

## THE REINCARNATED APOR CODEX

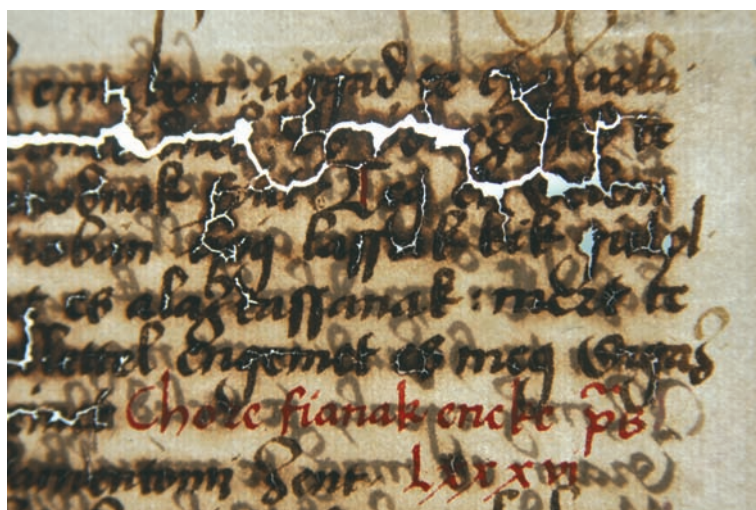


The five hundred year old codex is in the possession of the Székely National Museum (Sepsiszentgyörgy or Sfântu Gheorghe). Its lease, restoration and preservation came as a result of major diplomatic and professional efforts.

The medium-size octavo is considered the fourth oldest Hungarian literary work, a part of the first Hungarian Bible translation, the so-called Hussite Bible. (The codex contains the psalms of the Bible translation; however despite its name it probably bears the marks of Franciscan monks, while others suggest that Premontrean, Benedictine and even secular origins are not impossible.) Supplemented with a few ecclesiastical texts they copied, nuns made its binding on the Island of Hares in Buda in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The name was given by Áron Sziládi in honour of the owner, Baron Péter Apor. The book materialized again in 1877 when a late member of the family, Baron Zsuzsanna Apor donated it to the Székely National Museum in Sepsiszentgyörgy.

The codex issued in a facsimile edition in the early

1940s survived WW II in Budapest. (We know little of whether restoration was attempted at the time, but it is a fact that later many people thought the codex had been destroyed. As during the war the delivery train taking rare books and other valuables from Transylvania to the West was hit by a bomb, it was supposed that the Apor Codex was among them.)



Finally, the most precious item in the Székely institution returned to Romania in 1953, but has been deteriorating ever since because of its high acid-content ink. In order to avoid final destruction, restoration was vital but not easy. The guardian museum tried to organize restoration several times after the political switchover, but the actual project could never be launched. The Sepsiszentgyörgy party was always on the side of professional restoration in Hungary, as it was in their interest not to let its precious treasure be wasted even though their own efforts were doomed to failure. The National Széchényi Library repeatedly offered to help, but unfortunately for a good decade it came up against walls. From the second half of the 1990s the Romanian party used mostly diplomatic excuses disguised as professional arguments against



restoration outside their country, while in the meantime letters were literally falling out of the 500-year-old book kept in the museum's safe.

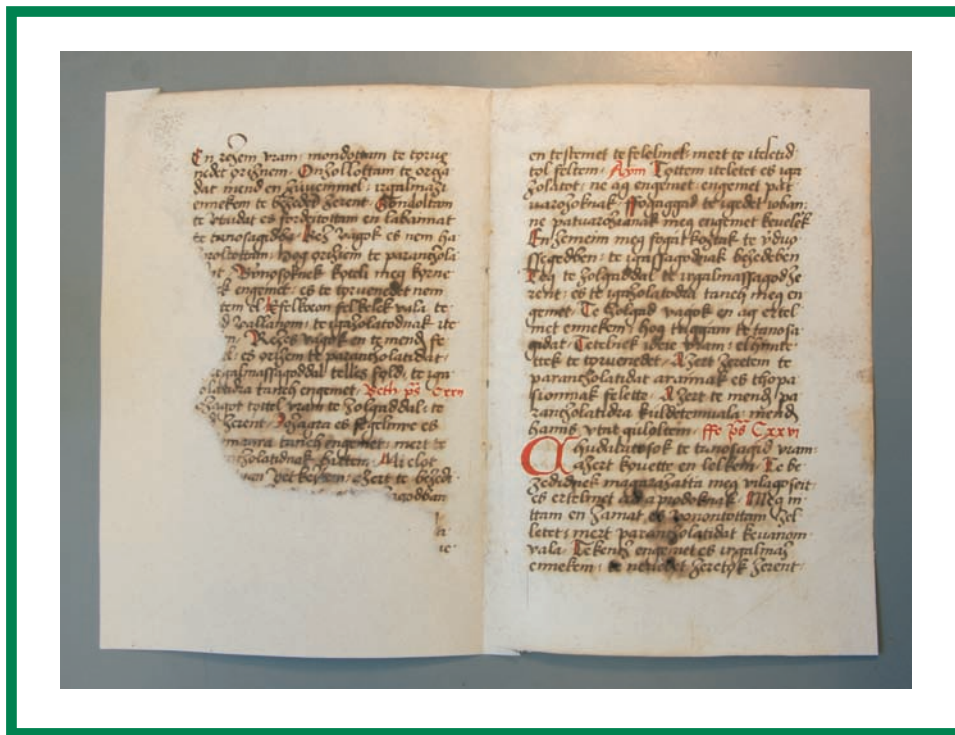
In connection with preparations for the 2009 exhibition of Hungarian language relics, the idea of combining a lease with restoration and preservation came up again. Coordinated by NSZL's Directorate for Research and Academic Affairs, professional and diplomatic moves were successful, and with Romania's EU accession things have also become easier. Thus the possibilities of inter-institutional professional cooperation were better outlined, and in the framework of a trilateral agreement (involving the two national libraries and the Székely museum) NSZL managed to lease the codex for over a year in exchange for complete restoration and digitisation. Leasing involves the possibility of a joint facsimile edition as well. The lengthy and rather delicate process of



*Language Relics from the Beginnings to the Early 16<sup>th</sup> Century*" opened in October 2009 featured not only the renewed *Apor Codex*, but, as one of the highlights, all three codices preserving the parts of the Hussite Bible, displayed together for the very first time in their long history. The oldest among them, the *Vienna Codex* is the property of NSZL, while the *Munich Codex* containing gospels

from the Old Testament was lent by the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, and the now saved *Apor Codex* will from now on be a worthy presentation of the psalms of the so-called Hussite Bible translation.

When the reincarnated book is returned to the Székely National Museum, it will have a separate exhibition in its honour, demonstrating its history and the stages of restoration. In the meantime, the National Széchényi Library is making an authentic copy and an exhibition version of



restoration was started at the end of 2008 with the support of the Balassi Institute. (The *Apor Codex* contains ink from three unknown hands. Thus one of the fundamental problems was the different levels of acid content and the related different degrees of loss of paper underneath the letters.)

The exhibition "*Behold O brethren...: Hungarian*

*the Apor Codex.*

We owe our thanks to all who have helped the noble cause, with very special thanks for the excellent work of leading restorer Zsuzsanna Tóth.

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