

Media and Literature  
in Multilingual Hungary  
1770–1820

Edited by  
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# The Newspaper as a Medium for Developing National Language, Literature, and Science

Mátyás Rát and the Magyar Hírmondó between 1780 and 1782\*

In the Habsburg Empire, periodicals, newspapers, journals and magazines only started to be published regularly a couple of decades after they did in other European countries. By the second half of the eighteenth century, Habsburg publishers had caught up though, meaning that by the 1770s the citizens of the Empire were able to choose from a wide selection of printed periodicals.<sup>1</sup> As the administrative language was Latin at the time, and various local ethnic groups also

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1 On the history of media in eighteenth-century Hungary see *Zeitschriften und Zeitungen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, Hrsg. von István FRIED, Hans LEMBERG und Edith ROSENSTRAUCH-KÖNIGSBERG, Studien zur Geschichte und Kulturbeziehungen in Mittel- und Osteuropa 8 (Essen: Hobbing, 1987); Andrea SEIDLER und Wolfram SEIDLER, *Das Zeitschriftenwesen im Donauraum zwischen 1740 und 1809: Kommentierte Bibliographie der deutsch und ungarischsprachigen Zeitschriften in Wien, Preßburg und Pest-Buda* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1988); Andrea SEIDLER, “Das deutsche Zeitschriftenwesen des Donauraumes (Wien-Preßburg-Pest/Buda) in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts”, in *A magyar nyelv és kultúra a Duna völgyében: Die ungarische Sprache und Kultur im Donauraum. Bd. 1: Beziehungen und Wechselwirkungen an der Wende des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, Hrsg. von Moritz CSÁKY, Horst HASELSTEINER, KLANICZAY Tibor és/und RÉDEI Károly, 106–114 (Budapest-Wien: Nemzetközi Magyar Filológiai Társaság, 1989); Andrea SEIDLER, “Gelehrter Diskurs und die Entstehung der ersten Gelehrten Zeitschrift in Ungarn im späten 18. Jahrhundert”, in *Zur Medialisierung gesellschaftlicher Kommunikation in Österreich und Ungarn. Studien zur Presse im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, Hrsg. von Norbert BACHLEITNER und Andrea SEIDLER, Finno-Ugrian Studies in Austria 4, 17–48 (Wien-Berlin-Münster: LIT, 2007), 17–18.

used German in their regular exchanges, until 1780 the language of the newspapers and periodicals was also mainly German, and to a lesser extent Latin.<sup>2</sup> Vienna was the centre of media publishing, although some papers were issued in Bratislava.<sup>3</sup> The topics of these newspapers not only covered politics and public life, but also economics, agriculture, science, history, geography, ethics, culture, and literature.

It was also a challenge to create print media in the Empire's ethnic languages, which would allow the non-German speaking nationalities to become independent and cultivate culture in their own tongues.<sup>4</sup> The first Hungarian-language newspaper was established by Ferenc Ágoston Patzkó (1732–1799), a printer from Bratislava, and by Mátyás Rát (1749–1810), a Protestant clergyman and scholar. In 1779, they received approval from the Bratislava magistrate, the publisher of the *Pressburger Zeitung*, the printer Johann Michael Landerer and the Council of the governor-general, and also got permission from Maria Theresa. They called the newspaper *Magyar Hírmondó* [*Hungarian Herald*], and its first issue was published on January 1, 1780.<sup>5</sup> The paper came out twice a week,

