

**Eötvös Lóránd University Faculty of Arts**  
**Doctor's degree (PhD) dissertation themas**

MELINDA CSAJÁNYI

*Aristocracy in the legislation of the period between the two world war,  
in special consideration to the born of jewish laws*

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**Chosen subject:**

The primary aim of our dissertation is the aspect of the hungarian aristocracy social- and political situation between the two world war. That is why we chose on closer examination the era nobleman's best documented group, the legislators, and as correlated point the codification connected to the jewish topic. We don't think, that the jewish topic was the most important question of the era, but we do think, as well as the society of the Horthy-era, the after-ages also considered this subject to important, and next to the posterior effect of the jewish-laws almost all the other laws become insignificant. Therefore, perhaps it is the best way to show the thinking, the recent- and future picture of the politican aristocracy lived in the Trianony Hungary kingdom without king.

The dissertation is trying to give a whole picture, about how and in what method emerged that part of the aristocracy, which remained in between the borders of a country, what lost it's king and the 2/3rd of it's territory, and also took place a leading position in the politics. In the 20th century out of 650 aristocrat family, 100 representated themself in 6 parliament instituion by 193 man between the two war period. We aimed to collect this nearly 200 person social, economical, family and political characteristics, and put them in order in terms of the description of the entire aristocracy. Big part of the hungarian jewish community belonged to the advanced party of the modernization, therefore we wanted to traverse the connection of the already have mentioned aristocracy to the modernization process in terms of their viewpoint regarding the jewish topic.

**The subject of historiography:**

The history and characteristics of the hungarin aristocracy in terms monography still needs to be done by our historiography. The reason of it, that the political system after 1945 has named the aristocracy as scapegoat, because of this, that false picture of them has been hidden away for decades. In the beggining of the '80s there were some serious effort to bare and write down the latest history of the aristocracy, but the pretty soon upcoming political transformation has taken the researchers attention away --no wonder--, what has turned toward to such a topic which involved a much more extensive social crowd. Regarding to our knowledge --especially between the two war-- we don't know any dissection, which is about the hungarian aristocracy specialized in XX. century. Although, through many decades the aristocracy has been the leading group of the hungarian society and this period was their finishing era. The drawing of Ernő lakatos (made in 1942 about the hungarian political leading group) not only affects the

age of Horthy and the aristocracy, but it's got a lot to do with the period (in terms of the aristocracy) which is just right before the era we are trying to analyse in our dissertation, therefore this is an unavoidable part of the composition. The „Összetört Címerek” (1989) written by Janos Gudenus and László Szentirmay is not made out of historians pen, but since it is a very important writing of the subject, and there is no doubt of it's academic demand, has an outstanding importance of dissertation point of view. The work is strivingly to objektivity showing of the 40 years period of the aristocracy poltical pourposes before it's time, confront with the created picture, open window, and show a way to a further research to the recent past of the ariscocracy. In 2006 Ellis Wasson english historial released a book in New York, titled the „Arisztokrácia és a modern világ”. The books point of view and also it's processed amount of data is eligible to the 20th century europian, even of the meaning of the hungarian aristocracy history generally created approach opposition. We have not had the chance to obtain the original version, but managed to get Mihályné Fodor and Endre Fülöp very detailed exposition of it and regarding to that we consider as a standard work the original version we are able to use to our work. According to the presentation of the recension writers the british historial makes clear in the very begining of his work, that „it is a mistake, that the aristocracy was a philistine, decadent, amateur and retrogressive strata. It's not true, that they did not understand the demands of the modern governance and economic. According to the reviews Wasson knows a lot about the europian aristocracy, and –probably because of that, he has a strong sympathy to them, and without any self-consciousness has an objective and extensive knowledge of the hungarian aristocracy also. In Endre Fülöp's opinion the Eszterházys, Festeticses, Bánfys, Zichys and the Széchenys are those families which are mentioned most of the time. The „Magyarország a két világháború között” titled work by Gusztáv Gratz was made during the 1940's, but it has remained in handwritting. The writting has released first time in 21st century, but it's aspect about the period between the two war the contemporary writers. The legitimist writer was one ofe the most important person of the economical and political public life, he was well-known and acknowledged in an extensive domestic and international circle, especially as of his objectivity and consistent principle. He did not mention seperatly any of the social class, but did talk about most of the noteable hungarian aristocrats as a personal friend in his book. Big number of those synthesis which are related to the Horthy-ages got some to do with the aristocracy, considering as a class, in terms of increasing content and depth starting from the 90's. Out of these summaries, firstly an academical school-book written by Ignác Romsics is the one which goes into detailes and leaves behind all those schemes what were not proper to the aristocrat approach.

