My initial question was: why did the Hungarians, well known for politicizing history and historicizing politics, not produce some spectacular forgeries (or confabulations) around 1800 to boost national consciousness? There must have been several reasons for this. Maybe among the Hungarians there was more of a continuity of national memory of heroic past and of tragic defeats than elsewhere. While Hungary had become part of the Habsburg monarchy centuries before and rebellions against this failed, the status of the kingdom within the empire was by no means similar to that of nationalities without political rights in need of establishing a national identity, true or false. And, although, for example, the Bohemian aristocracy had a strong voice in Vienna, the Czechs felt themselves overwhelmed by the Germans and seemed in need of a new mythical past of their nation, more so than the Magyars. Whatever the case may be, I dare answer my rhetorical question by pointing to the discovery and popularization of the “Deeds of the Hungarians” by an anonymous notary of the medieval royal court, published in the mid-eighteenth century.

* I should like to express my thanks to my fellow fellow Péter Dávidházi for referring me to the exciting contemporary writings (including his own) on Vörösmarty and his age.


2 A few were produced, but none became a central element of national consciousness, comparable, for example, to Hanka’s “discoveries.” The forged documents referred either to matters ecclesiastic (as the so-called “Sylvester Bull,” see above, p. xii) or to a specific minority (see Nora Berend’s study below, pp. 109–28). Another minority, the Transylvanian Székely, was identified with the original Scythians who came before the Magyars to present-day Hungary in a strange text called the Székely Chronicle of Csík that first appeared in 1796 (see above, p. x, n. 7). I felt challenged to say something more about it than nineteenth-century scholars did—namely, that it is not a medieval chronicle, probably compiled for some private reason—but it would need quite some work and such specialized knowledge that I do not have.

3 On the Czech forgeries, see the study of Pavlína Rychterová, above, pp. 3–30.
By relating the ancient origin of the Magyars and describing their wandering and victorious conquest of the Carpathian Basin, it contained sufficient material for a national myth, a fabulous pedigree, heroic deeds, and spectacular victories of the ancestors. It served well as the basis for a poetic formulation of the victorious, romantic past and thus “warm the hearts” of the Magyar readers and listeners, about to ascertain their national self-identity within the multinational Habsburg Empire.

The *Gesta Hungarorum* (as it came to be called from the *incipit*) survived in one single copy of 24 folios, 17 by 24 cm. in size, written in Gothic minuscule dateable (on paleographical and artistic grounds) to the later thirteenth century and—containing several scribal errors—clearly not an autograph. Knowledge of it in the Middle Ages seems to have been limited and its fate through the centuries is not known. Catalogue evidence suggests that it reached the Imperial Library in Vienna some time between 1610 and 1636. The *Gesta* was first mentioned by the librarian Peter Lambeck in 1666, and in 1692, his successor, Daniel Nessel suggested publishing it. In 1711, Dávid Czvitättinger gave a detailed report of it in his encyclopedic *Specimen Hungariae Literatae*. It was then first published in 1746 by Johann Georg Schwandtner in his *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum*, with a preface by the learned polyhistor, Matthias Bél; four reprints followed in the subsequent twenty years. János Letenyei translated it into Hungarian in 1790 and gave the author the name “Anonymus,” which has remained his ever since. The manuscript came to Hungary in the wake of the 1932 Treaty of Venice (in which the treasures of the Hapsburg Empire were distributed among the successor states) and is now in the Széchényi National Library as Clmae 403.

Other narratives of ancient Hungarian history were not unknown before the appearance of the *Gesta*. The main medieval tradition was passed on by John Thuróczy’s *Chronica*, first published in 1488, reproducing the text of a fourteenth-century compilation that, in turn, contained much older parts of

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5 Daniel de Nessel, *Sciaographia sive prima delineatio et brevis notitia magni corporis historici hactenus inediti, quod ex bibliothecae Caesareae Vindobonensis codicibus manuscriptis se publicis usibus communicaturum pollicetur* (Vienna: Mann, 1692), 29.
7 For a summary introduction and an English translation, listing other editions and translations, see Martyn Rady & László Veszprémy (eds. and trans.), “Anonymi Bele Regis notarii Gesta Hungarorum &c.,” in *Anonymus and Master Roger* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2010).