

The Merits and Dangers of Latin: An Early Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Debate

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Abstract: In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the kingdom of Hungary, intellectuals and politicians were fiercely debating the merits and dangers of Latin. In a country in which Latin was still the official language, and the second language of elites, this was no mere academic discussion. Rather, it concerned both the practical aspects of coexistence in a complex multi-ethnic feudal polity and the question of the identity of the nation and its development. The social and political role of Latinity was negotiated by its supporters and detractors in the Diet, the county assemblies of the nobles, and in countless pamphlets and newspaper articles. In 1808, a surreptitious attempt to steer the public debate on the topic led to an essay competition known as the “Tübingen Call”, which attracted a fair number of submissions. The surviving essays from the competition present a wide range of arguments for and against the use of Latin from various points of view, which are reviewed and analysed here.

Keywords: Latinity; Hungary; official language; public debates; nationalism.

I The Latinate Polity and the Politics of Latinity

In the kingdom of Hungary and its associated lands of Croatia and Slavonia, Latinity remained an integral part of public life, and indeed of the very identity of a significant part of society, much longer than anywhere else in Europe, with the exception of the Holy See. Hungary held onto Latin as the official language until 1844, although it increasingly shared this role with Hungarian from the early nineteenth century onwards, while Croatia and Slavonia retained it as their exclusive official language until the very eve of the 1848 revolution and abolished it only in 1847. The long-lasting supremacy of the language of the Romans certainly owed much to the fact that the country was populated by a mixture of ethnic groups speaking various, often very dissimilar languages: Magyars, Germans, different Slavic groups (Slovaks, Croats, Serbs, and Ruthenians), and Romanians, to name only the main ones (Jews aside). In this situation, using the neutral Latin as the official language put no group at a disadvantage. But the persistence of Latin in this role over such a long period of time also had its roots in the specific political circumstances in which Hungary found itself in the early modern era. Both the Reformation and Ottoman expansion led to the fragmentation of the kingdom, and made the perception of dividedness into a crucial experience and one of the defining elements of Hungarian identity. Politically, the land was divided between “royal”

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Hungary under the Habsburg dynasty, the territory occupied by the Turks, and the semi-autonomous Grand Duchy of Transylvania, while the tensions amongst Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists denied the country the possibility of religion serving as a potential stabilising force which might overcome political division.

The only remaining unifying factor in these circumstances was the politically dominant and fairly numerous nobility, comprising around five percent of the population. As a whole, the nobility, mostly of Magyar but also of German and Slavic ethnic background, constituted the *Natio Hungarica*, a political nation in a pre-modern sense. The principal identity of its members was defined, regardless of their ethnicity and native language, by class membership and by participation in public affairs which were conducted in Latin. Parliamentary debates, the county congregations of the nobility, decisions by magistrates and official correspondence on every level, practically the whole administration with the exception of the military and finance—everything was in Latin. The *Natio* saw itself as the embodiment of the kingdom: it, and not the divided-up territory, *was* Hungary. And to avoid another fragmentation, this time along linguistic lines, the *Natio* used Latin as its common language. Without speaking a word of Hungarian, a Croatian or German nobleman could pride himself on being a part of the *Natio Hungarica*.

On a symbolic level, Latin was a direct link with Classical Antiquity, and—especially important for a country forever at war with the Ottoman Turks—an intellectual connection with the civilised world of learned Europe.² On a practical level, it was the language of political gatherings, legal procedures, documents, and deeds, but also the language of education and of everyday use amongst the higher strata of society. The extent and ease of Latin conversation is a commonplace in reports written by early modern western travellers about their journeys through Hungary.³ This everyday Latinity spread also amongst the lower orders of society, especially in the ethnically mixed parts of the country. While European travel literature helped to create an image of a land where even the ploughing peasants conversed in Latin,⁴ systematic archival research in the 1990s has shown that the anecdotal evidence, gathered from literary sources and suggesting the omnipresence of Latin, does not show the whole picture.⁵ Knowledge of Latin was of course closely connected with the availability of education, which was by no means universal in early modern Hungary. In the eighteenth century, even a significant number of the nobility, especially the poorer ones, had no knowledge of Latin and sometimes even had problems Latinising their own names, as in the case of the nobleman named Sándor who signed a document with *Alex Sander* instead of *Alexander*.⁶ While such examples show that Latin was not as widely used as travelogues would suggest, it

² Vermes 2014, 66–78.

³ Tóth 2000, 135–8.

