

# THE MUNICH CORVINAS



*Ex Bibliotheca Corviniana. Die acht Münchener Handschriften aus dem Besitz von König Matthias Corvinus.* Hrsg. von Claudia FABIAN, Edina ZSUPÁN.

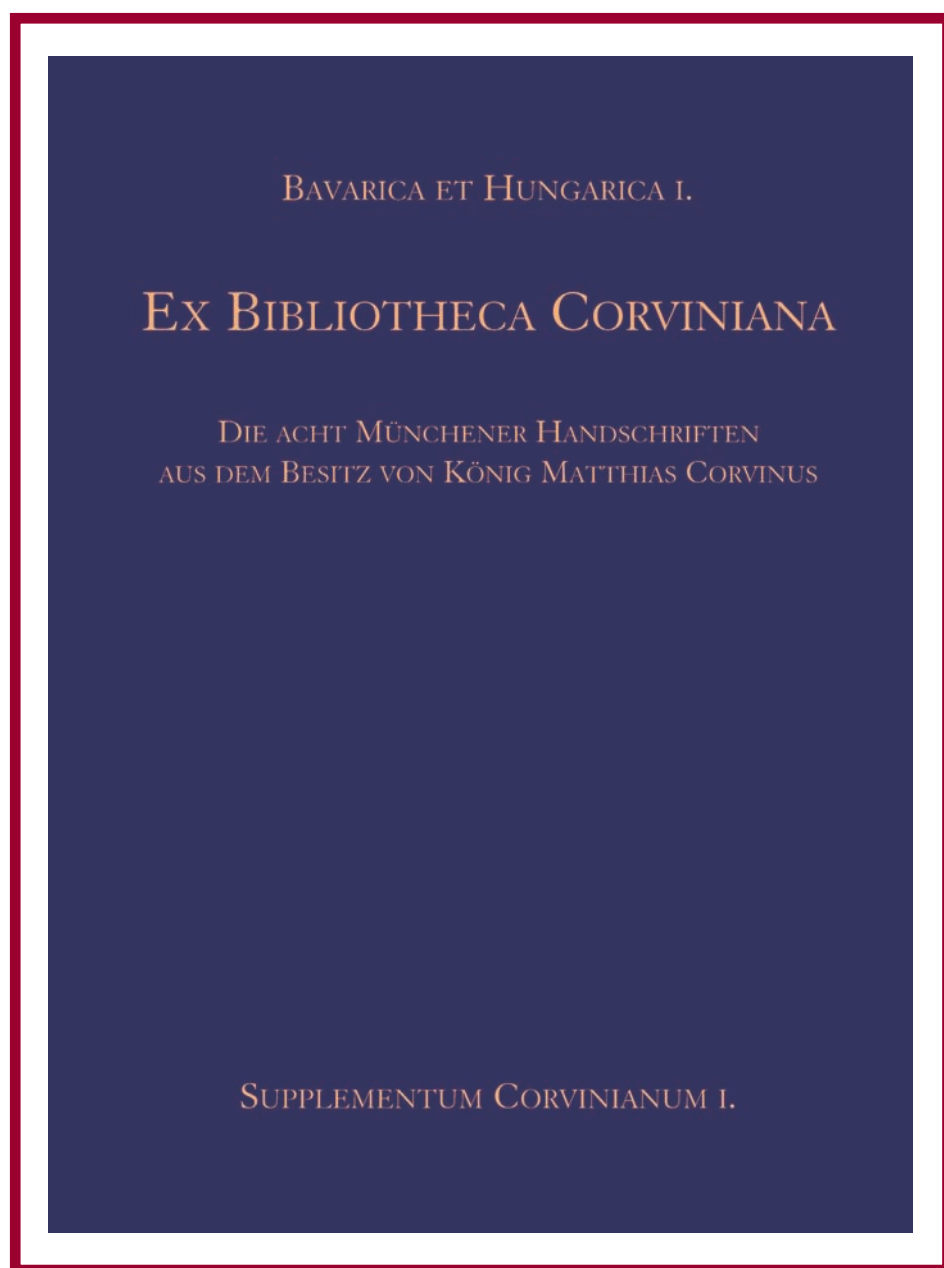
(Supplementum Corvinianum I.  
= Bavarica et Hungarica I.)  
Budapest, 2008.

