

Matthias Bel and the Russian Academic Milieu during the Enlightenment

T. Součková

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Since the 1950s the Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian scholars have carried out research aimed at analysing the personal correspondence of Matthias Bel, a Hungarian polymath and one of the most significant intellectuals of the first half of the 18th century in the Habsburg monarchy. Analysis of Bel's letters has revealed many interesting facts about Bel's life as a Baroque scholar. It has also brought to light the sphere of his collaborations with various colleagues, both domestic and foreign ones. Amongst Bel's contacts, there were also German scientists from the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, most importantly, Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer and Christian Goldbach. With the recent emergence of the projects supporting the publication of the bilingual Latin-Slovak translations of Bel's major work *Notitia Hungariae novae historico geographica*, historians have been seeking for to widen a range of its possible interpretations or to compare Bel's opus magnum with similar works of his contemporaries. The study thus focuses on the analysis of a trace, which Bel's communication left in the Russian historical milieu in the first half of the 18th century. On the basis of historical sources, and with corresponding relevant scholarship, a connection with Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev's work *Istoriia rossiiskaia* is outlined. With Bayer being in contact with both Bel and Tatishchev, a rather unexpected bridge was built between the Hungarian and Russian science in the era of the early Enlightenment. The aim of the study is to introduce new, and yet unpublished discoveries about the work of Matthias Bel and Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev.

Keywords: Matthias Bel, Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev, Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer, St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, correspondence, 18th century.

Tatana Souckova — PhD, Associate Professor, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 2, Nam. J. Herdu, Trnava, 917 01, Slovakia; tatana.souckova@ucm.sk

Татьяна Соучкова — PhD, доц., Университет св. Кирилла и Мефодия в Трнаве, Словакия, 917 01, Трнава, пл. Й. Герду, 2; tatana.souckova@ucm.sk

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С 1950-х годов чешские, словацкие и венгерские ученые проводили исследования, направленные на анализ личной переписки Маттиаса Бела, венгерского эрудита и одного из самых значительных интеллектуалов первой половины XVIII столетия в Габсбургской монархии. Анализ писем Бела позволил узнать много интересных фактов о его жизни как ученого эпохи барокко, а также определить сферу его сотрудничества с отечественными и зарубежными коллегами. Среди контактов Бела были немецкие ученые из Петербургской академии наук, прежде всего Готлиб Зигфрид Байер и Христиан Гольдбах. С недавним появлением проектов, поддерживающих издание двуязычных латино-словацких переводов главного труда Бела «Историко-географические знания о Венгрии», историки стремятся расширить диапазон его возможных интерпретаций или сравнить магнум опус Бела с аналогичными работами его современников. Таким образом, исследование сосредоточено на анализе следа, который оставила коммуникация Бела в русской исторической среде первой половины XVIII в. На основе исторических источников и с учетом соответствующей научной литературы по данной теме прослеживается связь с сочинением Василия Никитича Татищева «История Российская». Поскольку Байер был в контакте и с Белом, и с Татищевым, между венгерской и русской наукой в эпоху раннего Просвещения был создан довольно неожиданный мост. Цель исследования — сделать новые, еще не опубликованные открытия о творчестве Маттиаса Бела и Василия Никитича Татищева.

Ключевые слова: Маттиас Бел, Василий Никитич Татищев, Готлиб Зигфрид Байер, Петербургская академия наук, переписка, XVIII век.

Since the 1950s the Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian scholars have carried out research aimed at analysing the personal correspondence of Matthias Bel (1684–1749), a Hungarian polymath and one of the most significant intellectuals of the first half of the 18th century in the Habsburg monarchy. Analysis of Bel's letters revealed many interesting facts about Bel's life as a teacher, linguist, historian, geographer or philosopher. Moreover, it brought to light the sphere of his collaborations with various colleagues, students and supporters, both domestic and foreign ones. Amongst Bel's contacts, there were also German scientists from the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, most importantly, Gottlieb (Theophilus) Siegfried Bayer (1694–1738) and Christian Goldbach (1690–1764).

However, since the 1960s, when the Czech historian Jaroslav Vávra published two detailed studies dealing with a surviving correspondence and elaborating on its critical edition with the translation from Latin, practically no discoveries have been added to this field¹. In 2017 Miroslav Daniš², a Slovak scholar, incorporated in his paper some of the core information about Bel's contacts with St Petersburg academicians based on the

¹ Vávra J.: 1) *Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům* // Historické štúdie VIII. Bratislava, 1963. P. 199–240; 2) *Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům II. Matěj Bel a Christian Goldbach* // Historické štúdie XII. Bratislava, 1967. P. 211–224.

² *Daniš M.* Iz istorii slovatsko-rossiiskikh sviazei v XVIII veke // Zapad — Vostok. 2017. Vol. 10. P. 20–47.

previous Vávra's article. Nonetheless, it served as a summary of already known facts, as the author's attention was mainly focused on depicting Hungarian and Russian 18th century scholarly contacts in general.

Recently, a new era of "the Bel studies" has begun in Slovakia. With the emergence of several projects supporting the publication of the bilingual Latin-Slovak translations of Bel's major work *Notitia Hungariae novae historico geographica*³, scientists have been seeking to widen a range of its possible interpretations or to compare Bel's work with similar works of his contemporaries. Accomplishing of such a goal requires repeated examination of the polymath's communication with various scholars from all over Europe in the period of Enlightenment so that historians will be able to reveal mutual sources of knowledge and inspiration.

