“My work called ‘The Origin of Species’”: Translation, Authorship, and Agency in Early Hungarian Darwinism

In my talk, I will address some aspects of the translation and reception of Darwin’s work in Hungarian in the 1860s. Though the first full Hungarian translation of *Origin of Species* was published in 1873-74 (translated by László Dapsy), parts of the work were made available already in the early 1860s. This paper will focus on texts produced by Jácint Rónay, a Benedictine monk living in exile in London following the fall of the Hungarian War of Independence in 1849, considered to be the first Hungarian translator of Darwin’s work in Hungary by many, but as an author of original works by himself. This paper will rethink his role in light of the flexibility and uncertainty of the modes of and approaches to translation and especially authorship in the literary traditions of mid-19th-century Central Europe, situating his agenda to circulate knowledge about Darwinism and science in general at a meeting point (or on a middle ground) where boundaries of language, science and public space – as well as the carefully negotiated identity between translator and author – were blurred.

The paper will touch on a number of themes, including the process of relocation though the agency (though intervention) of translators and their audiences, as well as the role of the translator, both in the role of facilitator within the scientific community and as an important link between author and the public readership. Since the scientific and popular reception of Darwinism were inextricably linked by men of letters, public intellectuals acting as agents of translation, and the public discourse and dissemination of Darwin’s work in Hungary, the paper will also reflect on the agency of translation in the parallel – and closely connected – transformation of the scientific community and public space in 19th century Central Europe.