



## BOOK REVIEWS

The Culture of the Aristocracy in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1750–1820.  
Edited by Gábor Vaderna. Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2022. 422 pp.

The book under review is based on the conference “The Culture of the Aristocracy in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1750–1820,” held between May 30 and June 1, 2019 to mark the bicentenary of the death of Count György Festetics in Keszthely, in the Baroque castle of the Festetics family (today the Helikon Palace Museum). The event was organized in cooperation with the research groups “Literary Culture in Western Hungary, 1770–1820” of the Institute for Literary Studies of the Research Centre for the Humanities and “The Patterns of the Circulation of Scientific Knowledge in Hungary, 1770–1830” of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE). Although the studies pursued by the two research groups cover similar periods, they focus on different aspects of the vibrant intellectual life at the turn of the century. While the former focused on the regional context of literature and the cultural life of the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Transdanubian region, the latter dealt with the production and circulation of scientific knowledge in Hungary on the basis of examples from various disciplines, from medicine to agronomy. The main aim of the conference and also of the edited volume was to link the findings of the research groups and of the outcomes of other experts in Hungary and abroad under the aegis of the flexible concept of “the culture of aristocracy.” Together with the introduction, written by the editor, Gábor Vaderna, senior research fellow of the Institute of Humanities, Budapest, the volume contains 24 papers written by 23 authors. Since the book is not divided into separate sub-chapters, for the sake of clarity, the articles are discussed below in thematic blocks into which I myself have organized them. In total, I have distinguished five thematic blocks: the social history of the aristocracy, educational issues, academic knowledge transfers, patronage and literature, and aristocratic constructed spaces (such as castles and gardens).

Four studies deal with the social history of the aristocracy in a narrower sense. Two of them offer overviews of the Croatian-Slavonian aristocratic families and the social history of politics in the second half of the eighteenth century. Ivana Horbec, scientific advisor at the Croatian Institute of History, discusses the role of the Croatian-Slavic aristocracy in local politics. In legal terms, the Croatian-Slavonian nobility considered themselves Hungarian, but as Horbec

argues, it also constituted a distinct entity within the Kingdom. In contrast to the previous period, from the 1760s, the aristocracy became increasingly interested in local public life, as indicated also by the construction of palaces in the larger towns. Suzanna Coha and Nikola Vukobratović from the University of Zagreb focus on the links between the Croatian national awakening and the role of the Ban, who could either defend Croatian rights or hinder national efforts. The collective identity pattern of a separate “*natio croatica*” was present in the early modern era, based on the forged *Pacta conventa* treaty of 1102, and it later became a cornerstone of modern national ideology. Through a Latin poem which was written to the Ban, the authors demonstrate how a distinctively anti-Hungarian position was established in the late eighteenth century.

Zsolt Kökényesi, senior lecturer at Eötvös Loránd University, focuses on the Hungarian members of the Order of the Star Cross (Sternkreuzorden) of the Habsburg Monarchy, which was awarded to women of aristocratic birth. The study also provides a list of the “Ordensdamen” in Hungary for the period. Kökényesi stresses that the acquisition of the Order was a family strategy. It delivered a kind of “symbolic capital” for the individuals and their families. Its holders included not only the wives of conservative figures but also wives of progressive aristocratic lords. Eva Kowalská, leading senior researcher at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, deals with the Lutheran noble family of Zay in various contexts. Members of the family held the baronial title from the sixteenth century and became counts in 1830. Kowalská describes the family’s relationship with the Silesian Protestant exile Calisius family, to whom the Zays were linked through marriage, as well as the role of the Lutheran general inspector Péter Zay in Lutheran Church reform. The cultural representation of the family is also discussed, with reference to the family’s manor and private collections.

