

# Outstanding Figures in the Life and History of the University Library of Cluj: József Sebestyén K. (1878-1964)<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** József Sebestyén K. was a prominent scholar, specialised in heraldry. Additionally, he was a leading heraldic painter, a Hungarian genealogist and a distinguished connoisseur of Transylvanian monuments. Beyond evoking his major achievements – which included the painting of the first coat of arms of Greater Romania, as well as numerous other coats of arms for public institutions and private families – this study aims to present several original findings concerning the events surrounding the University Library of Cluj between 1945-1959. The research conducted in the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca revealed new information regarding the years during which József Sebestyén K. was employed by the library. The official documents from the aforementioned archive can be more readily understood when read in conjunction with his correspondence with Lajos Kelemen (an eminent archivist who was both his friend and colleague at the University Library of Cluj), as well as with entries from the journal kept by his colleague, writer György Jakab (Bözödi), as well as the correspondence with his wife, Ilona Gyenge. The interpretation of the *ex libris* designed by K. Sebestyén József (still found today in thousands of volumes belonging to the collections of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library) will undoubtedly represent a novelty.

**Keywords:** The University Library of Cluj, The Transylvanian Museum Society, Ex libris, Transylvania, Heraldry, Journals.

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<sup>1</sup> The paper entitled “K. Sebestyén József és a Kolozsvári Egyetemi Könyvtár” [József Sebestyén K. and the University Library of Cluj] was presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the Doctoral Students’ Conference of the Hungarian-language Department of History in Cluj-Napoca, on 1 March 2025.

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**Rezumat:** József Sebestyén K. a fost un eminent specialist în heraldică, pictor heraldist de prim rang, genealog maghiar și un bun cunoscător al monumentelor transilvănene. Pe lângă evocarea marilor realizări - a pictat prima stemă a României Mari, dar și multe alte steme ale unor instituții publice sau de familie, voi prezenta în acest studiu descoperirile mele legate de evoluția Bibliotecii Universității din Cluj, în perioada 1945-1959. Cercetările din arhiva Bibliotecii Centrale Universitare „Lucian-Bloga” din Cluj-Napoca au scos la iveală noi informații despre anii în care József Sebestyén K. a fost angajatul Bibliotecii. Documentele oficiale din arhiva bibliotecii pot fi mai ușor înțelese prin prisma corespondenței dintre acesta și Lajos Kelemen (marele arhivist, care i-a fost prieten, dar și coleg în cadrul Bibliotecii Universității din Cluj); de asemenea, din jurnalul scriitorului și colegului, György Jakab (Bözödi), respectiv din corespondența cu soția lui, Ilona Gyenge. Interpretarea ex-librisului desenat de József Sebestyén K., care se găsește și în zilele noastre în miile de volume din colecția Bibliotecii Centrale Universitare „Lucian-Bloga” din Cluj-Napoca, va fi cu siguranță o noutate pentru mulți.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Biblioteca Universității din Cluj, Societatea Muzeului Ardelean, Ex-libris, Transilvania, Heraldică, Jurnale.

The present study pays tribute to one of the outstanding figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, József Sebestyén K. In addition to recalling the achievements through which he has become known over time, my research into the history and development of the University Library of Cluj between 1945 and 1959 highlights several new findings and previously undocumented aspects of his activity.

His pseudonym, József Sebestyén Keöpeczi, is familiar to many. He is known as a heraldist, a coat of arms painter, a genealogist and an illustrator, yet few are aware that, between 1940 and 1947, he was also an employee of the University Library of Cluj. Proceeding chronologically in the identification of the documents relevant to the present research, thus beginning with the year 1945, we uncovered, in the archives of the “Lucian Bloga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, a table<sup>2</sup> listing the library employees who had remained in Cluj. After the end of World War I, part of Cluj’s Hungarian population (civil servants, teachers, intellectuals) fled to Hungary out of fear of reprisals.

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<sup>2</sup> Cluj-Napoca, the Archive of The “Lucian Bloga” Central University Library (hereinafter ALBCUL): file no. 45 / 12 March 1945, 7 folios.

Because of the general state of uncertainty, in the summer of 1944, 21 librarians, led by director Árpád Herepey, left for Hungary, while those who remained guarded the institution day and night.<sup>3</sup> Among the 52 employees, the renowned heraldist appears in the capacity of *library officer* (Hungarian term: *könyvtári tisztt*). It is highly likely that this table, drawn up by the library director, István Monoki,<sup>4</sup> was compiled at the request of the authorities, given the fact that, in the final column, each employee is listed as “nélkülözhetetlen munkaerő,” meaning “indispensable workforce” (see Table 1).

Before reviewing several biographical details, we must clarify the version of the name used henceforth. In the official documents of the University Library of Cluj, his name appears as *K. Sebestyén József* (following the Hungarian convention in which the family name precedes the given name). However, the standardised English form will be used throughout the present study: *József Sebestyén K.* He signed his works using the artistic name “K.” or “Keöpeczi/Köpeczi Sebestyén József” (see Fig. 4. The origin of the name Keöpeczi or Köpeczi will be addressed in a later section), which is also the form that appears on his business card (see Fig. 2). In the two volumes<sup>5</sup> dedicated to his life and work, the literary historian Péter Sas used the form “Köpeczi Sebestyén József,” while Attila István Szekeres (heraldist, heraldic graphic artist, president of the Transylvanian Association of Heraldry and Vexillology, and member of the International Academy of Heraldry) has opted, in his conference papers<sup>6</sup> and published works, for the variant *József Sebestyén Keöpeczi*.

The abbreviation/initial “K.” and the noble predicate Köpeczi/Chepeț derive primarily from the noble origins of the Sebestyén family from Trei Scaune/Háromszék, more precisely from Micloșoara/Miklósvárszék, as Köpecz was one of the settlements from Miklósvárszék (see Fig. 3: the coat of arms

<sup>3</sup> See Gyórfi Dénes, *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae: evoluția instituțională și practici ale lecturii în Clujul universitar: 1872-1945* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2019), 255.

<sup>4</sup> István Monoki (1887-1963): Hungarian bibliographer, director of the University Library of Cluj between 1944-1947.

<sup>5</sup> Péter Sas, *A heraldikus. Köpeczi Sebestyén József élete és munkássága*, Vol. I-II (Miercurea Ciuc: Pallas-Akadémia Könyvkiadó, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Attila István Szekeres presented his paper titled “Artistul heraldist József Sebestyén Keöpeczi (1878-1964)” at the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of Genealogy and Heraldry, 12-14 May 2016, Iași; on 9 February 2016, he launched the biographical volume titled *Keöpeczi Sebestyén József, a címerművész* at the “Kájoni János” County Library in Miercurea Ciuc.

of the Sebestyén family of Keöpecz – the use of the letter “e” appears in the diploma of ennoblement granted in 1608 by Gabriel Báthory, Prince of Transylvania<sup>7</sup>). Another reason for the adoption of the place name Köpeczi (from Köpecz/Chepeț) as an artistic name is related to the fact that József Sebestyén K. enlisted in the Székely Division in 1918.<sup>8</sup> The division was dissolved in 1919, after which he was taken as a prisoner of war and sent to the POW camp in Brașov. Following his release, he was placed under house arrest. In 1936, he told journalists Endre Hegyi and Ilona Jagamas: “I was interned in Chepeț (Köpecz/Căpeni), because my artistic name was Köpeczi.”<sup>9</sup> After his forced exile to Köpecz, he lived there with his family between 1919 and 1940.

In the following, we shall briefly outline several important biographical data pertaining to the life of József Sebestyén K., with particular emphasis on the years spent in the University Library of Cluj.

He was born on November 12, 1878, in Sic, Solnoc-Dăbâca County.<sup>10</sup> His father, József Sebestyén (1855-1933),<sup>11</sup> was a schoolteacher. Thus, young Sebestyén attended school wherever his father was appointed: after Sic, in Nimegea de Jos, then in Șieu, completing his secondary education in Bistrița, where, within a Saxon milieu, he also refined his knowledge of the German language. Aspiring to become a painter, József Sebestyén K. attended the courses of the Royal Hungarian School of Artistic Drawing in Budapest during the first semester of the 1898/1899 academic year.<sup>12</sup>

Upon arriving in Cluj in 1903, Sebestyén began researching the noble origins of his family, for which purpose he requested, together with the

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<sup>7</sup> Attila István Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic al județului Covasna* (Arcuș: Tinta, 2015), 51.

<sup>8</sup> Ádám Kónya, “Országok heraldikusa Keöpeczi Sebestyén József,” *Erdővidéki lapok*, I/2 (2000): 4-6; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 34-50.

<sup>9</sup> Endre Hegyi, “Látogatás Köpeczi Sebestyén Józsefnél, a román és a magyar királyi címerek tervezőjénél,” *Keleti Újság*, 116 (22 May 1936): 5. Original text: “Szabadulásom után Chepețire internáltak, miután előnevem Köpeczi volt.” Unless otherwise indicated, all translations were made by the author of the present article.

<sup>10</sup> ALBCUL, ad 45/12 March 1945, f. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Lajos Kelemen, *Napló II (1921-1938)* (Cluj-Napoca: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2018), 358; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 563.

