

Relevant Research

Scholars in Vienna began to show interest in Bocskay's work around the middle of the 19th century, after a significant portion of the Ambras collection (including the calligrapher's *Manuscript 2*) were moved from Innsbruck to the imperial capital in 1806. These objects were exhibited in Vienna in the Lower Belvedere starting in 1814.⁶ Though *Manuscript 2* was not mentioned in the first printed guides to this exhibit,⁷ interested visitors might have been able to view it among the codices there, which were accessible by special appointment. According to a later catalog, it was put on display for a brief period starting in 1879 (*Saal IV, Tischkasten IV*),⁸ by 1882, however, other pieces had taken its place.⁹ Then in 1891, the Ambras collection was transferred to the new Kunsthistorisches Museum, where *Manuscript 2* was once again displayed with the rest of the collection (*Saal XXIII, Vitrine III*).¹⁰

Manuscript 2 was then mentioned in a few contemporaneous publications and began to attract scholarly attention. Within a relatively short period, two extensive monographs on the Ambras collection were published in Vienna: Alois Primisser's 1819 survey provides only a summary discussion of the writing model books that had been housed in Ambras,¹¹ while Eduard Sacken's 1855 book suggested that Bocskay's manuscript was significant.¹² Roughly half a century later, Sacken's opinion was echoed by Julius von Schlosser (1866–1938), the director of the Kunsthistorisches Museum's Collection of Weaponry and Industrial Design (*Sammlung für Waffen und kunstindustrielle Gegenstände*), later known as the Collection of Sculpture and Applied Art (*Sammlung für Plastik und Kunstgewerbe*),¹³ which at that time housed *Manuscripts 2* and 3. Schlosser published the first work of *Kunstkammer* research in 1908; the primary focus of this monograph—which is still of fundamental importance to the field—was the Ambras collection. And though his text makes no mention of *Manuscript 2*, Schlosser used a photograph of it—captioned with Bocskay's name—to exemplify the collection's writing model books (*fig. 1*).¹⁴

Another detailed introduction to this manuscript appeared in Johann Evangelist Schlager's 1850 study of Vienna's court artists (*Hofkünstler*), other local masters (*Andere hiesige Meister*), and the history of the court's collections,¹⁵ though Schlager relegated "Georg Bocksay [sic!]" to the category of "other masters." Even so, he was the first Austrian researcher to note that in 1570, Bocskay—by that time, a Hungarian court secretary—had received 200 thalers for the inscriptions on Maximilian I's cenotaph.¹⁶

1.
Photo
of *Manuscript 2*
in Schlosser's
monograph.
SCHLOSSER 1908, 77



Fig. 64. Aus dem Schriftmusterbuch des Georg Bocskay.
(Wien, Hofmuseum.)

Manuscript 2 was also reproduced in a facsimile edition in the mid-19th century, and though the aforementioned Sacken and Schlager were aware that Bocskay's work was reproduced in this publication, it did not mention the calligrapher's name, nor the fact that *Manuscript 2* had served as one of its sources. This album, entitled *Zier-Schrift nach Vorlagen aus dem sechszehnten Jahrhundert (Decorative Scripts Based on 16th-Century Models)*, was published by the *Hof- und Staatsdruckerei* in Vienna in 1850. We do not know the identity of its editor; it was likely produced in a tiny print run. The dimensions of this representative album were fairly large (roughly 55 × 37 cm); it consisted of 15 pages of black-and-white lithographs featuring five alphabets ornamented in various styles. Of the five, two were derived from Bocskay's *Manuscript 2* (fig. 2; cf. figs. 65–67 and 127).¹⁷ Given that the latter did not contain complete alphabets, all of Bocskay's letters were copied precisely for this album, with imitations in place of missing letters.