However, rereading of the letters Matthias Bel exchanged with the St Petersburg academicians, along with meticulous analysis of their works, revealed that Bayer's and Goldbach's works are not suitable for any form of scholarly comparison with Bel's writings as the focus of the former lay elsewhere. Bel's work, primarily the aforementioned *Notitia Hungariae novae historico geographica*, represents a vast historical and geographical synthesis about the Kingdom of Hungary, whereas both Bayer's and Goldbach's scholarly outputs were of a different aim and scope.

Nevertheless, in the first half of the 18th century, Vasili Nikitich Tatishchev (1686–1750), an intellectual of a great importance for the establishment of the Russian history and geography, worked on his historical opus. Being both a historian and geographer, apart from his other occupations, Tatishchev shared many features with Matthias Bel enabling him to create such ground-breaking work in terms of the development of a critical approach to historical sources and their evaluation.

Therefore, an initial historical analysis and subsequent comparison have suggested interesting parallels in the works of Bel and Tatishchev. Moreover, various new findings, that were not known to a contemporary academic public, have been made. The key element of the research is Bel's correspondence with Gottlieb S. Bayer, with whom also Vasili Nikitich Tatishchev kept in touch. Linking these three scholars has revealed rather unexpected connections, which will be demonstrated through primary sources together with secondary historical literature on the topic.

Firstly, an overview of the relevant historiographical literature is outlined. By presenting the crucial studies about Bel's correspondence with the St Peterburg academicians, the article introduces a brief overview of the central and eastern European *Republic of Lettres*⁴.

³ *Belii M. Notitia Hungariae Novae historico geographica, Divisa In Partes Quatuor, Quarum Prima, Hungariam Cis-Danubianam, Altera Trans-Danubianam, Tertia Cis-Tibiscanam; Quarta Trans-Tibiscanam: Universim XLVIII Comitibus Designatam, Expromit Regionis Situs, Terminos, Montes, Campos, Fluvios, Locus, Thermas, Coeli, Solique ingenium, Naturae munera Et prodigia, Incolas variarum Gentium, atque harum mores, Provinciarum Magistratus, Illustres Familias, Urbes, Arces, Oppida, et Vicos propemodum omnes, Singulorum preterea, Ortus et Incrementa, Belli Pacisque Conversiones, et praesentem Habitum Fide optima, Adcuratione summa, Explicat, Opus, Hucuseque Desideratum, Et In Commune Utile, Sacratissimis Auspiciis Caroli VI. Caesaris, Et Regis Indulgentissimi Elaboravit Matthias Bel. Accedunt Samuelis Mikovini Mappae singulorum Comitatum, Methodo Astronomico-Geometrica concinnatae. Viennae Austriae, 1735–1742.*

⁴ For the definition of the *Republic of Lettres* or *respublica litteraria*, see the article (chapter in the book) of D. van Miert, H. Hotson and T. Wallnig. Authors stress the need to integrate the characteristics of eastern European intellectual networks into the overall picture of the early modern period *Republic of Lettres*. Miert, van D., Hotson, H., Wallnig, T. What was the Republic of Letters? // Reassembling the Republic of Letters in the Digital Age. Göttingen, 2019. P. 30–31.

Secondly, the role of Bayer's and Bel's communication is defined with regard to the fact that Bayer subsequently mentioned Matthias Bel in the articles published in *Commentarii Academiae scientiarum imperialis Petropolitanae* (hereinafter referred to as *Commentarii*). Two of these articles Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev later integrated into his *Istoriia rossiiskaia*, including the references to Bel's thoughts and work.

An outline of the possible intellectual and scholarly parallels between Bel and Tatishchev is also introduced, even though no evidence of their mutual contacts, and therefore any kind of inspiration or collaboration, has been revealed so far.

The aim of the study is to present new, and yet unpublished, discoveries about the work of Matthias Bel and Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev, including a suggestion for a minor amendment in the current critical edition of *Istoriia rossiiskaia*, where Bel's name was confused with the name of a Polish chronicler Marcin Bielski (1495–1575)⁵.

Overview of the literature reflecting Matthias Bel's correspondence with the St Petersburg academicians

The first who attempted to analyse the correspondence between Matthias Bel and the St Petersburg academicians was Jožo Martinka in 1955 in his study dedicated to the scientific contacts between “*Istropolis*” and “*Petropolis*” in 1735⁶. Martinka very briefly outlined some of the milestones of the correspondence remarking on the mentions about Samuel Mikoviny (1686–1750), an engineer and a cartographer, who considerably contributed to Bel's *Notitia Hungariae novae historico geographica*, and who was one of the most important scholars of that time in the Habsburg monarchy. Martinka also commented on Bel's contact with Johann Georg Gmelin (1709–1755), but his conclusions about their communication were later corrected by Jaroslav Vávra in the study in 1963⁷.

