

# When people still had enough time to live Education of girls from Hungarian aristocratic families, from the 1860s until 1947

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper the author want to focus especially on the education of girls from Hungarian aristocratic families by studying not only the relationship between the parents and the children but also the aim, content, methods of education. The sources were primarily the memoirs that have been more frequently published, that resulted in more detailed, subtle conclusions complete with personal motivations as well. The research method was narrative text analysis. The author concluded that there were practically only some aristocratic girls who had enrolled a secondary school before WW1. After WW1 there were more and more girls taking part in school education, the reason being their financial circumstances and the changed social and cultural situation. Some have already enrolled in university or obtained a vocational qualification. However, working women were very rare among them. The relationship between the parents and children was different by families, but the strict distance increasingly loosened up. One of the most important goal of education was the knowledge of modern languages. Besides practising religion and arts physical education and sports were present in the lives of the girls in the country. Girls could only move around in their own social groups, they put special emphasis on developing social competences. A girl's goal was to find a spouse who is worthy of her rank.

## KEYWORDS

girls, educational history, European history, Hungarian, high nobility, 19th–20th century

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## INTRODUCTION

For ideological reasons in the Socialist Era in Hungary, the history of aristocratic girls' education was not studied. Regarding this subject, in the last twenty years, on the one hand, an important summarizing work was born (Virág, 2013), and on the other hand, new sources became accessible. Pál, for example, examined, on the basis of self-documents, how the life of Hungarian aristocratic children in Transylvania was shaped by the communist regime (Pál, 2013, pp. 321–324). All this facilitates the birth of a more thorough analysis manifesting multiple aspects. In the present research, we focus especially on the education and teaching of girls born with titles of high nobility; we are interested to find out about the relationship between children and parents, as well as touching on the aim, content, and location of upbringing and education, the applied pedagogical methods, and the personality of the educator or home tutor. Our sources were memoirs, that is: nine memoirs as well as the correspondence of an English governess. Besides these, we also relied on ten relatively briefly written recollections. In our research, we applied the method of narrative text analysis.

The economic and social transformation of the 19th century bore for the aristocracy the danger of parting with their elite role. Namely, the aristocrats lost the majority of their birth rights, while not all of their class possessed a large enough fortune for an economically elite position. So, they sought the means of staying on top of the social hierarchy, which the German literature calls "Obenbleiben", "staying on top" (see Conze, 2005, pp. 87–88). One way to achieve this involved studying and thus obtaining the profession as well as position that these studies made possible. Aristocratic boys' education reinforced this strategy, but did any change occur in bringing up and educating aristocratic women as a result of these social-economic processes? Below, we will seek an answer to this question.

## GIRLS' EDUCATION IN HUNGARY IN THE 19TH–20TH CENTURY

The institutionalisation of girls' education in Hungary accelerated in the 19th century as a result of the social, economic, and cultural evolution. Traditional female roles (being a mother, wife, housewife) did not require a school knowledge; preparing for these roles was possible in the family circle. Primary education among girls started to spread with a quasi-mandate (1777), then a direct prescription (1845). As for higher-grade schools for girls, however, in the first half of the century, only a very small number had been established. These were privately owned, and primarily satisfied the bourgeois class's education ideal. As an exception, we can mention Countess Blanka Teleki's institute in Pest, which aimed to offer an education in a markedly Hungarian national spirit to girls originating from the circle of high nobility. Namely, according to Teleki, it was wrong for aristocratic girls to grow up under the influence of foreign governesses, and thus, exclusively absorbing a foreign mentality and culture. Into this school, which opened in 1846, at first only a single girl applied, and although the interest eventually quickened, very soon after the 'March revolution and freedom fight' broke out, the school had to close its gates for good (at the end of 1848) (Pukánszky, 2006, pp. 111–123).

Women's workforce opportunities expanded very slowly, especially with regard to intellectual fields. The first such available profession became the educator (kindergarten teacher and school teacher). In the institution for kindergarten teacher training, which opened in 1837, the



number of female students accelerated after 1862, and independent women's kindergarten teacher training institutions were also established. The women's teacher training institute that opened in Pest in 1856 provided a possibility to prepare for a teaching career. The secondary school's maintainer was the order of Saint Mary Ward. Upon the society's needs, the number of women's teacher training institutes grew with celerity, because due to the scarcity of higher-grade girls' schools, girls who did not want to teach but desired a higher education (i. e. secondary education) also registered into these institutions.

