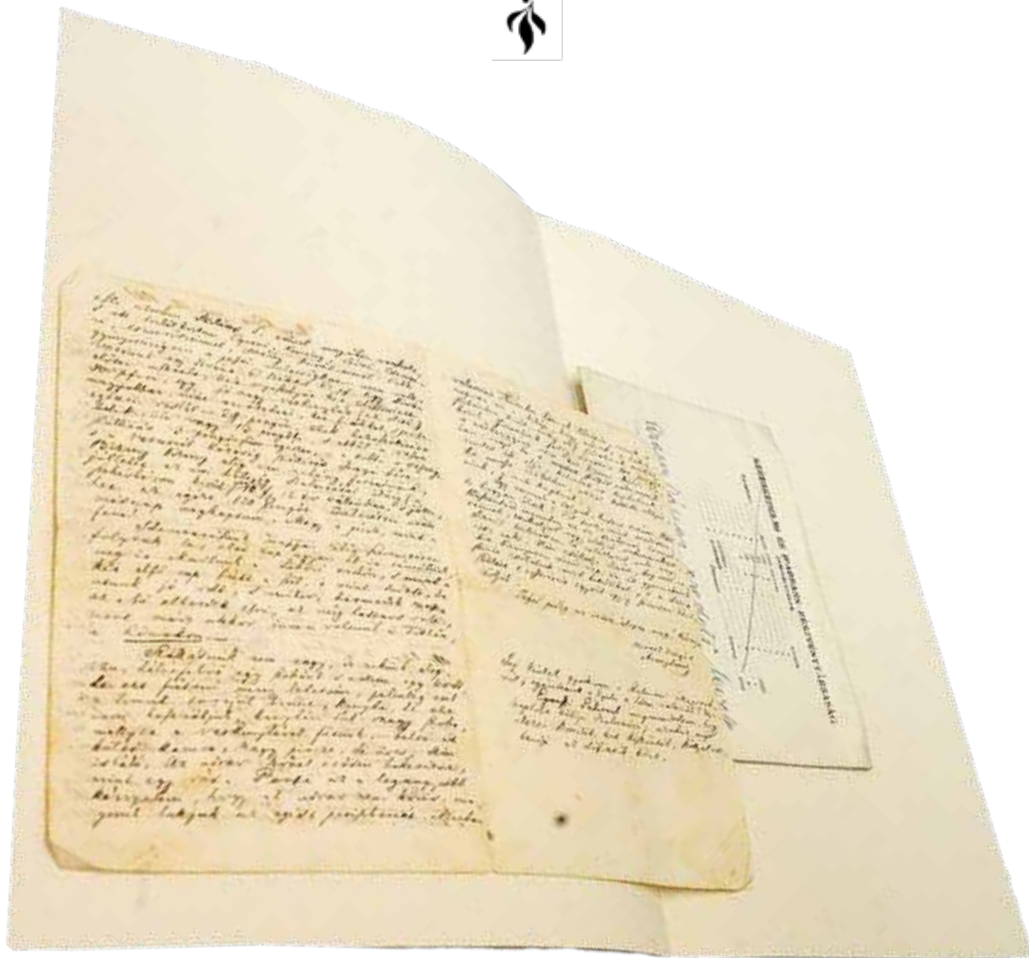


A NEW LETTER BY JÁNOS ARANY ENTERS THE MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION



In the spring of 2019, the national library received an especially valuable donation, a letter by János Arany from the descendant of Sándor Ercsey, the famous poet's brother-in-law, György Fráter living in Switzerland.

After János Arany's death, his family donated his manuscripts to several public collections, but the most famous manuscripts, such as the *Toldi* trilogy, *The Death of King Buda* were received by the national library. These were the manuscripts that established an estimable János Arany collection of the Manuscript Collection that was later enriched with further donations from legacies and commissioned pieces. We treasure almost twenty autograph poems, such important ones as *Family Circle*, *The Ceremonial Opening of the Bridge*, *Vörös Rébék* [Beckie Scarlet] or *A dalnok búja* [The Minstrel's Sorrow]. Another group of manuscripts valuable from philological perspective consists of administrative documents. Arany served as the secretary of the Kisfaludy Society starting from the 1860s, then of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and in his

office hours he served the administrative cases of both societies. This is how many documents signed by him have survived, like invoices, book orders, and correspondence exchanged with the members. We own slightly more than 100 letters – many of them addressed to Sándor Petőfi, and responses addressed to Arany belong to the collection – however, this is the first one that is related to family matters.

Following the Arany exhibition of 2017 organized in the library as part of the János Arany Memorial Year and in the simultaneously happening exploration of the legacy found in the poet's hometown, György Fráter, the Ercsey descendant living in Switzerland contacted us requesting an expert opinion about the authenticity of a letter owned by him. After taking a look at the letter's digital copy, I was convinced that we can talk about an important, missing piece of the correspondence between the family members from Szalonta and Nagykőrös, which was dated on 12 November 1851, in Nagykőrös, the response by Sándor Ercsey to which I could have a look at



during my examination of the legacy kept in Nagyszalonta. The Arany critical edition recorded the existence of this letter and marked it as belonging to a private collection.

György Fráter – after making sure that this is not a copy, but an original autograph – brought the letter to us. At the personal meeting the manuscript itself proved the assumption: the text written on a two-folio ivory paper was indeed typical of Arany: the style and form of the letters, the black ink, the paper – that were identical to the messages written in Szalonta – proved unquestionably that this is an original document. After the examination, the owner – as he had indicated previously – donated us the letter.

An important source document was received by the national library from the point of view of Arany's career, as well. After the defeat of the Revolutions of 1848, the poet could not return to his earlier profession of notary, so he became the private teacher of Domokos Tisza in Geszt, than he moved back to Nagykőrös as he obtained a job as a teacher here. The donated writing was his first letter written from Nagykőrös, in which he reported about the living conditions of the Arany family and about his own work to his brother-in-law living in Szalonta. Many other messages followed this one which are essential documents of the poet's life and important sources for the research of his career.

This donation is significant for the library from multiple perspectives, as on the one hand, manuscripts from great classics of the nation turn up only rarely, and even more rarely are we able to purchase them. On the other hand, we obtained almost nothing from the correspondence of the

Arany family, therefore it is a gap-filling piece as far as its content is concerned.

The manuscript obtained based on a contract of donation was already handed to the restoration laboratory in the spring of 2019, as the manuscript bore smaller tears and signs of moderate ink corrosion, which was testified through the examination of the material as well. Ink corrosion is an often-occurring phenomenon in case of manuscripts written with iron gall ink, as a consequence of a long and slow process which was probably accelerated by inadequate storage conditions (fluctuating humidity and temperature). In order to prevent this process, the manuscript underwent a conserving, calcium-phytate treatment carried out by two staff members of the restoration laboratory, Éva Benke and Orsolya Koppán.

Afterwards, the letter was included into the collection of the Manuscript Collection, where the storage conditions meet the requirements and it is available for researchers. György Fráter could still see the beginning of the restoration process, but could not live up until it was finished as he passed away in the summer. We think of him with gratitude, and it is our pleasure that the letter could enter the Manuscript Collection, as according to the donator's explanation: his children do not speak Hungarian, so they could not even comprehend the worth of the Arany autograph. There is a good chance that the manuscript would have vanished completely.

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