⁴ See e.g. Scharschmidt 1712, 548.

⁵ Tóth 2000, 131–5.

⁶ Tóth 2000, 131.

also reinforces the point about the symbolic importance of Latin for the identity of the nobility. The very fact that nobles who knew no Latin were trying to Latinise their names and give the impression of being Latinate shows how important the Latin language was for them. To be associated with Latin meant to be associated with nobility and power.

The rule of Latin was challenged for the first time when the Habsburg emperor Joseph II (1765-90) tried to improve the state of the country in the 1780s. Inspired by the rationalist ideas of the Enlightenment, the absolute monarch initiated a series of reforms aimed at modernisation and at simplifying and standardising the administration of his many heterogeneous domains. In 1784, he issued a decree replacing Latin in the administration and the judiciary of Hungary with German, the official language of his Austrian territories. The opening words of his decree were: "The use of a dead language, such as Latin, in all affairs shows sufficiently that a nation has not yet reached a certain level of enlightenment."⁷ In his understanding, Latin was the sign and at the same time one of the causes of underdevelopment in Hungary. As Hungarian was in his eyes not fit for the role of the official language, being underdeveloped and spoken only by a smaller part of the populace, the sole solution was the introduction of German. The emperor's aim was not to turn the Hungarians into Germans: from his rationalist point of view, he had just replaced one language, a dead and obsolete one, with another, more convenient and functional. It was a

[...] decision, which by no means has as its aim to eradicate the national languages, or that the various [...] nations should abandon the use of their native language [...] but this measure only seeks to achieve, that those who exert themselves in public offices use the German language instead of Latin when carrying out public business.⁸

The strong reactions in Hungary, however, clearly showed that the abolition of Latin was not simply a matter of choosing the most convenient communication medium, but a highly emotional question of identity. As the nobles from Nógrád county put it in their reply to the royal council: "That one noble nation should be forced to speak the language of another one is utterly grievous to endure, as it cannot be introduced without contempt for and suppression of that nation."⁹ In their assemblies, the nobles rejected the imposition of the "foreign" German

⁷ *Constitutio* 1788, 110–11, "Usus in cunctis negotiis linguae mortuae, ut Latina est, satis indicat nationem nondum certum luminis gradum assecutam esse."

⁸ *Constitutio* 1788, 115, "[...] consilium, quod nequaquam eum in finem inivit, ut nationales linguas exstirpatum eat, sive ut variae [...] nationes usum nativae linguae missum faciant [...] sed eo tantummodo constitutum spectat, ut, qui publicis gerendis muniis operam dicant, Germanici loco Latini idiomatis in pertractandis publicis negotiis usum faciant."

⁹ Rescript of the county of Nógrád, 69, "Ut autem natio aliqua nobilis alterius nationis vernacula loqui compellatur, hoc prout absque contemptu et depressione nationis induci nequit, ita illud sustinere acerbissimum est."

and defended their “indigenous” Latin language, arguing against what they saw as unjust, illegal, and impractical reform. The usually sober and business-like official rescripts by the counties were filled with emotional outpourings expressing the nobles’ sense of victimisation: “wounds upon wounds”, “we are so terrified that we can hardly express the gravity of the hurt we have suffered”, or “overloaded with grief, we are lost for words.”¹⁰ When the reform project was aborted in late 1789 and the dying emperor withdrew his decrees, Latin once again became the official language of the kingdom. The counties expressed their satisfaction and public opinion was jubilant, as shown by an anonymously published pamphlet:

Letter, in which the Senate and the People of Latium congratulate themselves that the famous, heroic kingdoms of Hungary and Croatia now again speak their language, and rejoice with them that the Latin language has come back from exile and, declared dead, returned to life.¹¹

However, while happiness over the abolition of German was widespread, not everybody was delighted with the reintroduction of Latin. For a significant number of educated noblemen, Joseph’s failed attempt to introduce German had proven that it was indeed both necessary and possible to replace Latin with a living language, only in their opinion this language should have been Hungarian. They embraced the views of the Hungarian language movement, which a handful of intellectuals had started in the 1770s as a purely cultural endeavour, combining the educational ideas of the Enlightenment with the proto-Romantic glorification of the national past and enthusiasm for all things authentic.¹² Its proponents, the most famous amongst them Ferenc Kazinczy (1759-1831), wanted to raise the cultural and economic status of Hungarians through mass education, which according to them was only possible in the mother tongue. But since the Hungarian language itself was not yet quite ready for this role, as it was rarely used in anything but everyday conversation, intense literary activity and conscious widening of the vocabulary were needed to make it capable of replacing Latin. Steeped in enthusiasm for the national language, national traditions, national values, costumes, and songs, all of which were supposedly found uncorrupted amongst the simple folk, the language movement propagated a new concept of national identity, modelled after the German example: every native speaker of Hungarian, high-born and low-born alike, was part of the nation. In this ethnolinguistic concept, a language was more than just a *vehiculum* for one’s thoughts or an arbitrarily chosen medium for smooth communication: a language was the central characteristic of the historic, organic community—a language was the nation itself. As the Magyar middle nobility, which

