

Eötvös Loránd University

Faculty of Humanities

Doctoral Theses

Tamás Szemethy

**The social situation of the new aristocrats in
Hungary from 1711 to 1799**

Doctoral School of History, head: Prof. Dr. Gábor
Sonkoly DSc, university professor

Economic and Social History, head: Prof. Dr.
György Kövér CMHAS, professor emeritus

Chairman of the committee: Prof. Dr. László Csorba
DSc, university professor

Opponents: Dr. habil. István Fazekas PhD, associate
professor, Dr. habil. András Forgó PhD, associate
professor

Secretary of the Committee: Dr. Adrienn Szilágyi
PhD, Research fellow

Member of the committee: Prof. Dr. János Poór
DSc, university professor (emerited)

Dr. Béla Mihalik PhD, Research fellow (alternate
member)

Dr. habil. Lilla Krász PhD, associate professor
(alternate member)

Name of the supervisor: Dr. habil. István M. Szijártó
DSc, associate professor

Budapest, 2019.

Research topic and Historiography

In my doctoral dissertation I dealt with those nobles who were raised to the Hungarian barons and counts. I excluded those who were the members of the aristocracy by their origin. My interest in researching the secular elite of the 18th century was basically aroused by the fact that in several places – both contemporaries and the scholars of later periods – we read that by the end of the century the Hungarian aristocracy "diluted".

This idea was reinforced by the fact that there were indeed several people in the era - for example Antal Grassalkovich or Ferenc Koller - who really owe their considerable wealth to their court service, so from a less wealthy nobility level they became one of Hungary's wealthiest landlords in only one generation.

Although the stereotypical approach mentioned above can be read in several places on the subject, such as Imre Wellmann's or Ágnes R. Várkonyi's works, the systematic examination of this group has not yet been carried out. In this dissertation I have tried to fill this gap.

Sources and Bibliography

The basic source of my research was the Royal Books, which theoretically had to introduce all nobility titles throughout the 18th century. Previously, Béla Pálmány and his research team compiled a list of people who received Baron or Count titles during the period

under review. In addition to the Royal Books, they have used additional sources for their research. Comparing my list based on the Royal Books with that list, it turned out that the difference was minimal, so I managed to compile a catalogue of members of the group.

Further expanding the range of archival sources, in some cases I was able to discover meaningful new information based on material found in family archives, and in addition, I reviewed A 35 and A 39 of the National Archives of Hungary, which hold documents submitted for noble title donations. As I found relatively little new information in these materials, I included other archival records of the individual from the Ráday Archives and the Budapest Municipal Archives.

I supplemented the archival texture of the Hungarian Archives with the Austrian State Archives documents where I examined the advisory appointments, the stem tests, the inheritance inventories and the military records.

I supplemented the archival research with basic genealogical literature and local history work on the subjects. In some exceptional cases, a monograph was written about the person who was promoted or his family, so extensive and thorough work on Pál Kray or Miklós Vay helped my research. Despite that, there were some people who remained in shadow as I couldn't find basic information on their life.

Methodology

During my research I applied the method of prosopography, which was used to collect the basic biographical data of the 91 subjects,

and then to analyze them. As an appendix to my dissertation, I have attached the information tables, which include for each person their noble forename, date and place of birth and death, date of promotion, name of their parents and, if possible, their basic biographical information, holdings, career their titles, as well as their basic biographical details about their children.

In order to state that the mentioned hypothesis about the “diluted elite” is valid or not, I made smaller groups of 91 people. On the one hand, I separated the 28 counts from the 63 barons, on the other hand, I broke them down further to clerks and soldiers.

In order to determine whether the above-mentioned "dilution" took place over the course of the century, I divided the 91 studied people into several groups. On the one hand, I separated the 63 barons from the 28 counts, and on the other hand, I divided the groups so obtained into officers and clerks. I divided the long period of almost a century into two. As a borderline for soldiers, I marked the establishment of the Order of Maria Theresa in 1758, while for officers based on the results of István Szijártó M. and Tünde Cserpes, I considered the year 1770 as a break.

Main points of the dissertation

In my dissertation I tried to distinguish between typical and atypical careers. Accordingly, I tried to determine in both the soldier and clerk

groups where in the course of their careers the promoted people were able to reach the title of Hungarian aristocrats.

The central issue of my study was the phenomenon of "dilution" observed throughout the century, in which I not only analyzed careers, but also examined whether members of the group were able to obtain wealth - primarily property - that could permanently allow them to live an aristocratic lifestyle.

Following Eva H. Balázs, I determined which counties, and in a broader sense, which regions belong to each person. Based on previous research findings, people from the West should have been in the majority of the study group.

I investigated the recognition of the people by the traditional elite who received the favor of the ruler as well. Basically, it meant that I examined the background of the spouses of the new elite. According to my assumption the most significant new aristocratic families could become the permanent members of the elite because of their successful marriage strategy.

Results

1. First I had to make clear the meaning of the concepts which I used for examination of the 18th century's social elite. During my research I made an exact definition for the "new aristocrats" which allowed me to make the list of the nobles who belonged to this group. This made it possible to identify and analyze a part of the elite.

2. I used the methodology of the prosopography for my research which allows to collect and analyze the data for the mentioned group. At the same time, I tried to illuminate the pitfalls of the method and, if possible, I made more detailed analysis which meant that I wrote case studies about the atypical members of the group in order to make a more complex picture about the new elite.

3. Based on the prosopographic analyses I could identify the typical items of the careers of the clerks and soldiers. Typically, the members of the investigated group held a national office and, in the case of the soldiers, were chief officers, most of them served several decades of service before they reached the rank of aristocrats.

