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**Social status and representation: the court of the Festetics family  
in Keszthely at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries**

**Thesis booklet**

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## 1. Rationale for the choice of the topic and background to the research

My topic lies at the intersection of social, mentality and cultural history. My doctoral dissertation deals with the prominent figure of the Keszthely lineage of the Festetics family, Count György Festetics and his court in Keszthely, in terms of social status and representation. The uniqueness of the dissertation is that the status, representation and prestige aspects of the history of the aristocratic families of Transdanubia at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries have come to the fore of Hungarian historical research in the last few years, but the range of individual studies necessary for a regional and complex comparative analysis is far from complete.

The genealogical reconstruction of the history of the Festetics family was carried out by Dezső Szabó. György Kurucz, a researcher of the history of the Festetics family, wrote the first gap-filling biography of the Festetics, the chapters of which are a contribution to the research results of the subject. Piroska Péczely was the first, who dealt with Keszthely castle, its furnishings and property from a representative point of view, and Gábor Alföldy with the garden. Géza Cséby has written a dissertation on the history of literature, focusing primarily on the Helikon celebrations. Róbert Stohl also wrote a dissertation on literary history, in which he made József Takáts, the tutor of György Festetics' son László Festetics, and his educational principles the subject of his research. Gábor Lukács, in his dissertation on economic history, examined the management of the Festetics estate in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Some of the sources analyzed in my dissertation may overlap with the ones mentioned above, yet in line with the research background I will approach them from a new angle, complementing them. However, the topic of my dissertation, the representational tools of the Count of Keszthely to display social status and prestige, have not yet been studied. Among the manuscript documents relating to György Festetics, there is a group of sources that have not been examined or published by others, despite the abundant source material, no analysis of the Count's court in Keszthely has been carried out before. The special difficulty of the choice of topic is, that the period of Romanticism was the heyday of letter, diary and novel literature, but neither the father nor his son kept a diary, nor did they venture to write political or literary works, as other noble families, such as the related Széchényi family.

The period under study is between 1790 and 1819, that is, from the time when György Festetics settled in Keszthely and established his modernisation programme until his death. This period of time covers a transitional period that brought about substantial changes in perspective and mentality, which inherently complicates the research. The above-mentioned members of

the Festetics family (Kristóf, Pál, György Festetics) certainly had a remarkable vision for the known Hungarian context of the time, and indirectly influenced their wider environment, the literary and political public as a whole, setting a model to follow.

## **2. Objectives of the dissertation**

The aim of my dissertation is to present the courtyard of Count György Festetics of Keszthely, to analyze and compare the different segments. In the course of my investigation, I first seek an answer to the question of sample selection and tracking. A key question is to what extent the Viennese court exerted an influence on the choice of patterns, and in which areas the influence of patterns outside the borders of the Habsburg Monarchy can be observed in the various manifestations of the Festetics family in Keszthely. In comparison to previous research, I am also seeking answers to the question of what kind of principled frameworks, in accordance with the fashion and social status of the time, or even patterns that differed from them, determined the manifestation forms of family representation. It is also a question what sources the heads of the family could rely on when formulating the instructions that determined everyday life. I am also seeking answers to the question of the possible, pattern-giving functional effects of the internal courtly orders and the relations that emerge in the hierarchy of court personnel.

In the course of the analysis, I will attempt to reconstruct György Festetics' choice of status and means of representation, offering an appropriate insight into the manifestations of other Transdanubian and Western European aristocratic families. Accordingly, on the basis of the sources available to us, I will try to draw conclusions about the Transdanubian courts and the Hungarian aristocratic way of life. In addition, it is essential to take into account and analyze certain elements of the political aspirations of the Count of Keszthely and his underlying motivations. The reason for this is that I intend to contribute further to the picture of the culture and mentality of the Hungarian aristocracy of the time, especially with regard to Festetics' value-oriented manifestations, which partly reflect the approach of the bourgeois social order without privileges.

In this work, I attempt to explore court and family ties, strategies of assertion, foreign, especially English, impulses, the intentions and limitations of integrating different patterns and influences, but equally important are the possibilities of status justification, the ideological and psychological background of representative practices.

