

# ***Hungarian polymath Matthias Bel (1684–1749): crossing the boundaries of interpretation of his work in the modern Slovak historiography\****

DÁVID JABLONSKÝ – TAĀNA SOUČKOVÁ  
UNIVERSITY OF SS. CYRIL AND METHODIUS  
IN TRNAVA

## **Abstract**

Matthias Bel, as one of the most influential Hungarian polymath, scholar, teacher and evangelical priest of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was a big inspiration not only for Hungarian scholars and historiography, but also for the Slovak academic milieu. Following the example of leading European scholars, his rich scientific, pedagogical and spiritual career predestined him to compile a historical-geographical description of Hungary in the form of a multi-volume work called *Notitia Hungariae Novae historico-geographica*, which even more than two centuries after its creation offers a rich information base for a wide range of Hungarian and Slovak academics. The paper reflects Matthias Bel's work in the Slovak historiography of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and also new trends in research of his legacy at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Matthias Belius, polymath, scholar, Hungary, Slovak historiography, Modern Times

Matthias Bel<sup>1</sup> (1684–1749) was a Hungarian polymath, scholar, teacher and evangelical priest born in the village of Ocova,<sup>2</sup> who, in addition to theology, was interested in history, geography, philosophy, medicine and folk customs and traditions. He knew several languages; studied or worked in various Hungarian cities and beyond the borders of Hungary, and with his works and activities contributed to the development of science, education, culture, language and literature. After his death, he earned the nickname “the Great Ornament of Hungary” (*Magnum decus Hungariae*), which contemporary authors still call him in scholarly literature. His most valued scientific work, which was published during his

---

\* This article was created with the financial support of the project APVV-18-0196: *Vedomosti Nitrianskej stolice M. Bela (interpretácia a aplikácia)*.

<sup>1</sup> Latin: Matthias Belius; Hungarian: Bél Mátyás; Slovak: Matej Bel; German: Matthias Bel.

<sup>2</sup> Older Hungarian spelling in Kingdom of Hungary. Nowadays it's a village under the name Očová of the Zvolen District in the Region of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.

active career, is considered to be a multi-volume work called *Notitia Hungariae Novae historico-geographica*.<sup>3</sup>

The work contains a valuable source base for the humanities, natural or even applied sciences. Researchers have been drawing on the work for several decades when designing their studies, monographs or complex translations. Attempts to analyze and interpret individual parts of the work are thus still alive today. In the individual volumes, there are references to important historical figures, Hungarian families, military clashes, historical events, religious conditions, and the occurrence of diseases and epidemics. Within selected localities, historical toponyms and their location, memorable architectural objects, lakes, rivers, streams, mineral waters, bridges, caves, minerals and animals are highlighted. There are also frequent references to the occurrence of forests, pastures, mountains, hills and fertile land cultivated in the mirror of the cultivation of agricultural crops and grain or the planting of fruit orchards and vineyards. Last but not least, the work also points to the multi-ethnic character of Hungary. The ethnic composition of the population is also depicted in the form of a description of folk customs and traditions, language, clothing, crafts or traditional way of life and livelihood. The work is thus a tiny probe into the way of life and behavior of the inhabitants not only in the urban but also in the rural environment. Four volumes published between 1735–1742 offer a description of the towns and villages of the districts falling under *Pozsony County*, *Turóc County*, *Zólyom County*, *Liptó County*, *Pest-Pilis-Solt County*, *Nógrád County*, *Bars County*, *Nyitra County* and *Hont County*.<sup>4</sup>

Although the work of Matthias Bel was sporadically used and appreciated for more than two centuries, a more striking effort to analyze Bel's life and work was noted from the perspective of Slovak historiography by a Slovak historian and employee of the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Ján Tibenský (1923–2012). His monographs and studies,<sup>5</sup> especially from the 1980s, brought a systematic overview not only of Bel's scientific career, but also of the broader context of his life. This caused an appropriate im-

<sup>3</sup> BELIUS, Matthias (1735–1742), *Notitia Hungariae Novae historico-geographica*, Tomus I–IV, Vienna, Typis Johannis Petri Van Ghelen.

