in the 1789 Year of the Enlightenment-Era Newspaper <i>Magyar Kurír</i> .....	193
Piroska BALOGH Johann Ludwig Schedius's <i>Literärischer Anzeiger</i> and the Tradition of Critical Journalism in the Kingdom of Hungary around 1800 .....	207
Norbert BÉRES „Roman und was besser ist, als Roman“ Über die Vertriebsstrategien des Romans .....	221

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Katalin CZIBULA Der Beginn der Theaterkritik in der deutsch- und ungarischsprachigen Presse in Westungarn .....	233
Ágnes DÓBÉK Reports on European Publishing Culture in the Journals of Western Hungary .....	243
Zsófia BÁRÁNY Catholic and Protestant Union-Plans in the Kingdom of Hungary between 1817 and 1841 The Golden Age of “Public Opinion” and the Memory of the Reformation in Veszprém County .....	251
Index .....	269

## Reports on European Publishing Culture in the Journals of Western Hungary\*

As the eighteenth century turned into the nineteenth, educational journals published in Western Hungary were including European news reports about how many more books were being published, about libraries that were being built, and about new developments in printing. In this study I present news reports from István Sándor's periodical *Sokféle* [*Variety*], the Komárom [Komárno in Slovak] periodical *Mindenes Gyűjtemény* [*Miscellaneous Collection*], as well as *Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek* [*Military and Other Famous Stories*] and its ancillary periodical *Hasznos mulatságok* [*Useful Delights*]. I also dwell on the topics these publications covered.

These periodicals contained short, almost pop, articles about the history of literary culture. They also published brief news stories, the biographies of scholars, and descriptions of scientific institutes. You should not think of these historical descriptions as being like the ones you might encounter today, as they are rather statistical and bibliographical lists, some of which were made more reader-friendly with interesting accompanying stories.

In late eighteenth-century Europe public libraries were becoming increasingly important in spreading culture.<sup>1</sup> Volume IV of István Sándor's periodical *Sokféle* was

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1 FÜLÖP Géza, *A magyar olvasóközönség a felvilágosodás idején és a reformkorban* [*The Hungarian Reading Public in the Time of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reform*], Irodalomtörténeti könyvtár 33 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978); Wayne BIVENS-TATUM, *Libraries and the Enlightenment* (Los Angeles: Library Juice Press, 2012).

published in 1796<sup>2</sup> and in it he discusses how libraries were used and how important they had become in his essay *A Könyvestárokról* [*About Libraries*]. According to István Sándor, there was no more useful way to spend money than to establish libraries. He believed that people who wanted to learn could find everything they might possibly need in libraries, and for free as well! Sándor believed the large number of books should not put prospective readers off, since “Paris has seven times a hundred thousand People; but since we cannot speak with each of them, we choose four or five friends for ourselves instead”. Then he lists the great libraries of antiquity, and finally also reports about the fact that at the time there were four thousand libraries in Europe, with the most famous being in Rome, Paris and Vienna.

In Hungary the first public libraries opened at the end of the eighteenth century. The Egyetemi Könyvtár [University Library] and Nemzeti Könyvtár [National Library] in Pest-Buda were accessible to all, although in reality it was only scholars and intellectuals that could access them regularly. And the broader public of the capital, and even more so people living in provincial towns, had no public libraries to visit or use.<sup>3</sup> György Klimó, Bishop of Pécs, was the first to allow his private collection (merged with the library of the chapter-house) to be used, at first only by the clergy of the diocese, but then in 1774 he opened it to the public, creating what was Hungary’s first truly public library.<sup>4</sup>

The first reading circle opened in what is now Bratislava in 1781, followed by others in Pest, Sopron, and Győr, although these societies seldom lasted long.<sup>5</sup> Many patrons and lords who appreciated science and supported culture, and even some book collectors from the noble Széchenyi, Teleki, Ráday and Nádasdy families, wanted to serve their communities and national interests with their collections. István Kultsár himself also donated his valuable library of four thousand volumes to Komárom in 1827 and established a foundation to manage it.<sup>6</sup>

2 SÁNDOR István, “A Könyvestárokról” [“About libraries”], *Sokféle* Vol. IV (1796): 146–148.

3 CSAPODI Csaba, TÓTH András and VÉRTESY Miklós, *Magyar könyvtártörténet [Hungarian Library History]* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1987).

