

LANGUAGE. MEMORY. CREATION.

KAZINCZY: –EXHIBITION IN THE MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

26th October 2009 - 28th February 2010

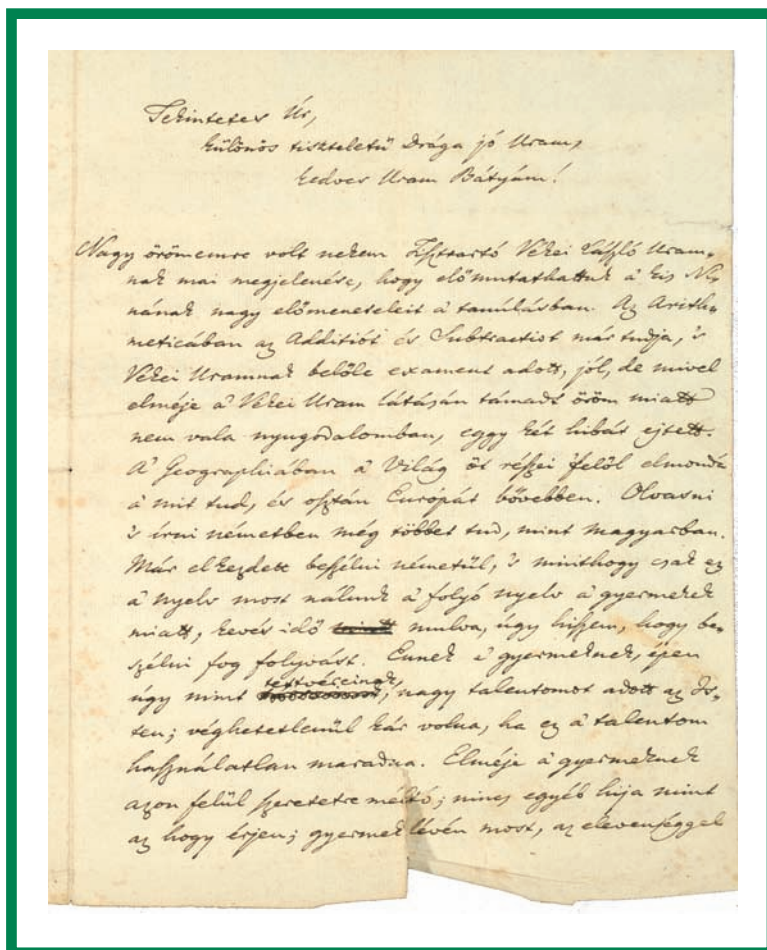


The Ministry of Education and Culture declared the 250th anniversary of Ferenc Kazinczy's birth the Year of the Hungarian Language and Communication. However, unlike with the Renaissance Year, this declaration was not associated with a comprehensive and somewhat restricting strategy. As a positive result, institutions could handle the issue quite flexibly.

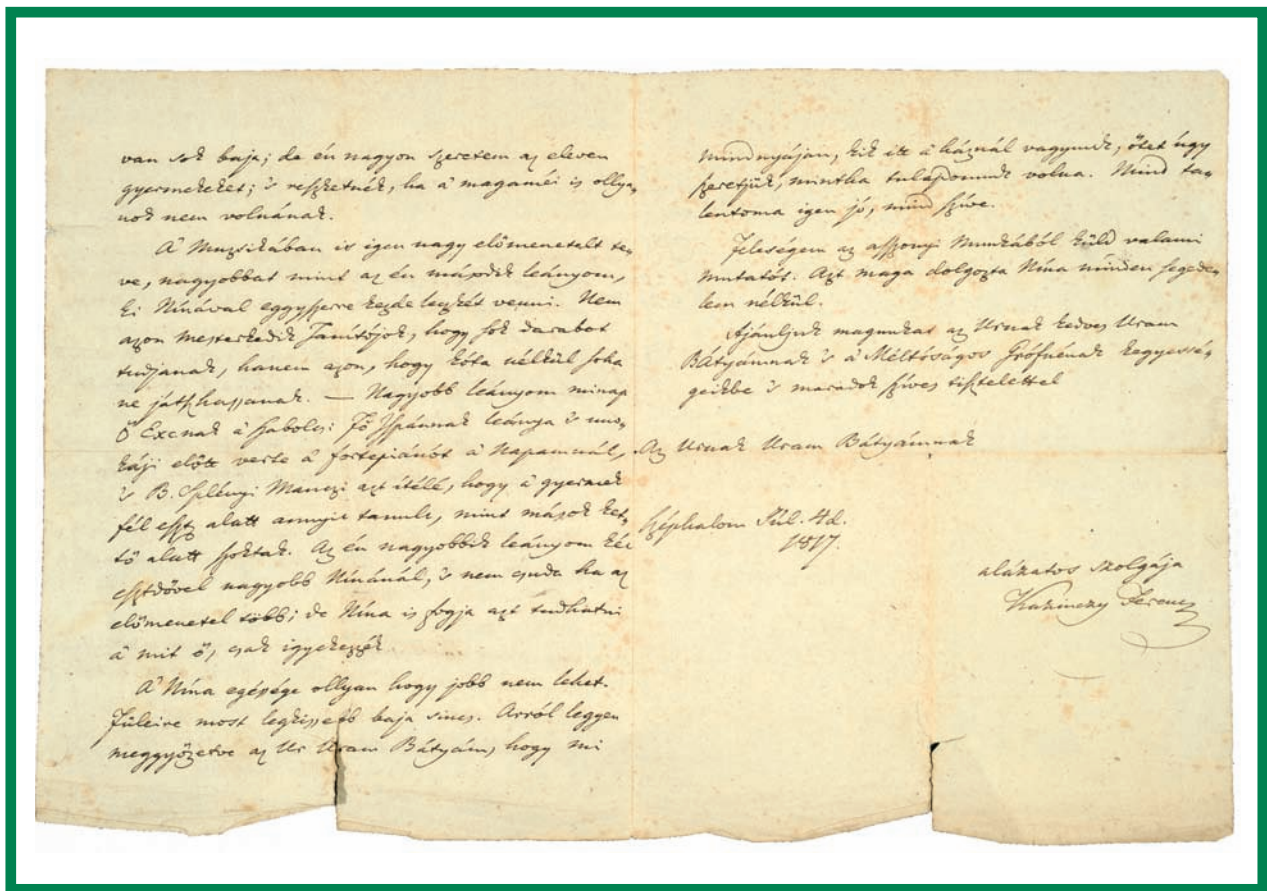
The Kazinczy anniversary has a cultic history, similarly to almost all historical and literary anniversaries. But this is somewhat different because already in his own life time Kazinczy was a cult figure in Hungarian literature. He constructed his books, portraits, objects and his whole world in a way that enabled the circle that respected him and, after his death, the whole nation to pay cultic respect to the “Sacred Sage” Cultic devotion to him has characterized all the commemorations so far, always leaving space though for interpretation and analysis. Gábor Halász, a former colleague in the Manuscript Collection, had the motto “the greatest acknowledgment is commentary” at the head of his 1931 groundbreaking Kazinczy essay. Despite the rich literature about him, certain points of Kazinczy's vast lifework still require interpretation and further exploration.