<sup>4</sup> In Latin (and Slovak) form: *Comitatus Poseniensis (Bratislavská stolica)*, *Comitatus Thurociensis (Turčianska stolica)*, *Comitatus Zoliensis (Zvolenská stolica)*, *Comitatus Liptoviensis (Liptovská stolica)*, *Comitatus Pestiensis et Pilisiensis et Soltensis (Peštiansko-Piliško-Šoltianska stolica)*, *Comitatus Nogradiensis (Novohradská stolica)*, *Comitatus Barsiensis (Tekovská stolica)*, *Comitatus Nitriensis (Nitrianska stolica)*, *Comitatus Hontiensis (Hontianska stolica)*.

<sup>5</sup> TIBENSKÝ, Ján (1984), *Veľká ozdoba Uhorska. Dielo, život a doba Mateja Bela* [Great Ornament of Hungary. The work, life and times of Matej Bel], Bratislava, Tatran, 288 pp.; TIBENSKÝ, Ján (1984), *Matej Bel. Život a dielo. Najslávnejší a najdokonalejší polyhistor, rodák očovský* [Matthias Bel. Life and work. The most famous and perfect polymath, a native of Očovo], Bratislava, Osvetový ústav, 152 pp.; TIBENSKÝ, Ján (ed.) (1984), *Matej Bel o svätajurskom víne* [Matthias Bel about the wine of Svätý Jur], Bratislava, Obzor, 75 pp.; TIBENSKÝ, Ján (ed.) (1984), *Bratislava Mateja Bela* [Matthias Bel's Bratislava], Bratislava, Obzor, 225 pp.; TIBENSKÝ, Ján (1987), *Doba život dielo* [Time, life, work], Bratislava, Veda, 411 pp.; TIBENSKÝ, Ján (1977), "Matej Bel a apológia Trenčianskej stolice" [Matthias Bel and the apology of Trenčín County], *Historický časopis*, vol. 25, n° 2, 239–260.; TIBENSKÝ, Ján (1984), "Matej Bel a jeho vzťah k Slovákom" [Matthias Bel and his relationship with Slovaks], *Historický časopis*, vol. 32, n° 2, 193–218.; TIBENSKÝ, Ján (1995), "Výskum života a diela Mateja Bela na širších a pevnejších základoch" [Research of the life and work of Matthias Bel on broader and firmer foundations], *Historický časopis*, vol. 43, n° 2, 230–245.

pulse, thanks to which many contemporary scientists, institutions or universities are also dedicated to analyzing Bel's legacy. Around the same time as Tibenský, the Slovak geographer and historian Ľubomír Viliam Prikryl (\*1934) also published several studies based on his interdisciplinary approach. Prikryl focused on geographical elements contained in Bel's work.<sup>6</sup> After the publication of monographs or partial studies on activities and works of Matthias Bel, translations of individual counties from Bel's *Notitia* gradually saw the light.<sup>7</sup> At first, this process was not systematic, which changed thanks to an initiative of the Kysuce Museum in Čadca. By involving its employees in cooperation with the leading Slovak philologists and historians, the museum began a gradual process of publishing transcriptions and critical translations of particular counties in Slovak language. Academics from the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica and the University of Trnava in Trnava assisted in this process,<sup>8</sup> not to mention also the Hungarian historian and philologist Gergely Tóth (\*1977).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> PRIKRYL, Ľubomír Viliam (1984), "Matej Bel a jaskyne na Slovensku (k 300. výročiu narodenia Mateja Bela)" [Matthias Bel and caves in Slovakia (on the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Matej Bel's birth)], *Slovenský kras*, vol. 22, 5–24.; PRIKRYL, Ľubomír Viliam (1984), "Matej Bel ako geograf" [Matthias Bel as a geographer], *Geografický časopis*, vol. 36, n° 1, 3–18.; PRIKRYL, Ľubomír Viliam (1984), "Spolupracovníci Mateja Bela v oblasti geografie" [Collaborators of Matthias Bel in the field of geography], *Geografický časopis*, vol. 36, n° 1, 60–69.; PRIKRYL, Ľubomír Viliam (1985), "Matej Bel a vyučovanie zemepisu" [Matthias Bel and the teaching of geography], in KREJČOVÁ, Margita (ed.), *Pedagóg Matej Bel (1684-1749)* [Teacher Matthias Bel (1684–1749)], Bratislava, Slovenská pedagogická knižnica a Ústav školských informácií v Bratislave, 224–230.; PRIKRYL, Ľubomír Viliam (1994), "Prvky geografie obyvateľstva v diele Mateja Bela" [Elements of population geography in Matthias Bel's work], *Geografický časopis*, vol. 46, n° 1, 87–93.

