

**Gábor Ambrózy:**

**The Economic Career of Count Tivadar Batthyány (1729–  
1812), an Entrepreneurial Nobleman at the End of the  
18th Century**

Thesis booklet

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**Budapest, 2023**

## **The Aim of the Research**

The thesis presents the official career of Count Tivadar Batthyány (1729-1812), an aristocrat with estates in Transdanubia and Croatia, his economic activities, his private life, his activities in the public interest and his political pamphlet. We have tried to place this biography, which is essentially economic in focus, in the economic historical discourse of the period, of enlightened absolutism. It is primarily a biography<sup>1</sup> with an economic-historical focus, in which the career opportunities available to a Hungarian nobleman who sought to increase his wealth by engaging in commodity production and trade in the decades of enlightened absolutism are presented. The career of the subject of the doctoral thesis, Tivadar Batthyány, can be considered atypical when examining the career choices of the social elite of the period: trade, infrastructure development and manufactory management were not popular careers among the nobility. The aim of this dissertation is to present the economic activities of Tivadar Batthyány on the basis of archival and manuscript repository sources that have not yet been used, and to examine how this career fits in with the career paths of other noblemen of the period and the economic policy trends of the Theresian

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<sup>1</sup> For a theoretical approach to biography, see Bödeker 2003, Röckelein 1993, Loriga 1996. 209-231.

and Josephine periods. The investigation of his career, his activities and his pamphlet points to the (economic) policies of enlightened absolutism in Hungary and provides a microcosm of the centralising economic and public policy decisions made in the interests of the Empire. This micro-historical approach allows for the interpretation of the decisions of individuals – in this case a very particular individual – and their responses to the challenges of the period, while at the same time providing a kind of under-view of the period itself.

Other aims of the research included the most accurate possible description of Batthyány's self-propelled boat, mapping its dimensions and interior and exterior design, and modelling the *Batthyánysches Wassermaschine*, the hull-mounted mechanism that propelled the boat. We also sought to find out what were the circumstances of the era's waterborne cargo transport that prompted the Count to build such a special vessel. Last but not least, a comparative analysis of an anti-Jozephinist pamphlet published in 1790 under the initials of G.T.B. was carried out. The Hungarian translation of the text, along with several private and business letters originally written in French, can be read here for the first time.

## The Sources Used

In a 1975 study on the reception of Western European intellectual currents in Hungary, Éva H. Balázs almost calls for a monograph on Tivadar Batthyány: “This dynamic, impetuous magnate deserves a monograph.”<sup>2</sup> She adds that Mária Mialkovszky's 1972 dissertation can be seen as a first step. While Mialkovszky's 95-page paper was indeed a significant step in exploring the Count's library and some of his economic involvements, it was in many ways a torso work due to the disorganised state of the library at the time.<sup>3</sup> Since the 1970s, there have been no enterprising Hungarian historians to continue this work, articles on the history of transport have been published regarding his self-propelled *Bucentaurus* ship<sup>4</sup>. However, in the 2020s, several publications on Batthyány have come to light: an investigation into the content and provenance of Batthyány's libraries is underway<sup>5</sup>, and there have been publications on his self-propelled *Bucentaurus* ship, his enterprises and *Widerlegung*.<sup>6</sup> In German, shorter studies on Tivadar Batthyány were published in the course of the 2010s,

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<sup>2</sup> H. Balázs 1975. 156–157.

<sup>3</sup> Mialkovszky 1972

<sup>4</sup> Bíró 1971., Szócs 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Hursán 2020. 81-102.

<sup>6</sup> Ambrózy 2020 a; Ambrózy 2020 b; Ambrózy. 2022. 4–36; Ambrózy: 2022. 488–502.

notably by Gert Polster<sup>7</sup> and Gerhard Stadler<sup>8</sup>, with a focus on economic history.