With the Public School Act of 1868, a new secondary institution emerged: the so-called civic school for girls (*polgári leányiskola*, i.e. *Bürgerschule für Mädchen* in German-speaking countries), which, on the one hand, opened up chances for practical careers (with a professional training built up on it, as well), and on the other hand, it gave a qualification for engaging in office work. As the name reflects, the policymakers of this education primarily targeted the urban bourgeoisie's children when organising this type of institution.

No sooner than the 1860s did the social need for girls' secondary education become the subject of political debate. The National Association for Women's Education (*Országos Nőképző Egyesület*), founded in 1868, handed in a petition for establishing a secondary grammar school for girls. This, however, was not realised until 1896; instead, a secondary grade "higher school for girls" (*felsőbb leányiskola*, similar to the *höhere Mädchenschule*) opened in 1875, which offered a higher general knowledge, providing alike for an opportunity to study modern foreign languages and arts (singing, drawing). The educated wife and mater familias stood as this school's ideal.

For girls wishing to acquire a Matura, only the secondary schools for boys (that is: secondary grammar schools [*gimnázium*] and secondary modern schools [*reáliskola*]) offered the necessary education; the girls could attend these schools' eight-class education as private students. Very few girls, however, undertook this. Women acquired permission to pursue university studies in 1895: the faculty of liberal arts, as well as the medical faculty and the pharmacological studies, opened their gates for them. The entire university education only became accessible for women in 1946. They could, however, apply for lower-grade education (into academies and colleges). Prior to World War I, their number at the universities remained fractional; it began rising more drastically following the war.

The first secondary grammar school for girls (*leánygimnázium*) opened in 1896. Beside these schools, the girls had a chance to prepare for their Matura exams on the complementary courses offered by upper form schools for girls. The rise in student numbers made a repeated regulation of higher schools for girls necessary (1916, 1926, 1934). As a result of this process, the curriculum of girls' secondary school education converged ever more closely to the curriculum of boys' schools, while preparing girls for female roles gradually became crowded out. In spite of this, the education policymakers insisted on a parallel procedure: coeducation could only be realised after meeting strict conditions. If these were met, state schools could accept girls as so-called 'walk-in' private students. Other maintainers (primarily the Calvinist church) offered more leniency than this: girls could even register into them as regular students. General coeducation was only introduced in the 1950/51 schoolyear in Hungary, as Socialism asserted the complete equality of the sexes. Initially, in the larger secondary schools, separate classes for boys and girls still operated, but in the 1960s, even these were contracted (Pukánszky, 2006, pp. 123–177; Kéri, 2018, pp. 431–455).



The number of female secondary school students and the institutions established to educate and teach them gradually rose following World War I, mainly from the end of the 1920s. As a result of this process, the proportion of girl students in secondary schools rose from 19.5% (1925/26) to 41.4% (1951/52). Parallel to this, among women, the proportion of girls with a Matura certificate rose, and the difference that had formed between women and men gradually reduced: in 1920, 8.5% of men between 20 and 24 years of age possessed a Matura certificate, while in the case of women, this proportion reached 2.3%. In 1941, this proportion stood at 9.5% and 4.9%, respectively, and in 1960, it had reached nearly the same number (16.8% vs. 16.5%) (Pukánszky, 2006, p. 173).

## ARISTOCRACY IN HUNGARY (FROM THE 1860S UNTIL 1947)

Thus, in the approximately eighty years we have investigated, educational opportunities broadened for girls. Below, following the research of Virág (2010), we will analyse how this process affected girls who had titles of high nobility (duke, count, baron). The period under scrutiny can be considered the age of capitalism in Hungary. The government ratified civil rights of freedom and proclaimed equality before the law (1848). The remnants of the old social system were dismantled. However, bearing titles of nobility was not prohibited until as late as 1947. As for bestowing titles of high nobility, that remained possible until the dethronement of the last monarch, Karl IV; that is, until 1918.

