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**ARISTOCRATIC RESIDENCES IN HUNGARY  
DURING THE PERIOD OF DUALISM**

**Abstract of the thesis**

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The history of Hungarian home-design and interior furnishing is a field of Hungarian cultural history that so far has been rather poorly elaborated. This statement is true also for the literature treating the residences of the Hungarian aristocracy. This fact was the major motivation for me while choosing a topic for my dissertation.

During my research work I used several sources. Because of the dramatic destruction of the aristocratic family archives, I was constantly confronted with the deficiency and the incompleteness of the disposable sources. I could examine as a useful source the inventory books of the aristocratic residences. With the help of these inventories, the number and type of the different furnishing objects could be precisely determined and they also gave a thorough description of the disposition of the various rooms.

The annex of photos attached to my dissertation is an other precious fount of information concerning the style and manner of the interior furnishing. I could mainly have recourse to memoirs while the composition of the chapters treating the details of the life-style linked with the changes of the interior furnishing. Contemporary monographies of local and regional history, press issues, architectural and public life reviews served as further important sources to the completion of my work.

The period of Hungary's history between 1867 and 1918 is called the Dualism (the era of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy) and is mainly referred to as a time of rapid economic development. The aristocracy managed to preserve even during these decades its leading role, and strictly distinguished itself from other social groups. It still incorporated the traditional élite. At that time a process of equalization took place in the financial situation of the historical aristocracy, the new aristocracy and the haute bourgeoisie. As a consequence of this, the living standards, the life-style and the quality of the residences of these social classes also became more and more similar. At this process of gradual convergence, the aristocracy served as a general model to be followed. The aristocratic taste, the manner of the aristocratic residences had a major impact at that time, and not only on the homes of the smaller nobility and of the upper middle-class, but, even if just to a slighter extent, on the dwellings of the lower middle-class and the middle-class as well.

The differences in the financial conditions of the aristocracy were quite truly reflected in the dimensions, the level of specialization and the quality of furnishing of their respective homes. If we look at these differences, we can find an abundance of examples for both,

luxurious and modeste dwellings, the latter, with the level of the furnishing representing mainly the circumstances of the smaller nobility and of the middle-class.

In the second half of the 19th century, the impetuous development of technology, industrialized applied arts and transports had an important effect on the life-style of the aristocracy. The previous constancy and immutability was replaced by expanding mobility. It resulted also in a large variety of aristocratic dwelling-types – adapted to the new circumstances. These residences – beyond offering a more or less permanent home for the family – also had to fit other demands and functions, which can be seen in the different ways of their furnishing, and in the special installation of the different rooms. The decades following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867) may be considered as the last important period of the construction of palaces, aristocratic residencies, mansions and villas on Hungarian territory.

The new claims of the enriched bourgeoisie are soon manifested in the fields of the architecture and the applied arts. An increased demand for ornamental objects and articles of personal use was general. These growing needs could no longer be satisfied with the products of traditional handicrafts. The orders of the aristocrats primarily stimulated the applied arts, but the appearance of a great number of new manufactured goods is also a typical phenomenon.

The art of the second half of the 19th century was characterized by an intense inspiration by the arts of the past and a renewal of the traditional historical styles. At the beginning and at the end of this period, the different styles were often mixed and applied at the same time. In the last decades of the 19th century the Art Nouveau and the early modern currents appear in the arts and in home-design – principally in middle-class homes, while the aristocrats keep on maintaining their taste for historical styles. In many aristocratic dwellings we can find rooms furnished with folk objects in a typical Hungarian manner. Driven by their interest in far-eastern civilisations, the aristocracy and wealthier middle-class people often visited Asia, and purchased pieces of art to decorate their homes and to enrich their collections.

The second half of the 19th century brought remarkable qualitative changes in dwelling conditions. An increased demand for practically furnished, comfortable homes appears. A significant change occurs in the setting of the ground plan. From the mid-19th century, the main point at the layout of the rooms of an aristocratic residence was comfort and functionality, with the full respect of the needs for representation. The architecte was given a

larger freedom to put without any major restriction, spaces of varied dimensions and forms next to each-other.

The new setting, modelling the English system, was more logical and respected the needs of comfort of every-day life. According to the typical pattern, the rooms of representation arranged in a separate groupe around the central hall or the stairway hall, were all directly connected with each-other. They were clearly detached from the private rooms. The guest-rooms and the servants' rooms constituted an other unit in the layout.

Close to these rooms, a number of service premises were established, that, according to their functions were equipped with all the necessary special tools and provided the residence with professional services.

Apart from the ground plan, the new demands showed up at the furnishing as well. In this field, it was again the highly developed English home-design that set the example. As an important part of this, arm-chairs, couches and sofas were prevailingly covered on their whole surface with drape, providing a bigger comfort to the user. Regarding the arrangement of the interiors, a widespread utilisation of various wooden materials must be noted. A preferential role was accorded to textiles. Among the architectural novelties we have to mention the use of cast-iron structures that played an important role at the decoration of the interiors too.

Considering the place that the Hungarian aristocratic home-design and interior furnishing occupies within the European trends, we can easily take notice of the fact that – being a country under strong German and Austrian influence and bound with numerous links to this territory – it was predominantly affected and determined by German and Austrian examples. There are rather few special Hungarian elements in our aristocratic residences that diverge from this general pattern.

