

In the 2009 series of events marking the Year of the Hungarian Language, the National Széchényi Library organised a major exhibition from medieval Hungarian language relics under the title “Behold O Brethren...”: *Hungarian Language Relics from the Beginnings to the Early 16th Century*” where virtually all of our outstanding relics were displayed. The unique exhibition was opened by President of Hungary László Sólyom. The display was accompanied by a detailed representative catalogue and a file of two facsimile sheets, the latter primarily for general educational purposes. Since the opening day the public may get acquainted with our written natural treasures as well as with the related content (audio materials, pictures, interactive and media connections, etc.) through a scientific and a more general web site, both of which apply a number of user-friendly techniques. With cooperation from the

Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the National Library’s website intends to act as the long-term central point of research into Hungarian language relics.

Details of the 2009 NSZL series of events (exhibition, conference, web page and others) related to the Kazinczy Memorial Year of the Hungarian Language will be reported in the 2010 Bulletin. The President’s opening address and the description of the chamber exhibition in the exhibition space of the Manuscriptorium are below, as the National Library commemorated the Kazinczy anniversary with another display as well. Under the title “*Language. Memory. Creation. Kazinczy*”, using Kazinczy-relics the Manuscript Collection introduced the background to the period from the beginnings of the written Hungarian language to the great revival, as well as Kazinczy’s relationship to language relics.

LÁSZLÓ SÓLYOM’S OPENING ADDRESS AT THE ‘BEHOLD O BRETHREN’ EXHIBITION

Dear General Director, Curator, Esteemed Guests!

I have often visited the exhibitions of the National Library with great pleasure as a visitor and occasionally also giving opening addresses. As a former librarian myself, I feel at ease and don’t insist on formalities. By way of introduction, let me recall two of my memories. As a young boy, probably still in lower primary school, I used to take Zsolt Beöthy’s literary history out of my father’s bookcase, mostly because the two volumes were in very beautiful leather bindings. At the head of one there was the *Funeral Sermon* in two columns in a letter-perfect form, as well as in its present-day reading. I never got any further, but always returned to this. I liked the solemnity of the prayer, but I was even more intrigued by the differences between the two texts, or as I would put it today, the rules governing the two texts.

Almost sixty years on, we were celebrating Saint Stephen’s Day in the village of Deáki by the Vág River in Slovakia, where the Funeral Sermon had been found and had probably been in use. In the village whose majority is still made up of Hungarians, an eighty year old retired engine-driver stood up and recited the Funeral Sermon. It was thrilling. No actor would have done it any better. Moreover it was as if we were all standing by an open grave and listening to the priest in awe. Would you ever think that this could be a present-day function of a language relic?

Dear Guests,

This exhibition presents Hungarian texts from Hungary’s first five hundred years in a totality never seen before. We can follow the development and spread of Hungarian literacy. This is an important cultural historical process. The entire background of the written language switch is involved, from the expansion of content to the sites and actors of the sources and their technical execution. We can trace how we got from Hungarian names of places and offices inserted into a Latin text to fully Hungarian pieces, who the scribes were, where and how they worked, what we can read out of the certificates and codices containing the relics, ranging from their style to book-binding, from their economic, legal and other environment. Naturally, these are the only available sources for us about the old Hungarian language, changes in its grammar, vocabulary, dialects, and even about differences between the literary and the spoken language. In addition, we can see how difficult it was to record spoken Hungarian using the Latin alphabet and how long it took to establish its own script.

The beautiful catalogue with a study amounting to a separate book included in it, reveals this wealth to us, raising our awareness of the various messages of the language relics. We should thank both the authors and the catalogue designer, but primarily the curator and the organizers of the exhibition.

Will old parchment, and perhaps ornamental but hardly legible pages of books keep people in the halls? And what lessons do visitors take away? The exhibition designers used all possible techniques, from displaying contemporary objects to applying electronic devices and even ideas for children. I will be subjective again: you can enjoy an exhibition the way you appreciate a piece of music: concentrating on the whole or on its details. In this exhibition, the resulting general impression is not due to the overall visual impact, but rather comes from each page, each line and each Hungarian word, from their inseparable direct and indirect implications. Because we should not for a minute forget that these are sacred relics, the roots of Hungarian history, our culture and national identity. Let me open the exhibition by paying due respect to them.