<sup>12</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 19-20; Attila István Szekeres, *Keöpeczi Sebestyén József, a címerművész* (Baraolt: Tortoma, 2014), 107.

University Library director, Farkas Gyalui,<sup>13</sup> different diplomas from the Hungarian National Archives. These constitute the first two archival documents attesting to his presence as a researcher on the premises of the University Library of Cluj.<sup>14</sup> This correspondence is preserved by the Hungarian National Archives and was published in 2011 by the literary and art historian Péter Sas.

In the months that followed, Sebestyén became the co-editor and illustrator of the newly founded scholarly periodical titled *Genealógiai füzetek* [Genealogical Journal], edited by Sándor Imre until 1914, when the journal ceased its publication because of the outbreak of the war.<sup>15</sup> As soon as 1905, this journal gave rise to a professional collaboration with historian Lajos Kelemen,<sup>16</sup> who, over the years, would come to play a major role in Sebestyén's life. The relationship between the two was documented by the correspondence collected and published by Hungarian historian Péter Sas in the two volumes of Lajos Kelemen's journal.<sup>17</sup> From the very beginning, Lajos Kelemen was impressed by the artistic skills that created the badges bearing the Mikó coat of arms for the team of organisers of the Mikó Commemorative Ceremony, held on 12 November 1905, among whom Kelemen himself was included.<sup>18</sup>

In September 1906, Count László Teleki's entire archive<sup>19</sup> was transported to the Wesselényi House (the one-story building next to the University Library), in two large carts, together with the chests and two archival cabinets. There, Lajos Kelemen unpacked and sanitized the enormous number of documents.

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<sup>13</sup> Farkas Gyalui (1866-1952): writer, literary historian, acting director (1899/1900) and subsequently deputy (technical) director of the University Library of Cluj (1911, 1920-1926). See also Dénes Gyórfi, "Farkas Gyalui, Former Deputy Director of Cluj University Library," *Philobiblon* XIII (2008): 507-514.

<sup>14</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 119. The letter sent by Farkas Gyalui to the Hungarian National Archives (dated Cluj, 23 April 1903) reads: "I must mention the fact that, in accordance with our agreement, the requested diplomas will be consulted solely within the premises of the University Library." Original text: "Megjegyzem, hogy kölcsönös megállapodásunk szerint iratokat csak az egyetemi könyvtárban fogják használni."

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-23; Szekeres, *Patrimonium heraldic*, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Lajos Kelemen (1877-1963): Hungarian historian and archivist, employed by the University Library of Cluj between 1903-1949. See Lajos Kelemen, *Napló I (1890-1920)*, *Napló II (1921-1938)* (Cluj-Napoca: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2017-2018).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* I, *Ibid.*, II; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Kelemen, *Napló I*, 272; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Count László Teleki (1864-1949), following his divorce, sold all his property in Transylvania and relocated to Gyömrő (Hungary). See Kelemen, *Napló I*, 320.

The library director, Pál Erdélyi,<sup>20</sup> approved Kelemen's request to hire intelligent people to organise the archive. According to Kelemen's journal, those were the circumstances in which Sebestyén came to work alongside him in the Wesselényi House.<sup>21</sup> Lajos Kelemen had been the one who initiated him into the intricacies of archival work. A document dated 22 July 1947<sup>22</sup> attests the fact that József Sebestyén K. had indeed been an employee of the University Library in 1907 – an employee certificate, signed by the library's retired director, Antal Valentiny.<sup>23</sup> According to the certificate from 22 July 1947, librarian József Sebestyén had been employed by the University Library, from the beginning of March to the end of August 1907, as a day labourer and was paid at a rate of two crowns per day. His assigned duty was the organisation of the archive – which, due to a lack of space, had been moved to the Wesselényi House, located near the new building (under construction at that time).

In 1907, he further refined his studies in heraldry and painting abroad. Lajos Kelemen carefully preserved the postcards he had sent him from different European cities:

Today (30 April 1907, in the evening), I received two letters from Sebestyén, from Strasbourg and Ulm, letting me know that he would write to me again from Paris. He was planning on returning home by mid-May. Things are rather easy for him – he does not need to think much of tomorrow.<sup>24</sup>

Upon his return to Cluj, due to Lajos Kelemen's friendship and influence, he became a member of the Philology and History Section of the Transylvanian Museum Society. He moved to Budapest in 1914 and, one

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<sup>20</sup> Pál Erdélyi (1864-1936): librarian, literary critic, director of the University Library between 1900-1919.

<sup>21</sup> Kelemen, *Napló* I, 320-321.

<sup>22</sup> The document is preserved in the József Sebestyén Köpeczi personal fonds at the Archive of the Transylvanian Museum Society, Personal Documents file; see also Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 540.

<sup>23</sup> Antal Valentiny (1883-1948): Hungarian linguist, bibliographer, director of the University Library of Cluj between 1940-1942.

<sup>24</sup> Kelemen, *Napló* I, 339. Original text: "Április 30., este. 1907. Sebestyéntől ma Strassburgból és Ulmból két levelezőt kaptam, s jelzi, hogy Párizsból ír újra. Úgy tervezte, hogy május közepére itthon lesz. Könnyű neki – ő a holnappal nem gondol."

year later, he received permission from the Minister of Internal Affairs to use the title “heraldic painter of the Royal Hungarian National Archives.”<sup>25</sup> In this capacity, he designed the coat of arms of the Kingdom of Hungary, as well as the royal seal.

In 1917, he published a substantial volume titled *Erdély címere*, discussing the coat of arms of Transylvania, in the scholarly journal on heraldry and genealogy, *Turul. A Magyar Heraldikai és Genealogiai Társaság Közlönye* [The *Turul*. The Bulletin of the Hungarian Heraldic and Genealogical Society]. The text is abundantly illustrated with the author’s own heraldic drawings. This is the very first truly scholarly work that addressed the issue of the Transylvanian coat of arms.<sup>26</sup>

The period between 1919 and 1940, during which he lived in Căpeni, was the most fruitful phase of his heraldic activity, as well as of his work in cultural heritage conservation and monument protection. One of his greatest accomplishments was the design of the coat of arms of Romania, after the unification of the country following the Treaty of Trianon. For this task, he had been recommended by university professor Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș, acting as a representative of the Royal Court.<sup>27</sup> The coat of arms designed by József Sebestyén K. was adopted on 23 July 1921 and published in the *Monitorul Oficial* [The *Official Gazette*] no. 92 of 24 July 1921.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, he was awarded the Order of the Crown of Romania, Officer rank.<sup>29</sup> His design for the Romanian coat of arms was used between 1921 and 1941.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Attila István Szekeres, “József Sebestyén Keöpeczi autorul stemei României din 1921”, in Mircea Ciubotariu, Lucian Valeriu Lefter, eds., *Mihai Dim. Sturdza la 80 de ani. Omagiu* (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” 2014), 919-933; Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 54; Attila István Szekeres, Tudor Radu Tiron, “Stemele din biserica reformată de la Căpeni – un ansamblu unic de heraldică publică și privată”, *Monumentul X*, Vol. II, Part 1 (Iași, 2009): 329-358; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 30-33.

<sup>26</sup> Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș (1872-1952): Romanian art historian, museologist and professor at the Art History department of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the Bucharest University, as well as director of the Carol I Foundation between 1899-1946. See *Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș (1872-1952): biobibliografie adnotată*, Podgoreanu Anca, ed. (Constanța: Ex Ponto, 2004), LXVI; Hegyi, “Látogatás,” 5; Ádám Kónya, “Stema României și heraldistul József Sebestyén Keöpeczi”, *Acta Siculica* (1995): 343-350; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 71.

<sup>28</sup> Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 55, 139.

<sup>29</sup> Szekeres, Tiron, “Stemele din biserica reformată de la Căpeni”: 330; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 45-48.

<sup>30</sup> Kónya, “Stema României”: 343.

Sebestyén intended to prove that the so-called Transylvanian culture was, in fact, an integral part of European culture. The phrase “the easternmost frontier of Western culture” became a poetic manifesto and he did everything in his power to substantiate it.<sup>31</sup> Inside the Reformed Church of Căpeni, he created a veritable gallery of coats of arms.<sup>32</sup> He was commissioned to paint numerous family crests, he designed *ex libris* bookplates and produced the illustrations for Imre Lukinich’s work titled *A bethleni gróf Bethlen család története*<sup>33</sup> [The Count Bethlen family of Bethlen]. He collaborated with the Székely National Museum of Sfântu Gheorghe<sup>34</sup> and, additionally, he perfected his linguistic and professional skills by taking part in the restoration works on the Black Church of Braşov.<sup>35</sup> He published a series of studies in heraldry and art history, primarily in Hungarian journals, but also in scholarly Saxon and Romanian journals: *Genealogiai Füzetek*; *Erdélyi Irodalmi Szemle*; *Erdélyi Múzeum*; *Művészeti Szemle*; *Siebenbürgischen Vierteljahrschrift*; *Mitteilungen des Burzenländer Sächsischen Muzeums*; *Ilustrația*; *Flacăra*.<sup>36</sup> Among those who commissioned various works from him were Attila T. Szabó<sup>37</sup> and János Herepei.<sup>38</sup>

Beside his professional achievements, we must also highlight the events from his private life in the village of Căpeni, as they had a major impact on him. There, he married Ilona Gyenge<sup>39</sup> and, shortly after that, they had two

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<sup>31</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 71.