<sup>7</sup> BEL, Matej (1989), *Turčianska stolica* [Turóc County], translated by Július Sopko, introduction and notes by Richard Marsina, Martin, Osveta, 97 pp.; BEL, Matej (2000), *Užská stolica* [Ung County], translated by Martin Slaninka, Bratislava, Veda, 221 pp.; BEL, Matej (2000), *Zemplínska stolica* [Zemplén County], translated by Martin Slaninka, Bratislava, Veda, 91 pp.; BEL, Matej (2001), *Oravská stolica* [Árva County], translated by Jozef Minárik, Liptovský Mikuláš, Transoscius, 169 pp.

<sup>8</sup> NAGY, Imrich – TURÓCI, Martin (eds.) (2013), *Matej Bel: Trenčianska stolica* [Matthias Bel; Trenčén County], Čadca, Kysucké múzeum v Čadci, 448 pp.; TURÓCI, Martin – KORDOŠ, Jozef (eds.) (2014), *Matej Bel: Liptovská stolica* [Matthias Bel; Liptó County], Čadca, Kysucké múzeum v Čadci, 391 pp.; NAGY, Imrich – TÓTH, Gergely – TURÓCI, Martin (eds.) (2015), *Matej Bel: Oravská stolica* [Matthias Bel; Árva County], Čadca, Kysucké múzeum v Čadci, 430 pp.; JURÍKOVÁ, Erika – TURÓCI, Martin (eds.) (2016), *Matej Bel: Turčianska stolica* [Matthias Bel; Turóc County], Čadca, Kysucké múzeum v Čadci, 412 pp.; NAGY, Imrich – TURÓCI, Martin (eds.) (2017), *Matej Bel: Zvolenská stolica* [Matthias Bel; Zólyom County], Čadca, Kysucké múzeum v Čadci, 609 pp.; TURÓCI, Martin – KORDOŠ, Jozef (eds.) (2019), *Matej Bel: Tekovská stolica* [Matthias Bel; Bars County], Čadca, Kysucké múzeum v Čadci, 532 pp.

<sup>9</sup> From his other works we can highlight, e. g.: TÓTH, Gergely (ed.) (2006), *Bél Mátyás kéziratai a pozsonyi evangélikus liceum könyvtárában (Katalógus) = Catalogus Manuscriptorum Matthiae Bél, quae in bibliotheca Lycei Evangelici Posoniensis asservantur*, Budapest, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár – Gondolat Kiadó, 159 pp.; TÓTH, Gergely (2012), "Theatrum Nobilitatis Hungaricae. Genealogické výskumy Mateja Bela, so zvláštnym zreteľom na rod Thurzo" [Theatrum Nobilitatis Hungaricae. Matthias Bel's genealogical research, with special reference to the Thurzo family], in LENGYELOVÁ, Tünde (ed.), *Thurzovci a ich historický význam* [The Thurzo family and their historical significance], Bratislava, Pro Historia, 203–215.; TÓTH, Gergely (2015), "Bél Mátyás besztercebányai diákjai" [Matthias Bel's students from Banská Bystrica], in *Humanista történetírás és neolatin irodala-*