It was thus around the middle of the 19th century that these publications began to familiarize the Viennese public with *Manuscript 2*. In the succeeding decades, the other two writing model books (*Manuscripts 1* and *3*) were also displayed at exhibitions and mentioned in the accompanying catalogs. *Manuscript 3* was certainly on display in the *Schatzkammer* (Imperial Treasury) by 1867; at that time, it had not yet been separated from the jeweled binding that was attached to it at some point after the completion of its miniatures (see section III.3.2; figs. 111 and 112); for this reason, it was housed in the Golden Cabinet of the Imperial Treasury (*Gold-Cabinet, Kasten 4*).¹⁸ It was also featured in the first guidebook to the collection (1869), wherein Johann Gabriel Seidl was the first to attribute the manuscript to Bocskay.¹⁹ Around that time, authorities began systematically reorganizing the imperial collections in anticipation of the opening of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, then known as the *K. K. Kunsthistorisches Hofmuseum*; during this reconfiguration, numerous pieces were temporarily transferred from the *Schatzkammer* to the Ambras collection in the Lower Belvedere;²⁰ *Manuscript 3* and its jeweled binding were incorporated into the Ambras collection,²¹ and were displayed among the goldwork in the permanent exhibition (*Saal VI, Vitrine in der Mitte*) from 1879–1887.²² After the Kunsthistorisches Museum opened in 1891, this work and its cover were moved to the new building and exhibited in the golden-objects room (*Saal*

The sources indicate that Bocskay and Gétyey had three children—István, Borbála, and Orsolya—but the available archival data (recorded later, circa 1600) concerns only the son. István is listed as a property owner in Körös County's urbaria for 1598 and 1600;¹⁵⁵ in 1602, he was recorded as one of the owners of his late father's house in Körmend. By then, the Bocskay and Nádasdy families were sharing the use of this building.¹⁵⁶ According to this document, István Bocskay, having seen Imre Nádasdy's¹⁵⁷ willingness to learn, temporarily loaned him his half of the house, with all its associated possessions. In addition to the manor, this set of properties included a garden, pastures, tillable fields, and a farmhouse. The urbaria of the city of Körmend indicate that István Bocskay still owned this house in the early 17th century.¹⁵⁸

Bocskay also took care of his deceased elder brother Ferenc's orphaned daughter Anna; he was named his niece's guardian in 1566.¹⁵⁹ Bocskay arranged Anna's marriage to Márton Nádasdy¹⁶⁰ in 1571,¹⁶¹ and may thus have established family ties with the branch of the Nádasdy clan with whom the Bocskays were sharing their house in Körmend around 1602. The court in Vienna contributed 200 florins to Anna's endowment.¹⁶² The calligrapher also requested Boldizsár Batthyány's assistance in hosting Anna's wedding reception in Körmend (see section II.3). By 1572, the young couple had taken up residence at the groom's ancestral home in Nádasd, the town which had given his family its name. Their residence in Nádasd is confirmed by a document recorded there, wherein Márton Nádasdy noted that George Bocskay, "the Secretary and Councilor of His Highness, the Emperor and King," had taken possession of his brother Ferenc's legacy on his niece Anna's behalf, including "a lidless, gilded-silver goblet" and "a silver helmet."¹⁶³

4. Bocskay's Last Will and Testament and the Site of his Burial

Bocskay took ill in March of 1575;¹⁶⁴ according to a payment recorded in the ledger of the Hungarian Chamber,¹⁶⁵ he died on April 5th. The Viennese Court had already sent him his second payment of the year for his service as a courtier or *Hofdiener* (covering the period up to April 6th, 1574; see section III.2.2), but sent an "advance" of 50 florins to cover the calligrapher's burial expenses ("zu notturfft seiner begrebnis").¹⁶⁶ The latter sum was disbursed by the court paymaster (*Hofzahlmeister*) Peter Häckl on April 8th, thus the funeral presumably took place at some point thereafter. The money was received by "Francisco Donbach von Saßwar," or Ferenc Sasváry, whom Bocskay's will had named as his chief servitor; Sasváry may have been responsible for arranging the burial.