Within cooperation with the Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, in 2008 the National Széchényi Library launched two series: *Bavarica et Hungarica* and *Supplementum Corvinianum*. Both titles speak for themselves. Volumes of *Bavarica et Hungarica* will from time to time present to readers library documents, medieval and modern manuscripts, prints, small prints and posters of Bavarian and Hungarian interest. The other series, *Supplementum Corvinianum*, has set a very different objective. Applying several perspectives, it intends to give a complex introduction of the corvina groups kept in Hungarian and international collections. The first stage of the project was the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. Therefore, the first volume of the two series coincided, and as a result a detailed catalogue of corvina manuscripts in Munich was produced, complete with accompanying studies. The volume is a tribute to the Bibliotheca Corviniana, the “Magnificent Library” on the occasion that in 2005 UNESCO managed to have its surviving copies included in the Memory of the World Register.

Forewords by directors of the cooperating libraries, István Monok and Griebel Rolf are followed by a study written by Ferenc Földesi, the head of NSZL’s Manuscript Collection, bearing the title *Bibliotheca Corviniana. Die Bibliothek und ihr Gedächtnis*. The paper gives a comprehensive and carefully shaded image of Matthias Hunyadi’s library, never losing sight of the underlying theme of legend building and legend development. Földesi introduces and rearranges the academic issues addressed in connection with the Bibliotheca Corviniana. The study ends with an evaluative review of recent literature and its priorities.

The eight-member corvina group kept in Munich boasts two highly valuable manuscripts written in Greek. One, a beautiful parchment codex, contains the works of the antique historiographers, Polybius and Herodianos, as well as a very popular late antique romance, Heliodoros’s *Aithiopika*. The text was copied in Constantinople in the first third of the 15<sup>th</sup>

century in the fine handwriting of Isidoros of Kiev, a high-ranking member of the Byzantine clergy. The codex left its place of birth following the fall of the city in 1453, setting out on its journey covered in mystery. A more modest paper codex contains two texts that fall into the sphere of Neo-Platonism: a work by Plotinus and Porphyrios’s Plotinos biography. According to the colophon, it was copied in the Cretan town of Gortyn in 1464–65 by the Spartan Demetrios Triboles, who belonged to the circle of Cardinal Bessarion. In the volume, however, the hand of another Cretan scribe, namely Michaél Lygizos of Kydonia is also recognizable. In her paper, *Mit glücklicher Hand errettet? Zur Provenienzgeschichte der griechischen Corvinen in München*, Kerstin Hajdú, a colleague at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek produced a thorough codicological description of the two codices, offering a detailed account rich in data, about the fate of the volumes after the “Corviniana”, touching in more general terms on the complicated but exciting adventures of corvinas taking them to German-speaking territories. She discusses the general, but little researched problems of Greek corvinas, and within this framework questions that the Porphyrios–Plotinos codex should be a corvina. The six manuscripts in Latin represent different phases of the royal library’s history. The epic work of Tommaso Seneca and poems by Gaspar Tribachus pay a lyrical tribute to the brave deeds of Galeazzo Marescotti, a contemporary knight in Bologna. The codex was made around 1460 in Ferrara. Two other manuscripts also date back to the 1460s, but this time to Florence: the Latin translation of some orations by Demosthenes and Aischines, as well as Celsus’s *De medicina* form part of the library’s early layer. Moreover, the Demosthenes corvina was probably originally in János Vitéz’s possession. In the early 1480s, the prefect of the Vatican Library, Christophoro Persona, translated into Latin the work of the Byzantine historiographer, Agathias, and dedicated a copy of it to Matthias Hunyadi. The codex was made in Rome in 1483–84. The small manuscript introducing the provenance of the Septuaginta, however, originates from the Buda workshop, and may be dated to around 1480. The ornate codex that was just being made in Buda at the time of Matthias’s death records the moment of changing monarchs. The Buda manuscripts of Beda Venerabilis and Seneca gained their final form under Ulaslo II’s crest. The