¹⁰ Rescript of the county of Zagreb, fol. 5r, “vulnera vulneribus cumulata”; Rescript of the county of Torna, fol. 149r, “tantopere consternati sumus, ut gravitatem concepti doloris vix satis explicare possimus”; Rescript of the county of Zemplén, fol. 55r, “verba non suppetunt dolore obrutis”.

¹¹ *Epistola* 1790.

¹² Margócsy 2015.

came increasingly to dominate politics at the expense of the aristocracy, gradually embraced this new concept of national identity in the aftermath of Joseph's failed reforms, they transformed the originally purely cultural language movement into a decidedly political force. Only the total dominance of the national language could save Hungary from its backwardness and the Magyar nation from extinction and assimilation, which was threatened both by the absolutist court and the numerical inferiority of the Magyars. Hungarian had to become the official language and replace Latin in every walk of life.

Until the 1830s, most intellectuals from other linguistic groups in the kingdom reacted to Magyar aspirations not by creating their own political movements for national awakening, but rather by insisting on Latin as a part of their supra-ethnic identity as *Hungari*.¹³ For them, this meant all the inhabitants of Hungary regardless of their ethnicity, as opposed to ethnic Hungarians or Magyars alone. The most effective opposition to the Magyar national movement came from the Croats: protected by the legal autonomy of Croatia within the Hungarian kingdom, they insisted on Latin as their legal right and strongly resisted any attempts to suppress its use. By 1807, however, they had stopped trying to avert the introduction of Hungarian in the whole kingdom and concentrated instead on keeping it out of Croatia, effectively letting other Hungarian non-Magyars down in their struggle.¹⁴ For the Viennese court—the other strong source of resistance to the introduction of Hungarian—the language movement seemed doubly dangerous: it looked like a symptom of separatism, and at the same time like a gateway to perilous democratic ideas. Consequently, the court blocked several attempts of the national movement to introduce legislation favouring the Hungarian language, either directly or through the upper house of the Diet, dominated by the aristocracy, only conceding to its demands gradually, whenever financial pressure forced it to seek the Diet's support.

The alliance of Magyar *litterati* and political activists carried the suppression of Latin as a part of their national programme into both parliamentary politics and public discourse. In the 1790-91 Diet, they succeeded in making Hungarian the language of debate and of the minutes of the body's lower house. They also introduced Hungarian as a subject in high schools, academies, and university, making it an obligatory subject in 1792. In 1805, the Diet passed a law which allowed (but did not prescribe) the use of Hungarian in official correspondence with the government and in bilingual Latin and Hungarian representations to the chancery and the court. In 1807, the Diet debated compulsory measures for the proliferation of Hungarian, and demanded that it be made the language of instruction in schools and that fixed deadlines be set for all authorities to adopt it in their administration. The abrupt end of the Diet, however, prevented passing any laws.

At the same time, the struggle for public opinion produced numerous articles

¹³ The one exception being the Romanians in Transylvania.

¹⁴ See Šubarić 2015.

and pamphlets for and against abolishing Latin and introducing Hungarian as the official language. One of the more acrimonious debates arose in 1807, when the Slovak nobleman Ján Feješ published his admonition against the introduction of Hungarian.¹⁵ He argued that in a country where so many languages were spoken it was morally wrong to force the language of one group (which made up only one-third of the population) on all the others, reiterating one of the main arguments of the proponents of Latin since the beginning of the language dispute. The opposing standpoint was bluntly formulated by the lawyer András Cházár in his furious rebuttal of Feješ, whose standpoint Cházár considered a crime: “It is a crime, against the king, the law, the nation—in a word, against public safety.”¹⁶ For him, the non-Magyars, who were the descendants of peoples the Magyars had once defeated, had no rights and depended on the goodwill of the masters of the land: “Hungary is created by the Hungarian, and the Hungarian is created by the Hungarian language. Thus to be a Hungarian and to have occupied Hungary is the same.”¹⁷