- 2 On the history of native-language media and literature in eighteenth-century Hungary see György KÓKAY, "Ungarische, deutsche und tschechische/slowakische Zeitungspläne in Ungarn am Ende des XVIII. Jahrhunderts", *Magyar Könyvszemle* 88, No. 3–4 (1972): 220–232; István MARGÓCSY, "Some Aspects of Hungarian Neology", *Hungarian Studies* 5, No. 1 (1989): 3–8; Andrea SEIDLER, "Sprachenvielfalt als konstituierendes Element der ungarischen Presse im 18. Jahrhundert", in *Multilingualism and multiculturalism in Finno-Ugric Literatures*, ed. Johanna LAAKSO and Johanna DOMOKOS, *Finno-Ugric Studies in Austria* 8, 157–170 (Zürich–Berlin: LIT, 2011); Andrea SEIDLER, "The Long Road of Hungarian Media to Multilingualism: On the Replacement of Latin in the Kingdom of Hungary in the Course of the Eighteenth Century", in *Latin at the Crossroads of Identity: The Evolution of Linguistic Nationalism in the Kingdom of Hungary*, ed. Gábor ALMÁSI and Lav ŠUBARIĆ, 152–165 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2015); Piroska BALOGH, *The Language Question and the Paradoxes of Latin Journalism in Eighteenth-Century Hungary*, in *Ibid.*, 166–190; István FRIED, "From 'Hungarus' Patriotism to Linguistic Nationalism", in: *The Palgrave Handbook of Slavic Languages, Identities and Borders*, ed. Catherine GIBSON, Tomasz KAMUSELLA and Motoki NOMACHI, 245–260 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
- 3 On the periodicals published in Pressburg see Jozef TANCER, *Im Schatten Wiens. Zur deutschsprachigen Presse und Literatur im Pressburg des 18. Jahrhunderts*, *Presse und Geschichte – Neue Beiträge*, 32 (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2008).
- 4 Andrea SEIDLER, "Systemtheoretische Überlegungen zu einer möglichen Standortbestimmung des ungarischen Pressewesens im 18. Jahrhundert", in *Deutsche Sprache und Kultur im Raum Pressburg*, Hrsg. von Wynfrid Kriegleder, 155–173 (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2002), 158; Andrea SEIDLER, "Multiethnizität und Mehrsprachigkeit im Königreich Ungarn im 18. Jhd. Eine Untersuchung der sprachlichen Entstehungsbedingungen von Zeitung und Zeitschrift", in *Deutschsprachige Zeitungen in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, Hrsg. von Jörg RIECKE und Britt-Marie SCHUSTER, 348–361 (Berlin: Weidler Buchverlag, 2005).
- 5 See János POÓR, "Die erste Zeitung in ungarischer Sprache »Magyar Hírmondó«: Politisches Ge-



on Wednesdays and Saturdays and was printed in octavo format, in a single column on half a printed sheet per issue.

Between 1780 and 1782, Mátyás Rát wrote and edited *Magyar Hírmondó* by himself, although he did rely heavily on his correspondents for content. In the beginning there were more than 300 subscribers, mainly citizens of Bratislava, although it was also sent to subscribers in Vienna, Pest, Győr, Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca, Oradea, Pápa, Debrecen, Komárom/Komárno, Pécs, Sopron, Trnava, Nitra, Buda, Eger, Prešov, Gyula, Sighetu Marmației, Târgu Mureș, Ónod, Székesfehérvár and Veszprém. A few copies were even distributed abroad. Some of the most important figures in the Hungarian aristocracy and intelligentsia were subscribers, namely, György Festetics, Lőrinc Orczy, Gedeon Ráday, Sámuel Teleki, Miklós Bethlen, József Benkő, Elek Horányi, Miklós Révai, József Keresztury, István Sándor, János Mosotzi Institoris, and Sámuel Tessedik. As there was no official Hungarian literary language, *Magyar Hírmondó* was written using the dialect of the Great Hungarian Plain, but Rát often used phrases and idioms from the Transdanubian region and Transylvania as well. He often voiced his own opinion, which meant he was constantly battling with the censors. His main goal was to inform readers about public life, politics, and economics. He regularly published information on events in other European countries and around the world, as well as from within the Habsburg Empire. Very few column inches were left for news on science, the book market or Hungarian literature. However, *Magyar Hírmondó* did publish a smattering of news articles and literary publications related to the history of science and Hungarian literature. As Rát writes in 1780, “let me [...] inform the curious reader of a few things, even though these are not entertaining or memorable stories, yet [...] let them fill a small space here”.<sup>6</sup>