Even though the estate-based society had dissolved, in the age of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867–1918), the aristocracy still possessed the greatest influence and prestige due to their state power positions and large fortunes. However, this stratum's financial decline and dilution had already started. As a result of the economic processes bringing about a reduction in the large estates' power, as well as due to demographic reasons and newly bestowed titles, ranks of high nobility were much less likely to mean automatic riches (Dobszay & Fónagy, 2005, pp. 435–436). This is even more pertinent for the era following the revolutions in 1918–1919 and the closure of World War I – this period saw a further weakening of the aristocracy's economic strength and elite positions. Certain individual families' legitimacy and loyalty to the king, as well as a new regulation regarding the high nobility's political representation, played a role in this (Barta, 2009, pp. 192–203). Aristocracy became even more heterogeneous than before. Because of the border modifications, numerous families' estates, or part of their estates, ended up as a successor state's territories; the radical land reforms significantly diminished their fortunes. In Hungary, however, due to the moderate nature of these land reforms, the significance of large estates even managed to grow. Thus, the aristocracy's social prestige remained high. In Hungary, after 1945, the estate distribution, nationalization, and then internment of the remaining members of this social stratum, their fate was sealed. They became the Communist system's persecuted victims in Hungary as well as in the region's other countries (Püski, 2008a, 2008b; Romsics, 2005, pp. 190–191; Pál, 2013, pp. 218–324).

Due to the economic processes that brought about a reduction in the large estates' power, and also due to the newer title donations, titles of high nobility did not necessarily any more mean either a large fortune or a safe livelihood. As for the period following World War I, we can state with even more certainty – both about the high nobility living in Hungary and those living in the territories of the successor states: this period brought about an impoverishment and a weakening of their elite positions. After 1945, the land distribution, the state appropriations, then their internment, sealed the fate of this social stratum.



High nobility in Hungary, which amounted to about 4,500 people in 1918, was a heterogeneous stratum in itself: clans varied in terms of their rank and ancestry, their fortune's size, their estate's location, their manner of livelihood, religious affiliation and the strength of national consciousness. So let us emphasize that from the applied sources, we cannot make generalised assumptions regarding the entirety of this social stratum; even with the best effort, we can only endeavour to spotlight certain tendencies (cf. Ballabás, n.d., pp. 159–199).

## SOURCES AND RESEARCH METHODS

The results of this study are based on subjective sources.<sup>5</sup> Among the applied sources, the correspondence of the English Mary Elisabeth Stevens is also present; she served as a governess in the family of the Prime Minister Count Gyula Andrássy in the 1860s (Stevens, 2007). The prime minister's grandchild, the Countess Mrs. Mihály Károlyi, born Katinka Andrássy, 1892–1985)<sup>2</sup> authored one of the nine memoirs (M. Károlyi, 2011). Countess Mrs. Imre Andrássy, born Stella Kuylenstierna (1902–1998) observed with an outsider's eyes this world which had become familiar to her (Kuylenstierna-Andrássy, 2015). As István Horthy's wife, Countess Ilona Edelsheim Gyulai (1918–2013), similarly to Katinka Andrássy, also undertook a role in Hungarian public life (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001). Countess Ilona Károlyi Széchenyi (1898–1984) was another member belonging to this family with a glorious past, a family long active in Hungarian political life (Károlyi Széchenyi, 2005), just as the family of the youngest memoir author, Countess Borbála Nádasdy (born 1939; Nádasdy, 2008). As opposed to the above, Countess Mária Magdolna Windisch-Graetz (1911–2005) descended from an indigenous family (I. Károlyi, 2017), just as the family of Duchess Eugénie Odescalchi (1898–1985), a family that could claim a more ancient Hungarian past (Odescalchi, 1987). By this time, however, both of these families had become strongly integrated into Hungarian aristocracy. We also included several Transylvanian aristocrats of high nobility into our research, such as Countess Katalin Bánffy (born 1924) (Bánffy, 2010), and the commoner descendant Augusta Paton, with a Scottish-Greek background (1900–1989), who became acquainted with the world of high nobility as the wife of Count János Kemény (Kemény, 2019). The authors of the relatively briefly written recollections, compiled by Countess Gabriella Kornis (Kornis, 2002) also include Transylvanian aristocrats: Baroness Klára Apor (born 1920), Baroness Éva Apor (born 1935), Baron Ferenc Atzél (born 1942), Countess Éva Bethlen (born 1920), Count Pál Degenfeld-Schonburg (born 1924); Baroness Mária Gerliczy (born 1920), Baroness Mónika Huszár (born 1918), Baroness Mária Kemény (born 1934), Countess Gabriella Kornis (born 1921) and Countess Éva Toldalgi (born 1923).