### 3. Research methods

The questions foresee that I will approach the subject through a synthesis of several methods, namely linear descriptive (analysis of the source material in relation to the literature), micro-historical reconstruction and comparative analysis, in addition to some other specific methods (psychological specificities of cultural memory, quantitative analysis).

The examination of the above mentioned areas justifies the use of micro-historical and case studies, which provide cultural and social history data on mentality, attitudes to everyday life, lifestyle, quality of life, eating and consumption habits, table manners and financial situation. Research into the history of the estate has made it possible to determine the number and composition of the staff, their functions at a given time, their job descriptions, their areas of activity and their living conditions.

### 4. Sources and adaptations used

In view of the aforementioned, I would like to reconstruct the system of the theoretical and practical characteristics of the aristocratic way of life, utilizing the results of international and domestic research on the nobility, but relying heavily on manuscript and printed sources. The most important sources are orders, missals, instructions, travel diaries, inventories, wills, and contemporary press sources.

The basic starting point is the manuscript sources (section P), mainly the Directorate files, kept in the National Archives of the Hungarian National Archives, which can be found in family archives. It is particularly noteworthy that György Festetics ordered the writing of two detailed regulations for the estate of the Count of Festetics and the internal staff in 1800 and 1803, based on a preliminary survey carried out by a commissioned officer, in which he himself merely made corrections and confirmed them with his signature. Another characteristic of these directorate documents is the striking absence of any reference to György Festetics' wife, Countess Judit Sallér.

The Helikon Library and Castle Museum in Keszthely has valuable and relevant documents on the Festetics family, with an extremely rich collection of books and small prints, as well as works of fine art. In terms of printed sources, travelogs and travel diaries deserve special mention, such as the travelogs of József Teleki in Hungary and those of Johann Centurius Hofmannsegg, Richard Bright, Robert Townson and John Paget for foreign travelers.

## 5. Main content and new findings of the dissertation

### The cause and „public good” of the Hungarian language

Count György Festetics, the first-born son of a wealthy noble family from Transdanubia, settled in Keszthely in Zala County at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a farming town that was hardly known in Hungary at that time, let alone in Europe. His subsequent activity and programme of action as a lord of the estate, in comparison with the representatives of the contemporary Hungarian noble families, was above all manifested in the fact that he established and operated a different kind of noble court in Keszthely, in contrast to his own social environment. His outstanding education, which he acquired as a student at the *Collegium Theresianum* in Vienna, must have helped him to realize that serving the interests of the 'common good', in other words acting in accordance with Hungarian national interests, could not be achieved against the foreign dynasty, the Viennese court, which had all the constraints and power, but by founding professional institutions that were also useful from the point of view of the state, namely the interests of the Empire as a whole, and by gaining the patronage of the dynasty<sup>1</sup>. The significance of the institutions established in Keszthely can be seen in the fact that the various elements of its intellectual-educational programme sought to counteract the central, Viennese government's in many respects deliberate omissions, not only within a local framework, but also by creating mechanisms of general cultural and educational policy.

The Count's merits include his efforts made for the case of the national language, supporting the Hungarian-language press and Hungarian theater. The prominence of the Hungarian language went beyond the mere medial framework, as it also laid the foundations for the change in mentality that made the Hungarian nobility receptive to European ideals without any particular sacrifice.

In terms of the previous literature and the elements examined in the various parts of my dissertation prove that Festetics took England as a model, which was at the forefront of development, and thus, by adapting foreign impulses, the conscious model economy was built in the same spirit. The Festetics transformed and furnished their estate in accordance with the tastes and fashions of the time, starting from the Viennese model, which was gradually replaced by the English model in both architecture and garden design at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> György Kurucz: The Count of Keszthely. György Festetics. Budapest 2013. 126, 123, 161-163, 198, 282, 284-285, 292, 296.

Out of conviction, in the spirit of the enlightenment, he worked for the „common good” in the hope of developing and spreading national culture and education. After his forced resignation from the military, his stay in Keszthely can be interpreted as a political programme, as he sought to make up for the obvious shortcomings in cultural policy at local level. A good example of this is the special series of events of the period, the Helikon celebrations, which served to display social and intellectual prestige. György Festetics is regarded as a local patriot who, in accordance with the values of the elite, was characterized by a virtuous attitude, and the virtue he represented served as a model for the later period. As the Count of Keszthely also served as a soldier in his youth, the modern-day 'merit' (honor) became apparent after 1790, following his discharge from the army.