On January 8th of 1576, Bocskay's position as court secretary at the Hungarian Court Chancellery was filled by János Joó, a scribe at the Chancellery of the Aulic War Council (*Hofkriegsrat*) whose appointment had been arranged by his father, the royal director and *fiscalis* Balázs Joó.¹⁶⁷ János Joó assumed this secretarial position on July 1st of 1578 and served in it until 1587.¹⁶⁸

There are also several surviving records of sums owed to Bocskay at the time of his death. According to the previously cited ledger of the Hungarian Chamber,¹⁶⁹ as of April 5th, 1575, that institution still owed him more than 725 florins. By November 8th

Verbatim Latin text of
Bocskay's will,
with abbreviations
spelled out in brackets
and missing sections
in parentheses

[Fol. 1r]

Testamentum Domini
Georgy Bochkaý etc

[Fol. 1v left blank]

[Fol. 2r]

[The following two lines are written in a different hand:]

In nomine Patris, et Filij
et Spiritus Sancti etc.

Ego Georgius Bochkaý de Razynýakereztwr, Sacrae Caesareae Regiae[ue]
Ma[ies]t[ra]tis Secretarius et Con(s)iliarius, cum considerarem animo q[ue]
iteratis Vicibus revolverum inconstanciam praesentis seculi, et praesertim
Diuinam ordinationem, sum(mam) (e)t terminum meae Vitae, nunc ob oculos
positum, cum in speculo quodam cernerem, quod mihi ex hac lamentabili,
omnibusq[ue] miserýs et doloribus referta, Vita, in aeternae Vitae heredi
tatem, celestem ß[c]i[licet] Patriam, per filium dei Patris omni potentis, omni//
bus ad se confugien[tibus] peccatoribus, et pie in se obdormientibus, praepara//
tam, migrandum sit. Cogitavi omnino et decreui, bene res vniuersas
et negotia mea, domestica, disponere. Ne post excessum meum
aliquis tumultus, et discordia, per consanguineos et affines meos
inde subsequeretur. Imprimis itaq[ue] animam meam deo meo
aeterno, conditorj omnium rerum, tam caelestium q[uam] etiam terrestri[um]
vt in fururae Vitae, beatissima gaudia, in perpetuum sibi per
filium suum Vnigentitum, et Spiritum sanctum conseruet, com
mendo. Corpus Vero terrae Matri suae humandum, Quod in
Nouissimo die, Vnà cum electis sanctis Dei, gloriose iterum resu//
scitaturum credo, Relinquo. Deinde etsi in praesentiar[um], Corpore
sim satis aeger, et debilis, Tamen diuina p[ro]uidencia, mente
animo q[ue] adhuc per omnia sanus. De bonis itaq[ue], et rebus
tam mobilibus, q[uam] etiam immobilibus, à Deo mihi concreditus
et attributis, coram fide dignis personis Vi[deli]c[e]t Egregýs et Nobi//
libus, Joanne Jo de Kazahaza, Sacrae Caesareae Regiae[ue] Ma[ies]t[ra]tis
Cancellariae Bellicae Jurato Notario, Sigismundo Farkas de
Besse, ac Simone Kassa, R[euerendi]s[si]mi domini Stephaný Feýer Kowý
familiaribus, hoc pro rato et firmo testamento meo, fieri, habe
riq[ue] omnino et reputarj subordinauj.

29.
Bocskay's signature
in the labyrinth
in *Manuscript 1*
(details from
fol. 118r)



features a sonnet in which Van Mander compares Jan van de Velde to Apelles; in the Netherlands, analogies to the famous painters of antiquity (Apelles, Zeuxis, Parrhasius) had become a standard feature of panegyrics in praise of calligraphers.³⁶⁵

The theoretical framework for the recognition of calligraphy as a distinct art form was created in Italy, and the Mannerists' cult of *disegno* won converts all over Europe, like Karel Van Mander, the defining figure of Netherlandish art theory, whose *Book of Painters* presents *Schrijfconst* as a new form of art. Hoefnagel—like his contemporaries—did the same in calling Bocskay the “Hungarian Zeuxis,” emphasizing his outstanding talent by comparing him to the famous painter of antiquity.