We established the results of our present study based on subjective sources. Subjective historic sources are the authors' memory constructs, influenced by their Weltanschauung, their

<sup>1</sup>The range of sources can be extended. We will only touch on the education of Baron Mária (1864–1928) and Magdolna Vécsey (1873–1960), and their sisters, as Ildikó Zsoldos has also dealt with the subject in detail, also on the basis of subjective sources (cf. Zsoldos, 2014 and 2015). The life of Count Klára Andrássy (1898–1941) was dealt with by Bittera (2020), and that of Count Ilona Andrássy (1917–1990) by Erdős (2015) (Ilona's father was a second cousin of Klára [cf. Erdős, 2015, pp. 89–90]).

<sup>2</sup>The source of the birth and death year is the analysed writing or Gudenus's genealogy (Gudenus, 1990, 1998).



social and economic situation. From the aristocrats' memoirs, we can unfold a worldview that – in spite of being far from homogeneous – characterizes this stratum, or at least, parts of this world image can be reconstructed. Every narrative constitutes an individual experience of the past, but comparing these texts might bring us equally close to understanding how the examined segment of society used to think (Gyáni, 1997, p. 151). In spite of the sources' individualized nature, a collective memory takes shape (Nora, 1992, p. 15). The writings were created after the events had occurred, so the authors' points of view changed, just as Reinhart Koselleck emphasized (Koselleck, 2003, pp. 212–213). Therefore, employing Paul Ricoeur's system of concepts, "lived time" becomes completed by the "known time" that has passed since then (Golnhofer & Szabolcs, 2009, p. 18). The authors interpreted, ordered, structured the happenings according to their aims and points of view.

These works were made for publication; they can be considered "direct sources" (Nora, 1992, p. 27). Their authors consciously phrased the aim of publishing these writings: on the one hand, they serve as justification and orientation, and on the other hand, they are intended to erect a monument to the culture of an earlier, by that time bygone culture, so they can be regarded as the imprints of cultural memory (Assmann, 2013, pp. 20–21).

Education can be considered aristocracy's identity-preserving factor; however, the authors' richness of details in dwelling on this aspect varies greatly. Of course, the cause for this might be the difficulty of remembering: due to the passing of time and the shift in the system of concepts, the world of childhood experiences appears with differing variety (Halbwachs, 2021, pp. 79–80, 85).

## ARISTOCRATIC GIRLS' EDUCATION

### The aim of education, moral education

*"In the safe, serene years preceding World War I, a girl belonging to my social class had no other worries than making a good match and continuing in her own home the same life as what she had become accustomed to in her parents' house."* – as Countess Katinka Andrássy wrote (M. Károlyi, 2011, p. 125). Ilona Edelsheim Gyulai encapsulated the same ideas when she wrote: *"Our parents thought we didn't have to learn anything else but what we needed for getting married and living the life they lived."* (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, p. 33)

Thus, the girls' and their parents' aim remained to find a spouse worthy of their rank (cf. Lieven, 1992, p. 135), and for this purpose – as Winkelhofer underlines it (2009, p. 109) they did not consider enhancing the girls' intellectual capacities as particularly important. Within the girls' education, according to Winkelhofer, they targeted the formation of personality traits that were traditionally deemed feminine: the girl should be attractive but possibly ignorant and naive, and thus, sinless and pure. Warmheartedness and a modest, sympathetic, shy character was important (Winkelhofer, 2009, pp. 20, 32–33, 108–109).

The memoirs that we analysed partly corroborate this portrait. Girls were expected to possess the following qualities: kindness, adaptability, discipline, dutifulness, the embrace of responsibility for her family and fatherland, politeness, obedience, respectfulness, honesty, truthfulness. Uneducatedness was, however, not typical of these girls; as we can see below, their parents placed a great emphasis on their studies; but the girls only knew their own world: they circulated in a narrow society, under constant supervision. This only changed if they became walk-in students.