We can divide the relevant articles and news pieces into a few subgroups. There are a number of book advertisements, reviews, and overviews of newly published Hungarian-language books, although Rát was aware that “[even] the reports about books [...] do not suit everyone’s taste”.<sup>7</sup> The editors also regularly reported news and information on the lives and achievements of Hungarian and foreign scholars, as well as essays on literary history and aesthetics. In this paper, I analyse the results of the research of these particular primary sources, and I

sicht – das Bild Ungarns – das Bild des Auslands”, in *Zeitschriften und Zeitungen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, Hrsg. von István FRIED, Hans LEMBERG und Edith ROSEN-  
STRAUCH-KÖNIGSBERG, 159–174 (Essen: Hobbing, 1987); SEIDLER, *The Long Road...*, 152, 163.

<sup>6</sup> *Magyar Hírmondó* (henceforward: *MH*), No. 7 (22 January 1780), 55.

<sup>7</sup> *MH*, No. 7 (22 January 1780), 56.

demonstrate the insights they offer into the eighteenth-century history of science and literature.

*The network of Magyar Hírmondó subscribers and correspondents*

Mátyás Rát was born in Győr and studied at the Bratislava and Sopron Evangelical lyceums after completing his primary studies. József Benczur, one of his teachers in Bratislava had a particularly great impact on him. Rát even commemorated him in *Magyar Hírmondó*. After his secondary studies, Rát travelled around the Kingdom of Hungary and Transylvania. He refers to these journeys when he mentions in *Magyar Hírmondó* his formidable knowledge of the precise names of Hungarian municipalities and regions. When he came back from travelling, he completed his university studies in Germany. In Göttingen, he studied under August Schlözer, taking this renowned professor's journalism course.<sup>8</sup>

The fragments of his *album amicorum* tell us about the network of acquaintances he built up during his years in Hungary and Göttingen.<sup>9</sup> The earliest entry was written in the autumn of 1772. Then in the spring of 1773, 38 of his relatives, classmates and friends living around Győr, Sopron and Bratislava wrote in his album. The first entry from Göttingen was written on September 10, 1773. Rát studied at the university until May 1777. From this period, forty-six of his classmates and professors are named in the album. Many of these people came from Hungarian towns, both Hungarian and German speaking and included György Méhes, József Sófalvi, Ferenc Fekete, Jónás Sámuel Palumbini, László Toldalagi, Ádám Radák, Carl von Bruckenthal and Michael Hissmann. He also mentions other acquaintances from towns outside Hungary, including Johann Nikolaus Schragen, Heinrich Borstelmann, Samuel Thörl, Jan W. H. Buch, Carl Ludwig Buch, Georg Heinrich Borheck and Kaspar Eichler. In the summer of 1777, after visiting Kassel, Erlangen, Nürnberg and Regensburg in Germany Rát returned to Hungary.

What all this shows is that Rát already had a wide network of Hungarian and international acquaintances in 1780, at the time he set up *Magyar Hírmondó*. In

8 SEIDLER, *Systemtheoretische Überlegungen*, 158–159; Annamária BIRÓ, “Schlözer und Ungarn”, in *August Ludwig (von) Schlözer in Europa*, Hrsg. von Heinz DUCHHARDT und Martin ESPENHORST, 69–84 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 74.

9 The digitized version of Rát's *album amicorum* is available in an online database: <http://iaa.bibl.u-szeged.hu/index.php?page=home>, downloaded: March 26, 2019.

Bratislava and Göttingen he may have been in contact with Masonic circles, although we do not know if he was ever a member. The source for studying his editorial and journalistic activities in more depth is his correspondence, although unfortunately very few of his letters have survived. This is true of his personal correspondence and the letters he may have written in relation to *Magyar Hírmondó*. For this reason, his social network can be reconstructed only partially, based on the *album amicorum* and a handful of letters that have been preserved.