<sup>32</sup> Szekeres, Tiron, “Stemele”: 329-357; Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 158, 161, 170.

<sup>33</sup> Imre Lukinich, *A bethleni gróf Bethlen család története* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1927). See Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 49-52.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-64.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>36</sup> József Sebestyén Keőpeczi’s studies published in the *Erdélyi Tudományos Füzetek* series: “A Brassai Fekete Templom Mátyás-kori címerei” (no. 8, 1927); “A Becse-Gergely nemzetség, az Apafi és a bethleni gróf Bethlen család címere” (no.13, 1928); “A középkori nyugati műveltség legkeletibb határai” (no. 19, 1929); “A Cenk-hegyi Brasovia-vár temploma” (no. 121, 1940); “Régi székely népi eredetű műemlékeink” (no. 126, 1941). József Sebestyén Keőpeczi’s studies published in *Erdélyi Irodalmi Szemle*: “A brassai fekete templom Mátyás-kori címerei,” 1 (1927): 13-32; “A Becse-Gergely nemzetség, az Apafi és a Bethleni gróf Bethlen család címere,” 1-4 (1928): 69-83. József Sebestyén Keőpeczi’s studies published in *Pásztortűz*: “Egy Báthori-címeres asztal Segesváron,” 5 (1927): 101-102; “Erdélyi renaissance-émlékek,” 13 (1927): 293-297.

<sup>37</sup> Attila T. Szabó (1906-1987): linguist, historian, literary historian, ethnographer, director of the Transylvanian Scientific Institute. See Kelemen, *Napló* II, 856.

<sup>38</sup> János Herepei (1891-1970): Hungarian museographer.

<sup>39</sup> Ilona Miklósvári Gyenge (1895-1945).

sons: András<sup>40</sup> and Albert.<sup>41</sup> His devotion to his wife and his paternal inclination are reflected in the family correspondence preserved in the József Sebestyén Collection held at the Romanian National Archives, Cluj County Branch. The letters contained in this archival collection were published in the first volume of Péter Sas's monograph.<sup>42</sup>

On 18 December 1923, Kelemen highlighted Sebestyén's importance and uniqueness within an auxiliary science of history, namely heraldry: "Today, he is the only Hungarian heraldic scholar in Transylvania."<sup>43</sup> Their mutual respect and admiration for each other's contributions to Transylvanian history are reflected in a letter sent on 17 May 1938 by József Sebestyén K. to Lajos Kelemen, in which he conveyed his best wishes: "Due to your work, the entire scholarly sphere of Transylvania has been elevated to a truly higher level, since all of our own work stems from yours. You are the initiator, the awakener of souls, the motivator of work."<sup>44</sup>

Financial hardship burdened Sebestyén throughout his life. His good friend, Lajos Kelemen, recounts this aspect of Sebestyén's private life in his journal: "Sebestyén is terrible at managing money and his wife lacks this ability as well. Therefore, they struggle to meet expenses. Sebestyén earns so little that they are drowning in debt."<sup>45</sup>

Following the Second Vienna Award, on 30 August 1940, Northern Transylvania was ceded to Hungary. As a consequence of this event, a political and administrative change took place in Cluj: beginning in September 1940, the Hungarian administration was installed, while the Romanian authorities withdrew. The "King Ferdinand I" University of Cluj and the "King Ferdinand I" University Library took refuge in Sibiu and Timișoara, while the library building in Cluj was handed over to the Hungarian authorities in order to ensure the proper functioning of the "Ferenc József" Royal Hungarian University Library; thus, the library staff was subsequently expanded.<sup>46</sup> The

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<sup>40</sup> András Sebestyén (1920–1946): József Sebestyén's eldest son.

<sup>41</sup> Albert Sebestyén (1921-?): József Sebestyén's youngest son.

<sup>42</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 119-565.

<sup>43</sup> Kelemen, *Napló II*, 216. Original text: "Ma ő az egyedüli heraldikus magyar író már Erdélyben."

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 20. Original text: "Veled tulajdonképpen egész Erdély tudományos világát felemelték, hiszen mindnyájunk munkássága Tőled ered, Te vagy a kezdeményező, a lelkek ébrentartója, munkára serkentője."

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 570. Original text: "Sebestyén a pénzzel nem tud bánni, s az asszony se ért hozzá. Így aztán tengődnek."

<sup>46</sup> See Győrfi, *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae*, 234, 248.

Hungarian elite sought to set the Transylvanian scholarly life on a new path. Shortly after the political changes, Sebestyén moved to Cluj. One month after having settled in Cluj, on 16 November 1940, he informed his wife that he was spending the entire day, every day, working in the University Library.<sup>47</sup> Beginning with November 1940, the entire correspondence bore, as the recipient's heading, "To Mr. heraldist József Sebestyén, University Library of Cluj," and, as the sender, "József Sebestyén Keöpeczi, University Library." At the end of each letter, he indicated the locality, the institution in parentheses (University Library), the date, and his name.<sup>48</sup>

Many assumed that he had moved to Cluj in 1940 due to the influence of Lajos Kelemen who was believed to have recommended him to the University Library.<sup>49</sup> However, Sebestyén's correspondence shows that he was, in fact, recommended to Minister Bálint Hóman<sup>50</sup> for a position at the library by Károly Kratochvil,<sup>51</sup> commander of the Székely Division.

He wrote to his wife frequently about the long wait for his appointment: "My appointment seems certain – after that is when we will finally be rid of all our problems" (23 February 1941);<sup>52</sup> "The appointment has still not arrived, but I already know my duties" (1 April 1941);<sup>53</sup> on 12 December 1941, he joyfully informed her that he had received an invitation from Minister Hóman, hoping that he would be appointed to a good position at the Transylvanian

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<sup>47</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 439: "It has been a month since I left home... I did not write to you because everything is still uncertain. My situation is being settled at the ministry... I usually spend my whole day working in the University Library."

<sup>48</sup> The National Archives of Romania, Cluj County Branch (hereafter NARCCB), Fund 608, File 16, 333 fols.

<sup>49</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 565. Letter of the art historian János Herepei, addressed to the priest Dezső László, marked Szeged, dated 15 March 1965, reads: "In 1940, he became an employee of the University Library of Cluj, where he was hired on the recommendation made by Uncle Lajos."

<sup>50</sup> Bálint Hóman (1885-1951): Minister of Education and Culture in Hungary between 1932-1938 and 1939-1942.

<sup>51</sup> Károly Kratochvil (1896-1946): an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, commander of the Székely Division. The letter sent by Károly Kratochvil to József Sebestyén on 7 November 1941 from Budapest reads: "I sent Homán a very lively recommendation on your behalf." Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 75-76, 461.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 444. Original text: "A kinevezésem most már biztosnak látszik, s akkor minden bajtól megszabadulunk."

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 448. Original text: "Még mindig nincs meg a kinevezésem, de már megvan a munkaköröm."

Museum in Cluj;<sup>54</sup> “I have begun work. I do hope the appointment will arrive next week. Please send the parcels to Bolyai Street no. 6, so I wouldn’t have to rent a cart to transport them from the library anymore” (4 January 1942).<sup>55</sup>

In Cluj, he lived away from his family and under rather difficult conditions. On 2 February 1942, already at his wit’s end because of homesickness and the continued delay of his appointment, he wrote:

Send me a little corn flower and eggs; there is no firewood, only poverty. If the appointment does not come this month, I won’t stay any longer. I’ll return home and I’ll put it out of my mind for good. I am also being called up to the army, but the salary is small and the work is hard.<sup>56</sup>

According to the research conducted by historian Dénes Gyórfi,<sup>57</sup> on 16 February 1942, the University Library of Cluj employed 25 librarians, 17 assistant librarians, and 23 attendants. The staff included several prominent intellectuals, such as heraldist József Sebestyén K., archivist Lajos Kelemen, historian Zsigmond Jakó,<sup>58</sup> art historian Géza Entz,<sup>59</sup> writers György Bözödi and Zoltán Jékely,<sup>60</sup> and others (see Fig. 6).

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<sup>54</sup> József Sebestyén’s letter from 12 December 1941, sent to his wife, reads: “My darling! Minister [Bálint] Hóman has summoned me to Pest. He is going to appoint me to the Transylvanian Museum of Cluj, and what a wonderful position that will be.” NARCCB, Fund 608, File 13. See *Ibid.*, 463.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 465. Original text: “Én megkezdtem a munkát. Remélem, hogy jövő héten már megjön a kinevezésem. A csomagokat címezzétek a lakásomra (Bolyai utca 6. 1 em. 1. ajtó), hogy ne kelljen a könyvtártól még kocsit fogadjak haza, a hazavitelre.”

<sup>56</sup> NARCCB, Fund 608, File 14; *Ibid.*, 468. Original text: “Ha teheted, küldj egy kis puliszkalisztet, s néhány tojást, itt nincs. Fa sincs, csak nyomrúság. A kinevezésemet mindennap várom. Ha e hónapban nem jön meg, hazamegyek, s többet nem is gondolok rá. A hadtest is hív, de kevés a fizetés és rengeteg a munka.”