4 MONOK István, “A könyvtárak nyilvánossága a 16–18. században” [“Public Access to Libraries in the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> Centuries”], in *Tudomány és kutatás a 240 éves Klimó Könyvtárban: A 2014. október 16–17-én rendezett jubileumi tudományos konferencia tanulmányai*, ed. DEZSŐ Krisztina, MOLNÁR Dávid and SCHMELCZER-POHÁNKA Éva, *A Pécsi Egyetemi Könyvtár kiadványai* 13, 13–23 (Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Egyetemi Könyvtár és Tudásközpont, 2016).

5 KÓKAY György, “Az első magyarországi kölcsönkönyvtár: Olvasókabinét Pozsonyban 1782-ben” [“The First Lending Library in Hungary – Reading Circle in Pozsony in 1782”], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 100, No. 1–2 (1984): 34–44.

6 V. BUSA Margit, “A Kultsár-könyvtár ismeretlen árverési jegyzéke” [“The Unknown Auction Catalogue of the Kultsár Library”], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 83, No. 1 (1967): 60–62.



Hungarian students and travellers visiting libraries abroad also contributed to the development of the Hungarian collections. The owners of pontifical and baronial libraries usually made the decision to start collecting books during their studies abroad. The growth of their collections was aided by domestic and foreign collectors and booksellers, as well as by brokers who were specifically employed for this purpose. The periodicals introduced several foreign libraries, most of which were mentioned because they also contained Hungarian works.

One of the reports in the Viennese Hungarian periodical *Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek* in its May 4, 1790 issue, talks not about the events of the ongoing Turkish war but about the fact that a Hungarian scholar had requested that the country's leaders, who were stationed around Bucharest, seek authorization from the local head of the church to be allowed to visit his library, which was located by the old church of St. Constantine.<sup>7</sup> The author of the report had actually visited the library and so knew that it housed many old curiosities. He was not shown everything though and he suggested that the leaders might have more luck, and might even discover some treasures of Hungarian pertinence. The author of this short report was not named by the editors.

In the July 6, 1790 issue, József Rozgonyi, who was also a librarian at the Sárospatak College, writes about his experience of the Hungarian library in Wittenberg.<sup>8</sup> Besides the works of Mihály Rotarides, Rozgonyi mentions some old Hungarian books as being notable rarities of the library. Even though all of these were well-known "old Hungarian" works, scholars had not been aware of all the Wittenberg copies. In 1725, Mihály György Kassai, a Hungarian professor from Wittenberg died. In his will he stated that his 3,000-volume library should be made open to Hungarian university students.<sup>9</sup> He also established a scholarship, which would allow many Hungarian students to return to Wittenberg, with each departing student adding one volume to the library. This library, which houses theological treatises, maps, and historical writings, is located in Halle today, and is one of the largest sources of old Hungarian prints outside Hungary.

7 *Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek* 4 May (1790): 575.

8 *Hadi és Más Nevezetes Történetek* 6 July (1790): 3–8.

9 G. KLEMENT Ildikó, "Külföldön tanuló magyarországi diákok olvasmányai a 18. század első felében: A wittenbergi Magyar Könyvtár 1755-ből származó katalógusának elemzése" ["Readings of Hungarian Students Studying Abroad in the First Half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century: An Analysis of the 1755 Catalog of the Hungarian Library in Wittenberg"], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 101, No. 3–4 (1985): 210–224.

István Sándor, in issue 3 of *Sokféle*, introduces King Matthias' missal held in Brussels.<sup>10</sup> It is believed that this book was peerless: "A brighter book than this can hardly be found in Europe because the missal that can be found in Lambeth, even though it is bright, indeed, cannot compete with this one." According to Sándor, all Hungarians travelling through Brussels would benefit from visiting the library, where the missal was kept. *Missale Romanum* was taken to Brussels by Queen Mary after the Battle of Mohács (1526). After that the dukes of Burgundy held it in their possession for centuries. Today it is part of the collection of the Belgian Royal Library.