Jaroslav Vávra was the first in the Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian historiography to explore the preserved Matthias Bel's letters to and from the German scholars of the Academy. He used archival materials from the St Petersburg branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences and completed a detailed research on the circumstances and impacts of Bel's contacts with the academicians. Vávra's two compelling studies were supplemented with the critical edition of the letters, which he, for the most part, transcribed from the original Latin documents and translated into Czech. In the article in 1967 Vávra pointed out the Russian study by Elena Sergeievna Kuliabko on the Hungarian-Russian scholarly correspondence. Kuliabko's study was published approximately at the same time as Vávra's first paper⁸. Kuliabko's text represents a rather brief summary of the exchange of the letters between Bel and Bayer, stating that their communication started in 1730⁹. However, this assumption was not correct, as the first edited letter in Vávra's text dates to 1726¹⁰. Moreover, the more recent editions of Bel's correspondence showed content of the very

⁵ *Tatishchev V. N. Sbornik sochinenii: v 8 t. T. 1: Istoriia rossiiskaia. Ch. 1. Moscow, 1994. P. 190, 214, 447, 465.*

⁶ *Martinka J. Vedecké styky Istropolisu a Petropolisu v geografii v r. 1735 // Pražská universita Moskevské universitě. Sborník k výročí 1755–1955. Prague, 1955. P. 94–97.*

⁷ *Vávra J. Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům... P. 206, footnote 12.*

⁸ *Ibid. P. 216, footnote 24a.*

⁹ *Kuliabko E. S. K istorii slovatsko-russkikh nauchnykh sviazei v XVIII v. // Russkaia literatura XVIII veka i slavianskie literatury. Leningrad, 1963. P. 168–171.*

¹⁰ *Vávra J. Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům... P. 203.*

first preserved letter, which had been sent by Matthias Bel to Gottlieb S. Bayer in 1725, and which Vávra considered to have been lost¹¹.

Jaroslav Vávra published two other studies dedicated to the topic of mutual Czech, Slovak, and Russian scholarly contacts elucidating primarily the Czech context of the communication¹². In both texts, he briefly outlined the key information about Bel's letters to St Petersburg with a reference to his previous articles. Although Vávra had analysed Bayer's and Tatishchev's works and perhaps he might have noticed the obvious mentions concerning Matthias Bel in both Bayer's and Tatishchev's texts, nowhere in his articles did he write about it.

Vávra's research on the 1960s became the base for all subsequent texts about Bel's scientific contacts with the German scholars of the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, which were usually part of wider synthetizing books about Matthias Bel's life and work¹³.

At present, the latest research focusing on Bel's correspondence with St Petersburg academicians has been conducted by the historian Miroslav Daniš, who has practically adopted Vávra's conclusions on the topic without any further examination of the subject¹⁴.

Importantly, both Bel's and Tatishchev's letters documenting their communication with the members of St Petersburg Academy of Sciences were published in the critical editions¹⁵. As for Tatishchev, some letters can be also found in other works¹⁶, or partly in the form of selected citations in the studies included in the editions of various Tatishchev's works¹⁷.

Matthias Bel's correspondence with the St Petersburg academicians

The beginnings of Bel's contacts with the German scholars working at St Petersburg Academy of Sciences date to the year 1722, when Matthias Bel sent a letter to Christian Goldbach, who was at that time on a visit in the Kingdom of Hungary. He stopped in Pressburg (today's Bratislava), where he reportedly got acquainted with Bel. After the departure from Pressburg, Goldbach continued his journey to central Slovakia to explore mining towns. Thanks to a personal meeting and a chance to exchange information about their works, Bel and Goldbach stayed in contact, and Goldbach even recommended Bel's dissertation about Hunnic and Scythian writing to his colleagues in Vienna¹⁸.

¹¹ Ibid; *Szelestei N. L.* Bél Mátyás levelezése. Budapest, 1993. P. 146–147.

¹² *Vávra J.*: 1) Podstata a problémy česko-ruských kulturních vztahů za pozdního feudalismu // *Slovanský přehled*. 1973. Vol. 59, issue 4. P. 257–265; 2) Petrohradská akademie věd a česko-ruské styky za raného osvěcenství // *Slovanský přehled*. 1974. Vol. 60, issue 2. P. 100–111.

¹³ *Tibenský J.* Velký vlastivedný projekt Mateja Bela a jeho snahy o organizovanie vedeckého života v Uhorsku // *Matej Bel. Doba, život, dielo / ed. by J. Tibenský*. Bratislava, 1987. P. 163–164. — Vávra's studies are being referred to also in the Hungarian monograph about Hungarian culture in the 18th century. See: *Kosáry D.* Művelődés a XVIII. századi Magyarországon. Budapest, 1983. P. 143, footnote 16. For the bibliography of Matthias Bel together with works about Bel until the year 1984 see: *Belák B.* Matej Bel (1684–1749). Výberová personálna bibliografia k 300. výročiu narodenia Mateja Bela. Martin, 1984. For the bibliography from the year 1984 see: *Bel M.* Turčianská stolica. Čadca, 2016. P. 284–316.

¹⁴ *Daniš M.* Iz istorii slovatsko-rossiiskikh sviazi v XVIII veke... P. 21–25.

¹⁵ As for the Bel's correspondence see the aforementioned critical editions: *Tatishchev V. N.* Zapiski. Pis'ma 1717–1750. Moscow, 1990.

¹⁶ *Grau C.* Der Wirtschaftsorganisator, Staatsmann und Wissenschaftler Vasilij N. Tatiščev (1686–1750). Berlin, 1963. P. 207–221.

¹⁷ *Tatishchev V. N.* Izbrannye trudy po geografii Rossii. Moscow, 1950; *Andreev A. I.* Trudy V. N. Tatiščeva po istorii Rossii; *Tatishchev V. N.* Sobranie sochinenii. T. 1: Istorii rossiiiskaia. Ch. 1. P. 5–38.