The common feature of the works listed here, which predate the 2020s, is that – with the exception of the Polster study – no attention was paid to Tivadar Batthyány’s personal papers, and they tried to portray the count – who had a wide range of activities – mainly based on his library collection<sup>9</sup> and on the surviving pictures of his ships. The most important source group, apart from the above-mentioned and already to a certain extent explored library material and the sources of fine art related to shipbuilding, is the very rich Batthyány family archives (MNL OL P 1313-1342). Within this archive, the focus of our investigation was on the personal papers (MNL OL P 1320) and private correspondence (MNL OL P 1314) relating to Tivadar Batthyány, but this was supplemented by a selective examination of the personal papers and letters of his father, the Palatine Lajos Batthyány and his brothers. In order to obtain a more precise picture of Tivadar Batthyány’s

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<sup>7</sup> Polster 2014. Vol.I. 203–222

<sup>8</sup> Stadler 2014. Vol.II. 101–115

<sup>9</sup> The catalogue of the library of Tivadar Batthyány in Vienna: A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtára Kézirattára, Hungarian Literary Library, 19th I-II. k. Regiester sammtlicher in dem Wiener Archiv: Graf Theodor von Batthyany befiendlicher Bücher, Ms Bibl. 2° 2/X Extractus Catalogi Librorum (Batthyany Theodore), Hungarian Literary Library 4-r 1. sz. (Bibl. 4° 1).

economic activities, we also consulted the archival materials of the central administration. We searched the Archives of the Hungarian Chancellery (MNL OL A 35, A 39), the Archives of the Council of Governors (*consilium regium locumtenentiale Hungaricum* MNL OL C 43, C 63), and we included copies of maps (MNL OL S) and plans (MNL OL T) in our research to reveal Batthyány's ideas for infrastructure development and to gain an idea of the location of his estates and the layout of his factories. We also used material from foreign archives in our work: for example registers from the Wiener Stadt Landesarchiv (WStLA), and we tried to reconstruct the production characteristics of his mines and the manufactories based on the mine foreman's reports found at Hofkammerarchiv (HKA) Münz und Bergwesen. By processing the reports from the Archives Nationales of the Consulate of Trieste in Paris, which are linked to Tivadar Batthyány, we have outlined the Count's commercial policy visions.

We have identified and processed a number of sources in various public collections, including, but not limited to, the Historical Picture Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, the Manuscript Archives and Fine Arts Collection of the Hungarian Museum of Technology and Transport History, the Ceramics and Glass Collection of the Museum of Applied Arts, the manuscript archives of the National Széchenyi Library and the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The latter

research site was of particular importance, as it houses the technical and natural science library associated with Tivadar Batthyány that was incorporated into Teleki Téka, and a number of contemporary printed sources of importance for our further research. It is here that the pamphlet *Widerlegung*, written in German by Tivadar Batthyány and hitherto neglected by historians, is to be found, the Hungarian translation and analysis of which is a significant part of this dissertation.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Results of the Research**

Thanks to the examination of the archival sources, the publication of this dissertation will bring to light a number of research results that will make the previously incomplete picture of Tivadar Batthyány more accurate. One such example is his first name, which in Hungarian historical literature has appeared in varying forms, sometimes as Tódor, sometimes as Tivadar. Among the large number of French, German and Latin correspondance examined, there are a few letters written in

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<sup>10</sup> Batthyány Tivadar: *Widerlegung des falsch genannten unpartheiischen Worts an die Bürger von Ungarn zur Beherrigung vor des Krönung ihres Königs*. Place of publication unknown, 1790. MTAK Magyar Tört.O.586.

Hungarian, in which his name appears consistently as Tivadar/Tivador. We have used this form of the name in the preparation of this thesis.

The personal papers and letters reveal aspects of his life that have not received much attention so far: his studies, his early years when he embarked on a short and unsuccessful military career, and his career in court circles and civilian life. In the early 1750s, he served as a court chamberlain (*camerarius*) to the young Archduke Joseph (later Joseph II), later gaining legal and administrative experience in the provincial assembly of Lower Austria, before being appointed a privy counsellor (*Geheimerrat*) in the Court Chamber of Vienna (*Hofkammer*) in 1755-56. He married in that year and later had two children.