4. If we would like to understand the elevation of the new aristocrats it is not enough to examine only their career but we had to take into account their ancestors' careers, their possessions or in a lot of cases we could see that the key to the elite was the useful service for the royal court of a further relative or a mother or a wife who originated from an aristocratic family.

5. The denominational status of the promoted people proved to be an important element in the evaluation of the policy of promotion. It can be stated that between 1711 and 1780 Charles III and Mary Theresa did not give the title of Hungarian barons or counts to Protestant nobles, despite that, during the reign of Joseph II there was only one Catholic person among the barons, the rest were Protestant. It can also be stated

that Leopold II and Franz I did not return to the discriminatory promotion policy which was before Joseph II's.

6. Regarding the difference between the title of Baron and the Count, we can say that the latter's higher prestige indicated that until the title donation of József Dessewffy in 1754, the commoners could only rise among the counts in two steps. In addition, it became apparent that György Fekete was the first nobleman to enter the higher-ranking counts without his family previously having an aristocratic branch.

7. Throughout the century, it has been part of the court policy to increase the visibility of the people who serve the monarchy and to place suitable individuals in the various offices. One of the tools of this was the creation of the Order of Mary Theresa and the Order of St. Stephen. Although both honors enabled the holder to win the title of Baron, my investigation revealed that this was only for the Habsburg hereditary provinces barony, in the case of the Hungarian Baron the cost was still to be paid to the applicant, although in most cases the existence of an honor could be an important reference.

8. Regarding the examination of the estates, it can be stated that the soldiers raised after 1758 had the most modest possessions, but at the same time the new members of the Hungarian nobility were typically members of the possessive nobility.

9. Through Eva H. Balázs's work, I examined the proportion of people associated with each region among the new aristocrats. Of the three regions examined (western, eastern, Croatian-Slavonic

territories), the western and eastern parts of the country were represented in almost equal proportions, suggesting that over the course of the century families in eastern Hungary were increasingly integrated into the courtly political elite. In addition, regarding those who were from the Croatian-Slavonic territories, it was primarily the second half of the reign of Mary Theresa that favored their rise.

10. Analyzing marriage strategies, the "closest" to the traditional elite were the soldiers raised prior to 1758, and even more so than the counts of the era.

11. Of the 76 noble families in the period under review, 91 were eligible to join the Hungarian aristocracy. But if we examine how long they could remain in this closed group we could find that there were only 54 such families which were new among the Hungarian aristocrats. The other aristocratic branches of the families mostly died out in a few generations. This is a much more modest number than we have read in the relevant literature.

11. In my dissertation I have dealt with three atypical people in more detail. The three case studies relevant to them provided an opportunity to draw further conclusions beyond the findings in basic biographical data.

(a) After a detailed analysis, it is still unclear exactly what might have led Mihály Horváth, the only trader in the group, to apply for the Baronial title, but it is a step forward in finding that he opened the door to Greek

merchants to apply successfully for the title of Hungarian nobleman in the courtyard of Vienna.

(b) Through the case of István László Luzsénszky I was able to demonstrate the significance of the client-patron relationship. This is an area that would be worth exploring in the future with new resources, since without the client-patron relationship, which can be detected mainly based on private correspondence, it would have been much more difficult for emerging nobility to enter the Vienna court.

(c) According to György Chiolich Farkas, his life might seem like an ordinary high priestly career, but some elements made his career special. On the one hand, he was the only one to receive the title of secular nobleman against Luzsénszky, which is strange because he was already entitled as a Roman Catholic bishop. The research revealed that Chiolich was believed to be an aspiring and powerful member of a major merchant family who sought every opportunity to increase his influence, so his claim to the Hungarian Baron title became a bit more understandable.

12. All in all, I succeeded in refining the ideas of the "dilution" of the 18th-century secular elite with my research. It was found that fewer people than previously thought were eligible to enter the ranks of

the Hungarian nobility, and it became apparent that a successful title donation had to follow a complex set of conditions that included the merits of ancestors and relatives, financial status, social status of the spouses, or religious affiliation.

Publications

1. Szemethy Tamás: Rangemelésben részesült új főrendek a 18. században. In: Rendiség és parlamentarizmus Magyarországon. A kezdetektől 1918-ig. szerk.: Dobszay Tamás et al. Budapest, Argumentum, 2014. 299-317.
2. Szemethy Tamás: A levélküldés nehézségei a lengyel örökösödési háború dél-itáliai frontján. Korall. 2016. 63. 110-129.
3. Szemethy Tamás: Honosított főnemesek a 18. századi Magyarországon. In: Szijártó M. István (szerk.), Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, 2017. 49-73.
4. Szemethy Tamás: A 18. századi magyarországi új arisztokraták prozopográfiai vizsgálata. In: Személyiség és történelem. szerk.: Vonyó József. Pécs, Kronosz, 2017. 202-220.
5. Szemethy Tamás: Hogyan lett Michael Mandukából báró Horváth Mihály? Egy 18. századi görög kereskedő a magyarországi új arisztokraták között. Aetas. 2017. 4. szám. 111-132.
6. Szemethy Tamás: A patrónus-kliens viszony jelentősége Luzsénszky István László felemelkedésében. In: KorájkorÁSZ 3. szerk: Vajnági Márta et al. Budapest, ELTE BTK, 2016. 55-78.
7. Szemethy Tamás: Görög kereskedők beilleszkedési nehézségei a 18. századi Magyarországon. In: Mozgás és átalakulás. Rendi társadalom - Polgári társadalom. 30. szerk: Halmos Károly, Kovács Janka, Lászlófi Viola. Budapest, HIK, 2018. 125-137.