¹⁸ *Vávra J.* Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům II. Matěj Bel a Christian Goldbach... P. 212.

For Matthias Bel the correspondence with Goldbach eventually remained the longest one, as their communication, with several breaks, took part between 1722 and 1740. However, it was not a very intense correspondence despite the fact that it was filled with many sincere wishes and an obvious effort to maintain not only personal but also, most importantly, professional relationship. Only five letters from Bel to Goldbach have been preserved, and just one copy of the letter from Goldbach to Bel was found in Goldbach's documents together with a short note referring to the letter sent to Bel in 1723 from central Slovakia¹⁹.

Nevertheless, the correspondence with Goldbach opened up to Bel another prospect of widening a range of his scientific contacts, as it was Christian Goldbach who probably introduced Bel to Gottlieb S. Bayer²⁰. Following communication with Bayer also brought Bel an opportunity to establish a written relationship with Johann Georg Gmelin (1709–1755) in the early 1730s. In his study, Jaroslav Vávra suggests that the promising connection of these two scholars was interrupted by Gmelin's participation in the expedition to Siberia in 1733. Unfortunately, the exact content of their letters is not known. There was supposedly only two of them, one from Gmelin to Bel and vice versa²¹.

It was also Christian Goldbach who Bel told about his aspiration to become a member of St Petersburg Academy of Sciences. In the letter from July 1739, Matthias Bel expressed a wish “to leave a memory of his name for the descendants, apart from London and Berlin, also in St Petersburg”²². However, Bel's ambition was not fulfilled, even though it is likely that Goldbach introduced Matthias Bel to the Academy by submitting his two letters from 1739 and 1740 to the academic committee. Nonetheless, in documents listing the members of St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, Bel's name was not included. He thus did not become its member²³.

Despite not achieving his goal of membership in St Petersburg Academy, Bel communicated with the German scholars, which led to several interesting outcomes. Thanks to Gottlieb S. Bayer, with whom Bel maintained not only scientific but also personal and friendly contacts, Bel's work was not completely forgotten within the Russian academic milieu.

To Matthias Bel, the importance of Bayer's friendship was apparent. He manifested it by including two Bayer's letters in *Adparatus ad historiam Hungariae*, a compilation of Hungarian historical sources, which Bel published in 1735²⁴. Another result of their

¹⁹ Vávra J. Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům... P.211–212.

²⁰ Ibid. P.216.

²¹ It was Gmelin who initiated the correspondence. See: Vávra J. Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům... P.206.

²² “[...] vt post Londinenses, et Berolinenses, et apud VOS nominis Beliani memoria exstared ad posteros” (Szelestei N. L. Bél Mátyás levelezése... P.462–463). Matthias Bel was a member of the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge and The Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences.

²³ Vávra J. Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům... P.208–211.

²⁴ *Bel M. Adparatus ad historiam Hungariae, Sive Collectio Miscella, Monumentorum ineditorum partim, partim editorum, sed fugentium, Conquisivit, in Decades partitus est, et Praefationibus, atque Notis illustravit, Matthias Bel. Cum Censura Ampliss. Senatus Posoniensis. Philohistorum Patriae. Posonii, 1735. P.408–415.* — Apart from Bayer's letters, Bel also published his letter to Bayer from 1726. This was for a long time considered to have been the first surviving Bel's letter to Bayer, but in fact there had also been a preceding Bel's letter from 1725, to which J. Vávra did not have access although he anticipated its existence. Furthermore, Bayer's reaction from January 1726 suggests that there must have been even more letters before the one from November 1725. See: Vávra J. Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům... P.203.

communication was an introductory poem for the first volume of Matthias Bel's *Notitia Hungariae novae historico geographica* written by Gottlieb S. Bayer and sent to Bel in 1733. Unfortunately, the correspondence did not continue after the poem had been sent and ended by the year 1733²⁵.

From a scholarly point of view, the main topic of Bel's and Bayer's correspondence was the problem of Hungarian ethnogenesis and the development of the Hungarian language. The scholars avidly discussed contexts of Finno-Ugric language group as well as the Scythian and Hunnic origin of the Hungarians. Matthias Bel, in the letter from September 1726, expressed very polite disagreement with Bayer's assumptions about the geographical demarcation of ancient Scythian territory²⁶. In the next letter from March 1732, he asked Bayer to compare Hungarian and Finnish grammar as Bel did not know the Finnish language well²⁷ and was interested in parallels and similarities which would possibly help to clarify the questions of the common origin of the two languages. He also enclosed his Hungarian grammar book²⁸. In the answer from September 1732, Gottlieb S. Bayer apologized for not being able to accomplish the requested language comparison but promised to pass Bel's book to his Swedish colleagues Olof Rudbeck, Erik Benzelius and his brother Henrik, and Henrik Brenner²⁹.

Although Bayer disapproved of Bel's views on the Hunnic origins of the Hungarians³⁰, he regarded their mutual disputations as interesting and, most importantly, worth mentioning in his own works. Gottlieb S. Bayer referred to Bel in his studies for *Commentarii* three times in volumes III (1728, published in 1732), IX (1737, published in 1744), and X (1738, published in 1747). In the first mention, Bayer called Matthias Bel "a good friend of his" when he cited Bel's remark on the Don river in the ancient times, which Bel had published in his work *Hungariae Antiquae et Novae Prodromus*³¹ in 1733³².