<sup>57</sup> Gyórfi, *Bibliotheca Universitatis Claudiopolitanae*, 249.

<sup>58</sup> Zsigmond Jakó (1916-2008): university professor, Hungarian historian and archivist. Between 1941 and 1947, he served as assistant library custodian at the University Library – NARCCB, Bolyai Fund no. 1363, f. 394 – and was assigned for official duties to the Archive of the Transylvanian Museum in Cluj, later being seconded as an archivist to the Archive of the Transylvanian National Museum; ALBCUL, 195/22 August 1945.

<sup>59</sup> Géza Entz (1913-1993): Hungarian art historian, assistant library custodian at the University Library of Cluj between 1941 and 1945.

<sup>60</sup> Zoltán Jékely (1913-1982): Hungarian writer and translator; employed at the University Library of Cluj between 1941 and 1945.

His appointment would not have been possible under the laws in force at the time. At the moment of his appointment, Sebestyén was 64 years old and held neither a teaching degree nor a doctoral degree. He himself was aware of the exceptional nature of the decision, as he confessed to his wife in a letter dated 8 March 1942:

Darling! I am hereby joyfully informing you that my appointment has finally taken place, I am a university library officer. I took the official oath before the 15<sup>th</sup>. Everyone at the University is very pleased with my appointment and has high expectations for my work. I am immensely grateful for my appointment, particularly because the statutory age limit was disregarded – meaning that after the age of sixty no one may be appointed to a state position and employment normally requires a teaching diploma and a doctorate, with one beginning in any case as a trainee. The rank I hold now would normally be attainable only after eight years. In my case, this appointment has been a reward for my past scholarly work, a national gift. They have also assured me of very rapid advancement.<sup>61</sup>

Upon being appointed, he was congratulated by László Kovács, the head of the employment office in Cluj, in a letter dated 5 March 1942: “I wish that the position of library officer may be the first step toward the position of director. You obtained this position through your own work, in recognition of all of your efforts devoted to the cause of the Szeklers and the Hungarians.”<sup>62</sup> On 6 March, the director of the Székely National Museum of Sfântu Gheorghe, János Herepei, also wrote him a letter saying: “I read about your appointment. I was overjoyed.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 76, 470-471. Original text: “Egyetlenem! Örömmel tudatlak, hogy a kinevezésem megtörtént, Tudományegyetemi könyvtártiszt vagyok. 15. előtt letettem a hivatalos esküt. Nagyon nagyra becsülöm a kinevezésemet, mert két dologtól tekintettek el, és pedig a törvényben előírt kortól, mert 60 év után senki ki nem nevezhető állami állásra és az előképzettségtől, t.i. ide tanári oklevél és doktorátus kell, s akkor is csak gyakornoksággal kezdődik, s az a fok, amelyben én vagyok a legjobb esetben is nyolcv év múlva érhető el. Nálam a tudományos munkásságot, a megszállás alatti erős nemzeti munkát és magatartást jutalmazták vele. Ez egy nemzeti ajándék. Nagyon gyors, évről évre való előhaladásomat is biztosították.”

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 470. Original text: “Ha valaki megérdemelte ezen soron kívüli kinevezést, úgy mindnyájan meg vagyunk győződve, hogy a Te sok évtizedes tudományos munkásságod, melyet a székelység és a magyarság érdekeiért folytatál ténylegesen és érdemlegesen minden elismerést kiérdemelt.”

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* Original text: “Olvastam kinevezésed. Nagyon örültem neki.”

During this period, he worked extensively alongside Lajos Kelemen, producing illustrations both for Kelemen's studies and for articles published in the journal *Erdélyi Múzeum* [The Transylvanian Museum]. Undoubtedly, Lajos Kelemen played a decisive role in the Transylvanian Museum Society's request for the creation of badges and seals for the Association and its branches. Moreover, Sebestyén readily designed the seal of the Library of the Transylvanian Museum, the institution in which he activated at that time.<sup>64</sup>

József Sebestyén K. designed one of the *ex libris* used by the University Library of Cluj (see Fig. 5). By definition, an *ex libris* is a small label, drawing, stamp, or engraving, usually affixed to the first page of a book, indicating its owner. Its purpose is to mark ownership, while also fulfilling an aesthetic and cultural function. Most *ex libris* designs include heraldic, literary, professional, or philosophical symbols. An *ex libris* is therefore both a mark of ownership and a small, personalised work of art. The *ex libris* designed by József Sebestyén K. was, for many years, applied to the volumes from the collections of the University Library of Cluj. Readers who come across an *ex libris* rarely ask themselves who designed it and what it represents. In the course of the present research, we were able, with the help of the heraldist Attila István Szekeres<sup>65</sup> and Clara Fulea,<sup>66</sup> a specialist in the cultural history of *ex libris*, to decipher the meaning of the one designed by József Sebestyén K.. According to Clara Fulea, the *ex libris* of the University Library of Cluj (*Bibliothecae Universitatis Kolozsvár*) was created by József Sebestyén K. at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most likely in 1910. Unfortunately, a precise date cannot be irrefutably established. However, the stylistic features and the historical context clearly point to this period. According to the heraldist Attila István Szekeres, the *ex libris* may have been created sometime between 1904 and 1914.

The central element of the *ex libris* in question is an incense burner, or a symbolic altar with rising flames and smoke, which may be interpreted

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 80; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. II, 461, 502.

<sup>65</sup> Personal correspondence with heraldist Attila István Szekeres, from 30 January 2025.

<sup>66</sup> Personal correspondence with historian Clara Fulea, from 30 January 2025. See Clara Fulea's published research on the topic of *ex libris*: Clara Fulea, "O istorie culturală a ex-libris-ului: incursiuni în istoricul ex-libris-ului românesc" (PhD diss., Babeş-Bolyai University, 2021); "Eva Mârza, Alexandru Ştirban, Florin Bogdan, Ex-libris, colecția Mârza (recenzie)", *Caiete de antropologie istorică*, 1 (2021): 220-221; *Ex-libris. Incursiune în istoria ex-libris-ului* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2023); "Tema morții în ex-libris-uri", *Caiete de antropologie istorică*, 1 (2022): 27-39; "Femeile și ex-libris-ul", *Caiete de antropologie istorică*, 2 (2022): 164-173.

as a symbol of the enlightenment brought about by knowledge. However, it may also allude to the sacrifices made in the name of learning and culture. The book placed beneath the altar further reinforces the fundamental idea conveyed by the *ex libris* under scrutiny, namely that of knowledge being one of the crucial pillars or intellectual development.

In the upper right corner, one can observe a coat of arms which, as a heraldic element, refers to the historical context in which the *ex libris* was created. Its structure consists of a main shield divided into four parts, with a heart-shaped inescutcheon. In the first section of the main shield, there is a raven (Hunyadi) perched on a tree branch, turned to the right, holding a ring in its beak; in the second section, there are three wolf's teeth facing forward (Báthory); in the third section, there is a wolf emerging from a triple tumulus, turned to the right, with a crescent in front of it and a star behind (Szapolyai); in the fourth section, there are two swans facing each other, with their necks crossed (Bethlen of Iktár). At the bottom, there is a wall with three bastions (Cluj/Kolozsvár), while the central shield depicts a small Hungarian coat of arms. The Holy Crown of Hungary surmounts the larger shield. The entire composition is framed by a border decorated with vegetal ornamentation reminiscent of the finely crafted margins of medieval codices. These details confer a particular elegance upon the work, emphasising the prestige, status, and intellectual heritage of the University Library. Through its richly detailed, meticulously executed style and carefully chosen symbolism, this *ex libris* reflects not only the cultural identity of the University Library, but also its scholarly and educational role.

Owing to his processional success and integration into the city's elite circles, József Sebestyén K. attempted to bring his wife from Căpeni to Cluj. On 5 May 1942, he wrote "Here, I have absolutely no enemies. Everyone loves and appreciates me, so you too would be treated the same way."<sup>67</sup> On 29 September 1942, "I wish I were home with you, but this wonderful position, this pleasant, refined entourage cannot be compared to the coarseness of Köpec."<sup>68</sup> On 29 May 1943, "I feel so lonely – nothing but work and more work. Even last summer, I couldn't spend my entire leave with you because of the researchers

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<sup>67</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 474. Original text: "Nekem senki ellenségem nincs, mindenki szeret, becsül, ebben volna Neked is részed."

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 482-483. Original text: "Úgy szeretnék otthon lenni! De hát ez a szép hivatal, ez a kedves, úri környezet össze sem hasonlítható a köpeci durvasággal."

from Pest.”<sup>69</sup> On 2 December 1944, “I have no news of you. Darling, please come to me. Even though the food is scarce, we’ll manage and we’ll live here in peace and quiet. I am well, in good health, in the service of the University Library. Please look after my books, letters, documents and drawings.”<sup>70</sup>

Nonetheless, he was far less fortunate in maintaining his family than he was with matters related to his work. Anna Fadgyas,<sup>71</sup> the museologist and secretary of the Székely National Museum of Sfântu Gheorghe, assisted him in communicating with his wife by mediating their letter exchanges. It was through her that he learned of the death of his wife. His sons then return from the front – András had been decorated for his merits on the Kyiv front. A difficult period followed in Sebestyén’s life: on 17 January 1945 his wife died, and shortly thereafter, in June 1946, he also lost his eldest son. With the death of his son, Sebestyén definitively abandoned the idea of returning to Căpeni to manage the house and land there. Albert, however, was more fortunate – after returning from the front, he arrived in Cluj on 18 May 1945. In November 1945, Lajos Kelemen helped the two of them with residence documents, but Albert did not remain long in Cluj. He first settled in Hungary and later in Austria. He never returned, as it is believed that he had been sentenced to 15 years in prison for a naïve conspiracy against the Romanian authorities. The years following World War II were truly difficult for Sebestyén – his wife and elder son had died, his younger son disappeared, and he received no further news of him. He lived with no family. Lajos Kelemen was the only one of his friends who remained by his side throughout the years<sup>72</sup> (see Fig. 1).