Symbolically, just as the year 1765 brought significant changes to Hungary thanks to the enlightened absolutist turn of the Habsburg Monarchy, it also marked a major turning point in the life of Tivadar Batthyány. With the death of his father, he inherited an extensive estate, manors, mines and, not least, a handsome sum in bonds<sup>11</sup>, which made him one of the most affluent 50 landlords with the largest estates in the Kingdom of Hungary.<sup>12</sup> He also received a new appointment this year, becoming an advisor to the Royal Chancellery of Hungary, and

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<sup>11</sup> MNL OL P 1313 Majoratus 68. d. 1–12. no. 8–9. Batthyány Lajos' division

<sup>12</sup> Fónagy 2013. 772–773



his attention turned increasingly to the management of his own estates. The considerable amount of money he inherited from his father, the last palatine connected to the *natio Hungarica*, also known as the banker of the Hungarian nobility, Lajos Batthyány, was used to modernise and increase the production of his copper, sulphur and antimony mines in Borostyánkő. He engaged in a complex economic activity, treating the extraction of raw materials, the production of goods and the transport and marketing of finished products as a single process. The extracted sulphur was processed in vitriol manufactories, and he was a supplier to the munitions office of the Vienna Arsenal (*K. k. Pulveramt des Wiener Zeughaus*). He processed copper in his copperware manufactory in Lipótfalva, producing so-called 'Nuremberg goods': pins, thimbles, bells, candlesticks and other metal goods.<sup>13</sup>

In 1769, he started his most important industrial enterprise. It was a brass smelter, copper and ironworks similar to that in Lipótfalva, but on a larger scale – employing around 600 people at its peak in the 1770s. After taking possession of the property, he carried out important alterations, built a new plant

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<sup>13</sup> MNL OL C 64 Departamentum commerciale 1786. no. 25 A. pos. 86. Manufactory table for the needle and brass manufactory of Tivadar Batthyány in Lipótfalva. MNL OL C 64 Departamentum commerciale 1787. no. 1 7th pos. 19. 82, 83. Tables of manufactures for the sulphur, copper and vitriol manufactory in Borostyánkő.

and, in addition to the goods from Nuremberg, also made the Nadelburg complex, which was already a factory, suitable for the production of sword blades and tool steel. The factory was run in a protoindustrial framework, employing foreign craftsmen and providing them with separate social facilities: a church, a restaurant and a school. In the same year, 1769, he became a shareholder in the Temesvár-Trieste Trading Company, mainly in order to sell his products to the Balkans, the Black Sea and, increasingly, the Adriatic. It was a well-planned expansion, as evidenced the fact that in 1766 he bought the manors of Ozály (*now Ozail, Croatia*), Brod and Grobnik, which were located on the Kulpa River, a 1-2 hour journey from Fiume (*now Rijeka, Croatia*).<sup>14</sup>

It is to this estate that his fascination with shipbuilding from the second half of the 1770s is linked. At that time, Károlyváros played a central role in the building of river ships in the region and it was here that Batthyány – as a close landowner – began his career as a shipbuilder and ship designer. By the 1780s, he had several hardwood sailing ships of the Rhine type built, which he used to transport his goods on the Kulpa, the Sava (*lat. Savus*) and the Danube between Vienna and Károlyváros.<sup>15</sup> He also carried out a number of

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<sup>14</sup> MNL OL P 1320 5.d. s. fol. 61

<sup>15</sup> Archives Nationales (Paris), AE/B/I 1084, Reg. 3. 1777–1778. Correspondances consulaire, Trieste fol. 67. Batthyány

river regulation works on the Kulpa. His recurring complaint in his letters and pamphlet *Widerlegung* is that he has failed to turn the Kulpa into a navigable canal as far as the estate of Brod (now *Brod na Kupi, Croatia*), which is only an hour's journey from Fiume.<sup>16</sup>

According to the sources, Batthyány, who was connected to Fiume by a thousand threads, played a significant role in the annexation of Fiume to the lands of the Hungarian Crown.<sup>17</sup> The town council of Fiume, in a letter of gratitude, granted a permanent seat on the town council to the Count, who had a palace in Fiume and was also a member of the Royal Croatian Council. In 1777-1778, correspondence with the French consul in Trieste, Saint Sauveur, reveals his plans for a commercial policy in the area, and the integration of the Sava and Kulpa regions into the coastal trade by water. Of course, this would have required substantial capital investment, and Batthyány apparently did everything he could to encourage French investors to invest here. This would have even included the possibility for French trade factors to benefit from the free port of Fiume, of course, significantly increasing Hungarian exports of goods, of which Batthyány's products, mainly metal

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Tivadar levele Saint Sauveur konzulnak, Vienna 15 January 1777.