The launch of *Magyar Hírmondó* was preceded by a call for subscriptions, issued on July 1, 1779. The call was signed by Ferenc Patzkó, but presumably Rát wrote the text. For Rát, launching a Hungarian-language newspaper was necessary because all the other European nations had print media in their own languages, and periodicals were regularly being published even in the larger towns in America. Although there were people in the country who read newspapers in German, Latin, French or Italian, Rát believed that Hungarian news should primarily be reported by a local newspaper. The call for subscriptions was widely circulated, and Rát received a number of replies. Due to a lack of documentation, we do not know who the subscribers were, and a letter Rát wrote on November 19, 1779, his only known extant correspondence on this topic, proves particularly valuable.<sup>10</sup> The letter was addressed to Jacob Ferdinand Miller (1749–1823), who was a professor of history and the librarian at the Oradea Grammar School, then the Academy. In the letter, Rát wrote in German, he thanked Miller and his other acquaintances from Oradea for subscribing to *Magyar Hírmondó*. Rát also wrote that he himself would be the editor and would therefore like to ask for Miller's help in forwarding news about foreign affairs.

While most of the articles published in *Magyar Hírmondó* were indeed written by Rát, he also included some letters and excerpts from his correspondents, who were usually uncredited, with only the name of the town the news came from being mentioned.<sup>11</sup> Rát received reports from every corner of the country: Upper Hungary, Transylvania, the Great Hungarian Plain and Transdanubia. Without further research we cannot identify who Rát's correspondents were. However, we know that one of his regular correspondents was József Benkő (1740–1814), an Aita Medie dwelling Protestant clergyman and professor of botany at the Academy of Cluj-Napoca. Between 1780 and 1782, excerpts from

10 MAY István, "Miller Jakab Ferdinánd levelesládájából" ["From Jakab Ferdinánd Miller's Correspondence"], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 107, 3 (1991): 266–278, 266.

11 On Rát's Transylvanian correspondents see Annamária Biró's paper *Siebenbürgische Präsenz in der Presse Westungarns: Die Korrespondenten Johann Seivert und József Benkő* in this volume.

thirty-seven of Benkő's letters were published in *Magyar Hírmondó*. Other correspondents we know of included Bernát Benyák (1745–1829), a Piarist monk and teacher from Buda, Pál Szeniczai Bárány (1748–1806), a Lutheran pastor from Varsád, János Szarka (?–1786), a teacher at the Sopron lyceum, and Sámuel Pataki, a physician from Cluj-Napoca. We know little about Rát's acquaintances in Bratislava. He was certainly in daily contact with the editors of *Pressburger Zeitung* (published from 1764), Karl Gottlieb Windisch and Johann Matthias Korabinszky, although there is no known documentation of their relationship. However, in his autobiography, Korabinszky mentions that when he was preparing Mátyás Bél's grammar *Der ungarische Sprachmeister* for publication (the first edition was published in Bratislava, 1779), Rát was the language editor of the text.<sup>12</sup>

The exact nature of the relationship between Rát and his professor from Göttingen, Schlözer, is yet to be explored. Their correspondence was presumably uninterrupted for several more years or decades. This assumption is supported by the fact that in 1787, Schlözer published Rát's piece, *Über die Ausrottung der ungarischen Sprache* in the journal *Staats-Anzeigen*, which he edited.<sup>13</sup> Rát also mentioned Schlözer in *Magyar Hírmondó*. In the issue from June 3, 1780, he wrote that Schlözer had reported on the launch of *Magyar Hírmondó* in his newspaper *Briefwechsel meist statistischen*, while he also mentioned a Finnish newspaper, which quickly had to be discontinued due to a lack of subscribers. Rát expressed the hope that his own newspaper would not meet the same fate.<sup>14</sup>

### *The types and subjects of articles published in Magyar Hírmondó*

As *Magyar Hírmondó* was the first, and for many years, the only Hungarian-language newspaper in print, it had to serve several different functions. Rát's mission was to compile the contents of the newspaper in such a way that readers from different social statuses, occupations and levels of education could all find

12 HORVÁTH Terézia, "Korabinszky János Mátyás és fő műve: a *Geographisch-historisches und Produkten Lexikon von Ungarn*" ["Johann Matthias Korabinsky and His Major Work, the *Geographisch-historisches und Produkten Lexikon von Ungarn*"], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 109, No. 1 (1993): 37–53, 39.