The next major unit deals with aristocratic education. Olga Khavanova, a fellow at the Russian Academy of Sciences, looks at the Theresianum, the Viennese school for the nobility, and the extent to which the Hungarian aristocracy was represented in it. Hungarians and Transylvanians made up one fifth of the students during the period, but they did not form a homogeneous group. Khavanova identifies five sub-groups from the perspective of the social backgrounds of the students: the children of leading magnates, the new aristocracy, Catholic Transylvanian aristocrats and noblemen, old county nobility, and newcomers and aliens. According to Khavanova, the pupils were bound more by the merits of their fathers in the eyes of the ruler than by their own convictions or achievements. Theodora Shek Brnardić, senior researcher at

the Croatian Institute of History, examines how the Enlightenment transformed the perception of paternal authority during the eighteenth century and the consequences for the educational practices of the children of aristocrats. Paternal authority was increasingly built on obligation and reciprocity rather than on mere power, at the same time acquiring a sentimental dimension illustrated by the examples of two counts, the Bohemian Franz Joseph Kinsky and the Croatian Ivan Draskovich. The former, who also authored treatises on education, implemented the new principles as the head of the Theresian Military Academy and his family, while the latter implemented Masonic morals into his children's education.

The next major section deals with the issue of patronage and aristocratic literature. In his case study, Gábor Vaderna examines the functions of the occasional poetry of the late eighteenth century through the figure of the Protestant Transylvanian lord Count László Teleki. Vaderna concludes that poetry at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was situated at the intersection of the private and the political public spheres, with virtue being its central theme. Béla Hegedüs, a senior researcher at the Institute of Literary Studies, deals with a German novel by Heinrich Gottfried von Brettschneider, director of the Buda University Library. Hegedüs juxtaposes the fictional reality of the novel with a history that could be reconstructed on the basis of sources, revealing that the figure of the unnamed bishop in the novel was based on Baron Ádám Patachich, Bishop of Kalocsa, while the novel's protagonist, an archivist, draws on the work of the linguist György Kalmár.

Réka Lengyel, research fellow at the Institute of Literary Studies, offers new insights concerning the beliefs of György Festetics. It is well known that Festetics was influenced by Masonic ideology, but there are no direct sources to support this. Lengyel attempts to reconstruct Festetics' place in the Masonic movement and shows how these influences appear in his writings, literary patronage, and life practices. István Rumen Csörsz, a senior researcher at the Institute of Literary Studies, focuses on the literary collecting activities of Miklós Jankovich, who belonged to the well-to-do landed gentry. At the end of the eighteenth century, the traditional practices of noble collections and the emergence of new types of institutions coexisted. Jankovich was a protagonist in these processes and was among the first collectors who sought to preserve old Hungarian literary treasures for posterity. For this purpose, he sacrificed his family's wealth. Eventually, his collection was purchased by the National Museum at the initiative of Archduke Joseph. Jankovich wanted to publish a

collection of so-called “Hungarian national songs,” a thematic edition of older and newer popular songs, a “living museum of texts.” Ferenc Toldy, one of his successors, selected pieces from the corpus with the intention of creating a canon. In contrast, Kálmán Thaly, under the influence of post-independence nostalgia, once again valorized the collection.

The articles by Ágnes Dóbék and Gábor Mészáros, junior researchers at the Institute of Literary Studies, deal with the phenomenon of literary patronage. Dóbék shows, through the example of Miklós Révai and his patrons, how the institution of patronage functioned in the world of the eighteenth-century literature. Révai’s three patrons embodied three different types. The fact that Bishop János Szily provided support shows that the high clergy at the time was already open to secular culture. The cases of Baron Lőrinc Orczy and Révai shed light on the conditions for the publication of literature: the former was not only the latter’s patron, but also a poet whose publishing activity was facilitated by those he patronized. The case of János Somogyi Medgyesi, nobleman and royal chancellor, illustrates that although they were not on the same social level as Révai they could have a mutual relationship through the enjoyment of literature. Gábor Mészáros examines the question of patronage through the relationship between Count Ferenc Széchenyi and the prolific Transdanubian poet, Ádám Pálóczi Horváth. Their relationship was not limited to patronage. Both were committed to the development of Hungarian literature. This shared commitment led to a meeting at Széchenyi’s house (*Litterarius Consessus*), attended by aristocrats, poets, and members of the reform-minded nobility, where the idea of founding a literary and scientific society was raised. Horváth’s example was also used to show that the visits of writers had a community-organizing force in literary life and could serve as a basis for subsequent institution-building. Olga Granasztói, senior research fellow at the Research Group of Textology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the University of Debrecen, discusses an unsuccessful attempt to establish a society. In 1791, the ambitious literary organizer, writer, and county nobleman Ferenc Kazinczy wrote to Prince Lajos (II) Batthyány-Strattmann, a Freemason and amateur poet, and encouraged him to become the president of a literary society which Kazinczy wanted to organize. Kazinczy himself attended the meeting of the aforementioned *Litterarius Consessus*. Granasztói persuasively shows how Kazinczy’s project failed, even though the prince and Kazinczy shared an intellectual platform.

