

Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities

Doctoral Dissertation

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**Sociological study of the nobility in Békés county
in the 18th and 19th century**

Noble society and noble possessions

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1. Topic introduction

The aim of the dissertation is to study the nobility in Békés county and its layers in the first part of the 19th century. The previous studies have already revealed significant features of the noble society although they focused mainly on the nobility in the Transdanubian and Northern Great Plain counties. The southern part of the Great Plain has not attracted the researchers yet. Also Békés shows specific features from numerous point of views. Its territory became empty under the Turkish subjection and desorption, thus the local nobility was reformed which was the condition and also consequence of the county management. Consequently our research question is how the nobility in the county revived in the 18th and 19th century following the Turkish Era. The other specific feature which can be detected in the estate possession of the county is that the Gyula Estate, the majority of Békés, was owned by the Harruckern family. The prevalence of the family influenced the further formation, layering and possessions of the county nobility. In conclusion, the sociological study of the nobility in Békés county follows the previous studies, although it provides a different picture regarding the specific local circumstances.

2. Historiography

Deeper nobility research and studies started in the early 1980s. These regional studies aimed at investigating the nobility's possession and social layers in the county. The studies focusing on the connection between the Hungarian nobility's social layering and possession were made mainly by the Hajnal István Circle (Hajnal István Kör) and the research group led by Béla Pálmány. In addition, numerous local history work assisted my thesis. János Karácsonyi published the noble families in alphabetical order in the third part of his work titled 'Békés vármegye története' (The history of Békés county). The upper noble families related to the county were firstly studied by József Palatinus. The historiography of the Harruckern family can be expanded within the history of the Károlyi family and also by Gábor Éble's work about the Károlyi family. Also family history work by Iván Nagy and Béla Kempelen can be seen as fundamental work as the archontological and prosopographical research of Julianna Erika Héjja. General studies involving the latifundia and estates; moreover regional and national studies focusing on other estates were used in the current thesis. The history of the Harruckern estate was examined from the structural point of view – based on the book by István Kállay named 'A magyarországi nagybirtok kormányzata 1711–

1848' (The management of the Hungarian latifundia between 1711–1848). In order to measure the social relations of the local nobility we focused on the marriages. While the previous studies highlights mainly endogamy, the current thesis can be compared to the study by Gyula Benda focusing on the nobility of Keszthely between 1790 and 1849 where the noble legal state could be detected less significantly in marriages.

3. Sources

The thesis is based on mainly the documents of the National Archives of Hungary and Békés County. Also the documents concerning the indigena families connecting to the county could be studied in the Österreichisches Staatsarchiv Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv and in the Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv.

The documents, which can be found in the Archives of Békés County, are mainly the materials and notes of the noble meetings (MNL BéML IV. A. 1.). Also, other documents such as noble proof certificates and other summaries were used for the analysis. As a huge amount of the noble archives has been destroyed, their use was not possible.

The notes and documents of the Harruckern family concerning the period between 1798 and 1853 can be found in the Károlyi family documents (MNL OL P 418) in the National Archives of Hungary. The family decided to move all the family files into the Archives in Pest following the family meeting in the year of 1853. The notes of the family meetings are available in Hungarian, mainly in copies. Also additional documents can be discovered such as contracts, correspondence, statements or briefs. The common estate's statements can be found in the archives of the Károlyi family.

Estate summary or statement currently is not available regarding the size or wealth of the estate in the examined period. That is why; county statements and summaries about the 1850s were used. Similarly, the other wealth notes can be only limitedly employed. In order to examine the estate owners in the particular century, the estate statistics of the years 1893 and 1895 (published in 1897) were used. The connection of the different archive types and styles was completed within a multipositional analysis. Also marriage certificates were used to register the noble marriages between 1790 and 1848.

4. Outline and content

The immigration was the first question to examine. Also the direction and the reason of the immigration were studied. It will be also worth studying the migration in a further examination. Also, the strong family relations were taken into account which can delay the breaking process of the estate and the forming of a narrow middle landowner layer in the county. The other two estates, which did not belong to the Harruckern family, did not have such influence. The estate of Kétegyháza was owned by the Almásy (zsadányi and török-szentmiklósi) family and the estate of Szentandrás was broken by the descendants of the Paksy family. Although previously some other studies claimed the important role of the Harruckern family in the county, the social and economic influence of the estate was not involved.