The following mention then states that "Matthias Belius is not against the fact that the Finns had been of Mordvinic corpus"³³. The last mention points out another Bel's work,

²⁵ *Belii M. Notitia hungariae novae geographico historica. Partis Primae. Cis-Danubianae, tomus primus. Viennae, 1735, p. XX–XXII.* — Similar poem had Bel asked from Christian Goldbach, but he never wrote any. One of Bayer's letters to Goldbach contains a request for a revision of his poem for Bel's "Notitia". See: *Vávra J.:* 1) *Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům II. Matěj Bel a Christian Goldbach...* P. 214, footnote 15; 2) *Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům...* P. 231, footnote 231.

²⁶ *Szelestei N. L. Bél Mátyás levelezése...* P. 162–165; *Vávra J. Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům...* P. 214–223.

²⁷ *Vávra J. Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům...* P. 222.

²⁸ *Szelestei N. L. Bél Mátyás levelezése...* P. 261–2; *Vávra J. Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům...* P. 226–227.

²⁹ *Szelestei N. L. Bél Mátyás levelezése...* P. 273–274; *Vávra J. Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům...* P. 228–229. — Olof Rudbeck the Younger (1660–1740), Erik Benzelius the Younger (1675–1743), Henrik Benzelius 1689–1758, Henrik Brenner (1669–1732).

³⁰ *Danish M. Iz istorii slovatsko-rossiiskikh sviazei v XVIII veke...* P. 23. — For further information about Bel's reaction to Bayer's criticism see: *Tóth G. "Civilizált" őstörténet. A magyar nyelv és a magyar nemzet eredetének kutatása Bél Mátyás életművében // Történelmi Szemle. 2012. Issue 2. P. 236–240.*

³¹ *Belius M. Hungariae Antiquae et Novae Prodromus, Cum Specimine, Quomodo In Singulis Operis Partibus Elaborandis, Versari Continuerit Auctor Matthias Belius Pannonius. Norimbergae, 1723. P. 7–8.*

³² "Matthias Belius, vir amicissimus, quem vt meritis est, honoris causa nomino in Historiae Hungaricae prodromo, (I) [reference to p. 7 of *Hungariae Antiquae et Novae Prodromus*] hanc *Tanai vetustatem iure suo vocat absonam et extra modum absurdam*" (*Bayeri T. S. Chronologica Scythica. Commentarii Academiae scientiarum imperialis Petropolitanae. Tomus III. Ad annum MDCCXXVIII. 1732. P. 349.*)

³³ "...Matthias Belius autem minime dissitetur: Fennici enim corporis fuere Morduani" (*Bayeri T. S. Geographia Russiae vicinarumque regionum, circiter annum Christi DCCCCXLVIII. Ex Constantino Por-*

De vetere litteratura Hunno-Scythica (1718). Here Bayer, analysing the history of the Finnish people, informs that the origin of their name was most exactly explained by Matthias Bel through the Hungarian language³⁴. As we know from the register of Matthias Bel's Pressburg library, he owned three volumes of *Commentarii* (I–III), which he managed to get from St Petersburg³⁵. When exactly Bel received the three volumes remains unclear, however, the fact that Bayer was familiar with Bel's various works shows that the mutual exchange of books, despite the difficulties with despatching, was more effective than it was assumed by Jaroslav Vávra. Moreover, the latter stated that Bel had known *Commentarii* only from the reviews in contemporary German scientific journal *Acta eroditorum* and from Bayer's letters, which is not correct³⁶.

Matthias Bel thus knew about the first mention Bayer made about him, but sadly, he never learned about the other references in Bayer's articles. Even if he wanted to get these volumes of St Petersburg academic journal, there was no one to ask for help. By the time when volumes IX and X of *Commentarii* were published, Gottlieb S. Bayer had been dead, and the correspondence with Christian Goldbach had been over since 1740.

Matthias Bel, Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev, and Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer

The fact that Bayer cited Bel's work in his studies, opened to Bel another, rather unexpected, way to the work of his Russian contemporary, Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev. A "father of Russian history"³⁷ included in the first volume of his monumental *Istoriia rossiiskaia* several Bayer's texts from *Commentarii*. Importantly, for the context of Bayer and Bel, it was chapters 16 and 17, which were based on Bayer's studies in *Commentarii* IX and X³⁸.

Tatishchev incorporated Bayer's texts into the book during the final phase of its completion, as only in 1749 he requested and received the volumes of *Commentarii* from St Petersburg Academy³⁹. They had been translated from Latin to Russian but Tatishchev was not satisfied with the result and asked for the original copies⁴⁰. Therefore, Tatishchev had been working with Bayer's studies, adding excessive critical comments to them and

phyrogenneta // *Commentarii Academiae scientiarum imperialis Petropolitanae*. Tomus IX. Ad annum MDCCXXXVII. 1744. P. 386).

³⁴ "Est autem Fennicum nomen quam accuratissime a Matthia Belio explicatum ex Hungarico, seu Magiarico sermone, (6) [reference to p. 20 of *De vetere litteratura Hunno-Scythica*] in quo feny est splendor, nitor, fulgor, iubar, fenyés, splendidus, fulgidus, fennyesség, splendor, fenyessen, splendide, apud Molnarum [Albert Szenczi Molnár, (1574–1634, a Hungarian linguist, philosopher, and theologian)]" (*Bayeri T. S. Geographia Russiae vicinarumque regionum, circiter A. C. DCCCCXLVIII. Ex scriptoribus septentrionalibus Commentarii Academiae scientiarum imperialis Petropolitanae*. Tomus X. Ad annum MDCCXXXVIII. 1747. P. 387).