Three papers on the history of science deal with the Festetics family. Piroska Balogh, associate professor at Eötvös Loránd University, deals with

the transfer of knowledge between the aristocracy and scientists through the example of György Festetics' son László and Johann Ludwig Schedius. Balogh uses the example of Festetics to show how the relationship between scholars and aristocrats became more balanced in the eighteenth century. Although the relationship between Schedius and Festetics did not conform to the traditional pattern, there was a degree of reciprocity between the two, and they both benefited from their study trips abroad. György Kurucz, Director of the Institute of History at the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, deals with György Festetics as a key figure in Hungarian agronomy and agricultural education. Festetics embraced the contemporary Göttingen idea of the unity of practical and theoretical training. In this spirit, he sent two professors from the Georgikon agricultural college on a study trip to Western Europe to gather knowledge and experience. The professors were given detailed instructions and had to carry out market research for Festetics' estate.

Lilla Krász, associate professor at Eötvös Loránd University, examined the volumes on medicine in the library of the Festetics manor, which also hosted the conference. Krász traces the “discursive concepts” that emerge from the Festetics medical collection and discusses the issue of patronage. The library had a vast medical collection: 1,070 titles in nearly 2,500 volumes, which embodied both the vision of the Enlightenment and the personal tastes of its aristocratic owner. Annamária Bíró, senior lecturer at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, focuses on the development of the scientific and cultural infrastructure of eighteenth-century Transylvania, in which Count Samuel Teleki and his son Domokos played a key role. Dezső Gurka, associate professor at Gál Ferenc University in Szarvas, deals with the relationship between German mineralogy and Hungarian magnates. One of the most important mineralogical societies of the time was based in Jena, which had a surprisingly large number of members from Hungary. The reason for this was that “Montanistik” was in its second heyday in Hungary, and the society also hoped to attract patrons through the honorary membership of wealthy magnates. The contacts in Jena contributed to the reception of Schelling's natural philosophy in Hungary and of Abraham Gottlob Werner's systematic system of mineralogical classification.

The last major section of the volume deals with the built culture of the aristocracy. Andrea Seidler, professor at the University of Vienna, presents three reports on how contemporaries viewed the palace and the cultural life of Miklós Esterházy. Four studies deal with the garden architecture of the aristocracy. Ivo Cerman, associate professor at the University of South Bohemia, shows

how Count Johann Rudolph Chotek's English garden at Veltrusy, near Prague, represented patriotism and loyalty to the Habsburgs. The layout of the garden and the celebrations held in it served as symbols of this patriotism. István Szabó, professor emeritus at Szent István University, looks at how the Festetics family transformed their natural environment. Borbála D. Mohay, PhD graduate at Eötvös Loránd University, uses extensive archival material to examine how Ferenc Széchenyi's English landscape garden in Cenk was shaped by its changing political and social meanings over time. The garden took on an oppositional function in the second half of the 1780s, but as Széchenyi's views changed, it increasingly became a place of relaxation and intellectual pleasure. Victoria Frede, associate professor at the University of California, explores the garden as a special place that provided a space for the highest level of diplomacy through the visit of Joseph II and his visit to St. Petersburg in 1780. She calls the phenomenon "garden diplomacy." According to Frede, paradoxically, the personal dispositions of rulers came to the fore at a time when the bureaucratic control of the state was increasing.

As the volume is based on a conference organized around a rather broadly defined phenomenon, the studies cover a diverse array of topics. As a result, the thematic, geographical, and cultural distribution of the contributions, as well as the length and methodological depth of the individual studies, vary widely. The volume follows the recent though controversial international trend of including both German-language and English-language contributions, an approach that is intentionally or unintentionally reflected on the cover. Nevertheless, the volume offers a kaleidoscopic snapshot of the state of contemporary scholarship on the subject, and in doing so, it represents a valuable attempt to bring together scholars from different countries working on different aspects of aristocratic culture in the Habsburg Monarchy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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