The thematic synthesis of Gábor Gyáni and György Kövér which is about society of the 20th century is dealing in a separate chapter with Horthy-aged Hungarian aristocracy. At this, the writers bring up almost all the questions connected to the aristocracy, define the presentives, therefore this work in terms of our theme is a historiographical masterpiece.

In the same year and almost the same subject of this book another great work has released by Levente Püski about the Horthy system. It is an extensive essay about the Hungarian aristocracy, as a group, between the period of 1920-1944 as a political system.

It is an unusual corrodent in the historiography, that during decades there is no release by any writers at all of a social class, but this situation happened about the Hungarian aristocracy if we consider the era between just before II. World War until the 80's.

That is why we have considered even those works which are not written by historians, but still has an academic way. For instance, Erzsébet Csekönics countess came up with a writing in 1929 about the crisis of the aristocracy. In the same year Istvan Weis sociologist has written down his reactions regarding to the countess putting of the aristocracy. Although both of the writings are more about emotions, than the academical knowledges, the aspects and conclusions of them has been still very useful for us.

In 1942 Baron Miklós Wesselényi journalist has made an „all-round inquiry” to those chosen (by him) representative members of the society about the aristocracy and of its future. In the beginning of this tome, which had all the answers edited, Wesselényi himself has worked out his own opinion in an expansive essay in the name of his attacked class, sensibly striving to objectivity.

Pál Pritz in 1987 wrote an academical essay about a close part but still characterful of Hungarian aristocracy lived between the two wars, which is a unique one since then, this close group worked in terms of the diplomatic service. The analysed class by him presenting a certain part of the politicized aristocracy, but in the same time helps us to bring an important and general conclusion about the entire Hungarian aristocracy.

An entire historical-aspect was ended up by the academical inaugural of Gyula Juhász in 1991. This work was about the Hungarian society during the II. World War. It was meant to be for a supplementary, which was trying to demonstrate the processes of the society deep inside at just before and during the II. World War. This progress has affected the Hungarian aristocracy of its existence, therefore this study is also unavoidable in terms of situating of our theme.

Levente Püski is showing the aristocracy for us in his work in such a way, which is about politicized peerage in the early 20's, that after the big changes they are still trying to obtain back their power.

A big value of his writing, that it is aiming to use the aristocrat recalls to give a countenance to it's contestation. József Pap has also tried to fill a gap in by released a work, which is about sociological content of the hungarian political elite. The analysed period and group of the writing do not match to the interest of our study, but his detailed analyses gives us an opportunity to compare the group in the after 1920's era. As of the pararellism of the subject the methodology of József Pap helped us in a great way to get our dissertation done.

The first contemporary writer literature (titled the „Korunk” by Levente Püski, what was released in a transylvanian journal), which not only from the profession point of view, but also stepped over of the political conditioning, considering the aristocracy point of view pictures the history of the peers in 20th century. Levente Püski makes clear already in the beginning of this study, that the aristocracy has not appeared as a solid social class in any way, and as against to the public opinion the majority of the aristocracy were loyal to the hungarian government.

In the researches of the University of Debrecen about the peers has released a work about earl Gyula Károlyi prime minister by Levente Püski, where Károlyi is presented not only as a politician, but also as an aristocrat, and by this it makes a numerous generally used statement about the peers.

In the same work we can find Robert Barta's writing, what is about the politician elite started to go down after 1919, and about the aristocracy inside of it. The writing is aiming to sketch the situation and forced back problems of the historical class.

The historiography of a study by Levente Püski about the hungarian peers is a milestone momentous. It was released in a volume of the „Állambiztonsági Levéltárak Történelmi Társulat”, which presents how the aristocracy became from enemy to scapegoat during the leftist dictatorship.

In contrast with the „aristocracy-question” which has already existed between the two war, the hungarian jewish situation, the discrimination, persecution, depredation and extermination of the jewry has an enormous domestic literature.

The appraise and review of these very important works are not our aim or duty, eventhough there are a lot of connected point between the hungarian aristocracy and jewry unrevealed.

