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LEECH BUSINESS AND HUNGARY

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The leech as a therapeutical tool has been known since ancient times. However, in the first part of the 19th century – as a result of some romantic medical theories, especially those of Broussais - its use and consumption grew to unbelievable extent. (E.g. in 1830 the leech-import only in London exceeded the 7 million animals/ year.) Being Hungary one of the main exporters of this ware, the question of leech-breeding and leech-commerce was discussed in the contemporary Hungarian medical and pharmaceutical press rather detailed. Authors – while analysing medical use of leeches -, invented special technics to improve results of leech-breeding, or they suggested methods to „recycle” leeches. The economic need of leech-production transformed somewhere even the geographical environment as well. A special profession – that of the leech-collector (nadályos) – also emerged from the Hungarian village society cooperating with pharmacists, still existing at the middle of the 20th century.

Present paper attempts to sketch the history of leech-business in Hungary in the first part of the 19th century. The case of the leech-business certainly proves the possible impact of some medical or pharmaceutical fashions on society.