Employee of the Matej Bel University, Imrich Nagy (\*1972), has not only been active in translating individual counties, but he also produced a number of studies and monographs related to Bel's person.<sup>10</sup> It was similar with the employee of Trnava University in Trnava, Erika Juríková (\*1974).<sup>11</sup> Among the other Slovak universities whose employees devoted themselves to research related to Matthias Bel, we can also include the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra<sup>12</sup> and the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. Peter Chrastina (\*1969), whose scientific career has been linked to both aforementioned universities, and who is one of the pioneers of historical geography and environmental history in Slovakia, points out the possibilities and limits of interdisciplinary research regarding Bel's work. Therefore on one hand, there are his studies,<sup>13</sup> and on the other hand,

---

*lom a 15–18. századi Magyarországon* [Humanist historiography and neo-Latin literature in Hungary in the 15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries], Budapest, MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Irodalomtudományi Intézet, 135–170.

<sup>10</sup> NAGY, Imrich (2012), “Dejiny slobodného kráľovského mesta Zvolen v pohľade Mateja Bela” [The history of the free royal city of Zvolen in the view of Matej Bel], in *Sambucus VIII: Práce z klasickej filológie, latinskej medievalistiky a neolatinstiky* [Sambucus VIII: Works from classical philology, Latin medieval studies and neo-Latin studies], Trnava – Kraków, FF TU v Trnave – Towarzystwo Słowaków w Polsce, 119–145.; NAGY, Imrich (2012), “Beckov vo Vedomostiach Mateja Bela” [Beckov in Matthias Bel's Knowledge], *Acta historica Neosoliensia*, vol. 15, n° 1–2, 345–358.; NAGY, Imrich (2010), “Matej Bel a Banská Bystrica” [Matthias Bel and Banská Bystrica], in SNOBKOVÁ Blanka (ed.), *Významné osobnosti v dejinách Banskej Bystrice: Fenomén osobnosti vo výskume regionálnych dejín* [Significant personalities in the history of Banská Bystrica: The phenomenon of personality in regional history research], Banská Bystrica, Štátna vedecká knižnica, 93–104.; NAGY, Imrich (2017), “Cicavce vo Vedomostiach Mateja Bela” [Mammals in Matthias Bel's work Notitia Hungariae Novae], *Quaestiones rerum naturalium*, vol. 4, n° 2, 5–18.; NAGY, Imrich (2018), “Matej Bel ako historik antických dejín” [Matej Bel as a historian of ancient history], *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, vol. 22, n° 2, 474–485.; KOLLÁROVÁ, Ivona – NAGY, Imrich (2021), “Matej Bel: Osobnosť, médium a transfer ideí na prahu osvietenstva” [Matthias Bel: Personality, medium and transfer of ideas on the threshold of enlightenment], Bratislava, Literárne informačné centrum, 176 pp.

<sup>11</sup> JURÍKOVÁ Erika (2002), “Matej Bel o Trnave” [Matthias Bel about Trnava], *Auriga*, vol. 44, n° 1–2, 25–33.; JURÍKOVÁ Erika (2008), “Problémy prekladu a interpretácie Notícií Mateja Bela” [Problems of translation and interpretation of Matej Bel's Notitia], in *Sambucus III*, Trnava, FF TU v Trnave, 152–158.; JURÍKOVÁ Erika (2009), “Matthias Bel and Trnava: An Analysis of Latin Written Sources”, *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 49, n° 2, 241–248.; JURÍKOVÁ Erika (2009), “Matthias Bel a Trnavská univerzita” [Matthias Bel and University of Trnava], in *Latina v cirkevnom a svetském školství* [Latin in church and secular education], Praha: Filosofický ústav Akademie věd České republiky, Kabinet pro klasická studia, 161–178.; JURÍKOVÁ Erika (2010), “Belove Vedomosti vo svetle súčasných poznatkov” [Bel's Knowledge in the light of current knowledge], in *Sambucus Supplementum II*, Trnava: FF TU v Trnave, 13–21.