Although our dissertation tries to connect to the results of those works which analyses the creation of the jewish laws. The writers judging differently, which laws belong to the most essential jewish laws. The researcher called Randolph L. Braham is specialized to the Middle-Europe and especially the hungarian jewry classic history. He has released a monography in 1981 in New York, about the hungarian holocaust. In this he wrote down the detailed, rich in data, and exact social- and political history of the Horthy-era in 1944. Braham considers the

numerus clausus as one of the first action against the jewish people, and judge the peers from the view of Pál Teleki, and not mention a word of the heroic fight of György Apponyi at the liberals.

László Gonda has taken to write the consequences and events of more than 4 centuries at his monography, from all that the jewish laws has taken only 4 pages. Among those who were against the discriminative laws in the chamber of deputies the writer emphasise next to the jewish representatives earl István Bethlen, and also the efforts of the leaded group by earl Gyula Károlyi at the upper chamber.

Viktor Karády gives in his book the relevant drawing of the hungarian jewish history, at this the hungarian jewry gets the aspect from many side, and a whole chapter analyses the effects of the jewish laws. The writer considers only the anti-semite laws made after 1938 among to the jewish laws. Karády points out, that between 1938-1943 the fate of the domestic jewry has not been decided yet, rather it has demanded on the happening of the power relations within the political elite. Enchances at this point, that from several member of the liberal aristocracy were against clearly of the jewish laws.

János Pelle next to the born and execution of jewish laws tells us exactly what was the function of the press in the era in the connection of the anti-semite legislation and public opinion, which made themself stronger in mutual way. The writer points out categorically the inside conflict and indefensibility of the „jewish” law definition. Next to the three disposition which have been tarditionally considered as jewish law by the literatures, the writer writes as the 4th jewish law about the 1942 XV. statute, which is about the field –forest agricultural property of the jews. Approvingly tells János Pelle, located into the focus of our dissertation, about the majority of the aristocrat poltican noting, that those conservative circles which were grouping around earl István Bethlen and upset Béla Imrédy have had a strong fight for years, trying to decrease the effects of the jewish laws.

In the monography of János Gyurgyák what is about the hungarian jewish situation, the jewish law appears in a certain part of the commencing. It collects in a very exact way the commitments of the peers in the more and more radicalizing atmosphere and makes their arguments into groups.

In Nathaniel Katzburg’s book about the hungarian jewish politics discuss the numerus clausus in a seperate chapter, but not among the laws which were against jews, and makes a difference between the atmosphere against the jews during the early 20’s and the anti-Semitism created after 20 years. Katzburg pointed out, that earl Pál Teleki has had an opinion against the jewry

more than anyone, in his low-key style. The book presents in detail the negotiations of the laws which we considered important, too.

Szabolcs Szita makes a difference in his book, which is about the Hungarian Holocaust, of the anti-Semitism between the period of the two wars, and considering these differences reviewing the commitments of the legislator aristocrats. The writer mentions the *numerus clausus* specifically among the Jewish laws.

Imre Lebovits has a similar standing-point, who is trying to understand the way what led to the Holocaust from the Jewish point of view. He does not think that the aristocracy was unified in terms of judging of the Jewish situation, although the aristocrat approach has a defence of the Jewish in his narration.

The Hungarian Jewish laws in the two-volume work of Géza Komróczy not only the domestic, but also about the Jewish go to discussion in terms of general public history.

There are also several essays next to the recapitulative works which are about the born of Jewish laws, regarding to our subject there is an outstanding importance of four essays written by Andor Ladányi, which are analysing the creation of the three Jewish laws and the modification of the *numerus clausus*.

We do not know any work which is specifically reviewing the connection between the legislator peers and the Jewish situation.

This relation is mentioned in a few points -at the work of Lendvai Paul- as a special connection of the nobleness to the Jewish in Hungary. This is an important antecedent of the question of our dissertation, that the interdigitation of the aristocracy and Jewish upper class was ended up because of the happenings from 1918.

Miklós Szinai had a little bit different opinion about the Hungarian aristocrats -lived between the two wars- compare to what was used to at that time from others. He could have been known in professional circles after his work released in 1988, where he not only tells us an unusually positive story at that era about Earl Albert Apponyi, but also shows us the possible attitude of the peers related to the Jewish situation. The essay about the Hungarian governments Jewish-politics between the two wars is not exactly about the aristocracy, but his contestation is about, which social classes has had an interest and which not in overwhelming the Jewish, and this is a very important part of our dissertation. In the essay of Levente Püski, what is about the relation of the Jewish situation and upper class, there is a presentation of all the changes in terms of the laws, and we are able to get known several commitment of peers about the Jewish situation, therefore we win a pretty essential amount of information to our present study.