13 KÓKAY György, "Rát Mátyás röpirata II. József ellen, a magyar nyelv érdekében" ["Mátyás Rát's Pamphlet against Joseph II, in the interest of the Hungarian language"], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 82, No. 4 (1966): 305–316.

14 *MH*, No. 45 (3 June, 1780), 368.

interesting articles within. *Magyar Hirmondó* reported on daily events in Hungary, Europe and other parts of the world. It also published educational articles on science, and occasionally provided some comic relief as well.

Rát relied mainly on local and foreign newspapers when putting together his foreign affairs columns. On December 6, 1780 he complained that he was working strenuously, and that much of his editorial work was “boring, difficult translation”.<sup>15</sup> He also often grumbled that news about politics and public life was for superficial people, and did not teach anyone anything real or useful. Based on letters he received from around the country, he regularly reported on the weather and how the conditions affected agriculture. He covered the biggest cases of insect damage, data on crop yields and changes in crop pricing. He often included his own commentary. He complemented the reports with further data and explanations based on his own knowledge. At times, his commentaries included his own experiences. For example, in the issue of November 29, he commented on Benkő’s letter (dated November 11) about spectacular Transylvanian greenhouses, and that he himself had seen a *Cactus grandiflora* blooming in the botanical garden of the University of Göttingen on August 3, 1776.<sup>16</sup> He regularly published interesting features. These included a story about a girl born without arms, who had still learnt to spin and weave with her feet, and a woman who gave birth to twins twice. He always separated verifiable stories from those he considered fiction. On the last page of the newspaper, he often gave some space to public announcements and advertisements (a house for sale in Győr, a brewery for sale in Bratislava, a boy that traded in stolen furs who had escaped, a list of firms that sold rose oil and the products of a Viennese kitchenware company in Bratislava, among many others).

Alongside information on politics, public life, economics, agriculture, health, and entertaining stories, there were some news pieces about culture and science (although very few). The new types of communication that had been forming and the growing market for print media provided scientific studies

15 *MH*, No. 98 (6 December, 1780), 800. On translating as a commonly used method in eighteenth-century journal writing see Aina NØDING, “The Editor as Scout: The Rapid Mediation of International Texts in Provincial Journals”, in *Eighteenth-Century Periodicals as Agents of Change: Perspectives on Northern Enlightenment*, ed. Ellen KREFTING, Aina NØDING and Mona RINGVEJ, 62–76 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2015). As Nøding argues: “For periodicals [...] satisfying their audience’s tastes and changing interests often meant offering readers a number of translations. [...] The art and quantity of translations were determined by the type of periodical, its place of publication, and the editor’s individual tastes and interests.” *Ibid.*, 66.

16 *MH*, No. 96 (29 November 1780), 774.

with a new framework, as the results of experiments had become more easily accessible and useable. The rapid development of the sciences became possible precisely due to the dynamic communication enabled by newspapers and periodicals being published on a regular basis.<sup>17</sup> This kind of dynamic communication, focusing increasingly on one discipline specifically, only emerged in Hungary in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In the 1780s, Rát's only contributions to the dissemination of scientific knowledge and the promotion of literature were the short news items he published in these fields, along with short works of poetry and prose. We can assume that most of *Magyar Hirmondó's* readers did not appreciate these pieces. In one of his articles, Rát writes that "Those who do not like reports on books have nothing to fear today, as they will not have to read such things."<sup>18</sup> Based on an article from the January 22, 1780 issue, we can assume that the seven issues that had been published up until then had been criticized by readers both in terms of language and content. In his response, Rát tries to answer charges especially regarding the latter, and he also lists several arguments for why he was giving space to news and reflections on science and culture:

Reports on books, I believe, are not to everyone's taste. However, I cannot give in on this matter. I never intended to write only about changes of reign [i.e. in empires and countries]. Advertising the progress and growth of sciences is of utmost importance. Hungarians do not have the weekly and monthly printed periodicals of other nations (Wochenschriften, gelehrte Zeitungen, Intelligenz-Blätter, Magazine, etc.). *Magyar Hirmondó* has to make up for this deficit. I also know that there are many who do wish to read reports on books that have come to light. At times I cannot even fill half of the sheet without these. It is true what a renowned native scholar has written in one of his letters: *Scitu dignissima quaeque, qualibus nec dimidiatae semper philyrae expleri utiliter possunt.*<sup>19</sup>