II The Case of the “Tübingen Call”: a Hidden Public Debate

In this atmosphere of heated public discussion, a Tübingen literary newspaper, the *Morgenblatt für Gebildete Stände*, printed on 4 April 1808 a competition call for the best answer to these questions:

Would it be feasible, advisable, and consistent with the benefit of the different nations inhabiting the Kingdom of Hungary and the associated lands to make the Hungarian language the only and exclusive language of public affairs, administration of justice, and public education? Is this language developed to a necessary degree? And what political, economic, and cultural advantages and disadvantages would arise from this?¹⁸

The call, republished a few days later in the supplement of the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, asked for submissions in Latin, German, or French to be sent to the Tübingen publisher J. Friedrich Cotta (1764-1832), the owner of the two mentioned news-

¹⁵ Feješ 1807.

¹⁶ Cházár 1807, 8, “Crimen est, in regem, legem, nationem, publicam, verbo, salutem.”

¹⁷ Cházár 1807, 6, “Hungariam Hungarus, Hungarum idioma Hungaricum facit. Tanti est adeo, Hungarum esse; quanti est: Hungariam possedissee.” The debate continued in several further publications.

¹⁸ “Preisfrage” 1808, 324, “In wie weit würde es ausführbar, rätlich, mit dem Wohl und mit den Privilegien der verschiedenen das Königreich Ungarn und die mit selbem vereinigten Länder bewohnenden Nationen vereinbarlich seyn, die ungarische Sprache ausschließlich zur einzigen Geschäftssprache bey Verhandlungen der öffentlichen Angelegenheiten, bey der Justitzpflege, und bey dem öffentlichen Unterrichte zu erheben? Besitzt diese Sprache die hiezu unumgänglich nothwendig erforderliche Ausbildung? Und welches sind die Vortheile, welches die Nachtheile, die hieraus in politischer, Kommerzial- und literarischer Hinsicht entstünden?”

papers, and offered the winner a sizeable prize of 100 gold ducats, sponsored by an anonymous “Hungarian patriot”, as well as the promise that the essay would be published. This call, which subsequently appeared in several other newspapers and journals in Austria and Hungary, has garnered a certain renown in Hungarian scholarship because of the participation in it of the language reformer Ferenc Kazinczy, with a marked increase in interest since the early years of this century in the context of nationalism studies.¹⁹ Unfortunately, in the course of political unrest in Vienna in 1927, the original documents and all the essays were lost when rioters set fire to the Palace of Justice and destroyed parts of the police archives. Consequently, scholarship has mostly had to rely on the sources published in the older literature: in his study of the Hungarian parliament of 1807, Ede Wertheimer excerpted some documents concerning the background of the call, while Gusztáv Heinrich’s monograph on Kazinczy’s participation in the call included an edition of Kazinczy’s essay and the assessment of one of the jurors.²⁰ Aside from this, one additional essay by Count József Dessewffy, which had not been sent in and so did not perish in the fire, is also known.²¹ Recent research has brought to light more responses to the call—a concept manuscript of one of the lost entries, two works inspired by the call but not sent in to the competition, and a newspaper article—as well as some additional documents in unrelated archival holdings.

The reason why the essays on the language question were kept in the police archive in the first place lies in the fact that the whole call was secretly organised by the Viennese police with the approval of the Habsburg court, as Wertheimer was able to demonstrate. Worried by the increasingly radical demands of the 1807 Diet, Johann Armbruster (1761–1814), a secretary in the Court Police Authority, proposed that an attempt should be made to win the Hungarian intellectuals over to the cause of the court and to influence public opinion through them. This was to be achieved by targeting the writers individually, offering them praise, honours, and gifts, as well as a publication forum in the form of a decidedly Austrian patriotic journal. In fact, these proposals by Armbruster were part of the much larger agenda of the circle around Count Johann Philipp von Stadion (1763–1824), foreign minister at the time, which aimed to transform the political culture through the integration of intellectuals, and by harnessing the power of patriotism and, eventually, German nationalism.²² Police chief Baron Joseph Thaddäus von Sumerau (1749–1817) seized upon Armbruster’s idea of influencing the public and gave it the definite form of a prize competition, which was in those times an instrument of choice

¹⁹ See e.g. Ajkay 2007; Miskolczy 2009b.

²⁰ Wertheimer 1896; Heinrich 1916.

