Proposed by a consortium of the following libraries:

National Széchenyi Library, Hungary
Austrian National Library, Austria
Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Italy
Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Germany
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, France
Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Germany
Koninklijke Bibliotheek Van Belgie, Belgium

This Consortium includes all libraries which own a greater number of the codices remaining from the original Bibliotheca Corviniana; the rest of collection is scattered all over the world in form of individual items.

PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

SUMMARY

The Bibliotheca Corviniana was the second greatest collection of books in Europe in the Renaissance period, after that of the Vatican. It contained works written for King Mathias (1458-1490) and copies of the most important documents known at this time. It represented the literary production and reflected the state of knowledge and arts of the Renaissance. The collection covered philosophy, theology, history, literature, geography, natural sciences, medicine, architecture, etc.

Mr. Pal Engel, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences described the importance of the Corvina library as follows: "One of the deepest concerns of King Mathias was the development of a library: he strove for a collection, where the whole body of knowledge of the ancient and modern world would be available. He systematically searched for curios, exchanged books with the great Lorenzo Medici, was a regular customer of Bistici's bookshop in Florence and maintained relations with other collectors. For some time a workshop, allegedly consisting of 30 artisans, produced books for him at Buda. Scholars think that at the time of the King's death his library may have comprised as many as 2000 volumes. According to a visitor, the Bibliotheca Corvina filled two halls of the palace at Buda, one containing the works of Greek authors, the other those of the Latin writers. Regiomontanus, the leading astronomer of his time was in charge of the Greek codices, Ficino and Pomponio Leto dedicated their works to King Mathias, while Poliziano helped him to acquire new books." (The Realm of St. Stephen, I.B.Tauris Publishers, London, 2002, p154.)

The material of the Corvinas reflected the most modern scientific standards of the time and corresponded to the needs of the humanist educational idea. They contained antique Greek and Latin authors discovered by humanists; the Bible and works by ecclesiastics; medieval theologians and scholars; and also writings of contemporary humanists. The humanists' favourite subjects included literature, history, philosophy, theology, rhetoric, military science, medicine, architecture and astronomy, which were kept in volumes written in Latin, Greek, perhaps Arabic and even Hungarian.

Today 216 Corvinas are known to exist all over the world. Only 53 items are kept in Hungary. The Austrian National Library possesses 39 volumes, different Italian libraries own 49 items and the rest is in French (7), German (8), English, Turk and USA collections.

Their reunification in a digital version of the Bibliotheca Corviniana and its inscription on the Memory of World Register would mean the recreation of a unique representation and overview of what was the common cultural heritage of the Renaissance in the 15th century Europe.
2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 National Széchenyi Library
Buda Royal Palace, Wing F
H-1827 Budapest
Hungary
Dr. István Monok
Phone: 00361 22 43 880
Fax: 00361 20 20 804
e-mail: monok@oszk.hu

In cooperation with:

Austrian National Library, Austria
Josefsplatz 1
A-1015 Vienna
Austria
Prof. Dr. Ernst Gamillscheg
Fax: 00431 53 41 0296
e-mail: kroepfl@onb.ac.at

Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Italy
Piazza San Lorenzo 9
50121 Florence
Italy
Prof. Dott. Franca Arduini
055 210 760
Fax: +39-055 230 2992
e-mail: medicea@cesitl.unifi.it

Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel
Postfach 1364
D-38299 Wolfenbüttel
Prof. Dr. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer
Fax: +49-5331-808134

Bibliothèque Nationale de France
58, rue de Richelieu
75084 Paris cedex 02
France
Jean-Noel Jeanneney
Fax: +33-1-5379-5702

Bayerische Staatsbibliothek
80539 München
Ludwigstrasse 16.
Dr. Hermann Leskien
Fax: +49-89-286-382293

Koninklijke Bibliotheek van Belgie
1000 Brussels
4 Boulevard de l'Empereur
Belgium
Dr. Raphael De Smedt
2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated:
Owners of surviving items of the Bibliotheca Corviniana.

2.3 Contact person (s)
National Széchenyi Library
Buda Royal Palace, Wing F
H-1827 Budapest
Hungary
Dr. István Monok

See also the persons listed under 2.1 above.

2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)
National Széchenyi Library
Buda Royal Palace, Wing F
H-1827 Budapest
Hungary
Dr. István Monok
Phone: 00361 22 43 880
Fax: 00361 20 20 804
e-mail: monok@oszk.hu

See also the details listed under 2.1 above.

