

# Hungarian Stamps 2010

## PROMINENT HUNGARIANS GÁSPÁR HELTAI WAS BORN 500 YEARS AGO



**Gáspár Heltai** (Caspar Helth) (Nagydisznód?, 1510?- Kolozsvár (today Cluj-Napoca), 1574?) 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant writer, translator and printer. An outstanding representative of late Hungarian Renaissance literature, one of the creators of Hungarian prose of European standard.

The price location and date of his birth are not known. On the basis of his family name he probably originated from Heltau (today Cisnădie, in Hungarian Nagydisznód) in Szeben (Sibiu) county as a child of an ethnic German middle class family. In 1543 he studied in the German town of Wittenberg, then starting from the following year he performed the duties of ethnic German Evangelical preacher in Kolozsvár. His mother tongue was German and only learnt Hungarian in 1536, but in spite of this he published all of his works in this language. Besides his work as a preacher he got involved in several enterprises. In 1550 he established a printing press jointly

with György Hofgreff, after whose death in 1558 Heltai became the single owner of the press and as an excellent businessman he reaped much success. At the beginning of the 1560s he established a paper-mill (~ paper factory). As the ethnic Germans in Transylvania supplied themselves with publications partly from Germany and partly from the press in Brasov of János Honterus, Heltai targeted the Hungarian public with the Hungarian language books that he had largely written and edited himself. Nearly a third of all Hungarian book production at the time came from his press. He took great care to ensure consistent spelling and with this he gained an important role in the establishment of the Hungarian spelling rules.

Similarly to the other preacher-writers, initially Heltai too published works religious-moral subjects, which he had translated from German or Latin sources. However, these were more like adaptations than translations and their essay-like character was softened with inserts of artistic prose. One of his most important publishing enterprises was the Hungarian language publication of the Bible. Between 1551 and 1565 he published large portions of the Bible on the basis of the work of various translators. However, he was unable to issue the entire text. Later on Heltai himself left the Lutheran church in favour of the Sacramentarians, and in the final years of his life he became an Anti-trinitarian.

Gáspár Heltai was the most original prosaic narrative writer of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. His oeuvre reflected the world of a blossoming Protestant-patrician urban civil society that was striving for independence and existed at that time merely in a small number of Transylvanian and northern Hungarian (now Slovakia) towns with populations from various ethnic groups and religions. (Source: [hu.wikipedia.org](http://hu.wikipedia.org) \* [enciklopedia.fazekas.hu](http://enciklopedia.fazekas.hu))

The stamp image shows the cover of the last great work by Gáspár Heltai published in 1575, *Chronica az magyaroknak dolgairól* (Chronicle of the ways of the Hungarians). The special cover belonging to the stamp shows a detail of a collection of Aesop's fables published in 1566, the Száz fabula (One hundred fables). The special cancellation stamp graphic is decorated with the watermark of Gáspár Heltai's paper-mill.

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Order article number:  
2010070010011 (stamp)  
2010070060012 (FDC)  
Date of issue: 8 April 2010

Perforation size: 30 x 40 mm, 50 stamps/sheet  
Number issued: 350,000  
Printing press: Állami Nyomda (State Printing House)  
Designer artist: György Kara

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