

Batthyány Ádám. Egy magyar főúr és udvara a XVII. század közepén [Ádám Batthyány. A Hungarian Aristocrat and his Court in the Middle of the Seventeenth Century]. By András Koltai. (A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai – Források, feldolgozások 14) Győr: Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár, 2012. 636 pp.

András Koltai's *Ádám Batthyány*, which summarizes decades of research, belongs among the most important achievements in recent Hungarian historical literature about the courts of early modern Hungarian aristocrats. This work is, in many respects, a unique and complex undertaking. In exhaustive detail and with enjoyable style, Koltai narrates the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century history of the Batthyány family—proprietors of estates of decisive importance in the western part of the Kingdom of Hungary and volunteers for the lion's share of the wars against the Ottoman Turks—with a focus on the life of the family's defining personality, the first Count Ádám Batthyány (1610–59). In so doing, Koltai offers a finely lined portrait of a significant portion of the aristocratic society of the western part of the Kingdom of Hungary. In introducing the careers of Batthyány's various clients (*familiares*), for instance, he acquaints the reader with numerous individuals from an entire range of noble society, and in much greater depth than do previous accounts. In the course of the author's earlier research, he examined Hungarian aristocrats' marriages to foreigners and their systems of family relations, which work produced, among other things, a detailed exploration of Ádám Batthyány's circle of clients. One result of this work is a useful database for researchers concerned with the society of the period in the western regions of Hungary.¹ As a landowner and as a military leader—as captain-general of Transdanubia (*partium Transdanubianarum supremus capitaneus*) and as captain-general of the frontier outpost at Kanizsa (*supremus capitaneus confinium Canisae oppositorum*)—Ádám Batthyány not only played a range of significant roles in various military agencies in the middle third of the seventeenth century, his court also served as a model for numerous other Transdanubian aristocratic courts and influenced the lives of those who resided on his possessions in important ways. Thus, among the Hungarian magnates who were then converting to Catholicism under the influence of the Archbishop of Esztergom, Péter Pázmány, the nineteen-

1 *Batthyány Ádám főúri-földesúri familiája. 1629–1659. Prosopográfiai adattár* [Ádám Batthyány's Circle of Clients, 1629–1659. Prosopographical Archives]. Accessed March 09, 2015, <http://archivum.piarista.hu/batthyany> – Benda Borbála–Koltai András, 1999–2004.

year-old Batthyány was, in many respects, exceptional: in the course of his court career in Vienna, he became an imperial chamberlain who provided real service to the emperor, and departed from the established custom of Hungarian nobles of the period in choosing a foreign (not Hungarian) wife—Auróra Formentin (1609–53), Empress Eleonóra’s lady-in-waiting, whom he met at court and with whom he established a love-match.

The volume is divided into five large chapters, each of which is further split into subchapters. The first section (*“The good that remains of the ancestors”*: *Courts and Traditions*) describes the concepts of royal and noble courts and enumerates the characteristics of the early modern Hungarian court, encompassing both the relations between the Hungarian nobility and the Austrian Emperor, as well as the questions and possibilities that faced Hungarian magnates who took up service at their ruler’s residence in Vienna. After a section dealing with the denominational loyalties of the members of the Batthyány family, Koltai’s second chapter offers a detailed picture of Ádám Batthyány’s youth and the circumstances of his upbringing. Those in the young lord’s immediate environment—the members of the evolving court—appear in the roles of individuals who had an influence on young Batthyány, most important among them Count Palatine Miklós Esterházy (1625–45) and Péter Pázmány.

In the third chapter (*“All the castle, and all its contents”*: *The Court’s Built Environment*), Koltai uses the information in inventories, budgets, and instructional guides to develop a detailed image of the built environment and administrative practices of Batthyány’s court, including the history of its fortresses, castles, and residential buildings. The volume’s fourth chapter (*“These good, faithful servants”*: *Court Society*) is built around a reconstruction of the rules for maintaining courtly order. The lack of written regulations for the aristocratic court posed a challenge to the researcher, so much so that he had to attempt, on the basis of court censuses and other sources, to reconstruct the strict and traditional order of courtly life and society. At the beginning of the subchapter entitled *The familiaris* (pp.248–304), Koltai makes a noteworthy statement about the concepts of *familiaris* (client) and *szerviens* (servant), specifically about the appearance of *familiaritas* (patron–client relationship) in Hungary: in opposition to earlier literature in the discipline, this author stresses the continuity in the early modern period of the medieval system of Hungarian *familiaritas*—convincingly, for this reviewer (pp. 248–49).

On the basis of the exact numbers in the notes to his stipend rolls, we can track the population of Ádám Batthyány’s court, the composition and

responsibilities of the groups that made up his court, their expenditures and the measures of their consumption, and even the length of their service, all illustrated with particular examples. In the fifth chapter (“*Only with good ends do we meet*”: *Life and Death at Court*), we get glimpses into the life and functioning of the court through the significant, sad, or sometimes joyful occurrences in the dominant family’s day-to-day existence.

The volume’s closing subchapter, entitled *Image and Memory*, contextualizes Batthyány’s military and political legacies among those of the noble elites of his day, and in doing so, makes an important claim: that this “in many ways typical, western Hungarian Catholic nobleman’s” ideals and courtly image make him a worthy representative both of his family’s rank and of the baroque spirituality propagated by the Catholic church during the Counter-Reformation.