## **Sources**

On one hand, this paper aims to present the hungarian aristocracy between the two world wars, especially a smaller group of persons, who participated in the legislation process.

On the other hand, it tries to cast some light on these persons' relationship to the jewish situation by analyzing their standpoints in the debates about the jewish laws.

Having this in mind, our sources can be divided to two groups. János József Gudenus' five volume book of resource work and Béla Kempelen's early collection of data served as source of the genealogical data of the high aristocracy in the 20th century.

The data about further members of the upper house and the parliament were gathered relying on the six parliamentary almanachs of the Horthy-era.

Since these documents didn't give sufficient amount of information on the denominations of these members of the parliament, the obituary collections of the Hungarian Research Center of Family History were used as well.

Regarding the lands owned by noble families and individuals, two list of landowners were used, one from the year of 1925 and one that was based on the data of 1935 and was published in 1937.

For the parts about party politics István Vida's *Hungarian Party Politics* was used as a source. The comments and manifestations of the noble members of the parliament about the „jewish situation” was gathered mainly from the electronically accessible protocols of the parliament and the committee protocols that can be found in the National Archives.

## **The structure of the dissertation**

The main topic of the dissertation is the nobility that participated in legislation between the two world wars. The 'jewish case' is not a subject of our research. However its presence in the legislation - which specifies this era more than anything, - can give detailed information about the nobility, as this presence had effects on almost every segment of social and economical life. For this reason, our work can be divided to three main parts built on each other intentionally, in order to contribute to the better understanding of the hungarian aristocracy between the two world wars.

The first chapter tries to shed some light on the hungarian aristocracy and the jewish community of the 20th century in a general way, including the presentation of these communities' roots and their place in an international comparison.



The so called „short 20th century” brought great changes to Hungary in terms of government form, size of region and composition of the population in just one year.

Our subjects, the aristocracy and jewish community of the Horthy-era are consisting of generations that were all affected in some way of the consequences of these radical changes.

Therefore the first part is a short overview of the changes and their effect on different groups of society.

Naturally, these radical changes shaped the country’s political structure as well, therefore in the introduction we will get acquainted with the political parties, that were brought to life almost by the same persons, who were parts of the previous political system before it fell to pieces.

We felt the need to present the two involved social groups’ short history of the Horthy-era in our introduction. In the case of the jewish community the great available literature made this task more easier than in the case of the aristocracy. Because of reasons mentioned in our historiography, the analyzing literature of the hungarian aristocracy still remains to be written.

We had to face similar difficulties, while trying to place our research of aristocracy in a greater international picture, while the vast amount of available literature on the jewish community between the two wars actually made our research harder.

We felt quite important to take a look on the opinions, these two groups had about each other, and to demonstrate the trending „science” of the time, called eugenics, and the impact it had on the thinking of many noble members of the parliament.

In the second chapter of our work we try to shed light from different angles on these aristocrats participating in legislation.

Approaching our „target group” from a little bit farther, first we present the hungarian noble families of the 20th century. Naming these families – that are declared members of nobility by consensus of different literatures - makes the location of the further smaller groups or persons easier in our opinion.

The hungarian nobility played leading political role in the country’s history for centuries, and this quite privileged position weakened gradually with the come of new, modern times. The radical changes that followed the I. World War only made this process faster, but did not end it.

This is why we felt important to investigate the presence of family or personal continuity between the age of dualism and the Horthy-era’s parliament membership.

The next part demonstrates the features of the 100 noble families, that played roles in the parliament’s work between 1920 and 1944, focusing on their place in the groups mentioned

above as well as on the extent of the lands owned by them and the nature of their roles in legislation.

The fourth part of the chapter takes a closer look on the 193 aristocrat, who took part in the parliament's work whether as a member of the upper house or as a representative. We tried to gather features of all kind to describe these persons, investigating and presenting their religious, personal, political and social life, and organize these informations in an illustration that can provide useful to other researchers.

At the end of this chapter – in an effort to connect to the next chapter – we provide a list of aristocrats that took part in the debates about the jewish laws.