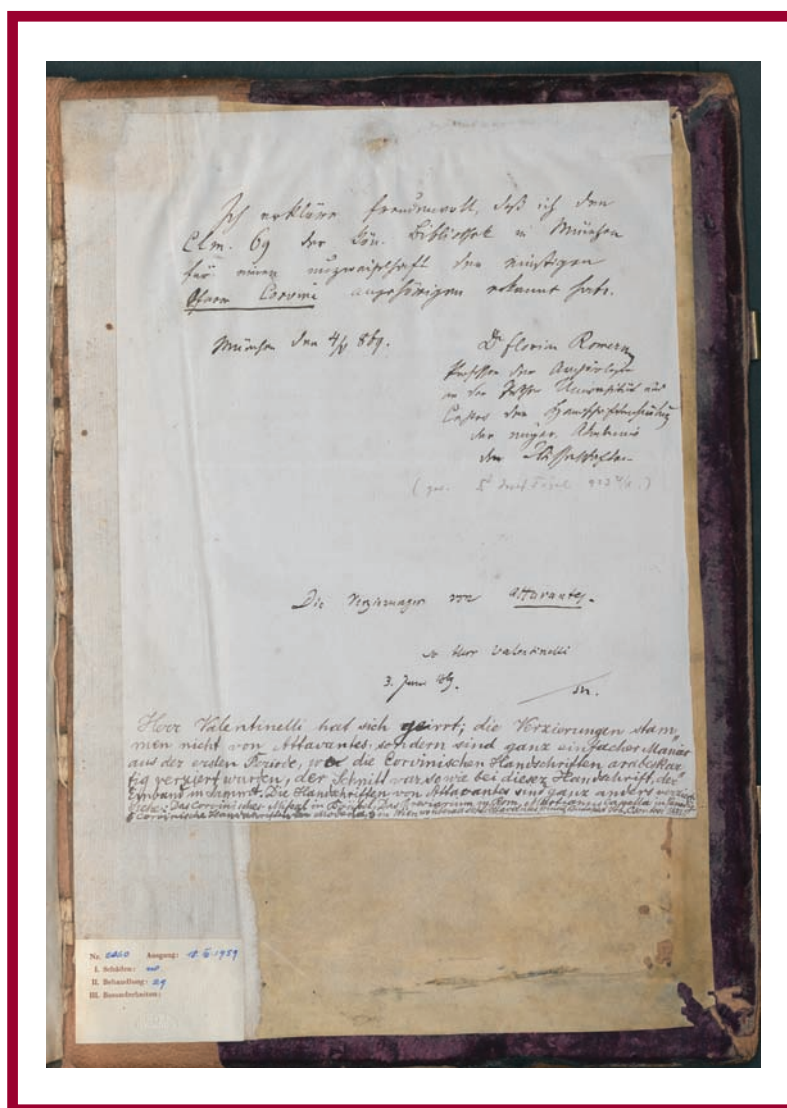


author of the present article prepared the detailed codicological description of the manuscripts listed, under the title of *Die Bibliotheca Corviniana im Kleinen. Beschreibungen der lateinischen Corvinen der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek*, and also attempted to place individual volumes in the general problematic of Corvinas. The study paid attention to the fate of codices “following the Corviniana” and their life in the Bavarian library, underlining the role of the Fuggers and their trade representatives in the manuscripts leaving Hungary.

Ulrike Bauer-Eberhardt, an art historian in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek did the analysis of Latin manuscripts from the point of art history (*Italienischer Buchschmuck in den Münchner Corvinen*), in most cases managing to identify illuminators. This was especially important for the two codices with

Florentine tendrils, as in this respect corvina research has had serious gaps. The author’s other equally significant attainment is naming the illuminator of one of the main manuscripts in the National Széchényi Library, the collection of eclogues dedicated by Gaspar Tribachus to János Vitéz, identifying him as Guglielmo Giraldi, the most outstanding book artist in Ferrara at the time.

Of the pieces in the corvina group, the six codices written in Latin bear the characteristic binding of corvinas, whose analysis has been conducted by Marianne Rozsondai, the head of the manuscript department within the Library of the Hungarian Academy Sciences (*Über die Einbände der in München aufbewahrten Corvinen*). A most valuable appendix to her study is the comparative table of the original



Notes by Flóris Rómer, József Főgel and János Csontos on a sheet attached to the interior of the back binding panel of the Celsus corvine (Munich, BSB, Clm 69)

stamps of the corvina master and the stamps used with the Beda corvina binding under Ulaslo II. The volume introducing the corvinas kept in Munich intends to be used primarily as a source of data, offering starting points for further research. The main message of the undertaking using multiple perspectives is that the complex analysis of a given group of

codices might completely change the image of the Corviniana, new answers might be given to existing questions, and in the meantime, new questions are continuously raised.

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