Rát gave priority to cultivating the Hungarian language, and to encouraging, coordinating and publishing science and literature in Hungarian. He considered all scientific disciplines equally important. Therefore, he published news

17 On the development of the scholarly media culture in the eighteenth century see: André HOLENSTEIN, Hubert STEINKE and Martin STUBER, "Introduction", in: *Scholars in Action: The Practice of Knowledge and the Figure of the Savant in the 18th Century*, Vol. 1, ed. André HOLENSTEIN, Hubert STEINKE and Martin STUBER, 1–41 (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2013), 13.

18 *MH*, No. 6 (19 January, 1780), 41.

19 *MH*, No. 7 (22 January, 1780), 56.

pieces and articles on mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, geology, archaeology, history, literary history and many others. He lauded the achievements of Hungarian scholars and authors. Benkő gave him an account of one of his former students, József Balog, with whom Benkő regularly exchanged letters. Balog studied under Professor Nikolaus Joseph Freiherr von Jacquin in Vienna, then became a physician in Leiden, and wrote his dissertation on the herbs of Transylvania. After that he travelled to America. On the voyage he grew too plump for all his clothes and he was sick for two months in Guyana, where he was fed parrot soup until he recovered. He sent letters and seeds to his professor but disappeared at the beginning of 1781. Rát used Balog's example to encourage his readers to study both their immediate and broader surroundings with a scientific curiosity and to write about them in Hungarian and other languages:

A lot of American news will be shared by this diligent young Hungarian lad with the two Hungarian Homelands – what am I saying? With Hungary and Transylvania? How many are there here, who would be curious about such news? And if they are curious would they spend money on such things? – or rather, with the whole of Europe, while he is staying there. [...] Although as yet few Hungarians appreciate books, but considering the higher honour of our nation, I dare to wish that he would write, whatever he will write about those lands and his discoveries in his letters or in any other way, or at least a part of that, rather in Hungarian than in other languages. As this way we could hope that his writings would be translated to other languages. I have never seen more than one little book translated from Hungarian to German in my entire life.<sup>20</sup>

Although some of the issues did not contain any articles on science, a few other were mainly or entirely dedicated to such subjects. Altogether at least one third of the content of the volumes between 1780 and 1782 were related to the different fields of natural sciences or the humanities. Out of this rich corpus, I only analyze those news pieces and articles in detail that deal with the history of language and literature.

20 *MH*, No. 73 (9 September, 1780), 591.

*Magyar Hirmondó as a virtual centre for national literature and linguistics*

Rát devoted special attention to the cause of Hungarian language and literature. He regularly published reports on books, but he also printed his own essays on linguistics, literary history and literary theory, as well as poems by classical, earlier Hungarian and contemporary authors. He published announcements and reviews not only about the books that were printed in the Patzkó printing house, but also about works that appeared elsewhere and which were either in Hungarian or otherwise relevant to Hungary. If his time and the available column space allowed, he described the content of the book in greater detail and also discussed shortcomings and errors. In the issue of September 27, 1780 he explained how difficult it was to acquire books published in Hungary, as he was working alone and did not hear about all the books that were published and he could not possibly read them all either. He argued that it was difficult to write in Hungarian as lots of the time the right phrases were missing from the language. For those books that he did review, he never failed to comment on the author's choice of words, rhetoric and style.<sup>21</sup>