3 IDENTIFICATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated
Hand-written and printed books of the so-called “Bibliotheca Corviniana”, i.e. the Library of King Matthias Corvinus (1458-1490)

3.2 Description
The Bibliotheca Corviniana was the second greatest collection of books in Europe in the Renaissance period, after that of the Vatican. It contained works written for King Mathias (1458-1490) and copies of the most important documents known at this time. It represented the literary production and reflected the state of knowledge and arts of the Renaissance. The collection covered philosophy, theology, history, law, literature, geography, natural sciences, medicine, architecture, etc.

The material of the Corvinas reflected the most modern scientific standards of the time and corresponded to the needs of the humanist educational idea. They contained antique Greek and Latin authors discovered by humanists; the Bible and works by ecclesiastics; medieval theologians and scholars; and also writings of contemporary humanists.

Corvina texts representing the Renaissance educational idea in their appearance most often show the characteristic style of Renaissance art, the all'antica, but Gothic style illuminations can also be found along with writings of scholastic authors. This duality of styles is manifested in all the arts of Matthias' age. The most beautiful exemplar of the all'antica style is the Philostratus Corvina, which displays nearly all the characteristic features of the style. These include the all'antica portrait, a medal-imitating portrait of antique emperors, whereby the visual scheme is more important than personal features, or the all'antica architecture, the aedicula, the battle of sea gods placed in cameo, the depiction of the triumphal march. Antique motifs fill two full front pages in Boccardino il Vecchio's composition. Naturally the majority of Corvinas show the stylistic features of all'antica painting, although not in such a complete way as the Philostratos Corvina.

The bibliophile-type, occasional book collection of the beginning was soon replaced by regular and conscious library building with the purpose of representation and later legitimation. Scholarly Italian
humanists played the role of ideologists, librarians, philologists, or agents who ordered books and had them copied. Books were no longer only imported but made in Buda. In the beginning only emblazoners were to be found at the court, but slowly Italian book copying, illuminating and binding masters appeared and established workshops, which catered to the copying and illuminating needs of the royal library at a most modern level. They provided the Corvinas with the current coats of arms and special bindings, and also worked for the orders of King Matthias's surroundings. The products of that great invention: printing, also appeared among the Corvinas, although the hand-written luxury codices formed the main part of the collection.

Most of these splendidly ornamented volumes were later lost. A small fraction of them was taken to Istanbul after the Ottoman conquest and 18 pieces were returned in 1869 and 1877 as a gift of the Sultan. Today 216 Corvinas are known to exist all over the world. Only 53 items are kept in Hungary. The Austrian National Library possesses 39 volumes, different Italian libraries own 49 items and the rest can be found in French (7), German (8), English, Turk and USA collections.

Each document is described and the collection is inventoried.


4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1 Authenticity
The collection’s authenticity has been proven by the following facts:

a) Most of the items bear the coat of arms of the king either on the first page or on the binding or on both.
b) Other items bear the portrait of the king or one of his emblems, such as the rush, a well, a sand clock, etc.
c) Some items could be identified as belonging to the Corvina collection on the basis of the signature of the sripor or illuminator.
d) There are some Corvinas, which bear the coat of arms of Queen Beatrix
e) In the case of the Corvinas of the Medici Library it could be proven, that the order for their execution had been placed by King Mathias

4.2 World significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability
The significance of the Bibliotheca Corviniana can be characterized by the fact, that it was the second greatest collection of books in Europe in the Renaissance period, after that of the Vatican. It was unique in terms of its comprehensive coverage, because it represented literary production and reflected the state of knowledge and arts of the Renaissance, containing both works written for King Mathias (1458-1490) and copies of the most important documents known at this time. It is irreplaceable as a royal collection.

4.3 Criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style
a. Regarding time, the value of the Corvinas lays in the fact, that they provide an outstanding representation and overview of what was the Renaissance culture of the 15th century
b. The Corvinas had influence on the whole Hungarian, Central-European and European culture. The diplomats, scientists, authors, artists visiting the royal court disseminated their impressions and knowledge all over Europe, in particular to Vienna, Krakow, and Prague. The influence on Czech culture was notable, because Mathias was king of this country and there were many Czech personalities working at the Buda court. The library was considered to be of great interest e.g. by Bohuslav Lobkowitz, as well as by two Austrian humanists: Johannes Brassicanus and Johannes Cuspinianus. They acquired several Corvina manuscripts, which were reproduced later by printing.
c. The Bibliotheca Corviniana has a special association both with the life of king Mathias and his Italian wife, Queen Beatrix, who have made an outstanding contribution to European culture by
offering in the Hungarian court excellent working and intellectual conditions to the most outstanding humanists of the end of the 15th century. The collection was also closely associated with the life of the outstanding humanists of the period. For example, it contained works by Marsili Ficino, Bonfini and Janus Pannonius. Regiomontanus, the leading astronomer of his time was in charge of the Greek codices, Ficino and Pomponio Leto dedicated their works to King Mathias, while Poliziano helped him to acquire new books.