<sup>16</sup> Batthyány 1790. 305. The corresponding page number refers to the Hungarian translation in the dissertation

<sup>17</sup> Fest 1916. 250

goods, grain, livestock and timber (harvested from Slavonian oak forests by serf robots) would have been the initial exports. The initiative did not come to fruition due to opposition from the governor of Trieste, Zinzendorf, and other court economic decision-makers, but Batthyány's keen interest in water transport and shipping remained undiminished.

Sometime in the late 1780s, certainly not unrelated to the outbreak of the Turkish War – which he condemned for its misguided consequences and its damaging effects on trade – he moved his shipbuilding factories to the Bratislava section of the Danube.<sup>18</sup> It was then that he began to experiment with his self-propelled upstream vessel, later named *Bucentaurus*. In the thesis we tried to thoroughly explore the conditions of waterborne cargo transport in the second half of the 18th century, and despite the lack of technical specifications and drawings of the *Bucentaurus* propulsion, we tried to model the principle of operation and possible designs of the famous *Batthyanyshes Wassermaschine*, which propelled the ship, taking into account analogies and technological solutions existing and in use at the time. The boat was powered by live animals, presumably horses, using a horse mill hidden in the hull of the boat, based on European examples, in such a way

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<sup>18</sup> Several engravings depict his shipyard: the shipyard of Tivadar Batthyány in Bratislava: Hungarian Museum of Technology and Transport Fine Arts Collection, No. 14719.

that the mills moved paddle wheels through gears. The ship could move forwards and backwards and was intended to be used as a tugboat. The last record of this remarkable craft dates from the early 19th century and, as the transport history of the time shows, the invention, which was patented, failed to revolutionise navigation.<sup>19</sup> Neither were investors in a hurry to invest their capital in this type of shipping, nor did Batthyány's successors and his family see any possibility in further promoting the *Bucentaurus*, using it for commercial purposes, developing it – Tivadar Batthyány was almost 70 years old at the time of the most notable demonstrations.<sup>20</sup>

A significant part of the dissertation is an analysis and Hungarian translation of Batthyány's political pamphlet *Widerlegung*, published in 1790. The Count, who as a young chamberlain had presented the underage Archduke Joseph II with a toy-kite (or something similar), forty years later bursts out in a furious pamphlet against him: he calls Joseph II, now Emperor and King, mad, a despot, a 'Turkish sultan', and rails against his absolutist policies. The infrastructural and economic underdevelopment and the entrenched images of the social structure are also, in his view, in need of change, but he rejects Joseph II's serfdom programme, taxation and

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<sup>19</sup> MNL OL P 1313 Majoratus 62. d. 28. 114. 17 June 1793.  
Patent letter of *Bucentaurus*

<sup>20</sup> Ambrózy 2020

commercial policy of the Josephine regime, to say the least. His vision of the world and his political programme combine the interest programme of the nationalist order and the economic modernisation ideas of the enlightened order. He reacted to the late Theresian and Josephine economic policy processes primarily as a Hungarian aristocrat and landowner, and at the same time, knowing the slow-moving reality of Hungarian public life and the legal, orderly constitution that framed it, he rejected the egalitarian features of the Enlightenment that promised freedom.

In one of his last letters, written in Hungarian, the elderly count writes about his library and his old age, and informs the unknown addressee that he has given up all experimentation, horse-breeding and prefers to spend his old age with his books.<sup>21</sup> It is not clear to whom he bequeaths his books, his bibliotheque, which he has collected over a long period of time: to his beloved daughter Eleonora, or is he reconciled in old age to his mistreated son, nicknamed Tonerl? The dissertation has left many questions open, which need further research to be clarified.

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<sup>21</sup> MNL OL P 1314 Nr. 66.672. The letter is fragmentary, difficult to read, one page survives, without address or date.

## **Further Research Directions**

Here, in the concluding passages of the thesis booklet, we have the opportunity to report on two major works on Tivadar Batthyány that are in preparation. The critical source edition of the Hungarian translation of Tivadar Batthyány's pamphlet *Widerlegung*, also published here in the thesis, is expected to appear in 2023/24. The other major work, which will focus on Tivadar Batthyány, will be a monographic revision of the present essay, which we plan to publish in the near future. This will of course require the inclusion of further archival sources and literature, since the present thesis was only able to present a small slice of Tivadar Batthyány's life, as was undertaken in its objectives. In the sense of modern historiographical practice, a biography is also a chronography, in which aspects of cultural history and social history also play an important role.