After the Brussels missal, István Sándor reports on the breviary of Matthias. He describes how, during his travels to Blainville, at one stop, an adventurous diplomat mentioned that he had stumbled upon the handwritten breviary of King Matthias in the Vatican Library in Rome. It contained many beautiful pictures, was covered in red velvet, and had been put together by the priest Anton Martin in 1487. In actual fact it was created for Matthias by Attavante degli Attavanti, who was at the time one of the most sought-after illuminators of Florence. It still resides in the Vatican Library.<sup>11</sup>

In his bibliographic works István Sándor painted a comprehensive picture of the development of Hungarian literature and book publishing. This is how the Hungarian rarities held outside the country may have ended up on his radar. An urge to collect "hungarica" also struck Ferenc Széchenyi around 1795 against the backdrop of the national movement of the nobility and the reform of the Hungarian language.<sup>12</sup> Sándor's report on the Corvinas located abroad was also relevant to these initiatives.

The periodicals also mentioned large libraries which travellers could admire, even though they had no Hungarian connections, and which played an important part in the history of libraries in Europe. The September 1789 issue of József Péczeli's periodical, *Mindenek Gyűjtemény* presented the history of the library of the royal monastery at San Lorenzo de El Escorial.<sup>13</sup> It emphasizes that at the time this library held the largest array of manuscripts from the East. An 1800-

10 SÁNDOR István, "A Máttyás Királynak Misés és Imádságos könyvéről" ["About the Missal and the Breviary of Matthias"], *Sokféle* Vol. III (1795): 76–77.

11 MIKÓ Árpád, "Máttyás király könyvtára az uralkodó reprezentációjában" ["The Library of King Matthias in the Representation of the Ruler"], in *A holló jegyében: fejezetek a Corvinák történetéből*, ed. MONOK István, 19–43 (Budapest: Corvina–Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár, 2004), 37–38.

12 CSAPODI Csaba, *The Corvinian Library: History and Stock*, Studia humanitatis 1 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1973).

13 *Mindenek Gyűjtemény* 23 September, quarter I, letter 25 (1789): 400–402.

item catalogue of these works was published by Michael Casiri under the title *Bibliotheca arabico-hispana Escorialensis*. The library grew extremely quickly under the monarch's personal tutelage, with its most valuable part being donated by the statesman De Mendoza. The story of how it was so much enriched under Philip III is most curious: close to Sale two ships had been captured, and among the spoils were 3,000 manuscripts in Arabic, with teachings in philosophy, religion, and politics. The emperor of Morocco, to whom the books belonged, was not willing to exchange them for Spanish prisoners, and so they ended up in the Escorial collection. Thus, the European library holding preserves the largest number of Arabic-language manuscripts to this day.<sup>14</sup>

In the second volume of *Sokféle*, published in 1791, István Sándor presented one of the curiosities of the library of the Canterbury Archdiocese.<sup>15</sup> The rare treasures include a missal which Henry V had written for his chapel in 1415. The codex was heavily ornamented, with its margins painted in Arabic patterns. I have not been able to trace the book based on the description.

*Mindenek Gyűjtemény* briefly mentions the libraries of Italy in connection with reporting on new books: "In Florence, Abbot Fontani, caretaker of the Riccardiana Library, has already published the first piece of his *Novae deliciae eruditorum*, containing those letters of Michael Glykas."<sup>16</sup> Francesco Fontani was the librarian at this Florentine library from 1783, and he published the first volume of the letters of the Byzantine historian Michael Glykas in 1785.<sup>17</sup> Then he lists the published works of Iacopo Morelli, head librarian of Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice, and finally reports that Don Luigi Mingarelli, librarian of what was then Biblioteca Nani (now the Nani Bequest, which has been integrated into Marciana) had published the Greek and Coptic manuscripts discovered in that library.