²¹ Published in Miskolczy 2009a, 312–25.

²² On Stadion’s efforts to incite patriotism with the help of intellectuals in the years around 1808, see Rössler 1966, 236–9, 297–305; they eventually resulted in the founding of two journals, Armbruster’s *Vaterländische Blätter* (1808–20) and Joseph von Hormayr’s *Archiv für Geographie, Historie, Staats- und Kriegskunst* (1810–30).

for encouraging and steering public debates. The envisioned competition would serve several purposes at one stroke: the essays favouring Latin or German would provide the court with good arguments against the introduction of Hungarian as the official language, while the call would sound out the Hungarian intellectuals' views on the language question, and at the same time throw a bone of contention amongst them, thus breaking up their solidarity. The publisher Cotta, chosen for his prestige, seems to have been unaware of the identity of the real initiator, the anonymous "Hungarian patriot" behind the call.

The competition call attracted 21 submissions, all but one from the eastern parts of the Habsburg domains: Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia, and Galicia. The participants represented a cross-section of the literate classes: amongst them were noblemen and commoners, Protestant and Catholic priests, private and public teachers, army officers and physicians, accountants, and poets.²³ Almost half of them had already at least once sought public approval by publishing their writings in some form. At the first glance the court could be satisfied, as only seven of the authors endorsed the elevation of Hungarian to official status (according to the contemporary assessment; Heinrich counts five unconditional and four conditional supporters of Hungarian). Ten essays advocated preservation of Latin, while four advised reintroduction of German. However, the first juror the police sought to involve, the university professor, publisher, and journalist Ludwig von Schedius (1768-1847), unexpectedly declared Ferenc Kazinczy, the great proponent of the Hungarian language, as the clear winner. In the time of the Napoleonic wars, the whole affair got pushed into the background, and the next years were spent in a sporadic search for other, more agreeable jurors. In 1813, the new foreign minister Metternich rejected a proposal to publish both the best essay for and the best essay against Hungarian, or only the best one against it (in the eyes of the police chief, one advocating Latin), and insisted on awarding the prize to someone recommending the introduction of German.²⁴ In 1816, after yet another juror, the linguist and later curator of the imperial library Bartholomäus Kopitar (1780-1844), proposed publishing all the essays as a collection in order to show that support for Hungarian was not a majority view, the essays were shelved in the police archive and forgotten.²⁵

Amongst the writings connected with the call still extant today, Kazinczy's essay is the most impressive, and it is not hard to understand why the jurors had a hard time not declaring him a winner.²⁶ The first part of his essay is more argumentative, explaining the benefits of the vernacular and pre-empting the possible objections of the supporters of Latin. Amongst other things, it systematically contradicts

²³ The participants are listed in Heinrich 1916, 25–8.

²⁴ Proposal by the police chief Hager; excerpt from Metternich's response in Wertheimer 1896, 405, n. 1.

²⁵ Kopitar's assessment is edited in Heinrich 1916, 178–94; on Kopitar's role, see Fried 1980.

²⁶ Edited in Heinrich 1916, 35–124.

the arguments put forward by Ján Feješ the previous year.²⁷ The second, more important part is an extended eulogy of the Hungarian language, in the form of a commented anthology of Hungarian literature, supposed to demonstrate that the vernacular was perfectly suited for any sophisticated task. Towards Latin, Kazinczy takes the rationalist stance of the Enlightenment: it is an obstacle to progress. On the one hand, the young are wasting their time learning it for years instead of acquiring some truly useful knowledge; on the other hand, the dissemination of knowledge to the people is impossible in a language other than their own mother tongue. Undermining the usual argument in favour of Latin, that it is the language of science and scholarship, he presents it as a danger to intellectual endeavour:

The neglect of the national language not only has the drawback that useful knowledge never becomes the patrimony of the great mass of the people, but also that we cannot find enough experts in the arts and sciences. How many are there amongst us who do not write solely because they are sensible enough to realise that he who writes in a language in which he cannot write purely and perfectly is making a fool of himself, that he is ridiculous even if he treats his subject most competently but writes impure Latin?²⁸

The dominance of Latin is detrimental even for the very learning of Latin, as Hungarians will never learn pure and correct Latin as long as they constantly hear the corrupted official and colloquial Latin. An oft-presented argument for Latin was its eternal immutability, which supposedly made it the ideal medium for legal matters, since vernacular terms changed their meaning with the passage of time, but Kazinczy demonstrated in several examples that Latin words were just as much subject to semantic change.²⁹ He also simply rejected the notion that a country inhabited by different linguistic groups needed a neutral official language, for in Hungary everyone had a duty to learn and use Hungarian, and only this would make him a Hungarian. He even brought up the cautionary tale of the ruin of Poland, the other European state where Latin had long remained in official use: had the Polish youth invested their energy in learning history instead of useless Latin, their kingdom would not have disappeared from the map.

