

# A NEW GEM IN THE NATIONAL SZÉCHÉNYI LIBRARY AND CORVINA DIGITALIS: THE BRUSSELS MISSAL



*Data of the codex:*  
**Missale Romanum; Brussels,**  
**Royal Library. MS. 9008.**  
**Parchment; 430 sheets; 400×285 mm**

In the framework of establishing contact between the *Bibliothèque royale Albert I<sup>er</sup>* in Brussels and the Hungarian National Library, in March 2009 the two directors general in a small ceremony presented each other's institutions with digital copies of valuable works. It was a noble gesture from the Belgian party that one of the most significant Hungary-related documents held in Brussels, a 15th century missal was digitised and donated to us. In 1526 Queen Mary herself took this codex along from Buda to Brussels. We reciprocated the gift by five digital copies of precious Belgium-related documents kept in the Széchényi Library.

The exquisite missal copied in Gothic script was produced in Florence between 1485 and 1487, explicitly for the Hungarian royal couple. It was probably part of the royal chapel's collection. The first pages of the volume contain a calendar (ff. 1r–6v), which is followed by the actual missal. The illuminator of this dainty manuscript was the outstanding Florentine master, Attavante degli Attavanti. In addition to the characteristic features of style, the exact identification of the date and the miniator is possible because the master signed and dated his work. There is the following note at f. 8v: *Actavantes de Actavantibus hoc opus illuminavit*

A. D. MCCCCLXXXV, meaning “Attavante degli Attavanti illuminated this work Anno Domini 1485”, and in f. 206r, we find *Actum Florentiae A. D. MCCCCLXXXVII*, or “made in Florence Anno Domini 1487.” It is to be noted that masters of the time would sign only their most outstanding products. This was the case with Attavante as well, a decisive figure in Florentine book

Missale Romanum  
Brussels, Royal Library. MS. 9008., f. 8v



production in the 1480s, following in the footsteps of Vespasiano da Bisticci.

The sumptuous gilded illumination was made every bit for the Hungarian monarch. On the left-hand side of the f. 8v ornamental frame there is Matthias Hunyadi facing the portrait of Queen Beatrice. Their portraits also feature in other parts of the codex. In the crucifixion scene of f. 205v some of the figures depicted around the crucified Jesus also remind us of members of the Hungarian royal family: the woman bending on the stem of the crucifix (Maria Magdalena) also seems to portray Queen Beatrice, the kneeling man in the foreground is probably Matthias, while the youth looking down on him as Saint John the Evangelist shows close resemblance to John Corvin. In the codex, the coats of arms of Matthias are covered by those of the Spanish Hapsburgs. The present binding is not the original, its edge is gilded.

As said before, Queen Mary, the widow of King Louis II took the codex to Brussels when on hearing the news of the lost Battle of Mohács in 1526, she had to flee the country. The great prestige and respect of the volume in its new home is reflected by the fact that for centuries Belgic governors would use this book to take their oath of office, which is reported in the notes of the first folios, where librarians and notaries entered the facts and dates of oaths.

Thanks to the generosity of the Belgian Royal Library, the National Széchényi Library's digital stocks of Corvinas have received a very important addition, thus containing not only Hungarian Corvinas but also a number of items kept abroad. It is hoped that this extended collection will soon be available to the public on the Corvina Digitalis web site.

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