Bocskay's work was particularly prized in these circles, as evidenced by a reference to him in Van Mander's biography of Joris Hoefnagel; as I noted in the introduction, according to Van Mander, Emperor Rudolf II had commissioned the Flemish master to decorate a book by “the best scribe in the world.”³⁶⁶

2. The Calligrapher

2.1 “In perpetuam memoriam Artis scribendi”—Bocskay on His Own Work

Bocskay also considered his own work to be art; references to this attitude appear as early as the Bocskay family's letters patent (see sections I.2 and II.1), the text of which was almost certainly composed by the calligrapher himself. Among Bocskay's merits, this document emphasizes his “scholarship” (*studia litteraria*) and “erudition” (*eruditio*), and draws particular attention to his assimilation of “the discipline of painting letters” (*disciplinam pingendorum characterum*). Bocskay thus defined the practice of calligraphy as a scholarly activity, an indication of the importance of a creator's intellectual background among the criteria of novel, Renaissance-era conceptions of art.

Bocskay commented on his own artistry in his manuscripts as well. He signed his work on numerous occasions (*figs. 95–97, 101–102, 126–129*), which gesture emphasized that the given writing sample was his own personal creation. He also sometimes added commentaries on himself or his work. In his earliest writing model book, *Manuscript 1* (1561–1562), he adapted an intricate design—the text of the *Benedictus*, or Cantic of Zechariah (cf. Luke 1:67–79) in the form of a labyrinth—from Wolfgang Fugger's



30.
Latin aphorism
on the subject of
fame woven into
Bocskay's signature.
Manuscript 1,
fol. 129r

the rest of this charter are written in the same *rotunda* in gold. It is my belief that Bocskay used this letter type as a reference to this document's formal predecessor, the *libellus* he designed for Miklós Oláh (fig. 141); the calligraphy here seems to reflect the important role Oláh played in János Liszthy's career at the Chancellery.

The main body of the text continues up to the verso of folio 4, where Maximilian II validated the bishop's letters patent with his signature. As the Chancellor who normally countersigned such charters, Liszthy (like Oláh) was unable to witness his own, and thus the signature in the lower right corner is that of his colleague George Bocskay. With its exquisite calligraphy, this signature served a dual purpose here: in Bocskay's capacity as court secretary, he was validating a confirmation of nobility issued by his chancellery, while simultaneously confirming the identity of the writing master who had decorated it.

Various German Blackletters—the Neudörffer Group

In the case of single-folio letters patent, calligraphic decoration was limited to the first few lines, generally just the rulers' titulature with which the texts of these official documents traditionally began. I have used the term "Neudörffer group" to refer to Bocskay's letters patent in which the central decorative element is a set of interlaced *Fraktur* initials in the style of Johann Neudörffer the Elder (figs. 73 and 74), or a few other German Gothic *Fraktur* capitals. Bocskay thus preferred these letter types in composing not only his manuscripts and *libelli*, but also the majority of the single-folio letters patent he decorated.

The 1550 letters patent issued to Bernát Zichy, the royal deputy master of stables (fig. 148),⁷²² is the earliest known letters patent bearing Bocskay's calligraphy. The most striking element of its first line is a finely constructed Neudörffer-style interlaced initial "F" (for "Ferdinandus") in black. The rest of this line is composed of German Gothic blackletters in gold.

Another early piece is a 1553 charter issued to János Alaghy Bekény and his family, including his brother György Alaghy, the notary of the Hungarian Court Chancellery (fig. 149).⁷²³ Its first line is composed of *Fraktur* initials, including a Neudörffer-style "F," and other German Gothic blackletters of gold, silver, and various colors (red, blue); its initial letter is surrounded by finely executed ornamentation. Each of these choices is typical of Bocskay. The text thereafter, however, is marked by a significant drop in quality, and was thus likely the work of another hand.

Bocskay very likely prepared a charter for Bertalan Kacsóh, an employee of the Hungarian Chamber, in 1556,⁷²⁴ by which time he was mixing blackletters with classical Roman *antiqua* scripts. This alternation of Gothic and humanist styles within a single text was characteristic of the calligrapher's writing models (figs. 42 and 75) and the *libelli* he produced in this period. Here the first line is written in gold, in a combination of interlaced *Fraktur* initials and classical Roman majuscules. Above the text, an extraordinarily precise arabesque serves as an upper border; the first line ends with another tiny arabesque.

The titulature in the first line of a letters patent issued to Bernát Gróf de Salamonfalva and his family⁷²⁵ in 1556 is also dominated by Neudörffer-style initials in gold.