<sup>12</sup> Here we can mention the works of Katarína Rácová: RÁCOVÁ, Katarína (2014), *Dejiny Nitrianskeho biskupstva v Belovom diele Notitia Hungariae Novae historico-geographica* [History of the Bishopric of Nitra in Bel's work Notitia Hungariae Novae historico-geographica], Bratislava, Historický ústav SAV, 299 pp.; RÁCOVÁ, Katarína (2012), *Trenčín pohľadom Mateja Bela* [Trenčín through the eyes of Matthias Bel], Nitra, UKF v Nitre, 168 pp.

<sup>13</sup> CHRASTINA, Peter – RÁCOVÁ, Katarína (2015), “Mosty na území Nitrianskej stolice v prvej polovici 18. storočia podľa Notícií Mateja Bela (historicko-geografický prístup)” [Bridges on the territory of the Nyitra County in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century according to Matthias Bel's Notes (historical-geographical approach)], *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, vol. 19, n° 1, 160–165.; CHRASTINA, Peter

there are lectures and seminars that he leads at the Department of Historical Sciences and Central European Studies of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. Finally, there are his popularizing lectures and workshops where he presents his research to non-academic audiences.

The scientific grant with which Peter Chrastina covers his research at the Department of Historical Sciences and Central European Studies in Trnava, as well as his teaching methods, are also an inspiration for his younger colleagues. Since the complete translations of the Slovak counties in *Notitia* have still not been published, some of Chrastina's colleagues have tried to focus on specific topics<sup>14</sup> or Bel's descriptions of cities and villages particularly from those counties that are yet to be translated into Slovak. It was a matter of course that the department also conducted bachelor and diploma courses on topics that were based on the knowledge contained in Bel's work. The students thus had to master various languages. In addition to teaching Latin and German, Hungarian language is also taught at the department for Slovak students. In connection with this, in 2020, a grammar textbook<sup>15</sup> from which the students learn, was also published. Apart from grammar and historically focused texts and exercises intended for translation, the textbook also contains a chapter

---

(2017), "Dudváh, Blava a Holeška v Noticiách Nitrianskej stolice (historicko-geografický výskum a environmentálne dejiny)" [Dudváh, Blava and Holeška from Nyitra County in the Notitia (historical-geographical research and environmental history)], in *Forum Historiae: časopis a portál pre históriu a príbuzné spoločenské vedy* [Forum Historiae: a journal and portal for history and related social sciences], vol. 11, n° 1, 52–64.; CHRASTINA, Peter – RÁCOVÁ, Katarína – ŠIMŮNEK, Robert (2017), "Ore Minerals of the Nitra County according to Notitia Hungariae historico-geographica by Matthias Bel", *Revista Transilvania*, n° 4–5, 118–126.; CHRASTINA, Peter (2019), "Jaskyňa Čertova pec vo vedomostiach Nitrianskej stolice Mateja Bela" [The Čertova pec cave from Nyitra County in Knowledge of Matthias Bel], *Historická geografie*, vol. 45, n° 1, 139–154.; CHRASTINA, Peter – JURÍKOVÁ, Erika – TROJAN, Jakub (2021), "Blesková povodeň v Sobotišti v roku 1672 vo Vedomostiach M. Bela a ďalších písomných prameňoch" [Flash flood in Sobotište (1672) in the Matthias Bel's Notitia of the Nitra County and other written sources], *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, vol. 25, n° 2, 362–392.