Similarly to Winkelhofer, we can conclude that the children were expected to acquire the peculiar aristocratic ‘habitus’, the aristocratic stance which made their social affiliation instantly obvious. They acquired this ‘habitus’ in their domestic environment, more specifically in the proper – that is: aristocratic – society. The junior members of the best families frequently met at afternoon teas, children’s parties, children’s balls. These programmes facilitated their acquiring the rules of good manners and becoming behaviour. The girls were also included in ‘tableaux vivants’, and they participated in small theatre performances. In this manner, they were prepared to create an effect with their appearance (Kornis, 2002, p. 26; Stevens, 2007, pp. 264–266, 283, 331–332; Odescalchi, 1987, pp. 36–37; Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, p. 18).

### Relationship between parents and children

As for their infants, these families employed nannies to take care of them, then entrusted them into the care of au pairs, governesses, and frequently, home tutors. It was up to the parents to choose the individuals managing their children. Later in the 19th century, according to Winkelhofer, the relationship between mother and child became tighter and more loving as compared to the first half of the century in the Habsburg Monarchy. The parents did not entirely leave the education to their personnel, but they themselves directed and supervised it – just as among the middle class (Winkelhofer, 2009, p. 12). According to Sisa, however, rigid rules and keeping the distance characterised the inner life of aristocratic families in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century (Sisa, 2005, p. 117).

According to Kornis, in the Transylvanian families, a respectful relationship formed between parents and their children. The parents were consistent in their education: they expected their requests to be met. The youngsters owed obedience. Regarding the children’s lifestyle and studies, the educators and teachers had to follow the parents’ instructions, who occasionally checked in on the lessons. In rural castles, the family spent a lot of time together, which strengthened the relationship between the generations (Kornis, 2002, p. 17).

Our own research displays a mixed image: the extent of intimate relationship between parents and children varied depending on the family. In this, family traditions, the parents’ personalities and their occupations as well as the family’s financial means all played a role. The 20th century, however, brought a definite tendency of the family members growing closer to one another; at any rate, the rigidity of behaviour protocol turned more lenient (Odescalchi, 1987, p. 19).

For example, in the 1860’s, Prime Minister Count Gyula Andrassy, due to his numerous duties, spent little time with his three children. As a strict *pater familias*, however, he was always present in the background. His wife, Countess Katinka Kendeffy sometimes played with her children, but according to the governess, she also relied too much on the governesses and home tutors to deal with her children. Thus, according to the governess’s description, the parents naturally did not know their children well, and the children respected their parents rather than loved them: “*These children donned masks in front of their parents.*” – she wrote (Stevens, 2007, p. 318).

The above-mentioned prime minister’s granddaughter recounts a similarly superficial relationship: “*We rarely saw... our mother, we could only wish her good morning and good night. I loved my mother with a passion, my love being mixed with admiration and fear.*” (M. Károlyi, 2011, p. 18). In the case of Duchess Eugénie Odescalchi and her mother, however, a markedly tight and intimate relationship was formed, to which the latter’s illness, the older daughter’s marriage, and the father’s frequent absence all contributed (Odescalchi, 1987, p. 70). Countess



Ilona Károlyi Széchenyi stressed her home's dominantly nonchalant atmosphere: *"Our parents' occupation [managing the estate] did not allow for noisy children running around them all day; and yet, we did not perceive them to be distant from us, because we could always turn to them with our worries."* (Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, p. 17).

As for the much younger Countess Ilona Edelsheim Gyulai, her words again reveal a mother's strictness: *"We all loved our step-mother, even though she was very strict. The truth is, I think, that we would not have dared not to love her."* (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, p. 28). Ilona maintained a tighter relationship with her father, they spent a lot of time together, it was he himself who held her daughters' geography lessons: *"Papi [Daddy] taught us geography, and I loved those classes, because he taught us playfully. We chose a random letter out of a book, and he gave us five minutes to write down all the countries, cities, rivers or mountains that we could think of, starting with that letter."* (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, p. 37). Countess Borbála Nádasdy's parents were not strict at all: they played with their children a lot; however, they too demanded order and becoming behaviour. They set the rules and insisted on keeping them. They raised their children for fortitude, showing one's pain was not becoming. When they failed in something, they could only blame themselves (Nádasdy, 2008, pp. 34, 70, 78-79).