Beside Kazinczy's essay, only one other submission to the call still exists.³⁰ Its author was Amand Wilhelm Smith (1754-1838), physician of the free royal city of

²⁷ Feješ 1807; Feješ also participated in the "Tübingen Call", but his essay was lost in the fire.

²⁸ Heinrich 1916, 52, "Aus der Vernachlässigung der Nationalsprache entsteht aber nicht nur der Nachteil, dass gemeinnützige Kenntnisse nie der Erbteil der grossen Masse des Volks werden können, sondern auch der, dass Wissenschaften und Künste nie hinlängliche Bearbeiter erhalten. Denn wie viele gibt es nicht unter uns, die bloss deswegen nicht schreiben, weil sie verständig genug sind einzusehen, dass derjenige sich lächerlich macht, der in einer Sprache schreibt, die er nicht rein und vollkommen schreiben kann, lächerlich selbst in dem Fall, wenn er seinen Gegenstand vortrefflich bearbeitet, wenn er ein unreines Latein schreibt."

²⁹ See e.g. Feješ 1807, 25-6.

³⁰ Smith.

Kežmarok in Upper Hungary. Born in Silesia, Smith had studied in Vienna—his letters from this period offer a vivid picture of the musical salon culture of Mozart’s time—and published several volumes on medicine and music. In light of the linguistic diversity of the kingdom, Smith rejected the idea of replacing Latin with Hungarian, but also saw the whole question as largely irrelevant. According to him, the progress of the nation was not to be achieved by the untimely introduction of Hungarian, but only by political and economic reforms which would establish a numerous and prosperous middle class, and by the consequent gradual raising of the country’s cultural level.³¹ As a model for cultural development, he presented Italy: one of the most cultured nations in Europe, it had arrived at this stage of sophistication through intense study, and later imitation, of Greek and Latin literature during the Renaissance. If it wanted to raise its cultural level, Hungary—which due to incessant wars never experienced anything like the Renaissance—should intensify the study of Classical Antiquity and of vernacular European literatures, then slowly start imitating them, in order some day to produce original works worthy of international praise. Knowledge of Latin obviously had a central role in this scheme: “The nation would lose the great noble character traits of the vigorous Classical world if the study of Roman literature were to be neglected (which would be the inevitable consequence of this measure).”³²

The essays sent to the publisher Cotta were not the only writings inspired by the “Tübingen Call”.³³ In 1810, a German-language response was published anonymously in Bratislava.³⁴ Hints in contemporary correspondence suggest that the author was Christian Heyser (1776-1839), master of a German Protestant school in Transylvania, who would later become the Lutheran bishop of Vienna, Styria, and Trieste.³⁵ Heyser, who stated in the preface that he had not participated in the competition as he was not interested in a prize, but only wanted to demonstrate the right way of dealing with the language question, was like Smith a supporter of Latin. While he disapproved of the introduction of Hungarian on account of the complex linguistic situation in the kingdom, he encouraged Magyars to cultivate their language and develop their literature. At the same time, he warned the Magyars against rashly discarding the benefits of Latin:

³¹ In this he was undoubtedly influenced by the ideas of his friend the economist Gregor von Berzevichy (1763-1822).

³² Smith, 86, “Die großen hochherzigen Charakterzüge der energievollen classischen Vorwelt [...] giengen durch das vernachlässigte Studium der römisch-classischen Litteratur für die Nation verloren (welches die unausbleibliche Folge dieser Maasregel seyn würde).”

³³ Two reactions have nothing to say about Latin and are consequently omitted here: the Hungarian essay by Count József Dessewffy and the article of 21 November 1810 in the newspaper *Hazai és Külföldi Tudósítások* 2.41, 325–8.

³⁴ [Heyser] 1810; the booklet had two editions, one dated 1810 and the other undated.

³⁵ Ajkay 2010, 50.