148.
Bernát Zichy's
letters patent.
Pozsony,
February 1st, 1550



The ascenders of the letter “D” expand into a pattern of flourishes that merges into strapwork. Another letter type in the first line is a classical Roman capital, also written in gold. The spaces between these letters, like the interiors of the initials, are filled with minutely detailed foliate ornamentation, the red of which acts as a counterpoint to the color of the letters. Each of the words in the first line ends with a tiny piece of golden strapwork which mimics the line work of the initials. This first line is thus exquisitely executed, although the patterning of the two initials is significantly different from Bocskay’s earlier *Fraktur* initials, and thus the calligraphic decoration of this letters patent may be the work of another, unknown master.

The first line of a 1557 charter issued to Kristóf Armbruster,⁷²⁶ the notary of the Hungarian Court Chancellery, opens with another finely rendered arabesque in gold; a similar decoration appears on Bertalan Kacsóh’s aforementioned letters patent. The gold *Fraktur* initials are accompanied by a white Gothic *textualis* on a black background embellished with golden foliate ornamentation. The second and third lines are written in a version of Amphiareo’s spotted French Gothic *textualis* (fig. 65).

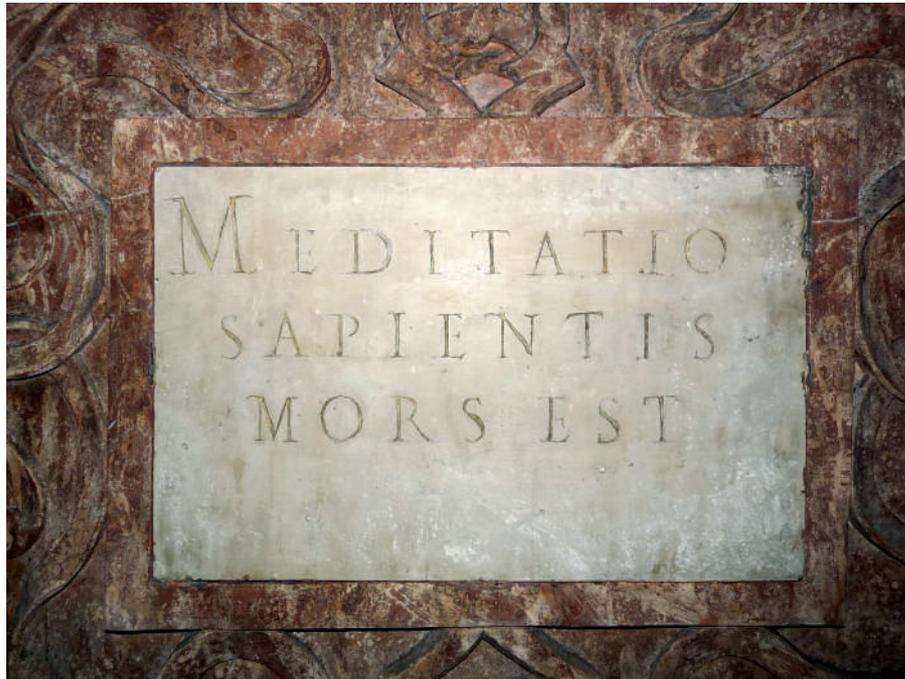
Márton Boroszlóy’s 1563 letters patent⁷²⁷ is a typical workshop piece. Like the opening lines of Kacsóh and Gróf’s charters, the first line here consists of a combination of *Fraktur* initials and classical Roman (*antiqua*) capitals. The *antiqua* letters are fairly uneven, but the meticulously executed initials seem to be Bocskay’s work.