In the case of the Keszthely lineage of the Festetics family, at least in relation to the activities of the generations under study, the dilemma of the modernization of the historical Hungarian state can be observed. If even in the midst of a specific contradiction, since the political and institutional framework of the civil state, as well as many everyday things, such as fashion (dress, interior decoration), consumption and entertainment, were „modernized” by some members of the Hungarian nobility in the Hungarian society of the time. György Festetics was at the forefront in this respect, a rational exponent and mediator of 'elite culture' in Hungary, a clear representative and promoter of value-oriented culture that superseded the ethnicity of modern Hungarian national consciousness (since he himself was of Croatian origin).

### **Aristocratic lifestyle, entertainment, prestige**

The Count of Keszthely's prestige aspirations were in line with the aristocratic customs and expectations of the time, but he also went beyond them. This included a preferred marriage strategy, the popular forms of social life and pastime, such as playing various games (billiards, chess, card games), representative hunts with weapons of special esteem, or meals and feasts with several courses, luxury and exclusive ingredients, quality wines, according to the customary order of rank. It also included the development of a specialized library in the mother tongue, for the specific needs of farming or even the noble household, which went hand in hand with the systematic and conscious collection of books. It should be added that for Festetics the book was not merely a means of expressing prestige, but rather a means of imparting knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 81.

The various forms of entertainment were not for their personal ends, for the simple enjoyment of wealth. The lords of Keszthely sought to display a particular attitude following Western European social patterns. Accordingly, theatrical performances, dances, musical performances and various instrumental performances were of great prestige. Since among the European aristocracy, musical instruments were a prestige and a form of entertainment, as well as aesthetic. Naturally, the death of a prominent member of a more prestigious family and the accompanying ceremony, organized funeral procession and funeral feast could also be included here, as it was the case with the Festetics as well.

It is especially necessary to highlight the marriage of György Festetics' son László Festetics to the star-crossed princess Josefin Hohenzollern-Hechingen. The marriage of convenience is unique and representative in that the bride comes from a princely dynasty rivaled by the Habsburg dynasty. The marriage contract was confirmed, the authentication of which is recorded by a certified copy of the official records of the General Assembly of Sopron County, in accordance with Hungarian legislation. This was more than a legal act, it was also a demonstration of prestige and social standing, and had an important message for Hungarian noble and aristocratic society. The marriage was known to the Hungarian nobility and intellectuals of the time, it was a very serious event, and compared to the Batthyány and Esterházy dukes, it also elevated the Festetics above the other Hungarian families.

Good appearance, namely a representative wardrobe, was also a part of the order and social affiliation. An examination of the wardrobe reveals that the count preferred Hungarian clothes, in accordance with the fashion of the time. The appearance of György Festetics, his attitude and his approach to the private sphere were in accordance with the „civilizing” process of the period<sup>3</sup>. This prestige is also reflected in the portraits of family members, which demonstrate an appearance in keeping with the fashion and social status of the time, but also carry a message beyond this.

### **Operating rules of the Keszthely estate**

György Festetics had an impressive estate at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The courtyard of Keszthely, Festetics' permanent residence, is inseparable from the built living environment, and the activities of the personnel and other servants that are closely linked to the courtyard of the nobility. A central administrative body, the *Directio*, contributed to the smooth running of the self-representing estate by drawing up various instructions. Festetics ordered the

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<sup>3</sup> Norbert Elias: The civilizing process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations. Translated Gábor Berényi. Budapest 1987. 87–90.

writing of two detailed instructions for the estate and the internal personnel. The first in 1800, when the hierarchical estate administration was established, and the second in 1803, which added new responsibilities and new posts. Looking through the records of his son, László Festetics, I do not find similar regulations, only shorter instructions, nor am I aware of any other internal regulations for the personnel of other Transdanubian noble families of the period. The Count was aware of the importance of drafting instructions, so the instructions covered anything that was profitable, saleable, wealth-generating or an attitude-shaping status symbol. In the case of the latter, we are dealing with a wide range of valuables (silverware, porcelain, copper and glassware, tableware), furniture, textiles, pets, livestock, cereals, or even food items counted as luxury consumables (spirits, wine, sugar, chocolate, coffee). The instructions describe the inner and outer spaces of the Keszthely estate, such as the care and keeping of valuable objects, or the conscious use of such objects, but they also provide additional information about the everyday life, eating and (luxury) consumption habits of the aristocratic family, in addition to the composition and duties of the inner personnel.