³⁵ Vávra J. *Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům...* P. 203, 204, footnote 9. — The register was supposedly made in 1749. — Tóth G. *Catalogus manuscriptorum Matthiae Bél, quae in bibliotheca Lycei Evangelici Posoniensis asservantur*. Budapest, 2006. P. 91–92.

³⁶ Vávra J. *Petrohradská akademie věd a česko-ruské styky za raného osvícenství...* P. 110. — Furthermore, Vávra never commented on Bayer referring to Bel, this detail has remained unknown to the Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian researchers.

³⁷ Thaden E. C. V. N. Tatishchev, German historians and the St Petersburg Academy of sciences // *Russian History*. 1986. Vol. 13, issue 4. P. 367.

³⁸ *Tatishchev V. N. Sobranie sochinenii*. T. 1: *Istoriia rossiiskaia*. Ch. 1. P. 184, 208, 446.

³⁹ *Andreev A. I. Trudy V. N. Tatishcheva po istorii Rossii...* P. 36.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*; *Tatishchev V. N. Zapiski. Pis'ma 1717–1750...* P. 346. — See a letter to Grigorii Nikolaevich Teplov from May 1749.

also finalizing some other chapters of the first part of *Istoriia rossiiskaia* almost until his death in July 1750⁴¹.

Gottlieb S. Bayer knew Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev before his arrival in St Petersburg as he had got acquainted with Tatishchev via Swedish colleagues in the early 1720s⁴². As their correspondence shows, Bayer was keen on learning more about Tatishchev's discoveries of ancient tombs in Siberia, and Tatishchev respected Bayer and appreciated his work, which led to his use of Bayer's interpretations as a part of his concept of the oldest Slavonic history⁴³. However, Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev did not forget to mention that some of Bayer's conclusions had been affected by Bayer's inability to understand Russian language properly⁴⁴. Nevertheless, Tatishchev considered Bayer's work to be highly appropriate and eligible for adding to his own historical synthesis, which he stressed in the introduction to the first part of *Istoriia rossiiskaia*⁴⁵.

When editing Bayer's text, Tatishchev made several changes to it, which he pointed out at the beginning of the critical commentary following immediately after chapter 16. Tatishchev wrote that he had shortened some parts and made several necessary corrections. He then stated that readers should see the text directly in *Commentarii* if they were interested in the original version⁴⁶. This also applies to following Bayer's texts in *Istoriia rossiiskaia*. Significantly, Tatishchev kept the mentions about Bel exactly as they were written by Bayer, omitting only a reference to Matthias Bel's *De vetere litteratura Hunno-Scythica*⁴⁷.

This detail represents a key point for the context of the reflection of Bel's work in the Russian scientific milieu of the 18th century as Tatishchev could have simply omitted the name of a person whom he, supposedly, did not know. There has been no evidence at all that Tatishchev was familiar with Bel's work, and it remains almost impossible to prove if Tatishchev somehow could have known, perhaps directly from Gottlieb S. Bayer, who Matthias Bel was. However, in the critical commentary after the chapters, Tatishchev did not leave any remark on the mentions about Bel, so it is likely that Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev trusted Bayer's opinions and findings deciding not to exclude Bel's name from the chapters.

To summarise, this adds a new little metaphorical dimension to the network of the 18th century intellectual contacts. Gottlieb S. Bayer arranged a connection⁴⁸ between two major intellectuals of that time, both being crucial to the development of scholarly writing in their countries.

⁴¹ Andreev A. I. Trudy V. N. Tatishcheva po istorii Rossii... P. 37.

⁴² Grau C. Der Wirtschaftsorganisator, Staatsmann und Wissenschaftler Vasilij N. Tatiščev... P. 49. — Tatishchev visited Sweden in the years 1724–1726. For detailed description of his visit see: Kuz'min A. G. Tatishchev. Moscow, 1987. P. 107–120.

⁴³ Grau C. Der Wirtschaftsorganisator, Staatsmann und Wissenschaftler Vasilij N. Tatiščev... P. 158–159, 212.

⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 159; Tatishchev V. N. Sobranie sochinenii. T. 1: Istoriia rossiiskaia. Ch. 1. P. 201.

⁴⁵ Valk S. N. Istoriia rossiiskaia V. N. Tatishcheva v sovetskoi istoriografii // Tatishchev V. N. Sobranie sochinenii. T. 7 i 8: Istoriia rossiiskaia. Okonchanie. Raboty raznykh let. Moscow, 1996. P. 28.

⁴⁶ Tatishchev V. N. Sobranie sochinenii. T. 1: Istoriia rossiiskaia. Ch. 1. P. 201.

⁴⁷ The number of the page (20) remained in the Tatishchev's version, yet without any actual reference. This applies to the edition of 1769 as well as to the critical edition of 1962. See: Tatishchev V. N.: 1) Istoriia rossiiskaia. Kniga pervaiia. Ch. 2. Moscow, 1769. P. 239; 2) Sobranie sochinenii. T. 1: Istoriia rossiiskaia. Ch. 1. P. 214. — For the first example see: Tatishchev V. N.: 1) Ibid. P. 190; 2) Istoriia rossiiskaia. Kniga pervaiia. Ch. 1. Moscow, 1768. P. 190.