In addition to his position as a library officer, József Sebestyén K. also held the position of commander of the air-raid defence. In order to protect the library’s priceless collections, Dr. Ernő Zikély, commander of air-raid defence of the University of Cluj, proposed the heraldist József Sebestyén K. for the

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<sup>69</sup> NARCCB, Fund 608, File 15; *Ibid.*, 499. Original text: “Én a vakációmát július végére kértem. Remélem nem kell itt maradnom, mint tavaly. Akkor csak 12 napot vettem ki a pesti kutatók miatt. Én is olyan árva vagyok, olyan elhagyott. Csak a munka, a munka, semmi más.”

<sup>70</sup> NARCCB, Fund 608, File 16; *Ibid.*, 528. Original text: “Oly régen nem tudok semmit Rólad. Édesem, amint teheted, jere fel hozzám, ha szűk is az élelem, valahogy megélünk itt csendben. A könyveimre, irataimra, leveleimre, rajzaimra vigyázz Édesem.”

<sup>71</sup> Anna Fadgyas (1906-1983): secretary of the Székely National Museum of Sfântu Gheorghe in 1924.

<sup>72</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 85-86.

position of air-raid defence commander, responsible for the library and the clinics, considering him the most suitable person for the post, given that he knew the institution and its assets better than anyone and had demonstrated intelligence and prompt presence of mind.<sup>73</sup> He wrote to his wife in several letters about this responsibility and the training required for this task. On 29 September 1942, he wrote: “On Saturday, I passed the exam to become an air-raid defence instructor... At the library, I am on duty from 8PM to 7AM. We are terribly afraid of air-raids. It would be an absolute disaster if this treasure trove of knowledge were to ever be destroyed” (see Fig. 9).<sup>74</sup> On 6 June 1944:

I received your saddening letter and thank you for writing to me. I have little to no time for myself, because there is so much to be done here, so much agitation, so many problems. Lately, I have been sleeping in the library, as there are so many alerts, and at every alert I must be present in my capacity as air-raid defence commander of the Library and the Clinics. On Friday morning, 2 June, air raids took place in the area of the railway station and the hospitals. Houses collapsed like houses of cards, and many people lost their lives. The image of the city is sinister. At this very moment, there are still people buried beneath the ruins. I was in the shelter in the library basement (see Fig. 8) together with 200 people, which is why I felt nothing of the bombardment. If only the war ended and I could be at home with you. I do not think I will have summer leave, although I do truly long for you. I cannot leave the library beyond a five-minute distance from which I could return. Such is the gravity of the situation. I cannot focus on any private work, as there is absolutely no time for such things.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> NARCCB, Fund 608, File 5, f. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I., 482-483. Original text: “Szombaton letettem a légoltalmi oktatói vizsgát... a könyvtárban éjjeli szolgálat van 8-tól reggel 7-ig, nagyon félünk a támadástól. Végzetes lenne, ha e hatalmas nemzeti kincs elpusztulna.”

<sup>75</sup> NARCCB, Fund 608, File 16; *Ibid.*, 522. Original text: “Megkaptam szomorú leveledet, köszönöm, hogy írtál, én bizony alig jövök hozzá, hogy írhassek, annyi gond, izgalom és dolog között vagyok. Mostanában a könyvtárban alszom, mert annyi riadó s veszedelem van, hogy nem merek otthon aludni, már csak azért sem, mert minden riadónál itt kell legyek, mint a Könyvtár, az Újklínika és a fogászat légoltalmi parancsnoka. Pénteken, június 2-án délelőtt szörnyű repülőtémadás érte a város állomás körüli részét. Magam a mi könyvtári, föld alatti nagyon erős óvóhelyén voltam vagy kétszázad magammal. Nem éreztünk semmit a bombázásból. A könyvtártól nem mehetek messzibb, mint ahonnan 5 perc alatt visszajöhetek, annyira veszedelmes a helyzet. Dolgozni sem tudok privát munkát, mert nincs idő hozzá.”

On 16 July 1944:

If possible, I will come home for a week. For now, however, I am extremely busy. I am truly tired of being the commander of 200-300 people in the shelter. There was only one air raid on 2 June. Now, there is only cannon fire.<sup>76</sup>

The consequences of this event are still discussed today. In 2024, historian Levente Benkő delivered a lecture on the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the air raids of 2 June 1944.<sup>77</sup> A brief assessment of the damage is enough to convey the atmosphere of the time: 459 people were killed, 2.434 families were left homeless, and the 1.200 bombs dropped within 40 minutes destroyed factories, warehouses, and railway infrastructure. The material damage was estimated at 31-33 million Hungarian *pengő*.<sup>78</sup>

Despite his advanced age, he was full of energy, strength, and a powerful desire to accomplish as much as possible. On 1 August 1944, he wrote to his wife: “After the war ends, I will retire, but I will be able to keep working, since I am still fit for work. I believe they will promote me to the position of chief officer.”<sup>79</sup> After the withdrawal of the Hungarian troops in 1944, the work of salvaging the archives continued under the leadership of Lajos Kelemen. His experience as an archivist contributed greatly to the conservation of many family archives, which were transported to Cluj. The team included József Sebestyén K., Zsigmond Jakó, Attila T. Szabó, György Jakab (Bözödi),<sup>80</sup> and others. They systematically visited the more important

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<sup>76</sup> NARCCB, Fund 608, File 16; *Ibid.*, 524. Original text: “Én, ha csak lehet, hazamegyek néhány napra, talán egy hétre. Nagyon be vagyok fogva, a könyvtárban alszom. Annyi légiriadó van, hogy igazán meguntam a sok óvóhelyen való tartzkodást s 200-300 embernek való parancsolást. Légítámadásunk eddig egy volt, június 2-án délelőtt, de távol tőlünk, de az borzasztó volt.”

<sup>77</sup> The event was held on 28 May 2024 by the Transylvanian Museum Society and it was titled “Orașul rănit. 80 de ani de la bombardarea orașului Cluj”; see also Annamária Papp, *Megsebzett Kolozsvár: a fotófilm műhely fényképalbuma az 1944. Június 2-ai amerikai bombázásról* (Cluj-Napoca: Exit, 2019).

<sup>78</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 605.

<sup>79</sup> NARCCB, Fund 608, File 16; *Ibid.*, 526. Original text: “Engem a háború végével nyugdíjaznak, de kormányzói úton teljes fizetéssel hivatalban tartanak, míg munkaképes vagyok, azt hiszem, hogy mostanában főtisztté előléptetnek.”

<sup>80</sup> György Jakab (Bözödi) (1913-1989): Hungarian writer, staff member of the University Library between 1942-1946. The manuscript of his journal is held at the Archives of the Transylvanian Museum Society, Cluj-Napoca, part of the György Bözödi Personal Collection.

Transylvanian castles that had been looted and set on fire, searching for family archives and libraries. In the autumn of 1944, they reached the looted and burned down Bánffy Castle in Bonțida, where, according to József Sebestyén K., they gathered materials even at the risk of their own health.<sup>81</sup>

After World War II, in addition to his position at the library, he carried out extensive private commissions for different churches (namely the Franciscan Church in Cluj and the Reformed churches in Bicfalău, Căpușu Mare, Câțcău, Dej, and Cluj). He also created new heraldic compositions, such as the coat of arms of the Reformed College of Cluj.<sup>82</sup>

The University Library of Cluj was an important part of József Sebestyén K.'s life, as it was for other eminent figures, such as Lajos Kelemen, Zsigmond Jakó, György Jakab (Bözödi), István Monoki, and others (see Fig. 7). At the University Library, József Sebestyén K. was a colleague of the writer György Bözödi. The manuscript of the writer's journal is preserved in the Archives of the Transylvanian Museum Society, as part of the György Bözödi Personal Collection and contains his memoirs from the period between 1941-1946. Both were appointed to the University Library of Cluj in 1942: the heraldist on 10 March, as a library officer at the Archive of the Transylvanian Museum, and the writer on 18 May, as an assistant librarian at the Old Hungarian Library.<sup>83</sup> György Bözödi's journal notes the important events both in the life of the Library and the University of Cluj, while also offering details about the political and cultural life of the city. Two events recounted in the journal stand out – instances in which the writer refers to his colleague, Sebestyén.