The Manuscript Collection's exhibition is intended as a contribution to these efforts, focusing on the relationship between Kazinczy and old Hungarians, on the bibliophile, the publisher and the “investigator” exploring Hungarian language relics, which in Kazinczy's career was an integral part of digging into the written sources of the Hungarian past. He was not a historical linguist; in the few pieces related to this field he relied on Miklós Révai's unquestioned authority. However, we owe Kazinczy a lot for exploring our old texts and making them available to the educated public. Assisted by Kölcsey, he worked for years in

order to have a copy of the *Debrecen Codex* produced from the original in the College. His efforts met with success. The copy we have displayed was produced in several stages, as it had to be stolen out of the



College, and accomplices were repeatedly at risk of losing their positions. Eventually, he gave the copy to István Horvát, his “student” in Pest, who had it published. It was equally difficult to obtain the unique copy of János Sylvester's *Grammatica Hungaro-Latina* from Miklós Sinaï's library (Sárvár-Újsziget, 1539) in order to have it copied. Kazinczy published it himself in the first volume of his planned *Old and Rare Hungarian Pieces* series. Unfortunately, this was the only volume that materialized, although we know from his letters that he intended to have at least



Kazinczy's so-far unknown letter to György Molnár

six volumes and that he had the table of contents for the second.

Kazinczy was also the first to publish Miklós Zrínyi's *Syrena* (apart from its 1651 edition), one of the most notable works in old Hungarian literature. The idea had been born as early as 1803, but because of his other commitments and function in literary life, he was unable to work actively with the text before the mid-1810s. Finally, *Syrena* appeared in 1817. Having no introduction, no critical comments, no biography, from a philological point it leaves much to be desired. Nevertheless, it is important that the book became accessible. Because of this undertaking and his general interest in the Zrínyis, Kazinczy managed to prevent the eruption of a minor cultural scandal which may have been caused by the Viennese court painter Peter Krafft's historical canvas, *Zrínyi's Outburst*. Initiated by Palatine Joseph and relying on public donations, Krafft started an enormous tableau for the Hungarian National Museum. However, he made a serious iconographic mistake: he depicted the Szigetvár hero based on the portrait of his great-

grandson, the poet. Kazinczy spotted the mistake before the public display of the painting and turned to the Palatine for help. Owing to his determination reflected in his letters and, naturally, to the Palatine's authority, eventually, Krafft portrayed the authentic Zrínyi.

In the booklet accompanying the exhibition, Kazinczy's correspondence gives a step by step introduction to the Zrínyi edition and the story of the painting. In addition, visitors to the Manuscriptorium can pick up another booklet as well: a copy of Kazinczy's letter addressed to György Molnár with a transcript of the text. The so far unknown letter was found in an unprocessed fond of the Manuscript Collection.

The National Széchényi Library could not have paid tribute to Kazinczy's memory more appropriately than by presenting the newly discovered letter.

Ferenc Földesi
foldesi@oszk.hu