Issue 2 of *Hasznos mulatságok*, published in 1821, describes a work by Petit Stadel, who was the librarian of the Mazarin Library in Paris, in which he presents the public libraries of France.<sup>18</sup> The article talks about the collections of the most important libraries including the Royal Library and the libraries of Lyon and Versailles. It explains how the Royal Library holds 8,000 printed and

14 Alfred HESSE, *A History of Libraries* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1950), 51.

15 SÁNDOR István, "A' Lámbeți Könyvekről" ["About the Books of Lambeth"], *Sokféle* Vol. II (1791): 19–21.

16 *Mindenek Gyűjtemény* 16 September, quarter I, letter 23 (1789): 375.

17 Carlo FANTAPPIÈ, "Francesco Fontani", in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, ed. Raffaele ROMANELLI, Vol. 48, 744–747 (Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1997).

18 *Hasznos Mulatságok* 1, 37 (1821): 286–287.

50,000 manuscript volumes. Finally, he poses the question: when will the counties and towns of Hungary have such libraries?

The periodicals often tried to popularize reading and wrote about reading culture in other countries, reading habits in general, and the status of the publishing industry. They also discussed why Hungarian reading culture was so backward. Issue 2 of *Mindenes Gyűjtemény*, published in 1789,<sup>19</sup> covers these problems. It starts with the following problem: “English, French, and German travellers were traveling in Italy and complained that there were no worthwhile booksellers or reading circles available. If they came to Hungary, what would they think?” In Hungary booksellers did not sell books controlled by censorship at their homes. Nobody bought Hungarian-language books that were handed in to German booksellers. Establishing reading circles would have been necessary because even those books that were published did not reach the readers. In Western Europe there was already an accepted method of making reading more popular. Registers of books were printed and anyone could choose the book they were interested in, paying a daily fee to borrow it.

The rest of the work sets out an agenda for how to popularize reading, which, it claimed, should start with ordinary folk. People were not buying books because they were expensive, and book binders and traders were selling them at a tidy profit. As a solution, the author proposed what was an accepted custom in many other countries: that each book should have a limited price printed in it to make it impossible to profiteer from.

“Spiritual life and intellectual culture can be judged by book shops and the reading of books”, announces an article in *Hasznos mulatságok* which compares book purchases and the size of the population.<sup>20</sup> The more bookstores there are in any given town compared to the size of the population, the higher the level of education that can be ensured. For example, the article mentions that Vienna had 28 book shops for its 280,000 inhabitants. The piece mainly lists German cities, among which Leipzig merits the most attention, being the centre of the book trade in Germany, and maybe even Europe. In Leipzig new books were brought from every other country to the great Easter and Saint Michael’s Day markets, to be distributed from there. This is why in Leipzig the number of bookshops could not be compared to the size of the population. We know about the rights of booksellers in Hungary from an 1772 Bratislava edict published in

19 *Mindenes Gyűjtemény* 28 October, quarter II, letter 8 (1789): 118–119.

20 *Hasznos mulatságok* I, issue 27 (1822): 215–216.

the background literature.<sup>21</sup> From this it is clear that whoever wanted to open a bookshop needed to meet a strict set of criteria laid down by the Locotenential Council (*Consilium Regium Locumtenentiale Hungaricum*). We know that in 1792 five booksellers were operating in Pest. According to historical data, the city had 24,000 inhabitants at that time, which put Pest significantly behind the German cities.

Another piece in *Hasznos mulatságok* also reports on the book trade in the German territories.<sup>22</sup> Other German-speaking countries had accused the Austrians of making very few books. In their chagrin, the Viennese retorted that this could not be blamed on the German inhabitants of Austria, since the Austrian monarchy had many fewer inhabitants. Finally, the author of the news item comments that Austrian book publishers were importing German works to Hungary, thereby impeding the proliferation of Hungarian books. And this was indeed so. The book trade was significantly hampered by the semi-colonial state of the country. The traders were mostly German, and they sold mainly German and French books and did not really keep Hungarian books in their stores.