The Hungarian People's Union was established in 1944. It was a party supported by the Romanian Communist Party and by the Soviet authorities. The Hungarian People's Union's primary objective was to reconcile the representation of the interests of the Hungarian minority in Romania with its role as a party-controlled mass organization of the Romanian Communist Party. On 2 May 1945, several days before the first congress of the Hungarian People's Union, he recounts a discussion between himself and "Uncle/Ol' Jóska Sebestyén" (the form of address used in the original document was *bácsi*, which roughly translates to "uncle" or "old", indicating affectionate and friendly respect rather than age alone, but József Sebestyén K. was indeed 67

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<sup>81</sup> See Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 84.

<sup>82</sup> Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 56.

<sup>83</sup> ALBCUL, 45 / 9 March 1945.

years old in 1945, while the writer was only 32) concerning the election of the president of the Hungarian People's Union.<sup>84</sup> The second recollection dates from 18 May 1945 and is related to the fear of the reopening of the Romanian University and the loss of the Hungarian University.<sup>85</sup>

The Archive of the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca is rich in official documents concerning the period during which József Sebestyén K. was an employee. Most of these documents consist of staff registers<sup>86</sup> listing, for each employee, in addition to their name, the date and place of birth, their religion, education, marital status, position held, position proposed, political affiliation and other such details. The positions held by József Sebestyén K. between 1942-1947 were as follows: library officer, archivist, heraldist, assistant librarian, and librarian, while the proposed positions were: archivist-librarian,<sup>87</sup> assistant librarian and, finally, higher-

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<sup>84</sup> The Archive of the Transylvanian Museum Society, György Böződi Personal Collection, György Böződi's journal, part II, 2 May 1945, page 35: "That very morning I had been discussing with *ol'* Jóska Sebestyén how we should prepare for the major meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup>, so that we could elect Jordáky as president of the Hungarian People's Union, instead of Edgár." Original text: "Éppen ma reggel beszélgettünk a könyvtárban Sebestyén Jóska bácsival, hogy elő kell készülni a 6.-i nagygyűlésre avégett, hogy a Népi szövetség elnökévé Lakatost vagy Jordákyt válasszuk meg Edgár helyett."

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 May 1945, page 5: "This morning, there was quite a bit of commotion in the library, when doctors and clinic staff rushed in to tell us that yesterday the chief of police had issued a decree: within five days, all Hungarians who arrived after 1940 must leave Transylvania... For two days now, the city has been in turmoil because of the rumours that the Romanian university has been secretly reopened, and there is even unfounded information circulating that the Hungarian university has ceased to function. *Ol'* Józsi Sebestyén immediately ran to the university's central building, but he discovered that the exam sessions and the doctoral programmes were carrying on as normal." Original text: "Ma reggel korán nagy izgalom a könyvtárban, átszaladtak hozzánk a klinika orvosai, alkalmazottai, hogy a rendőrfőnök kiadta tegnap a rendeletet: 5 nap alatt minden 1940 után jött magyar hagyja el Erdélyt...Két nap óta tele van a város azzal, hogy a román egyetemet titokban megnyitották, sőt az az alaptalan hír is terjed, hogy a magyar egyetem megszüntette működését. Sebestyén Józsi bácsi át is szaladt a központi egyetemre, de meggyőződött, hogy a vizsgák, doktorálások rendben folynak."

<sup>86</sup> ALBCUL, 520 / 3 November 1944; ad. 533 / 16 November 1944; 14 / 17 January 1945; 23 February 1945; 62 / 29 March 1945; 13 June 1945; ad. 190 / 14 August 1945; 24 August 1945; 405 / 21 September 1946; ad. 433 / 5 October 1946; 6 / 1947.

<sup>87</sup> ALBCUL, 96 / 14 May 1945.

education librarian.<sup>88</sup> The official records of the library also document József Sebestyén K.'s acquisition of Hungarian citizenship following the Second Vienna Award,<sup>89</sup> his registered residence,<sup>90</sup> professional background,<sup>91</sup> and various certificates of employment.<sup>92</sup> The attendance registers bearing his signature over many consecutive years have also been preserved (see Fig. 10).

On 24 March 1947, the rector of the Bolyai University, Lajos Csőgör,<sup>93</sup> sent the director of the library an urgent request from the Cluj Police Headquarters (no. 9640), calling for a compilation of a nominal table detailing the political activities of the university personnel (professors, auxiliary teaching staff, administrative, technical and service staff). The library's response shows that Iosif Sebestyén, assistant librarian, had previously been a member of the

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<sup>88</sup> ALBCUL, 205 / 15 April 1947: Staff Classification Table of Administrative, Technical, and Service Personnel, University Library, no. 422: Sebestyén Iosif - Higher-Education Librarian, Grade 19, Category XII, Functional Coefficient 2.10.

<sup>89</sup> ALBCUL, 9 November 1944.

<sup>90</sup> ALBCUL, the places of residence between 1944-1947: ad. 533 / 16 November 1944, ad. 542 / 28 November 1944: Király Street (today, I.C. Brătianu Street), no. 4; 22 November 1947: 6 March Street, no. 5; 450 / 11 August 1947: Türr István Street, no. 8; 679 / 16 October 1948: Petőfi Street, no. 31.

<sup>91</sup> ALBCUL, 70 / 4 April 1945: studies in fine arts.

<sup>92</sup> ALBCUL, 260 / 29 October 1945: "Certificate - József Sebestyén K. has been in the service of the University Library since 10 March 1942, in the capacity of library officer;" 283 / 25 June 1946: "Certification. The Directorate of the University Library of Cluj hereby certifies that Mr. Iosif K. Sebestyén is employed by the library in the capacity of assistant librarian, seconded to the archive of the Transylvanian Museum;" 130 / March 1947: certificate requested by József Sebestyén K. attesting that he is an employee of the library; 450 / 11 August 1947: service certificate of librarian Iosif Sebestyén: "I hereby kindly request the issuance of a service certificate stating that I am employed at the University Library." Original text: "Subsemnatul Sebestyén Iosif bibliotecar, Vă rog să binevoiți a-mi elibera un certificat de serviciu din care reiese, că fac serviciu la Bibl. Univ. De prezenta am nevoie pentru Biroul Populației la scoaterea buletinului." 679 / 16 October 1948: "I, the undersigned Iosif Sebestyén, retired librarian, kindly request the issuance of a service certificate. I require this certificate in order to arrange my pension rights; I was employed until 1 September 1947, the date of my retirement." Original text: "Subsemnatul Sebestyén Iosif, bibliotecar în pensie cu onoare vă rog să binevoiți a-mi elibera un certificat de serviciu. Am nevoie de acest certificat la aranjarea drepturilor mele la pensie. Am funcționat până la data de 1 Septembrie 1947, până la data pensionării mele."

<sup>93</sup> Lajos Csőgör (1904-2003): dentist, university professor; first rector of the Bolyai University (1945-1948) and first rector of the Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy of Târgu Mureș (1948-1949).

Transylvanian Party and was, at that time, a member of the Hungarian People's Union.<sup>94</sup>

In 1946, a storm destroyed the roof of the church in Sic. József Sebestyén K. was invited by the vice-president of the Hungarian People's Union, Edgár Balogh,<sup>95</sup> to a discussion concerning the restoration of the church. In the summer of 1946, with financial support from the party, he succeeded in salvaging and conserving many of the church's mural paintings. Two documents from the Library Archive contain direct information on this issue – one document dated 17 August, is a request made by Edgár Balogh to the library director István Monoki for the approval of a one-week leave for József Sebestyén K., for the conservation of the mural paintings of the Reformed Church in Sic.<sup>96</sup> The second document, dated 18 August, is a request for a study leave between 19-30 August 1946, signed by József Sebestyén K. and sent to the rector of the Bolyai University.<sup>97</sup> This period also provided him the opportunity, together with Géza Entz, to write the study titled *A széki református templom* [The Reformed Church of Sic], which discusses the history and artistic significance of the monument – Sebestyén authored the section on the communion vessels.

In the project for the unification and organisation of the services of the University Library of Cluj, drafted on 24-25 April 1947 and implemented on 1 May 1947, Sebestyén's name appears under the Archive of the Transylvanian Museum.<sup>98</sup>

According to Lajos Kelemen's journal, Sebestyén's life became increasingly difficult, because of his material hardships: "József Sebestyén often ate only apples and dry bread for lunch, instead of a cooked meal." A life summed up in a single sentence: "Józsi Sebestyén does every kind of work from which he might receive the means to survive."<sup>99</sup> "I worked in the

<sup>94</sup> ALBCUL, 159 / 24 March 1947: a table listing the political activities of the library employees.

<sup>95</sup> Edgár Balogh (1906-1996): university professor, journalist, writer, literary critic, vice-president of the Hungarian People's Union until 1946; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 88; NARCCB, Fund 608, File 16, fol. 179.

<sup>96</sup> ALBCUL, 341 / 17 August 1946: document no. 6101/1946 of the Hungarian People's Union.

<sup>97</sup> ALBCUL, 341 / 17 August 1946: József Sebestyén K.'s personal request dated 17 August 1946.

<sup>98</sup> ALBCUL, 235 / 29 April 1947, fol. 2.

