

SUCCESS, QUEUES, CROWDS: FROM THE CORVINAS TO DIGITALIZATION

MUSEUM NIGHT IN NSZL



The kaleidoscopic program of the 2011 Museum Night offered something exciting for every age group, giving a glimpse of the National Széchényi Library's varied activity from 6 in the evening to 2 o'clock at night.

A long queue was forming outside the main entrance to the library already before the opening. In the same way as every year before, one of the Museum Night highlights was the guided tour of the library. Our visitors and readers are always curious to see how we work, what our stocks contain, to admire the largest, the smallest, the oldest, the most valuable book... The most popular event was the mysterious midnight walk led by the library's chief director. The walks came to an end on the eighth floor with its Buda panorama.

As before, our program attracted all age groups: the oldest visitor was 82, while the youngest was eight months old. Naturally, our evening offer was more popular with young people: the library's own band, BAMB, played rockabilly, blues and country music, warming up people waiting in the jam-packed auditorium for the arrival of Csaba Vastag, the winner of X-Factor.

Visitors also enjoyed our exhibition in memory of the Croatian classic writer, Miroslav Krleža. It was on this day the writer moved into virtual space: we launched NSZL's Krleža web page with the participation of the writer György Spiró, the Comedy Theatre actor Béla Fesztbaum and the Kossuth Award winning costume designer, Márta Jánoskúti.

In the evening the "library was turned on": in our colleagues' presentations and using hands-on equip-





ment we demonstrated digitization in our age, showing how we can have as many as hundreds of books on our e-reader.

In the Collection of Posters and Small Prints exhibition, “*From the tool for buttoning shoes to the cast-iron stove*” posters, postcards, illustrated catalogues and everyday objects recalled the turn of the 19th century when they had a tool for buttoning up shoes, fridges ran on gas and beautiful stoves were made of iron. The Collection’s reading room also kept open, and showed other rare posters this night. At the other end of the corridor, familiar actors were smiling at visitors from pictures, as they wandered around enjoying the photo exhibition of the first Hungarian cinema that started 115 years ago.

There was continuous interest in the Map Collection as well, where old and new tools of position identification were on display. Besides high-tech equipment, there were fascinating 19th century instruments and some medieval tools could even be tried out: for example, a copy of the 15th century Regiomontanus quadrant could be applied for measuring time.

The bookbinders created a relaxing ambience in

their workshop, as during the night they not only demonstrated the actual phases of bookbinding – including gilding and painting the cover – but also the hidden court lit by oil lamps and exuding a Mediterranean atmosphere was pleasant to the soul and the eye. The little masterpieces created there could be bought as souvenirs.

Our Manuscript Collection was true to the title of our selective exhibition, “*Varietas delectat.*”

Indeed, the program was exclusive and delighting, as each rare manuscript was to be seen for one hour only; thus between six in the afternoon and two after midnight, eight different rarities were for delectation, coupled with witty and fascinating stories.

One of the bewildering items was a liturgical book written in medieval Ethiopian, or *Ge’ez*, that the British army looted in an 1868 punitive expedition



from the treasury of the bandit turned Ethiopian emperor, which the commander-in-chief of the expedition donated to a Hungarian officer in his service, who in turn presented it to the national library within the same year. A Corvina was also on display, purchased at the price of an elephant in the years of social-



in their content or form, including papyrus fragments, codex scrolls, a fan-shaped manuscript, secret scripts and visual puzzles.

In the *Do it Yourself Theatre* held in the reading room of the Collections of Theatre History and Music History, playful children and adults took part in activities testing their skills and abilities.

For example, they constructed mockups of the Globe and the new National Theatre; their puppets acted out

ism and last shown to the public in 1990. There was a vivid interest in the Manuscript Collection's mini display called "*Babits on the Beach*." Of the thousands of photos in the bequest, we compiled a selection introducing the poet's lesser known profile: swimming, rowing, sunbathing or sitting on a seesaw.

Needless to say, we did not forget about children arriving with parents. Therefore, we exhibited an original manuscript of Petőfi's poem "*My Mother's Hen*". On this special occasion, the Manuscript Collection "lowered itself" to presenting deception, revealing some of the "masterworks" of an early 19th century Hungarian forger. The hour when we showed several juicy pictures of a medieval codex was called "18+".

In another room, we celebrated Saint John the Baptist with the magnificent miniatures of a liturgical psalm book and the lines hinting at Saint John from the Érsekújvár Codex, one of our most valuable language relics. In addition, all through the night there was a representative compilation from the treasures of the Manuscript Collection to be seen: histories, historical relics from the beginnings to the end of the 18th century, as well as manuscripts unique

tales in a paper theatre and visitors could take home the pop-up figures and scenes they had made. "*Rákóczi on Stage*," the central thematic exhibition was related to the Rákóczi War of Independence, which came to an end 300 years ago. It revived some 19th and 20th century stage productions through their original scenery, costumes, photos, scripts and reviews.

The Collection of Old Prints offered a glimpse into the Apponyi collection, the remarkable stock of historical and geographical works donated to the Library by Sándor Apponyi in 1925. It is the largest collection of 15th to 18th century prints about Hungary in languages other than Hungarian.





The program *“This is how it happened – Europe’s image of Hungary in the 16th–17th centuries”* starting every hour discussed creepy plots, political assassinations, weird prophesies, the mysteries of Hamlet’s star and its Hungarian implications and unidentified flying objects in old books.

The aula on the sixth floor was busy with restorers, who enabled people to try binding techniques that

restorers apply in binding old books. The posters on the walls revealed some of the secrets of book restoration. Many adults and children made their own mini books and followed with awe the knack of bookbinding.

Dealing with the Monarchy’s battleships, our new exhibition on the eighth level, *“Reality, Dreams and Nightmares”* was launched on this night, peppered with film projections, a lecture and mockup ships for sale.

The number of visitors on this June night was over seven thousand, out of whom a thousand bought their tickets from us. Over 150 people subscribed to the library, taking advantage of the special rates on this occasion.

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