Consequently, the research focuses shortly on the two estates and separately and largely on the Harruckern estate. The documents, notes and statements of the family meetings, which were set up in order to direct the common estate, were used to analyse the features of the estate and its financial and social effects up to 1853 when it was finally broken by the heirs. The case of the Harruckern family drew attention to an argued issue of the period: the role of the indigenas. Consequently the role and relations of the bigger estate owning family members were examined. It was worth studying the alienation of the Stockhammer estate despite the protestation of the Harruckern heirs as it reveals the legal and credit system and also the estate management circumstances in the 18th and 19th century. The process is important as the sale of the estate parts provided the development of the middle landowner layer.

The following point was to study the layers of nobility, especially the middle noble group which was the county elite as the large landowners could belong to the empire levels. Our research applied a separated method to study nobles in county and estate positions. The multipositional elite definition and analysis by György Lengyel and also the approach of Vera Bácskai and Lajos Nagy was adapted.

To study the inner relations and family system of the county elite and its circle, the marriage habits of the middle nobility in Békés county and their social and spatial relations were analysed. Our hypothesis was that the elite members differentiated not only in their estates, wealth or positions, but also in their in-law relations. The possibilities and lives of the petty nobility was introduced with some examples. Finally, the local noble layer's political

behaviour was studied together with their views as Békés county always represented more liberal views in the diet.

5. Results and Data

The privileged order was analysed from a historical-legal definition and also from a behaviour sociological point of view. The results revealed the special relations of the county nobility, their strengths and weaknesses stemming from the restructuring. Also it supported another research statement that the borders among the nobles and between the nobles and non-nobles can be understood flexibly.

The first research question focused on where the immigrating nobles came from and what their reason was for it. We could register 283 family names in our database and also 355 nobles who could identify their nobility with their noble certificates. The data showed that the immigrating nobles came mainly from the Northern-Hungarian counties and the nobles coming from the neighbouring counties originated from Northern-Hungary. These counties included Bihar county (49 proved nobles), Pest-Pilis-Solt (25), Turóc (23), Szabolcs (19), Heves- and Külső-Szolnok (17) and Liptó (16) counties. Consequently, these data correlate with the previous studies' migration direction data. Although it can be claimed while the peasant immigrants came mainly from Hont, Gömör, Zólyom counties, the nobility originated even more northern parts. Also Transdanubian immigrants can be found, Vas county is represented by one family. The reasons of moving included demographical issues, economic and estate possibilities and also the legal development and extent of the county government organisations. To sum up, the moving could ensure county office career and living for the Upland nobles while their noble rights and possibilities were appreciated.

Similarly to other counties a large landowner circle could be found which was over the county society. But only a limited number of members kept in connection as they had different relations with the county. Thus the indigena families were also examined and two groups could be separated. One group involved the absentist indigena large landowners who could be related to the empire centre and also those who were not active either on county or country level. The other group consisted of the integrated large landowner indigena families who moved into the county and also they participated in the economic and political life of the county. Following the Harruckern family, the Wenckheim family became the main large landowner family in the county. Also a member from the Bolza family and the Károlyi family is through a marriage belonged to this group.

As the Harruckern family influenced the county life and the forming of the nobility, the features and history of the estate were examined using the common family meetings and the statements. The common wealth is worth highlighting from which loans were given to the family members employing legal interest. As the statements reveal, the heirs could pay the annual interest but the total pay-back was not always frequent. Apparently it could show the indebtedness and insolvency of the family members. The credit system and its experience are similar to the general processes in the examined period. In addition, the special relation between the large landowners and the county officers could be detected in the land lease contracts and in the contribution to the salary of the land surveyor and the doctor employed also by the county. The reasons could be found in the estate management of the estate establisher, János György Harruckern in the 18th century. The alienation of the Stockhammer estate part revealed the problematic side of crediting, also it showed how the Hungarian estates could be sold despite the protest of the family members. The buyers involved mainly officers who were applied by the estate. In the shadow of the Harruckern estate the reforming of the nobility could not be full as besides the lack of the petty landowners and the narrow middle landowner layer only layers from the two edges, the large landowner and petty nobility, could be formed.