<sup>99</sup> Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 91. Original text: "Barátja már akkor sokat nélkülözött és sokszor csak almát és száraz kenyeret evett főtt étel helyett. Egy életsors egy mondatban sűrítve: Sebestyén Józsi is dolgozgat s mindent, amiből kaphat szegény feje valamit."

afternoon five days a week... We met more and more rarely, every two or three weeks; Sebestyén worked on the second floor of the University Library in Cluj, while I worked on Kogălniceanu Street.”<sup>100</sup> In a letter sent to the lawyer László Fábián, he wrote “Cluj University Library” next to the date, 23 November 1949. This is an important document, as it shows that, in 1949, he was still working at the library without remuneration, as a member of the National Commission for the Protection of Historical Monuments. He lived on a modest pension of 2.900 lei, he received C Category food ration cards and provisions allotted to university employees.<sup>101</sup>

At the beginning of the 1950s, József Sebestyén K. worked in the archive relocated to the Nemes House (on Kogălniceanu Street, no. 8). Here, he was a colleague of Lajos Kelemen and of the staff of the History Section of the Romanian Academy: archivists Zsigmond Jakó, János Dani, András Kiss, researchers Elek Csetri, Samu Benkő and his wife, art historian Margit Nagy. The head was István Imreh, with Attila T. Szabó serving as director of archives.<sup>102</sup>

Kelemen was both his mentor and friend, to whom Sebestyén dedicated his study titled *A gelencei mennyezet – és karzatfestmények*, published in the commemorative volume *Emlékkönyv Kelemen Lajos születésének nyolcvanadik évfordulójára* (1957). On 26 April 1958, Lajos Kelemen wrote to Herepei János about the importance of the commemorative volume: “It is a source of pride for Bolyai University, a proof more enduring than ore itself that we do, in fact, live and work, if we are actually allowed to do so.”<sup>103</sup> Many sought to become part of the great archivist Lajos Kelemen’s inner circle, yet only few were admitted. Sebestyén was one of them. Despite their differing temperaments and habits, Sebestyén consistently expressed his respect and gratitude for all that he had received from his friend Kelemen.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 90. Original text: “A könyvtár bölcs igazgatója legújabb intézkedése Sebestyénnel együtt kiszorított ott régi megszokott munkahelyünkről, heti két nap kivételével minden délután. Találkozási lehetőségeink is megritkultak: Sebestyénnel 2-3 hétben egyszer találkoztunk, mert ő az Egyetemi Könyvtár II. emeletén dolgozik s én a Farkas utcában.”

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 542.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 93-94. Original text: “Ez az Emlékkönyv irodalmi eseménnyé nőtt itt s büszkeségévé vált a Bolyai Egyetemen, ls a benne szereplő írókon kívül minden öntudatos magyarnak. Ércnél maradandóbb bizonyítéka annak, hogy élünk s dolgozunk itt, ha hagyják.”

On the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, in 1958, Bishop Áron Márton sent him a letter of gratitude for all he had done for the Church and for the preservation of national heritage, concluding with a blessing that came at a moment of particular physical and moral hardship for Sebestyén. Áron Márton's letter dated 5 November 1958 was published by Péter Sas, under the suggestive title "A püspök és a heraldikus" [The bishop and the heraldist], in *Művelődés*, 12 (1996): 42.

He died on 27 December 1964, at the age of 86, and he was buried near the grave of Lajos Kelemen. By his will, he left his entire estate to his wife, Hortenzia Sebestyén (née Balázs). The two had met in the late 1940s, and Sebestyén spent the final years of his life in her house on Mănăștur Street, no. 91.<sup>104</sup> In accordance with his vocation as a heraldist, his funerary monument is decorated with the Sebestyén family coat of arms.<sup>105</sup> József Sebestyén K. remains in the memory of those engaged in heraldic studies and of those familiar with his work and figure as one of the most important Hungarian heraldists and genealogists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Due to his striking physical appearance – he was, after all, almost two metres tall –, his manner of speaking, and his distinctive way of life, he was a vivid presence in Old Cluj, not necessarily from the political viewpoint, but as a lively part of the cultural sphere.

He drew with the precision of an engineer. Those who saw him drawing marvelled at how such a tall man was able to hold a pencil with such control, particularly given that, after fighting alongside the Székely Division, he had been left with a disability: he could no longer see with one eye.

In addition to parties, female company and fine wine, he had another vice: he loved flowers. The garden around his house was filled with flowers, as was his workplace at the library. His personal imprint was visible even in the archive on the second floor – a familiar atmosphere, rich in colour. Due to Lajos Kelemen's power of persuasion, an increasing number of noble families entrusted him with their family archives for safekeeping. Sebestyén repaid this gesture by designing the family coat of arms for those who deposited their archives in the Archive of the Transylvanian Museum. Lajos

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>105</sup> Szekeres, *Patrimoniul heraldic*, 56; *Ibid.*, 99.

Kelemen summarised Sebestyén's grandeur in a single sentence: "Józsi, here, in Transylvania, you are the only one able to exercise the right to grant the Hungarian coat of arms."<sup>106</sup>

Áron Márton's letter from 5 November 1958 can be regarded as a fitting conclusion to what József Sebestyén K. represented, as a man and as a scholar in Transylvanian history:

You spared no effort in recording, cataloguing, and caring for our historical and artistic treasures, but did so generously, out of love for the cause... You undertook the task of preserving the memories of our past... You did everything within your power, conscientiously, with your individual skills and knowledge, to serve the cause of the people.<sup>107</sup>

Undoubtedly, József Sebestyén K. was one of the most outstanding figures of Transylvania, through his heraldic achievements, his work in the field of cultural heritage conservation, and the protection of historical monuments. He was also one of the defining figures in the history of the University Library of Cluj. Through his entire body of work, József Sebestyén K. became a role model for the coming generations. He deemed his appointment to the University Library of Cluj as a "national gift." Yet, in fact, through his creations, he himself may be considered a gift bestowed upon the Hungarian people.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 101-104. Original text: "Józsi, itt, Erdélyben Te gyakorlod a magyar királyi címeradományozás jogát."

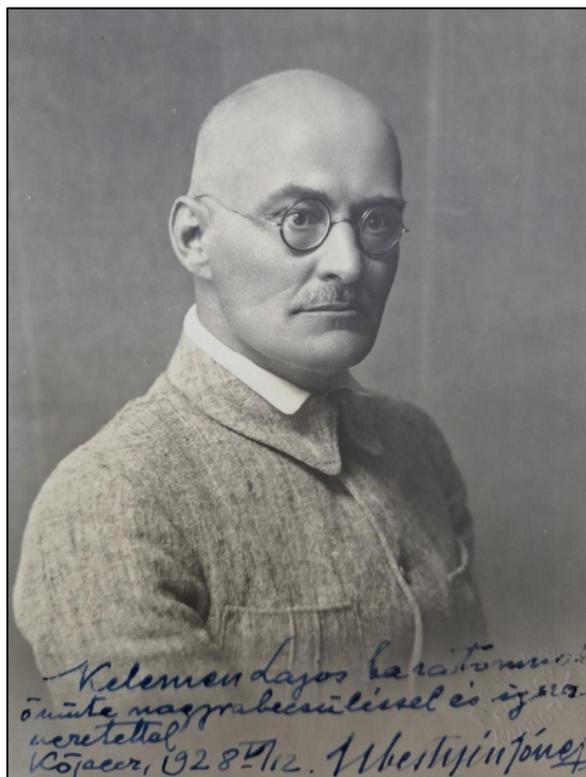
<sup>107</sup> Péter Sas, "A püspök és a heraldikus", *Művelődés*, 12 (1996): 42; Sas, *A heraldikus*, Vol. I, 96. Original text: "Nagyságod fáradságot nem kímélve, önzetlenül, tisztán az ügy iránti szeretetéből ápolta olyan időkben is, amikor a közvetlenül értékelt és hivatalos tényezők figyelmét más kérdések és gondok kötötték le, és aki múltunk emlékeinek gondozására vállalkozott...a maga részéről lelkiismeretesen megtette mindazt, amivel egyénileg és tudásával népe ügyének használhatott."

Appendix

Table 1. 12 March 1945

(Archive of the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).