The digitally recorded letters of the Batthyány brothers and Tivadar Batthyány's immediate family, written in French, German, Latin and only a small part in Hungarian, are still to be further processed. In the course of writing this thesis, we have attempted to carry out an economic-historical analysis focusing on the Count's estates and enterprises and their management, but we have also endeavoured to make clear, even if only in an indicative way, the significance of

Batthyány's cultural history and his openness to the most modern technical achievements of the period. In the course of a later revision into a monograph, it will be necessary to clarify and elaborate many aspects of his life, which are only outlined here, and to synthesize and condense the topics discussed in greater detail than in a biography.

It may be a cliché, but it is nevertheless true that the historical problem outlined here – the active life of a count active in the second half of the 18th century – has raised more questions than it has answered. One such detail that requires further research is the mapping of Batthyány's studies and possible (study)trips abroad. Neither the correspondence material we have so far processed nor the other sources discussed in detail above have provided any reassuring answers to these questions, which determined the Count's later world view. A more detailed exploration of the conflicts within the family would also be needed to clarify: why he names his daughter as his heir, as opposed to his first-born son. To this end, it is necessary to examine the correspondence of his wife Filippina Esterházy, written in German, and the letters and personal written sources of his children. It seems that Tivadar Batthyány's relations with his brothers were not always untroubled, as he calls his first-born brother, the holder of the princely title and the holder of the *fidei-commisum*, Ádám Vencel, a "bad constitution" who is always in the hands of usurers. The relationship between them is also worth



investigating in more detail, which we plan to do by examining the correspondence (P 1314) and the personal papers of the brothers.<sup>22</sup> From the point of view of institutional history, the collection of the Batthyány family's correspondence also hides further research: a large number of letters, which have not been processed in depth so far, reflect on the phase of Tivadar Batthyány's career described here only in outline. These letters can highlight the time he spent at the Chamber of Courts and the Hungarian Chancellery, on the personal changes that occurred there, and on the decision-making mechanisms. His role in the Royal Croatian Council and in the Temesvár-Trieste Commercial Society is not sufficiently clear.

Other promising material relating to river regulation and hydraulic engineering can be found in the Archives of the Council of Governors (MNL OL C 127 and C 128). These groups of documents belong to the *Directio navigationis*, which existed from 1773 to 1788, and the *Directio in hydraulicis et aedilibus*, which evolved from it after 1788, and which were actually concerned with water and navigation, and may provide further insights into Batthyány's infrastructure

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<sup>22</sup> Letters and personal papers of Ádám Vencel Batthyány, Croatian provincial governor MNL OL P 1316 (1693-1784) 43. d-51. d. Series Missilum; personal papers of József Batthyány, Prince Primate MNL OL P 1318 1. d-8. d; class records of Philip Batthyány: MNL OL P 1313 Majoratus 68. d. 33 A-E.

development work in Croatia, as well as into the general trends in river regulation and landscape formation in the late 18th century.

To the best of our knowledge, certain groups of documents from foreign archives also contain additional information relevant to our topic; For example, the records of the *Consilium Croaticum* of the Zagreb Archives (Državni Arhiv u Zagrebu), which may also contain some interesting material, as the Count was a member of the Croatian Royal Council (in some places, in older literature, the Croatian Council of Deputies), which existed from 1767 to 1779, and presumably also sources concerning his trade activities in Rijeka.

Many important documents are to be found in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Protokolle der Kabinetkanzlei, in the Hofkammerarchiv's plan library, and in the same archives in the Münz- und Bergwesen, which contain documents and reports on mining companies. For a more complete picture of the Borostyánkő mine, it is worth comparing the above-mentioned tables of the manufactories in the Departmentum commerciale, C 64, of the State Archives of the Governorate, with the records of the Slovak National Archives, State Central Mining Archives of Banská Štiavnica (Slovenský národný archív, Ústredny bánsky archív Banská Štiavnica).

We believe that, with the addition of the previously unprocessed sources outlined here, a rounded biography of this

in many aspects unique life can be produced, which keeps with modern biographical standards. By writing a biography of Tivadar Batthyány, we could further sharpen the sometimes incomplete and often distorted picture of the Hungarian aristocracy of the late 18th century in Hungarian historiography.

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