<sup>14</sup> JABLONSKÝ, Dávid – SOUČKOVÁ, Taťána (2022), "Obraz mesta Šahy v zrkadle vybraných historických a historicko-demografických prameňov" [The image of the town of Šahy in the mirror of selected historical and historical-demographic sources], *Populačné štúdie Slovenska*, vol. 15, n° 1, 5–20.; JABLONSKÝ, Dávid – SIPEKIOVÁ, Nicol (2020), "Charakteristika obcí modrokamenského slúžnovského okresu v zrkadle Belových Vedomostí" [Characteristics of the Villages of the Modrý Kameň District in the Mirror of Bel's Knowledge], in *Sambucus XIV: Práce z klasickej filológie, latinskej medievalistiky a neolatinistiky* [Sambucus XIV: Works from classical philology, Latin medieval studies and neo-Latin studies], Trnava, FF TU v Trnave, 69–98.; JABLONSKÝ, Dávid – SIPEKIOVÁ, Nicol (2021), "Zmienky o víne a vinohradníctve v obciach modrokamenského slúžnovského okresu nielen v zrkadle Belových Vedomostí" [Mentions of wine and viticulture in the villages of the Modrý Kameň district not only in the mirror of Bel's Knowledge], in KLOKNER, Tomáš (ed.), *Terra Vineatica: kultúra vinohradníctva a vína v stredoeurópskom priestore* [Terra Vineatica: the culture of viticulture and wine in the Central European area], Pezinok, Malokarpatské múzeum v Pezinku, 65–78.; SOUČKOVÁ, Taťána (2021), "Epidemie ve vybraných slovenských prekladech Vedomostí Matěje Bela" [Epidemics in the selected Slovak translations of Matthias Bel's Notitia], in *Historia Medicinae Slovaca VI*, Bratislava, LF UK v Bratislave, 56–67.

<sup>15</sup> JABLONSKÝ, Dávid (2020), *Maďarčina pre historikov: základy gramatiky a prekladové texty pre študentov histórie* [Hungarian for Historians: Basic Grammar and Translation Texts for (Slovak) Students of History], Trnava, UCM v Trnave, 140 pp.

dedicated to Matthias Bel. In addition to gaining language and historical knowledge, this helps to develop empathy and tolerance towards other nations and ethnicities and supports interest in studying the history of Hungary not only from the perspective of its northern part, from which Slovakia broke away in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also in a complex understanding, that reflects multicultural and the multi-ethnic nature of the Kingdom of Hungary, its diversity and rich history.

In 2022, another textbook based on the work of Matthias Bel was published as part of the project activities at the Department of Historical Sciences and Central European Studies. The authors Peter Chrastina and Taťána Součková prepared a series of teaching texts devoted to the problems of the natural conditions of the Nitra County and contextually also to other Hungarian Counties.<sup>16</sup> The textbook is a collection of examples of work with Bel's texts. It provides concrete examples of the application of interdisciplinary approaches, primarily historical-geographical methodology. The textbook is a manifestation of the aforementioned potential of Bel's work, which can be extended by didactic level.

It is significant, that the work of Matthias Bel, who actively advocated for the continuous improvement of his pupils' education, is used in modern times exactly in accordance with Bel's didactic concept of linking history and geography.<sup>17</sup> The use of Bel's texts in the university didactics of history is another example of crossing not only disciplinary boundaries. The work of the Hungarian scholar speaks to today's students in a language that both future historians and history teachers are learning to understand. Furthermore, by interpreting excerpts from *Notitia*, which describe the shape of the Baroque landscape and also its inhabitants, the students are learning to better comprehend today's cultural landscape as well. Bel's work thus becomes a bridge between the past times and the present.

In the courses offered at the Department of Historical Sciences and Central European Studies, the use of texts in teaching is the primary focus of Peter Chrastina, who incorporates *Notitia* texts into courses on historical geography, regional history or environmental history. These courses are attended both by students of single-subject history and by students of teacher training in history (history in combination with another subject).

An example of didactic and historical-methodological use of Bel's texts in university teaching is the model where, for example, in the course of historical geography or regional history the students are given a task of choosing one of the villages depicted by Bel in one of the volumes of *Notitia*. If the students choose a municipality that is close to them in some way (it may be their home municipality), the important didactic potential of the task, which is to activate the students and motivate them by arousing their interest and curiosity, is already fulfilled at this initial stage.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> CHRASTINA, Peter – SOUČKOVÁ, Taťána (2022), *Príroda a krajina Nitrianskej stolice v prvej polovici 18. storočia. Podľa Vedomostí M. Bela a vybraných autorov obdobia baroka* [Nature and landscape of the Nitra County in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to M. Bel's Vedomosti and selected authors of the Baroque period], Trnava, FF UCM v Trnave, 115 pp.