I have already introduced the decorative scheme Bocskay created for the 1572 *libellus* issued to János Pethő de Gerse III, the first few lines of which are distinguished by

204.
Inscription
on the eastern side
of the Nádasdy–
Kanizsay
sarcophagus.
Now in the Nádasdy
family crypt at the
Augustinian Church
in Léka
(Lockenhaus)



205.
Inscription
on the western side
of the sarcophagus



The sepulchral inscription:

ILLVSTR&[I] D[OMI]NO THOMÆ NADASDIO SVMMO INGENIO SINGVLARI VIRTVTE VIRO, COMPLVRIVM LINGVAR&[VM]/PERITISSI[M]OPACEBELLOQ[VE] CLARISS[IMO] DEVETVSTACOMITV[M]PETENEDIOR&[VM] FAMILÆ PROGNATO IN ITALIA OPTIMARV[M] / ARTIVM STVDYS IMBVTO · INDEQ[VE] CVM CARDINALE GAJETANO BVDA[M] REVERSO REGI HVN[GARLÆ] LVDO / VICO A SECRETIS, POST CVIVS FATA VARIA FORTVNÆ VICISSITVDI[N]E ACTO PRIMV[M] AVSPICIIS MELIO / RIBVS BVDEN[SI] PRÆFECTO MOX VRBE BVDA MILITV[M] INCO[N]STA[N]TIA TVRCIS DEDITA, SOLLIMAN[N]I POTE[N]TIA / IN ARBITRIV[M] REGIS IOAN[N]IS REDACTO, CVI VIRTVTI HOM[IN]IS ADMIRANTIA THESAVRIS, SED DE[N]VO / PROPRIO SVO AC PERPETVO PROPOSITO, ILLIVSQ[VE] REGIS PERMISSV PATRLÆ RESTITVTO SACRATIS[SIMI] AC / POTENTIS[SIMI] ROM[ANI] HVNG[ARLÆ] BO[HEM]LÆ SCLA[VONLÆ] DAL[MATLÆ] ETC· REGIS, AC TANDEM IMP[ERATORIS] FERDINANDI CONSILIARIO PERPE// / TVVM SVM[M]ISQ[VE] AC CO[N]TINVTIS APVD HVNC AD EXTREMV[M] VITÆ DVM PERFVNCTO HONORIBVS, AC PRIMVM / TAVERNICO[R&[VM] REGIORVM MAG[IST]RO, MOX DAL[MATLÆ] CROA[TLÆ] ET SCLA[VONLÆ] BANO, DEINDE IVDICI CVRLÆ REGLÆ / STATIM SVPR[RE]MO GENERALIQ[VE] CAPITANEO POSTREMO PALATINO REGNI ET PRO REGI, OPTIMO FIDELIS// / SIMO, CONSILIO ARMISQ[VE] TVRCARVM PROFLIGATORI PATRLÆ ILLVSTRATORI CONIVNX AMANTISSIMA / VRSVLA CANISÆA MÆRENS P[HISSIME] P[OSVIT] ·

OBIIT ANNO DOMINI · M·D·L·X·II· QVARTO NO//
NAS IVNIAS AN[N]O ÆTATIS SVÆ · LXIII :

The inscriptions on the shorter sides:

<i>eastern side</i>	<i>western side</i>
MEMORARE NO//	MEDITATIO
VISSIMA TVA,	SAPIENTIS
ET IN ÆTERNV[M]	MORS EST
NON PECCABIS	

These letters demonstrate that Bocskay received his commission directly from Orsolya Kanizsay. The larger tablet bearing the sepulchral inscription was essentially finished by September of 1565, but the two smaller tablets were still awaiting text from “my lord Gabriel,” the palatine’s former secretary Gábor Szentgyörgyi. The entire text had been etched in stone by late October, when Bocskay reported that he was gilding all three tablets. This letter indicates that he was living in the Nádasdys’ palace in Vienna at the time, and he almost certainly prepared these tablets there. Orsolya Kanizsay’s preferences for her sarcophagus’ inscriptions—employing Bocskay and using the process of etching—were surely influenced by the calligrapher’s presence in her home in Vienna, where he seems to have spent a long time preparing the inscribed tablets for the monument to Emperor Maximilian I. The workshop in which he executed these inscriptions had clearly been set up in the Nádasdys’ Vienna palace by the spring of 1567.¹⁰⁰²

The technique and letter type of his *all’antica* inscriptions for the monument in Innsbruck are echoed on the sarcophagus in Léka: both texts consisted of etched and

206.
Verbatim Latin text of the inscriptions on the Nádasdy-Kanizsay sarcophagus, with abbreviations spelled out in brackets and slashes for line breaks