d. Regarding subject and theme, it should be stressed, that the Corvina Library provided an outstanding coverage of the scholarly and scientific ideals of the humanist culture. The material of the Corvinas reflected the most modern scientific standards of the time and corresponded to the needs of the humanist educational idea. They contained antique Greek and Latin authors discovered by humanists; the Bible and works by ecclesiastics; some by medieval theologians and scholars; and also writings of contemporary humanists. The humanists' favourite subjects included literature, history, philosophy, theology, rhetoric, military science, medicine, architecture and astronomy, which were kept in volumes written in Latin, Greek, perhaps Arabic and even Hungarian.

e. Regarding form and style, each Corvina represents a rarity and is of an outstanding artistic style. Corvinas most often show the characteristic style of Renaissance art, the all'antica. But we can also find Gothic style illuminations just as writings of scholastic authors. This duality of styles is manifested in all the arts of Matthias's age. The most beautiful exemplar of the all'antica style is the Philostratus Corvina, which displays nearly all the characteristic features of the style. These include the all'antica portrait, a medal-imitating portrait of antique emperors, whereby the visual scheme is more important than personal features, or the all'antica architecture, the aedicula, the battle of sea gods placed in cameo, the depiction of the triumphal march. Antique motifs fill two full front pages in Boccardino il Vecchio's composition. Naturally the majority of Corvinas show the stylistic features of all'antica painting, although not in such a complete way as the Philostratos Corvina.

The collection represents also a great artistic value due to the great quantity and excellent quality of miniatures. For example, the Matthias Graduale contains 80 color miniatures prepared by French artists who have been working in the court of King Mathias in Buda.

4.4 Issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management

The Corvina Library once comprised about 2000 volumes. After the occupation of Hungary by the Turks (1526) the books were destroyed or dispersed. Today 216 Corvinas are preserved in 52 public and private collections in 14 countries on two continents. Due to the precious nature of their materials they are highly endangered due to usage and climatic conditions.

5 LEGAL INFORMATION

5.1. Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)
Members of the consortium

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)
Members of the consortium

5.3 Legal status:

(a) Category of ownership
Public or private

(b) Accessibility
Usage on the spot

(c) Copyright status
Copyright fully owned by the consortium
6 MANAGEMENT PLAN
The authentic Corvinas known today are scattered throughout the libraries and collections of the world. Hungarian libraries preserve 53 Corvina manuscripts and incunabula. Currently the Corvinas of the National Széchényi Library are stored in its new building, under controlled climatic conditions (efforts are aiming at keeping the temperature at 18° C, humidity at 55% and light at 55 Lux). Restoration is a continuous activity, performed by the laboratory of the Library. Access is limited to research workers studying in the Library. Digitization of the documents available in Hungary is now in progress and it will allow the opening up of the collection to the general public and extend access to users world wide. Preservation and restoration of the other Corvinas is assured by the large libraries in Austria, France, Germany and Italy, but smaller libraries face difficulties in this respect. Digitization of the documents abroad will recreate in virtual form a substantial part of the complexity of the Bibliotheca Corviniana, reflecting Renaissance culture and science for all types of interested users in the world. This procedure will be long and needs international co-operation as well as appropriate and high level information technology.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1
a.) The owner of the heritage: see 2.1.
b.) The custodian: see 2.1.
c.) National or regional Memory of the World committee: The Hungarian National Memory of the World Committee on the occasion of its session held on 15 January 2004 endorsed and strongly supported the Nomination

PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8 ASSESSMENT OF RISK
8.1 The materials of the Corvinas (parchment, paper, leather, colour and gilded coats etc.) are highly endangered by time, temperature, humidity, light, fire, theft. Due to their precious nature it is imperative that these works of art remain under continuous vigilance through restoration, in air-conditioned rooms equipped with fire detectors, and under the surveillance of appropriate personnel and equipment.

9 ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION
9.1 Current preservation efforts are not adequate enough to sustain the physical integrity of the Corvinas. All forms of usage (reading, photocopying, loan, exhibition, etc.) are causing the Corvinas to become worn out through wear and tear. By digitizing these documents, the original can remain untouched, while becoming accessible for millions of users through the Internet.

PART C - LODGEMENT

This nomination is lodged by:

Dr. Istvan Monok

(Signature) : .................................................
Date :