<sup>17</sup> KOLLÁROVÁ – NAGY, Matej Bel, 104.

<sup>18</sup> SOUČKOVÁ, Taťána (2020), "Historická geografie v kontextu vysokoškolské výuky historie: príklad využitia diela Vedomostí Matjeje Bela" [Historical geography in the context of the didactics of history in undergraduate education: an example of use of Matthias Bel's work Vedomosti], *Slavonic Pedagogical Journal*, vol. 9, issue 1, 64–65.

However, the aim of the task is to compare Bel's description of the village with its current appearance. Thus, the students are directly acquainted with the historical source, but at the same time they must pay attention to heuristics, i.e. collecting other available sources and literature, typically monographs on a particular village, articles in journals, anthologies, etc. If necessary, the research can be supplemented by fieldwork, photographic documentation or ethnographic exploration. In this way, students are introduced to the basic methodological procedures of historical analysis and, in addition, they learn to work within a fixed time and organisational plan, where they have to schedule the individual phases of their research appropriately.<sup>19</sup>

The advantage of such tasks is, that their difficulty can be gradually increased as wider variety of both analysed sources and specialist literature can be involved. Students move on to analysing a larger number of settlements, for example within a particular micro-region, or to noticing more thoroughly the changes in the landscape, looking for traces of landscape elements that have already disappeared. All this is combined with a continuously developing knowledge of the Latin and Hungarian languages, for which they use, among other things, the above-mentioned Hungarian grammar textbook.<sup>20</sup>

Moving on to the context of international cooperation based on the analysis of the work of Matthias Bel, it is important to mention the publication outputs that stretch beyond the borders of Central Europe. As a scholar from the Enlightenment era, Matthias Bel was part of a network of intellectuals who exchanged and discussed their knowledge through correspondence and sent each other their published works. This phenomenon has entered history under the name of the Republic of Lettres.<sup>21</sup> Its reflection in the surviving Bel's correspondence has become another of the themes developed by the members of the Department of Historical Sciences and Central European Studies within their scientific research activities.

In this respect, Taťána Součková critically reviewed an analysis of Bel's correspondence with academics of the Russian St Petersburg Academy of Sciences carried out in the 1960s and 1970s. Součková has managed to expand the already known facts with new information, as she found the hitherto neglected context of the real impact of Bel's scientific work, whose fragments were quoted in Russian academic milieu by Bel's contemporaries, Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer (1694–1738) and Vasily Nikitich Tatishchev (1686–1750). Such spreading of Bel's legacy as a scholar was possible because of the then existing collaboration of European intellectuals that crossed mental, academic and geographical boundaries.<sup>22</sup>

Matthias Bel's work is still alive and relevant today. It is not only the subject of extensive publishing and editorial activity in Slovakia and Hungary, but it is also a platform for interdisciplinary research and collaboration. Experts working on this topic are constantly searching for new dimensions and interpretations of Bel's *Notitia*. They are successfully implementing the outputs of projects in scientific monographs and articles, which also help in educating new generations of historians and history teachers. The work and legacy of

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> VAN MIERT, Dirk – HOTSON, Howard – WALLNIG, Thomas (2019), "What Was the Republic of Lettres?", in *Reassembling the Republic of Letters in the Digital Age*, Göttingen, Göttingen University Press, 30–31.; KOLLÁROVÁ – NAGY, Matej Bel, 13.

<sup>22</sup> SOUČKOVÁ, Taťána (2022), "Matthias Bel and the Russian Academic Milieu during the Enlightenment", *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University, History*, vol. 67, issue 2, 467–479.

Matthias Bel, the eminent polymath, priest and educator, is timeless and universal, across the borders of the former Kingdom of Hungary and far beyond.