The operation of the aristocratic court and the creation and maintenance of its prestige were the responsibility of a qualified background personnel, organized on a hierarchical basis, entrusted with estate management, administrative, law enforcement and animal husbandry tasks, and craftsmanship. The estate's internal staff, or servants, were further differentiated according to their specific tasks, responsible for serving the lords and ladies of the estate, meeting their needs and providing for their comfort. The personnel's wages were divided according to position, qualification and age, but their remuneration included both accommodation and full board.

The central estate administration was initially the responsibility of the court treasurer, then by 1803 of the highest ranking officer in the internal hierarchy, as well as of the subordinate courtiers and associates. Under the rules of procedure the court treasurer, who was responsible for the law and administration and held the position of court master, was responsible for the external and internal maintenance of the estate, the management of the household and the supervision of subordinate personnel. Given the nature of these duties, a constant presence could be expected in all the activity areas (room, kitchen, dining room, storage room, cellar, stables, garden). Certainly, at this time, the position of master of the estate was held by this person, who could even be considered a butler, according to the English model.

The person in charge of public safety and law enforcement was the dust collector, but the chimney sweep also had a big responsibility to prevent a potential fire from starting. Soldiers or hussars were given a representative role. In Festetics' court we know of two soldiers



who, in order to satisfy the internal services, sought to establish order with the servants. According to the instructions, the court guard also included a court gamekeeper, whose duties may have included professional management and law enforcement. The Count of Keszthely considered the establishment of a law and order service to be the most urgent task, although lower-ranking servants were given an equally important role in the representative interior and exterior spaces.

Court rules strongly protected the property of György Festetics, so much so that distinctive numbers were sewn onto the clothes. The Count ordered that the status letter „F” was to be sewn on shawls, tablecloths, handkerchiefs, and so forth. Strikingly, the white dresses were treated with great care, and were treated as two separate units, grouped according to who they were for: the person of the lord, or the clerks and servants, or for the kitchen. Festetics did not keep many servants, as he considered them too expensive and unadorned. In connection with the permanent residence, hygiene became an indispensable condition of the lord’s lifestyle. This required cleanliness of both furniture and textiles, which included constant cleaning, washing and even the proper storage of clothes in wardrobes by female servants (laundresses and maids) assigned to these tasks.

There can be little doubt that meals have also become a means of representation. In this context, the first person worthy of mention is the lady of the keys or housekeeper, who was responsible for the household and the servants, and who could therefore simultaneously do several things (preparing vinegar, starch, hair powder, drying fruit, baking cakes, helping the cook). Precise instructions were also drawn up for the court cook or cookess, so that the count’s meals could be prepared without waste or delay. In 1803, in the interests of efficiency and cost savings, even a second cook was hired to learn the trade of cooking alongside the cook. The majoress was looked after by the steward in accordance with the instructions of 1800, and her job description was described in detail in the instructions of 1803. She looked after the small cattle on the estate and also fattened poultry and pigs, weaved, and was under the supervision of the steward. A farm girl was later assigned to help her. Down the ranks came the kitchen servants, who obeyed the orders of the cook and the keyholder, were responsible for keeping the kitchen and the utensils clean, for preserving firewood and coal, and for fattening the pigs.

The elaborate instructions for the kitchen and dining room were extremely detailed to ensure that the precious silverware was kept clean, intact and well preserved. By 1803, the kitchen had become a quasi-catering service, and as a result, a new position was created, that of a „table-maker”, who, in the interests of hygiene, was responsible for the wardrobe of the Count’s outer garments and the tableware used every day, whilst also being responsible for the

registration of the furniture and objects in the Count's rooms. The name of this post also indicates a dominant presence in the kitchen.