| 1                            | 2                        | 3                         | 4                 | 5                                            | 6                      | 7                                                 | 8      | 9                                                                                                        | 10                                                                                | 11                                                                                      | 12                                     | 13                            | 14                                                           | 15                                              | 16                                        | 17         |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------|
| Folyozáim                    | VEZETEK<br>ÉS KÉRESZTNEV | Bodófi<br>állítás         | Francia           | Lakás                                        | Székelt hely<br>és név | Családi állapot<br>(név, gyermek<br>száma és kor) | Vallás | lakóni végzet-<br>ség vagy<br>szakképesíté-<br>s                                                         | Katonai<br>helyzet                                                                | Műve van<br>közszolgá-<br>latban                                                        | Hoz és milyen<br>alkalmat<br>kaphat be | Volt e<br>büntető<br>és mikor | 1941.X.II.<br>állás léte-<br>sége, egy-<br>rekesítés<br>léte | 1941.X.II.<br>állás módos<br>besejtés,<br>állás | Ar. illetés<br>hivatali elők<br>juttatása | Megjegyzés |
| 11. Dr. Somliler<br>Lászlóné |                          | Beszédesi és<br>gyakornok | 8% -<br>ntes 6    | Szécsényi<br>Kolosvár<br>1913. febr. 27.     |                        |                                                   |        | büntetés<br>abszolútó-<br>rium                                                                           | --                                                                                | 1941. könyvtáros<br>aug. 1. Kolozsvárt                                                  | --                                     | --                            | --                                                           | 83st.<br>57st.                                  | <i>néhány<br/>kötet<br/>munkást</i>       |            |
| 12. Bartalis<br>János        |                          | könyvtári<br>főtiszt      | 10% -<br>ntes 42. | Deák Ferenc<br>1893. júl. 29.                |                        | nős, 1.<br>25. hely.<br>év.                       |        | polgári isk.<br>szécsi ok-<br>levél, 66%<br>bűn. elv. a.<br>koron.                                       | t. t. t. 1917. április, ts-<br>szécsi ok-<br>levél, 66%<br>bűn. elv. a.<br>koron. | 1917. április, ts-<br>szécsi ok-<br>levél, 66%<br>bűn. elv. a.<br>koron.                | --                                     | --                            | VIII.                                                        | --                                              | --                                        |            |
| 13. Csermák<br>Olga          |                          | könyvtári<br>főtiszt      | 8% -<br>ntes 10.  | Hegyhás Sás-<br>Orrova<br>1896. okt. 7.      |                        | házas, rón.<br>kat.                               |        | ővónai ok-<br>levél                                                                                      | --                                                                                | 1917. tisztvise-<br>let. 1. 15. könyvtá-<br>ros: könyvtá-<br>ros, egyetemi,<br>könyvtár | --                                     | --                            | --                                                           | VIII.                                           | --                                        |            |
| 14. Kéki<br>Bela             |                          | könyvtári<br>főtiszt      | 8% -<br>ntes 19.  | Soltész Jé-<br>ntes u. 19.<br>1907. dec. 30. |                        | nős, 2. rón.<br>6; 1. kat.                        |        | szim. éretti t. z. 1940. tisztvise-<br>let. 10. 198<br>okt. 2. 1938 VIII.-bet<br>bölcsészeti<br>főeljár. | --                                                                                | 1940. tisztvise-<br>let. 10. 198<br>okt. 2. 1938 VIII.-bet<br>könyvtáros<br>Kolozsvárt. | --                                     | --                            | --                                                           | VIII.                                           | <i>Katona,<br/>Ch. a. g. 1. 1.</i>        |            |
| 15. Örv. Orbán<br>Józsefné   |                          | könyvtári<br>tiszt        | 7% -<br>ntes 11.  | Klimentér<br>Kolosvár,<br>1889. aug. 21.     |                        | özvegy, 1. rón.<br>28.                            |        | keresked. tan-<br>folyón                                                                                 | --                                                                                | 1915. városi tisz-<br>t. 1942. máj. 11. könyvtáros<br>Kolozsvárt                        | --                                     | --                            | --                                                           | IX.                                             | --                                        |            |
| 16. K. Szabstény<br>József   |                          | könyvtári<br>tiszt        | 7% -<br>ntes 4.   | Király utca<br>Szék<br>1878. nov. 12.        |                        | nős, 2. rón.<br>24; 22. kat.                      |        | heraldikus t. b. d. g. 1942. márc. 10.                                                                   | --                                                                                | 1942. márc. 10.                                                                         | --                                     | --                            | --                                                           | IX.                                             | --                                        |            |



**Fig. 1.** A 1928 photograph dedicated by József Sebastyén K. to his friend, Lajos Kelemen (National Archives, Cluj County Branch, Transylvanian Museum Society Collection, fonds no. 298).

1

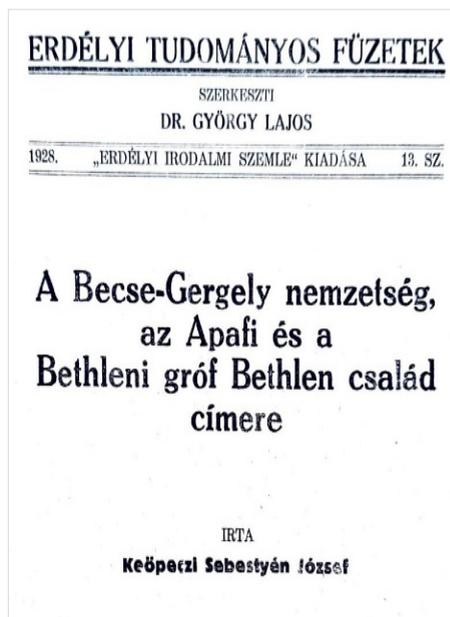
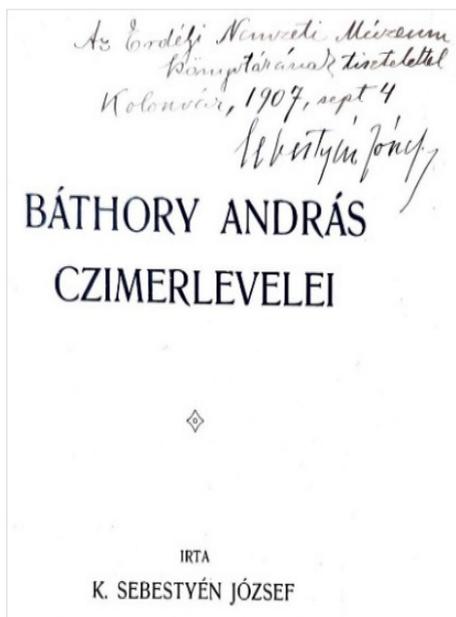
KEÖPEOZI  
SEBASTYÉN JÓZSEF  
M. K. TUD. EGYETEMI KÖNYVTÁRI TISZT  
HERALDIKUS

KOLOZSVÁR

**Fig. 2.** József Sebastyén K.'s calling card (National Archives, Cluj County Branch, Transylvanian Museum Society Collection, fonds no. 298).



**Fig. 3.** The Sebestyén of Keöpecz family coat of arms (National Archives, Cluj County Branch, Transylvanian Museum Society Collection, fonds no. 298).



**Fig. 4.** Works authored by K. Sebestyén József / Keöpeczi Sebestyén József (from the collections of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).



**Fig. 5.** The ex libris of the University Library of Cluj (From the collections of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).



**Fig. 6.** Géza Entz, Lajos Kelemen, József Sebestyén K., Zsigmond Jakó – 1942 (Archive of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).



**Fig. 7.** The staff of the University Library of Cluj – last row, left to right: Ede Kessler, János Bartalis, János Andrásófszky, István Monoki, Lajos Kelemen, József Sebestyén K., Arthur Reischel, Zsigmond Jakó – 1944 (Archive of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).



**Fig. 8.** The air-raid shelter located in the library basement (Photograph made by Kinga Tamás).

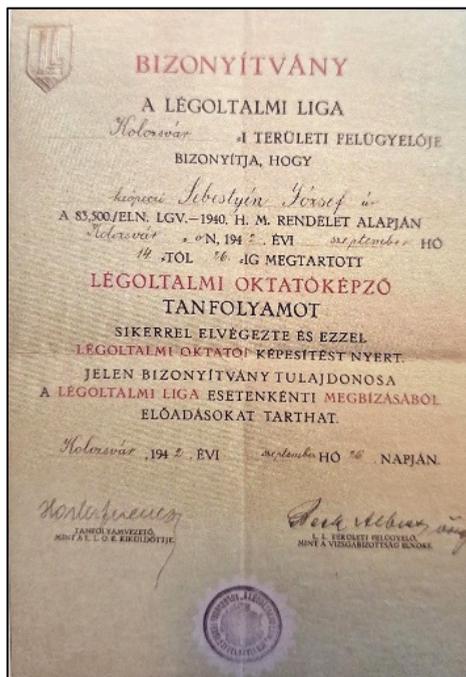


Fig. 9. The air-raid defence instructor certificate (National Archives, Cluj County Branch, Transylvanian Museum Society Collection, fonds no. 298).

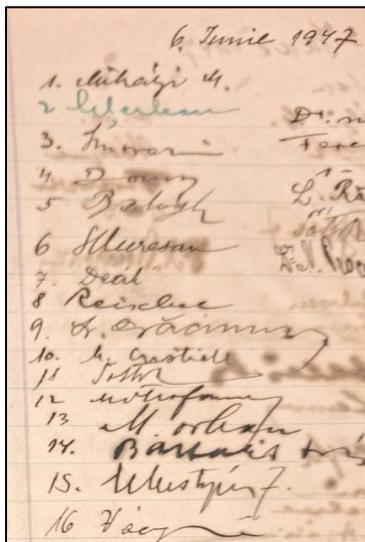
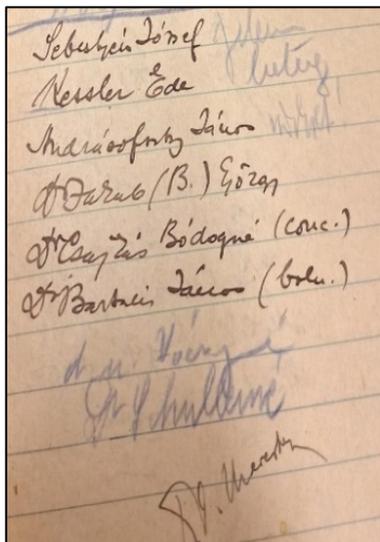


Fig. 10. Staff attendance registers from 1945 and 1947 (Archive of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca).