

LANGUAGE RELICS ON THE INTERNET



Parallel to opening its large-scale exhibition on the relics of the Hungarian language, the National Széchényi Library also launched a multimedia service entitled **Old Hungarian Language Relics**. During the planning of the website the idea was raised of employing the same service to reach both researchers and wider groups of users, taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the internet. Alongside more than 130 language relics in the academic section we also highlighted 16 texts of particular importance in the exposure section. We added special captions to the names of some the language relics, giving concise statements as to why the document is of particular value to everyone who understands Hungarian. Apart from our two oldest and most quoted texts – *Funeral Sermon and Prayer* (the earliest known continuous Hungarian text relic) and the *Old Hungarian Lament of Mary* (the oldest surviving Hungarian language poem) – the list includes items such as the first Hungarian language voucher (*András Vér's Safe Conduct Pass*), the oldest song surviving in the original (the *Szabács Encounter*), and the oldest Hungarian book (the *Jókai Codex*). The compilation also contains the first map printed in Hungary, the *Tabula Hungariae*, also known as the *Lázár Map*. We hope that putting this into our exposure section will help it become public knowledge that this work won the *UNESCO Memory of the World* title in 2007, and as such is unique among Hungarian language relics.

On the website we planned two sections which although graphically separate are interconnected. The two markedly different worlds of colour – the exposure section in burgundy and the academic in silver – are bound together by a ribbon of the well-known text, the *Old Hungarian Lament of Mary*, winding down the spiral of time, and the stylised tulip from the treasure of Hungarian motifs. And in the silver background, a part of the text from the *Funeral Sermon* shows through. Every page of the website offers an opportunity to move between the two sections. The connection between the content demonstrates our conviction that we should offer both scientific researchers and schoolchildren or other interested people the same level of quality and a format that encourages them to take a look at the other section.

The data sheets are at the heart of the service in the *Drupal* content management system. Their design and the definition of each data field was the combined work of researchers, web designers, and programmers. Every

language relic was assigned its own data sheet which, along with the most important information (name, place and date of writing, material of relic, number of pages, size, location, writing mode, information about the binding, etc.) also contained an academic description of the language relic, and, in certain cases, the digitalised version, stating the time and place of the digitalisation. Every description was originally prepared for the exhibition catalogue and written by researchers, before being adapted for the website.

Scrutinising the data sheets reveals evidence of the ongoing academic study and remaining digitalisation of the texts, because in many cases the description of the language relic is missing from the data sheet as the text has not yet been academically studied. This creates the theoretical possibility of having a well-defined content service with its own information fields, the status of which can draw attention to and define the direction for further work to be done. Given the lack of capacity the processing of “raw” digitalised pictures (in some cases codices of several hundred pages) is progressing slowly. At the same time, several virtually unified codices and documents have been completed since the website was launched.

Publishing the text of the language relic, compiling the list of technical literature, researching the digital content and organising the continued digitalisation were major tasks for the editors. Over the last century and a half several “text publication series” have been issued. Of the two series in the 19th century, an electronic version has been prepared of the six volumes of the *Old Hungarian Language Relics* with the cooperation of the *Hungarian Electronic Library* (MEK), whilst the links for the fifteen volumes of the *Treasury of Relics of old Hungarian Language* lead to the *KlimoTheca*, the digital collection of the library of the University of Pécs. In terms of the 20th century text publications, four of the nine volumes of the *Codices Hungarici* are available in the system at the time of writing, while the digital version of the remaining 5 volumes can be read as part of the *Old Hungarian Codices* series, which is currently being published and now has 31 volumes. Alongside the summary series we have published lists of publications of the documents, broken down by language relic. These lists contain both the items of text publication series and the separate entries for individual language relics. Many of the texts prepared for displays at the exhibition were included in the compilation too. In

these downloadable compilations wellknown linguists and literary historians have summarised the latest research results and theories (e.g. *Analysis of the Historical Sources of Place Names in the Árpád Era at the Department of Hungarian Linguistics of the University of Debrecen*).

Research for the lists of technical literature on language relics in general and certain language relics in particular as well as for content available on the internet was perhaps the greatest challenge. We collected the relevant pieces of literature and arranged them under the headings of the language relics they deal with, before linking the versions of the summaries, studies and articles already available on the internet. Researchers have yet to check and complement the lists, but at the same time the lists are continuously being expanded with new items as a result of the work of the NSZL's Content Provision Department.

During discussions with researchers it was decided that audio materials and multimedia elements would primarily be available in the exposure section. For this reason, in the academic section the only recitals available are of the four language relics whose texts could previously be heard at the exhibition. Other items of interest include several works of literature inspired by language relics, e.g. a rendition of Dezsó Kosztolányi's *Funeral Sermon* by Zoltán Latinovits and László Ménsáros. In the exposure section we have published other multimedia elements: nearly forty audio items and ten film excerpts are available to help those

involved in public education and other users who may be interested. Some of the audio pieces were provided by *Hungaraton Records Ltd*, while we received the films from the collections of the *Hungarian Television Corporation* and the *Hungarian National Film Archive*. Most of the audio material was prepared for the website in the NSZL's own studio. The voices of well-known artists can be heard on the 32 recordings, including that of late actor Tamás Végvári, reading a modern version of the *Funeral Sermon and Prayer* in one of his last recordings.

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Since its launch in autumn 2009 the website has been expanded with various content. We have completed all the data sheets and uploaded the available material, whilst also checking the accuracy of the information. A map of the locations where texts are kept has also been prepared, and this in itself demonstrates the unity of Hungarian culture transcending borders and centuries. In this context the translation of data sheets for language relics kept outside Hungary has also started. The Czech, Croatian, Polish, German and Romanian language data sheets for the twelve Hungarian language relics kept outside Hungary and appearing on the website will be published in the first half of 2011. We also plan to publish transcriptions and interpretations as well as digitalise specialist literature and expand the series of literary works inspired by language relics.

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