There is no nation in Europe, except maybe the Swedes, which in respect of the energy of its character, of its high-mindedness and bravery, resembles the Romans so much as the Hungarians. Therefore no one but a Hungarian has so natural an urge to come to know the excellent works of that people. The Frenchman transforms, and is compelled to transform, Roman gravity into pleasant levity, while the German can reproduce the vigorous spirit which speaks from these works only in words but not in deeds. But the study of the language of the Romans has a thorough effect on the practical life of the Hungarian, and in his bosom the fire burns which has often warmed the noble audience of Cicero. It would therefore constitute irreparable damage to his character if he were alienated from the study of the Romans.³⁶

This damage would inevitably happen in less than twenty years if Latin were no longer the official language, for the young would stop learning it if one could obtain every official position and fulfil any ambition by using the vernacular, and only a few scholars would still benefit from that noble spirit.

No! Even if the Hungarian language were so highly developed, which it is not, that it could replace Latin everywhere, in our troublesome times the use of Latin should not be limited; rather this vigorous language should continue to toughen the Hungarian spirit and to keep it floating above the ruins of the times, where it alone still stands free and untouched.³⁷

While Heyser ensured that his views were made known to the wider public and not just the jurors, another response to the call was intended for one reader only. From the fortress prison of Spielberg in the Moravian city of Brno, a political prisoner, Franz Rudolf von Grossing (1754-1830?), sent his lengthy treatise on the introduction of Hungarian directly to the emperor.³⁸ Grossing was a colourful

³⁶ [Heyser] 1810, 16–7, “Europa hat keine Nation, die schwedische etwa ausgenommen, auszuweisen, welche an Energie des Charakters, an hohem edelm Sinne, an Bravheit und Tapferkeit den alten Römern so gleich käme, als die ungarische. Niemand hat daher einen so natürlichen Beruf und Drang, sich mit vortrefflichen Schriften jenes berühmten Volks bekannt und vertraut zu machen, als der Ungar. Wenn der Franzose Römer-Ernst in angenehme Leichtigkeit verwandelt und verwandeln muß; wenn der Deutsche den kräftigen Lebens-Sinn, der aus jenen Werken spricht, wohl durch Worte, aber nicht durch Thaten zu übersetzen vermag: so greift das Studium der Römersprache tief in das praktische Leben des Ungars ein, und in seiner Brust entglüht das Feuer, das oft die edeln Zuhörer Ciceros erfüllte. Ein unersetzlicher Schade wäre es daher für seinen Charakter, wenn ihm das Studium der Römer fremd gemacht würde.”

³⁷ [Heyser] 1810, 18–9, “Nein! wenn auch die ungarische Sprache so hoch gebildet wäre, daß sie die lateinische überall ersetzen könnte, was aber der Fall gewiß nicht ist: so sollte in unsern verhängnißvollen Zeiten der Gebrauch der letztern doch nicht eingeschränkt werden, so sollte vielmehr diese kräftige Sprache noch ferner dazu dienen, den kräftigen Geist der Ungarn zu stählen, und über den Ruinen der Zeit, über denen er noch fast allein frey und unangetastet schwebt, auch in Zukunft aufrecht zu erhalten.”

³⁸ Grossing.

personality, an adventurer typical of the late eighteenth century.³⁹ An ex-Jesuit of a German family from Komárno in Upper Hungary, he became Maria Theresa's court secretary after the dissolution of the Order. Dismissed from the court by Joseph II in 1782, Grossing came into conflict with the authorities, and accusations of forgery and of writing anonymous invectives resulted in his flight from Vienna. A prolific writer, he published more than twenty works during his six years in exile, some anonymously, including bitter attacks against Austria. He also peddled his insider knowledge of Austrian politics from his time as the court secretary to various German courts, provoking further ire on the part of the emperor, who even sent agents to apprehend him. Exploiting the fascination of his contemporaries for secret societies, Grossing shrewdly focussed on women, who could not join the Freemasons, the Rosicrucians, or the Illuminati, and founded a secret order for ladies called the *Rosenorden*.⁴⁰ The society flourished for a few years, and Grossing, its secretary, lived well off the hefty subscription fees, keeping interest in the order alive through the publication of books and journals for the members. Finally caught by the Austrians in 1788, he was imprisoned for life for high treason, and probably pardoned only in the early 1820s.⁴¹