⁴⁸ Shmidt S. O., Afiani V. Yu., Lokhina T. V., Mironenko M. P. Katalog lichnykh arkhivnykh fondov otechestvennykh istorikov. Vyp. 1: XVIII vek. Moscow, 2001. P. 28–32.

Paradoxically, despite many common features which Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev and Matthias Bel shared workwise, they reportedly did not get any opportunity to encounter each other, even via correspondence about selected topics concerning their fields of research. These two men were polymaths with inner motivation to work for the sake of their homelands. Being aware of the need to ensure publishing of the factually correct historical and geographical descriptions of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Russian Empire, Bel and Tatishchev had set goals which inevitably exceeded the possibilities of a single scientist. An ambitious project like Tatishchev's *Istoriia rossiiskaia* or Bel's *Notitia Hungariae novae historico geographica*, both vast historical and geographical synthesis, took not only immense personal effort but also support and help from many colleagues and institutions. If Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev is called "the father of Russian history", Matthias Bel already in the 18th century was described by his first biographer with an epithet „Magnum decus Hungariae“ — "the Great Ornament of Hungary"⁴⁹.

In Slovakia and Hungary, Bel is considered to have been a scientist of European significance, whose work helped to establish a critical approach to scholarly writing. A very similar appreciation is bestowed on Tatishchev. Moreover, apart from creating scholarly texts, Tatishchev and Bel had other occupations: Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev — as an engineer and statesman, Matthias Bel — as a Lutheran pastor and teacher. Still, they were capable of producing astonishing numbers of texts while maintaining extensive correspondence with numerous colleagues at the same time. Both scholars were also very competent organizers of academic work.

Bel and Tatishchev also set examples by following their predecessors, revising their works and subsequently transforming them into new and more elaborated versions. Both Bel and Tatishchev were aware of the importance of connecting history and geography⁵⁰ as well as of employing modern methods of critical analysis of historical sources⁵¹. Or, for example, when completing geographical and historical characteristics of their countries, Bel and Tatishchev collected data by the method of questionnaires distributed to particular areas. This was a logical and reasonable means of obtaining information about different parts of the Hungarian Kingdom and the Russian Empire. The method had already been used by scholars before Bel and Tatishchev, both in Hungary and Russia, but these scholars managed to improve the forms of questionnaires in order to be able to get the most out of them⁵².

However, even with all the possible intersections of scientific interests and despite Bayer being an intermediary in transmitting information about Matthias Bel to Tatishchev, the two scholars reportedly never were in contact. Considering all the relevant circumstances, it was rather impossible.

First of all, Bel's active correspondence with St Petersburg Academy of Sciences took part from the early 1720s to the year 1740, when Bel sent the last letter addressed to Christian Goldbach. By this time, Bayer had already died. As was previously mentioned, Bel

⁴⁹ Tibenský J. Velká ozdoba Uhorska. Dielo, život a doba Mateja Bela. Bratislava, 1984. P. 11–12.

⁵⁰ Kollárová I., Nagy I. Matej Bel. Osobnosť, médium a transfer ideí na prahu osvietenstva. Bratislava, 2021. P. 104; Tatishchev V.N. Izbrannye trudy po geografii Rossii... P. 77.

⁵¹ Bel, for example, published a compilation of the selected Hungarian historical sources. *Bel M. Adparatus ad historiam Hungariae...*; *Tatishchev V.N. Sobranie sochinenii. T. 7 i 8: Istoriia rossiiskaia. Okonchanie. Raboty raznykh let. P. 5–483.*

⁵² Tibenský J. O práci, koncepcii, štruktúre a osudoch Belových Notícií // Matej Bel. Doba, život, Bratislava, 1987. P. 218; Andreev A.I. Trudy Tatishcheva po geografii Rossii // *Tatishchev V.N. Izbrannye trudy po geografii Rossii. Moscow, 1950. P. 9–10.*

did not own volumes IX and X of *Commentarii* where he was mentioned, so there was no way for him to find out that Bayer referred to his opinions and work repeatedly. Finally, he also could not know anything about Tatishchev's *Istoriia rossiiskaia* as it was published in 1768 and 1769, roughly a decade after both Bel and Tatishchev had passed away.

Similarly, to Tatishchev Bel was inaccessible. In 1749, when he received *Commentarii* from the Academy, he had no means to explore Bel's work or to ask Bayer about it directly. Even though there are letters to Bayer and Gmelin in surviving Tatishchev's correspondence with the academicians from St Petersburg, none of them contains any mention about Matthias Bel. The same, however, applies to Bayer's and Goldbach's correspondence with Bel, this time concerning Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev⁵³. The only possible conclusion, therefore, is that Bel did not know anything about the projects and works of Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev, whereas Tatishchev at least noted Matthias Bel through the texts of Gottlieb S. Bayer.

With the spread of information in the early modern period era of Enlightenment, Tatishchev's *Istoriia rossiiskaia* found its way also to the central European libraries. Thus, the information about Bayer's reflection of Bel's work did not remain completely forgotten. As for the Slovak intellectual circles, Tatishchev's *Istoriia rossiiskaia*, edited and published by Gerhard Friedrich Müller (1705–1783), was owned by Adam František Kollár (1718–1783), who also tried to revive the communication with St Petersburg Academy of Sciences. Kollár knew about Bel's contacts with Gottlieb S. Bayer and was willing to follow Bel's example⁵⁴.