This process was similar to the other counties. As the aristocratic landowners sold their estates to the middle nobles and the large estate managers became owners of bigger estates. Also as a consequence the large estate began to be broken into small parts. The Harruckern estate was so enormous that these processes in the county happened with only a half or one century delay. This could be in connection with the forming of the middle landowner layer. Consequently the power of the nobility against the county and the large landowners could appear later, which could happen because of the time consuming forming of the immigrating nobles or the powerful authority of the Harruckern estate. Also these could cause the weakness of the county nobles. This can be seen as the first restoration was made only in 1790 following the forming in the year of 1715. Then the next election was only 38 years later although it could be influenced by the governmental policy.

Thus in the forming noble society the separation of the county elite could be detected. This layer was in connection with the estate. Another fact also demonstrates this weakness: to belong to the multipositional elite the limit was only 100 acre in contrast with the higher limits of other counties. As the used method showed 24 nobles were the members of the county elite from the possible 72 people. Moreover, the study pointed out that the local elite should have more positions, bigger wealth and higher income; therefore, the unity of these

was necessary to belong to the county elite. The official and personal relations and network were important to form an elite group and these could be realised in positions, estates and marital relations.

In the current study the marriage habits of the middle nobles in the county and its social and spatial relations were examined to study the inner relations of the nobility. Concerning the period between 1790 and 1848, 588 marriages were registered where at least one spouse had noble origins. Consequently it seems that order exogamy and local endogamy marked the county nobility. Therefore, the social exclusion could not be detected among the nobility or it could be applied only for the county elite. Concerning the marriages two levels could be found: the dense network of the elite which reached the centre of the country and the other was the network of the narrower county relations. The former are the marriages of the top elite (1st and 2nd group), which can be filled into the national relation system. The later are the marriages registered in the 3rd group of the elite. On the one hand, they show examples that they chose in their own circle or they selected elite men for the ladies.

It would require a further examination to study the petty nobles in the county. The positions of the petty nobles were determined of their relations with the large landowners and the county elite. The political behaviour of the local noble layer was also studied as they represented liberal views in the diet. Following the diet of 1805 one representative was always selected from the large landowners; the other was a person who had previously participated in the diet. Consequently, the close relation of the estate and the county could be seen in the representative selection. Similar division cannot be seen in other counties according to the current data. Similarly to the petty nobles' issue, further examination can be led about the deeper analysis of the liberal views of the county.

Finally, it is worth studying the meaning of being a noble in Békés county. The nobles moving in the early 1700s did not reveal their noble legal state to receive land because the landowners did not give land to nobles. Also it meant the abandonment of the noble rights and the take-on of the peasant burdens. The identification of their nobility can stem from the regular meetings after 1828. To use the noble rights could be in connection with the more active political life. The noble legal state issue was important only this case as it seems that it did not count in the marriages and family relations. Regarding the marriages the noble legal state was secondary. The closeness of the marriages can be seen only if it is examined from professional or financial point of views. According to the data the society cannot be separated using order borders. The exogamic marital circle could be detected only concerning the upper levels of the nobility. The importance of the nobility is not unambiguous concerning the petty

nobles as the noble legal state could express only the legal ability. The noble state did not have an exclusive role in the family of friendship relations. Consequently, the noble blood could not have any specific features. It seems that the noble legal state was important only in the personal interests and in positional view as the nobles proved the legal state only in these cases.

6. Literature relevant to the topic

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The multipositional elite in the rural county in the first part of the 19th century. Methodological attempt at the local noble elite group of delimitation in Békés County. [Publication in progress]

The common property of Harruckern heirs, as the estate and county employees's lands. [Publication in progress]

7. Presentations relevant to the topic

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From the noble handicrafts till the medium landowners in Békés County. Hajnal István Circle's Conference. Eger, 28 August 2014

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