Upon hearing of the prize competition, Grossing used the opportunity to remind the ruler of his existence after, by then, twenty years of confinement, and to demonstrate how useful he still might be to the Austrian cause as a propagandistic writer. He advocated the introduction of German, which he considered to be the vernacular understood by the greatest part of Hungary's population, or at least of the higher classes, and generally the most perfect language in the world. His views on Latin were nuanced. While he found Latin ideal for solemn religious services (and recommended that the Protestants should introduce it), and also the best medium for science and scholarship due to its omnipresence in the learned community, he denied that it was suitable for administration and legal matters, because progress constantly generated new things and ideas for which Latin had no terms. By this he subverted, in a different way than Kazinczy, one of the usual arguments which the proponents of Latin brought to its defence: that Latin was no longer evolving and consequently Latin legal terms had final and unequivocal meanings, preventing any ambiguity in future interpretation of laws, deeds, and documents. But Latin, according to Grossing, caused the greatest harm in the field of education, not only because learning it took so much time, but also because Classical literature encouraged ambition and even revolutions:

³⁹ For his biography, see Wadzeck 1789; Gragger 1923, 25–37.

⁴⁰ The so-called adoption lodges, through which women could be co-opted into Freemasonry, were very rare in German lands.

⁴¹ Grossing's police files in Vienna were so damaged in the 1927 fire that they cannot be used; in 1822, he started publishing again, which would suggest that he had been set free by this time.

[...] far bigger and graver is the harm and disadvantage resulting from the fact that the students are being taught almost nothing else but Latin for the whole eight years and that they are given books to read which can only make an extremely dangerous impression upon them. One must have a very steadfast character, which inexperienced youth lacks, for otherwise the charming style of Plutarch, Tacitus, and others will encourage one to commit misdeeds [...] Have we not seen in the last decade of the eighteenth century what the example of Caesar alone can still bring about after more than a thousand years [...]? To give such books to youth to imitate (even if it is just to imitate their style) is more than stupid: it is a manifest crime against God and humanity, against all that is right and good.⁴²

The Napoleonic wars and the subsequent absolutist rule interrupted the momentum of the national movement, which only resumed in the 1820s. The “Tübingen Call” can be seen as the closing of the first phase of the change from Latin to the vernacular, offering as it does a wide range of arguments for and against the old language. The attack on Latin did not come only from enlightened and nationalist positions (Kazinczy), but also from conservative ones (Grossing). The language was simultaneously blamed for hindering progress and for causing revolutions. The proponents of Latin, while trying to offer rational arguments, also put emphasis on the emotional dimension of the language. Heyser, an ethnic German himself, appealed specifically to the Magyars, trying to bind them to Latin as an essential element of their identity and their former and future greatness. However, the Magyars were becoming less and less responsive to such pleas, instead seeking their fortune in their own vernacular. As an ethnolinguistic identity superseded the old class-based one, it was becoming increasingly difficult to justify the preservation of Latin. By the early 1830s, the last traces of the emotional attachment to the old *lingua patria* disappeared; even the proponents of Latin amongst the non-Magyars ceased to consider it a part of their identity, using Latin only as a shield against the onslaught of Magyarisation in the hope of one day replacing the language of the Romans with their own vernacular.⁴³ Over a period of fifty years, Latin had turned from being a cornerstone of Hungary’s identity to an obstacle to the development and happiness of a nation. It had turned from the living language,

⁴² Grossing, fols 31v-32r, “[...] ungleich größer und wichtiger war der dadurch entsproßner Schaden und Nachtheil, daß man der Studierenden Jugend ganze acht Jahre, beinahe nichts als die lateinische Sprache beibrachte, und ihr Bücher in die Hände gab, die unmöglich eine andere, als höchst gefährliche Eindruck auf sie machen konnten. Man muß einen sehr festen, bereits ganz ausgebildeten Charakter haben, den man sehr oft selbst bei dem gesetztesten Alter, geschweige erst bei der noch ganz unerfahrenen Jugend vergebens sucht, um nicht durch die z. B. reizende Schreibart eines Plutarchs, Tacitus u. s. w. zu eben jenen Lasterthaten angeeifert zu werden [...] Sah man nicht noch in dem letzten Jahrzehnd der Achtzehnten Jahrhunderts, was nach mehr als tausend Jahren das Beispiel eines Cäsars vermag [...]? Solche Bücher der Jugend zum Muster der Nachahmung (wenn auch nur in Rücksicht auf Schreibart) vorzulegen, ist mehr als Thoricht, Es ist offenkundiges Verbrechen wider Gott und die Menschheit, wider Alles, was Recht und Pflicht ist.”

⁴³ Šubarić 2015, 216.

from something everyone in the kingdom wanted to be associated with even to the point of Latinising their names wrongly, to just another subject in the school curriculum, finally becoming a dead language.

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