Our dissertation's third chapter focuses solely on the commentaries of these aristocrats – originating from families mentioned above – to the most fundamental laws affecting the life of the jewish community.

In the first chapter point we discuss the chances and failure of formation of the „Danube-valley aristocracy” or the so called „Hungarian nobilitas,” since the jewish nobility liked to view itself as a part of this community by nature. In our opinion the commentaries of nobility on the laws mentioned above are illustrating the failure of this formation process quite well.

In the next point we try to investigate the forms and possible reasons of anti-semitism that started to appear in the thinking of the nobility. In both points we tried to rely on our previous conclusions based on the available information on aristocrats.

Moving on to the next point, we looked over the list of persons – while having the overlaps in mind - that were present at the debates on jewish laws, focusing on the ones who wished to have effects on the content of these laws.

The fourth part of the third chapter we highlight the most important elements of these commentaries and speeches that were said and given during the debates on these laws, focusing on the ones that give us information about the moral values of the nobility, their constant and ever-shaping features, and their conceptions of past and future.

In this part we use individual subsections to show the law articles that had the most affection on the hungarian political order and the jewish society. Since there isn't too many of these articles, we didn't separate the commentaries that were said in the house of representatives, the upper house or the committee meetings.

The fifth point of the chapter summarizes the statements of nobility, this time focusing strictly on the persons, trying to lead to our paper's final conclusions, that will follow in the fourth chapter.

## **Conclusions:**

We have come to the conclusion, that during the time between the two world wars, the hungarian aristocracy did not re-organize itself, but continued the process of falling apart that started with the end of the 19th century. Because of this, the high-nobility of the post-trianon Hungary – now without a ruler – struggled to develop an articulation of moral values or a sense of its own interests.

While the middle-classes competed indeed with the jewish community for certain economical or intellectual positions, neither group of aristocrats were a match for the hungarian jews in the modernizational progress, rather they were partners, though not equal. In the beginning of the 20th century a disagreement of agriculture and mercantilism has unfolded, but at the same time, the merger of the jewish elite and the hungarian nobility did too, out of the realization of mutual interests. In an international comparison this process is quite similar to the forming of the west european capitalist - english and french - elite, rather than the social isolation of east - polish, russian - europe.

This hopeful progress was broken in two by the lost war and the escalating economical, social and political consequences that followed the consolidation in the 1920's.

We looked over the personal and family features of three group of aristocrats in post-Trianon Hungary, as well as their roles in social life and economy. It is safe to say that the high nobles and barons of the dunántúl-region were trying lead the economical development of the remained country, while most of the aristocrats of Transylvania and the Felvidék tried hold on to their positions in the political management, and carry on with their duties in spite of losing their territories.

The mutual interest of the aristocracy and the welthier group of the jewish community remained as it was after 1920, however the political and ideological factors were getting more stronger from the 1930's forcing this two groups apart.

This phenomenon can be easily noticed reading the parliamentary debates on the jewish-laws. However the traditional values can also be recognized in the reasonings of aristocrats from different sides, yet we can't find one topic when they were thinking as a group, except the defense of the veterans who fought in the fronts of the I. World War.

The dividing line in their thinking is most probably the perception of the racial question.

One group was under the influence of István Bethlen who was a defender of law and constitution, while the other group was influenced by Pál Teleki who put the interests of the hungarian race above all.

The crisis of the hungarian aristocracy that started from the end of the 19th century, has reached its end after the peace treaty of Trianon. The jewish-question and the aristocracy-question strengthened each other as they unfolded in the parliament, that created the jewish laws of the era.

### **Published works of this topic**

1. Christians and Jews in the time of crisis. Kitekintés XII. évf. Különszám. Békéscsaba, 2008. 42. o.
2. Where anti-semitism hides (The Letterbox of Új Nemzedék in 1939.)  
Sketches of hungarian history of two centuries. ELTE TDI Tanulmánykötet Bp.  
2010. 155-171.o.
3. Regime changes in (hungarian) history. Első Század.2010. Különszám. ELTE BTK. HÖK. 13 – 23.o.
4. Hungarian aristocracy and Trianon. <http://www.pestmlev.hu/data/files/202704808.pdf>  
(2011.04.23.)
5. Broken aristocracy, active aristocrats. (The fall of hungarian aristocracy between the law articles 1885:VII and 1947:IV) To be published in the next edition of MOMA.