In the eighteenth century, Hungarian translations of foreign works started to be made and published in a far greater number than before. At the time there were far more authors who adapted and translated works than those who created original works. In *Magyar Hirmondó*, Rát also published a number of reviews of translations that were either newly published or had appeared in the preceding years. In the issue of March 17, 1781, he reports on how in other countries the works of classical authors are translated into the vernacular, while there was also a Hungarian, Sámuel Szigeti, who translated the works of Xenophon and Edward Young into Hungarian. Rát also points out that such translations of classics had already been made in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, while at the beginning of the eighteenth century, György Balog and Márton Dálnoki Benkő had translated such works as well. Rát noted that these translations were useful as they encouraged people to study in the original languages. Rát also refers to the treatise *De la littérature Allemande* of Frederick the Great, published in 1780, and he opined that

21 On Rát's book announcements see: Ilona PAVERCSIK, "Zeitungen als Kommunikationsmedium des Buchhandels", in *Zur Medialisierung...*, 49–96, 56–57. On book reviews in European periodicals see Andreas GOLOB, "Links Between Newspapers and Books: The Case of an Early 'Media Tycoon' in Late Eighteenth-Century Central Europe", in *Books in Motion in Early Modern Europe: Beyond Production, Circulation, and Consumption*, ed. Daniel BELLINGRADT, Paul NELLES and Jeroen SALMAN, 111–142 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).



Hungarian authors should follow the advice of the Prussian king concerning the embellishment of their own language.

In the issue of March 7, 1781 Rát writes of his concern that translations could be harmful if translators use Hungarian in an over-individualized or inappropriate manner.

Some might say: shame, it is all merely translation! – True; and one might fear that these translations will include many foreign-sounding expressions, which then become familiar and will change the Hungarian word so much that those without an education will not understand the language of learned Hungarians. But what can one do?<sup>22</sup>

In the issue of the June 17, 1780, he wrote that the three most useful translations had been published in Cluj-Napoca in 1776, 1777 and 1778. He considered it important to report on these, mainly because before *Magyar Hirmondó* there had been no platform for publishing news, with information on new publications coming solely from bookbinders. He wrote longer reviews of two translations of Johann Georg Sulzer by József Sófalvi (1745–1794), whom he knew personally. He claimed that the text was written in “good and easily understandable Hungarian”, but he accused the translator of using too many new phrases.<sup>23</sup> According to Rát, instead of creating new expressions, old ones should be put to use again, for example, those found in János Apáczai Csere’s *Encyclopaedia*. He also expressed some dissatisfaction with the quality of translation he had read. For example, when commenting on Miklós Király’s<sup>24</sup> translation of *La Fortune des gens de qualité, et des gentils-hommes particuliers* by Jacques de Callières (Paris, 1661) he suggested the Hungarian title was inaccurate, and the style of the text rudimentary. Rát also urged authors to inform the public when they were beginning work on new translations. In that way it would be possible to avoid cases such the one in which a young lady was still working on the translation of Jeanne Marie Leprince de Beaumont’s *The Young Ladies Magazine*, while another translation was already in the printing house of Cluj-Napoca.

Poems and lyrical works also appeared regularly in *Magyar Hirmondó*. In the issue of May 27, 1780, for example, early Hungarian-language metric poems were published from the 1541 and 1574 editions of János Sylvester’s *Új*

22 *MH*, No. 19 (7 March, 1781), 148.

23 *MH*, No. 49 (17 June, 1780), 396.

24 Miklós Király was the judge of Gömör County.

*Testamentum [New Testament]*, which the Sopron lyceum teacher János Szarka had found in the Imperial and Royal Library of Vienna. In this case, Rát even added a supplement to the newspaper so he could publish the entire instalment of Szarka's letter. He paid special attention to promoting the exploration of old Hungarian literature. In the issues published on October 10, 1781 and January 16, 1782, he launched a call for the collection and publication of old folk songs, ballads, poems, and tales. His purpose was to preserve texts that survived mainly in manuscript form.

*Magyar Hírmondó* was gaining central importance, and more and more poets were sending their poetry to Rát. He published a lot of poems written especially to commemorate Maria Theresa's death. One of his favourites was János Gyöngyösi, a poet from Transylvania (1741–1818), and Rát published several of his works in *Magyar Hírmondó*. In the issue of October 4, 1780, Pál Ányos's *Poems Dedicated to the Fine Sciences* was published to celebrate the opening of the University of Buda. In this connection, Rát expresses his opinion on what a good poem should be like, and that Hungarian poets should be educated just like those from other countries.