Until the 20th century, when the scholarly critical edition of *Istoriia rossiiskaia* was published, the previous Gerhard Friedrich Müller's edition was used by some of the contemporary Czech and Slovak Slavists and historians, such as Pavol Jozef Šafárik (1795–1861)⁵⁵.

As for the current critical edition of *Istoriia rossiiskaia*, one important remark must be made about the way Bel's name is cited. In Bayer's studies in *Commentarii* (volumes IX and X), Bel is referred to as "*Matthias Belius*" or "*Matthia Belio*". In the Müller's edition of the manuscripts of the first two parts from the years 1768 and 1769, Bel's name is transliterated as "*Matfei zhe Belius*"⁵⁶ and "*Matveia Belia*"⁵⁷. Unfortunately, in the modern critical edition, the name has been transformed to "*Matvei zhe Bel'skii*"⁵⁸ and "*Matveia Bel'skago*"⁵⁹, which is clearly a mistake. In the index, a form "*Belskii Martin (Matvei)*" is used with an explanatory note that he was a "*Polish chronicler*"⁶⁰. Marcin Bielski, indeed, was a Polish

⁵³ Tatishchev did not own any of Bel's works. For further information see: Safronovova A. M. Lichnaia biblioteka V. N. Tatishcheva v Ekaterinburge. Ekaterinburg, 2017.

⁵⁴ *Catalogus praestantissimorum librorum nec non rarissimorum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Kollarianae*. [Viennae], 1783, p.97. — In 1762 Kollár addressed to St Petersburg Academy of Sciences a letter with several questions. The answer was written by Gergard Friedrich Müller himself, but it remains unknown, if it was really sent. Apart from other things, Müller confirmed, that in Bayer's documents in academic archive were only six letters from Bel. Therefore there are likely no other letters to be found. See: Vávra J. Dopisy Matěje Bela petrohradským akademikům... P. 236–240.

⁵⁵ Šafárik P. J. Slované starožitnosti. Oddíl dějepisný. Prague, 1837.

⁵⁶ "*Matfei zhe Beliius*" (*Tatishchev V. N. Istoriia rossiiskaia. Kniga pervaiia. Ch. 1. P. 190*).

⁵⁷ "*Matvnia Belia*" (*Ibid. Ch. 2. P. 239*).

⁵⁸ "*Matvei zhe Bel'skii*" (*Tatishchev V. N. Sobranie sochinenii. T. 1: Istoriia rossiiskaia. Ch. 1. P. 190*).

⁵⁹ "*Matveia Bel'skago*" (*Ibid. P. 214*). These inaccuracies have remained unnoticed also in the subsequent editions of "*Istoriia rossiiskaia*". See for example: *Tatishchev V. N. Istoriia rossiiskaia: v 3 t. T. I. Moscow, 2014. P. 194, 234*.

⁶⁰ *Tatishchev V. N. Sobranie sochinenii. T. 1: Istoriia rossiiskaia. Ch. 1. P. 447* (explanatory notes), 465. — It should be also noted that another minor confusion occurred with not including information

chronicler, whose work Tatishchev often quoted. However, in these two particular cases, the editors have confused his name with the Hungarian scholar Matthias Bel.

Conclusions

An initial impulse for the revision of older research outlines on Bel's correspondence with the German scholars from St Petersburg Academy of Sciences was motivated by the aim of revealing possible, yet hypothetical, connections between Matthias Bel and his Russian contemporary, Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev. Their works, both monumental and fundamental for the central and eastern European historiography, share many common features in the field of employing newly emerging critical scientific methodology as well as the scope of scholarly interests and achievements.

From the point of view of the Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian historiographical literature, the analysis of Bel's correspondence and its outcomes was thoroughly examined by Jaroslav Vávra in his four studies, but as the presented study shows there has still been space for discovering further details about the results of Bel's enthusiastic communication with the Russian academic milieu.

Despite the fact, that Bel's ambition to join St Petersburg Academy of Sciences was not fulfilled, he did manage to leave "a memory of his name" in the Russian scholarly literature. Sadly for Bel, he got only a limited chance to learn about his work being cited by Bayer. Furthermore, he did not know about Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev who included Bayer's text into his *Istoriia rossiiskaia* and thus recognised Bel's name and his work about Huns and Scythians.

The connection between the Hungarian polymath Matthias Bel and the Russian scientist and statesman Vasilii Nikitich Tatishchev, arranged through their common colleague, the German historian Gottlieb S. Bayer, represents an excellent manifestation of the functioning of the intellectual networks during the first half of the 18th century.

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about Olof Rudbeck the Younger. Only a brief profile of Olof Rudbeck (1630–1702) is given (Ibid. P. 452). However, in chapters taken from Bayer, Olof Rudbeck the Younger unequivocally is referred to as "Olai Rudbekvii, Olaev syn" (Ibid. P. 190, 209). In the original Latin version: "Olaus Rudbequius, Olai filius" and "Olaus Rudbequius, Olai F.". See: Bayeri T. S.: 1) Geographia Russiae vicinarumque regionum, circiter annum Christi DCCCCXLVIII. Ex Constantino Porphyrogenneta... P. 386; 2) Geographia Russiae vicinarumque regionum, circiter A. C. DCCCCXLVIII. Ex scriptoribus septentrionalibus... P. 374.

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