In Hungary, the book trade separated itself from printing in the last decades of the century, when output was becoming more prolific, and the number of readers was also growing. Until that time printers were usually booksellers as well, while book binders and travelling booksellers also sold books. The printing house in what is now Tranva was the largest printing workshop in Hungary. More publications were printed there than in all the other Hungarian printing houses put together. During eighteenth century several printing houses of various sizes started operating around the country, including in Bratislava, Pest and Győr. The owners of these establishments were mostly printers who had resettled from Austria and Germany.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century printing in other European countries made technological strides and several really significant inventions helped revolutionize printing technology. The majority of the work that had previously been done by hand was taken over by machines. However, in Hungary these advancements only started to spread in the last third of the nineteenth century. The press in Western Hungary reported on several printing technologies newly introduced abroad. The *Szép mesterségek [Fine Trades]* column of *Hasznos mulatságok* described the history of printing, suggesting that

21 KÓKAY György, *A könyvkereskedelem Magyarországon [History of Book Trade in Hungary]* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1997), 52.

22 *Hasznos Mulatságok* II, 20 (1818): 156–157.

the most perfect printing workshops at the time were *Typographia Apostolica* in the Vatican, for which Pope Sixtus V had built a spectacular palace, and the *Typographia Regia* in France.<sup>23</sup>

*Mindenes Gyűjtemény* talked about some English publishing periodicals. There even the common folk read more than nobler orders in other places. “In London alone, 83 different newspapers are printed every day, and some journals have 10,000–12,000 readers.”<sup>24</sup>

*Hasznos mulatságok* describes the Times’ printers: “The working parts of the machine, and the speed of the work, induce amazement in the onlooker because it completely differs from regular printing presses.” It describes the operation of the machine in great detail: the full preparation of one sheet took only three and a half minutes, meaning one machine could prepare 950 sheets in one hour, which is how they were able to print thousands of copies of the Times in such a short time.

In the same place there is a report on the production method of the Bassano printing house: in Bassano, near Venice, a printer called Remondini had his own paper made and also printed it himself, employing more than 1,000 people.<sup>25</sup> Here they made French, English, and East-Indian tapestry paper, and the most beautiful colour atlases and Turkish paper as well. They used two printing presses and two copperplate presses for this. Finally, he notes that in Hungary such things could only be dreamed of. There cotton rag painting and printing required by the profession on a daily basis were not in fashion, although both could have proved lucrative, according to the piece.

*Mindenes Gyűjtemény*, in its piece addressed to engravers and printers, describes in detail the method of preparing Frankfurt black ink.<sup>26</sup> The column *Híradás, tudósítás* [*News, Reports*] wrote about books that were awaiting publication, and occasionally about printing innovations also. Readers could learn about the printing of Anacreon’s works in Bodoni’s font in 1784 at the Parma royal printing works.<sup>27</sup> This was an innovation in printing, with only a few cop-

23 *Hasznos Mulatságok* II, 41 (1832): 323–327.

24 *Mindenes Gyűjtemény* 7 October, quarter II, letter 2 (1789): 29.

25 The Remondini family of printers had moved to Bassano from Padua. The printing house started to flourish with the cooperation of Giovanni Antonio (1700–1769) and Giambattista Remondini (1713–1773). Later on they got themselves accepted into the Venice guild of printers, and they also opened a shop in Venice, but they continued to print exclusively in Bassano. See: Tanya SCHMOLLER, *Remondini and Rizzi: A Chapter in Italian Decorated Paper History* (New Castle: Bird & Bull Press, 1990).

26 *Mindenes Gyűjtemény* 2 September, quarter II, letter 19 (1789): 302–303.

27 *Mindenes Gyűjtemény* 17 October, quarter II, letter 5 (1789): 80.

ies being published which were then given to good friends as gifts. The first version of the Bodoni typeface was created by Giambattista Bodoni, a famous Italian publisher, printer, and typographer.

From this collection of news items we can see that the periodicals (besides educational pieces on various topics) put great emphasis on bringing Hungarian book culture closer to that seen in European cities. They also reported on Hungarian books held in foreign collections, other important libraries, and new technologies in printing. Its editors, István Sándor, István Kultsár, and József Péczeli were also organizers of Hungarian literary culture themselves and were well-versed in both Hungarian and world literature.