Rát also expressed his opinion on poetic theory and practice in his book reviews. He usually praised the authors, and avoided criticising their shortcomings too harshly. That notwithstanding, one author did take offence at Rát's opinion. In 1781, József Rájnis (1741–1812), a teacher from Kőszeg, published his poems in Bratislava. The book was published under the title *A Magyar Helikonra vezérlő kalauz [A Guide to Hungarian Helicon]*. In *Magyar Hírmondó*, Rát published a long presentation of the book, praising Rájnis's poetic talent (September 1, 1781). He also explained that the lengths of vowels and consonants varied in the different Hungarian dialects. He thought that in lyrical works poets should pay special attention to how syllables of varying length were used. He also argued that in his poems Rájnis sometimes made mistakes. This judgement became the starting point for the first major literary debate in Hungarian. Rájnis wrote an entire book in response, arguing that Rát, a journalist, had no right to criticize poems. Rát published a long retort to Rájnis's complaints in the newspaper (December 18 and 28, 1782). Although their dispute eventually subsided, Hungarian authors discussed the issues Rát and Rájnis had made at length and in the following decade other new debates arose.

Rát also followed the history of educational and cultural institutions in terms of Hungarian language and literature. On July 5, 1780 he reported on the opening of the University of Buda: *Magyar Hírmondó* had never given an account of anything more glorious, anything more to the liking of true patriots than this

event. On this occasion, he published a summary of the history of Hungarian scholarship and universities (based on the notes of a scholarly patriot “residing here”). He also included a number of other articles written for this event. On February 21, 1781 he listed the most notable libraries in Hungary: of the University of Buda, of Kalocsa [Kollotschau] (Patachich), Pécs (Klimó), Eszterháza [today: Fertőd], Keszthely (Pál Festetics), Pécel (Gedeon Ráday), Debrecen, and Sárospatak. He mentioned Hungarian libraries in Transylvania as well.

Rát regularly reported on news concerning learned societies. On February 16, 1780 he announced that the Academy of Arcadia in Rome had admitted Antal Gánóczi as a member. Then in the issue of April 29, 1780, one of the articles is about Elek Horányi, who was recognized by the learned society of Leipzig for his work *Memoria Hungarorum*. On March 29, 1780 a new learned society was established in Lisbon, Portugal. On this occasion, Rát noted that “Such learned societies can be found in almost every other country. A few years ago, some noted patriots intended to establish a beneficial regulation like this in Hungary too. But their efforts failed for reasons unbeknown to me.”

### *Conclusion*

Mátyás Rát was among the first Hungarian intellectuals to recognize the importance of the media. His activity eminently illustrates the statement formulated by Aina Nøding: “Periodicals function as even greater eighteenth-century cultural movers than books and other media.”<sup>25</sup> But the times did not favour Rát, as Hungary was lagging behind other European countries when it came to cultivating erudition. In the Habsburg Empire the illiteracy rate was still very high during the eighteenth century. As attending school was not compulsory until the *Ratio Educationis* was brought in (1777), the potential readers of journals in Hungary came from a very small pool, mainly made up of the nobility and the professions. Rát found it difficult to keep subscribers and even harder to get more. No wonder he became exhausted from the constant existential struggle, and after three years he gave up being a journalist for a more secure pastoral position. *Magyar Hírmondó*, which finally ceased publication in 1788, was edited by new editors, who changed year by year. From the beginning of the 1780s several other Hungarian-language newspapers and magazines were launched, some in other cities including Košice, Pest, and Sibiu. These periodicals covered various

25 NØDING, *The Editor as Scout...*, 64.

topics (political news, science and literature), but none of them survived for long. It took three to four decades before a broader, educated reading public formed, which included large numbers of women, and which really demanded new types of publication. If we take into account other enterprises of the era, most of which failed, Mátyás Rát's efforts seem even more valuable. In the twenty-first century, the issues of the *Magyar Hírmondó* he edited constitute a unique source of eighteenth-century intellectual history.