We come to the following two questions: One, from the perspective of social history, how does András Koltai’s monograph enrich our existing knowledge of the early modern Hungarian aristocratic court? And two, did the function of the Hungarian aristocratic court change as a result of the division of the country and the difficulties of daily life in the Christian–Ottoman borderlands? The chapter of the book that summarizes international research into court history describes the major trends in European scholarship: we get clear synopses of criticisms of the work of Norbert Elias and his followers, as well as accounts of the work of research groups engaged in the study of central European court history.

Perhaps problematically, beyond this review of the international literature in the discipline, the author relatively rarely connects the implications of his work to the conclusions of international specialists. It would have proved particularly useful to the reader if the author had, at several points in his work, compared Batthyány’s court and its set-up with the courts and arrangements of aristocrats living in other territories of the Habsburg monarchy. For example, Thomas Winkelbauer’s elaborate and in many ways similar account of the court administration of the nobleman, soldier, and Catholic convert Gundaker von Liechtenstein (1580–1658) would have offered opportunities for just this sort of comparison.

Koltai charts his own course through this book. He gracefully combines historical biography and family history while observing the conventions of microhistorical writing. Accordingly, we immediately recognize the structure of the court, its institutions, and the roles of the individuals who constituted it, but at the same time, we also see the everyday life of the court as it unfolds, as well as its constantly changing, dynamic operation.

This is one of the chief characteristics of Koltai's writing—because of it, in my opinion, his introduction to Batthyány's court and his biography of the aristocrat qualify simultaneously as classic and as modern historical work, in that they are built on truly extraordinarily thorough research into his sources. Koltai's work appears to be a good example with which to confirm the proposition² that Elias's concepts (for example “interdependence,” or the “network of mutual dependencies”), with some rethinking, might still provide a model for court research. Elias's rigid conception of “court structure” might thus be transcended in favor of interpretations that stress the temporality and dynamic operation of the court, and that consider members of the court within “a network of mutual dependencies.”

The author's statement of purpose in the volume's foreword reflects his hope that “on the basis of this analysis of Ádám Batthyány's court it might be possible to make inferences about the structures, lifestyles, and mentalities of other courts” (p.12). It is difficult to determine the degree to which Ádám Batthyány's court was “typical” of western or Transdanubian aristocrats' courts, partly as a consequence of the fact that all the written records of court administration kept by other families of Hungarian magnates in the period, even when taken together, do not equal the rich trove of source materials found in the Batthyány archive. The unique value of this collection is also demonstrated by its structure, in that its materials have been reorganized into independent sections according to the type of document (inventories and instructional guides, for instance), which provides an extraordinary range of possibilities for explorations of aristocratic court society and investigations into the functioning of the court itself. This abundance of supporting documentation is further enriched by the author's own outstanding abilities as an archivist, as well as his refined sensibility for analyzing and explaining these materials. The complicated nature of Koltai's work allows him to establish connections between his central theme and several trends and traditions, foreign and domestic, in historiography. Alongside numerous recent works about the Batthyánys, much of the latest research into the aristocratic elites of western Transdanubia has focused on the roles played by the Esterházys, the Nádasdys, the Zrínyis, and the Pálffys, and these historical

2 Péter Erdősi, “Az erdélyi udvari társadalom modellje: kísérlet Norbert Elias fogalmainak alkalmazására” [The Structure of Transylvanian Courtly Society: An Essay on the Application of Norbert Elias' Concepts], in ... *éltünk mi sokáig 'két házban'...* Tanulmányok a 90 éves Kiss András tiszteletére [We Lived a Long Time in 'the House of Two'...: Studies in Honor of András Kiss's 90th Birthday], ed. Veronka Dáné, Teréz Oborni, and Gábor Sipos, *Speculum Historiae Debreceniense* 9 (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2012), 67–75.

analyses figure extensively in the present volume’s richly annotated scholarly apparatus and bibliography.

According to the author, the Hungarian aristocratic court diverged from its Western European model in the functions it served, in its operation, and in the institution of the *familiaritas* connected to the person of the *dominus*, the lord of the manor. That aristocratic courts functioned as “academies of Mars,” or schools of military life, can certainly be attributed to the threat of Turkish invasion, and the significance of the court’s manifold functions would only grow as the country was divided into three parts and the royal court moved beyond the border—one consequence of which was the adoption by aristocratic courts of certain functions of the royal court. It would have been inconceivable in the other territories of the Habsburg Monarchy—in the Austrian Hereditary Lands or the Lands of the Bohemian Crown (particularly after the Battle of White Mountain)—for an aristocratic contemporary of Ádám Batthyány’s to maintain a personal army of several thousand men. In Hungary, however, “amid the almost constant ‘clashes’ resulting from the Turkish conquest, the single most effective form of military defense came into being on the economic foundations of the great aristocratic estates, which provided private armies consisting of noble *familiares*, *hajdús* [mercenaries], and free peasants” (p.29).

Ádám Batthyány was one of the most significant Hungarian aristocrats of the period, and his court was truly the political, military, and economic center of the Transdanubian region. The author justifiably calls attention to the fact that his exploration of Batthyány’s military career, and likewise his description of the up-keep of a courtly retinue, call for separate monographs of their own (p.496). Likewise, this volume completely vindicates the claim its author makes at the beginning of his first chapter: “In the period between the battle of Mohács and the reoccupation of Buda, very few institutions played more important or more manifold roles in Hungary than did aristocratic courts like Miklós Zrínyi’s and Ádám Batthyány’s.”

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Translated by Jason Vincz