The library was considered a special venue of the estate and representation of the aristocracy, therefore a detailed instruction of fifteen points on the use of the library as well as on the protection of the collection was drawn up on 20 July 1808, which was given to the librarian with the aim of keeping the library in order.

In relation to the representative exterior space, it comprises the stud farm and the garden. The Count of Keszthely considered the breeding, keeping, training, grooming and maintenance of horses connected with the stud farm to be a matter of his heart, in which the servants, such as the stud master, the grooms, the court master groom, the coachmen and the carriage master also played a key role. At Festetics, the garden had several functions: 1) an expression of the prestige and scenery associated with the estate, 2) a place of entertainment, 3) a place of practical training in georgiconic skills, 4) a source of food.<sup>4</sup> The garden also included a tortoise and a snail garden, not only for their delicious meat but also for their prestige, for which precise instructions were drawn up. Precise instructions were also drawn up for the cultivation of wild saffron, a highly profitable herb. In this environment, the gardener was responsible for the tasks.

In summary, György Festetics left behind a skilled estate administration and court, which was the result of the competence of his personnel and the appropriate wealth required. At the same time, we must not forget that the promotion of hygiene also played an important role. This practice has gradually become part of everyday life in Keszthely, which has influenced the change in financial, material and, of course, behavioral culture.

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<sup>4</sup> Éva H. Balázs – Lilla Krász – György Kurucz (eds.): *Everyday life in the age of Habsburgs, 1740–1815. (Everyday history)* Budapest 2007. 43.

## 6. Publications on the subject of the dissertation

Egy dunántúli főnemesi udvartartás a 18–19. század fordulóján: Festetics György belső rendtartása. Orpheus Noster 9. (2018) 1. sz. 22–34.

Presztízs és udvari személyzet Festetics György udvarában. In: Történelmi útvesztők. Válogatás a Napi Történelmi Forrás szerzőinek írásaiból II. Szerk. Márton Balogh-Ebner – Sándor György – Tamás Hajnáczy – Ferenc Kanyó. Budapest 2018. 194–222.

Udvari élet és presztízs: adalékok Festetics György udvartartásához. KRE-DIt 1. (2018) 1. sz. Online: <http://www.kre-dit.hu/tanulmanyok/zsidai-reka-udvari-élet-es-presztizs-adalekok-festetics-gyorgy-udvartartasahoz/>

A főúri udvar, mint a reprezentáció és a lehetőségek színtere a 18–19. század fordulóján. Napi Történelmi Forrás 2018. Online: <https://ntf.hu/index.php/2018/02/06/a-fouri-udvar-mint-a-reprezentacio-es-a-lehetosegek-szintere-a-18-19-szazad-fordulojan/>

Attila Bárány [et. al.] (szerk.): Műveltség és társadalmi szerepek: arisztokraták Magyarországon és Európában. Learning, Intellect and Social Roles: Aristocrats in Hungary and Europe. (Speculum Historiae Debreceniense. A Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi Intézete Kiadványai 18) Debrecen 2014. Napi Történelmi Forrás 2017. Online: <https://ntf.hu/index.php/2017/12/29/muveltség-es-társadalmi-szerepek-arisztokraták-magyarországon-es-europában-learning-intellect-and-social-roles-aristocrats-in-hungary-and-europe/>

Dezső Gurka (szerk.): A báró Podmaniczky család szerepe a 18–19. századi magyar kultúrában. Budapest 2017. pp. 266. Napi Történelmi Forrás 2019. Online: <https://ntf.hu/index.php/2019/11/18/gurka-dezso-szerk-a-baro-podmaniczky-csalad-szerepe-a-18-19-szazadi-magyar-kulturaban-recenzio/>

„Ki ne örvendjen az olly ember’ kegyességének, a’ kivel a’ haza kevélykedhetik?” Napi Történelmi Forrás 2017. Online: <https://ntf.hu/index.php/2017/06/14/ki-ne-orvendjen-az-olly-ember-kegyessegenek-a-kivel-a-haza-kevelykedhetik1/>

Péter Móricz (szerk.): Batthyány Lajos nádor. Körmend 2017. pp. 208. KRE-DIt 1. (2018) 1. sz. Online: <http://www.kre-dit.hu/tanulmanyok/zsidai-reka-batthyany-lajos-nador-c-kotet-recenzioja/>