When the parents travelled abroad, they frequently took their children with them, since this meant an opportunity to learn and make acquaintances (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, pp. 38-42.). When they moved out to their country estate for the summer, the relationship between the children and the parents who lived for their work became tighter: *"Here, we could be together with our parents a lot more than otherwise, when we barely ever met them, they were so tied up in their various social obligations"* – as Countess Katinka Andrássy wrote (M. Károlyi, 2011, p. 33). In the case of families who permanently resided in the countryside, such a sharp contrast could not be observed.

### The place of education: the family home

Aristocratic girls' upbringing and education occurred typically in the family home, the castle. The children had to adapt themselves to the adult world. Their daily routines were rigorously planned: *"Our daily schedules were just as punctual and strict as a school timetable."* [...] *Our governesses were responsible for keeping the timetable with a minute accuracy."* (M. Károlyi, 2011, p. 26). This regularity was generally typical of the everyday life in families of high nobility: *"learning and entertainment, taking meals, sports and excursions all had their order."* (Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, p. 14). Daily routine could very rarely be broken (Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, p. 15).

In the Count Edelsheim Gyulai family, in the castle at Felsőelefánt (Horné Lefantovce, today Slovakia), at that time already a part of Czechoslovakia, where four girls were brought up, four governesses resided as a rule (a Hungarian, an English, a French and a German one), all of which had their task: *"The Hungarian teacher taught the ordinary school subjects, while the others taught us languages, history, and arts."* (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, p. 31) Besides these, a very small amount of mathematics and chemistry was also present in their "curriculum". The girls completed their schooling privately; they went to Budapest for their exams because their father did not want them to attend Slovakian schools (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, p. 31). The Huszár baronesses acted similarly instead of frequenting the local Romanian school; however, Countess Éva Toldalagi's Austrian stepfather registered her into the Romanian elementary school at





Nagyenyed (Aiud, today Romania); even the memoir's author highlighted the extremely unusual nature of this decision (Kornis, 2002, p. 179).

Countess Ilona Edelsheim Gyulai liked the English governess, Kate Masterson, the most, whom the girls addressed as 'Missy'. She sang them children's songs, organised common sewing and games for the siblings, and read aloud to them. *"We learnt English from Missy in a way that we did not even notice it. But in the early years, besides our mother tongue – without any difficulty – we picked up German and French, as well,"* as Ilona recollected (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, pp. 32–33).

The other sources also underlined the prominent role of foreign language command.<sup>3</sup> Every family employed foreign governesses: native Germans, English, and French. After World War I, not every family had an English governess, and in some families, we might even find "merely" a German one. The reason for this, no doubt, was a financial one. Those who could afford it employed the foreign governesses at the same time, but some families hired them consecutively (Nádasdy, 2008, p. 59; Bánffy, 2010, pp. 26–31, 41; Stevens, 2007, pp. 105–106; M. Károlyi, 2011, p. 51; Odescalchi, 1987, pp. 28–29; Kornis, 2002, pp. 127, 178, 247). Changing a governess could occur for a variety of reasons; it was not necessarily their pedagogical work that their employers were dissatisfied with. For example, a married Transylvanian count fell in love with the English governess serving in Baron János Kemény's family – and his love was returned – so to avoid the complications, they sent the girl home; the German governess was dismissed because she listened to the speeches of German national socialist politicians on the radio (Kemény, 2019, pp. 174, 203). Besides the above mentioned three foreign languages, several girls even learned Italian (Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, p. 14; Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, p. 33; Kornis, 2002, p. 181).

The girls might not even have learned Hungarian first. Later, however, they were sure to catch up in this field. Thus, they acquired foreign languages as quasi-native tongues, rapidly, easily, confidently, on a high level. For example, Mary Elisabeth Stevens, the English governess working with the Andrássy family, did not start her teaching with lessons but she endeavoured to familiarize the children with the foreign language. She taught them the names of objects in their surroundings along with simple sentences to give them a chance to express what they would like to do. First, she always addressed them in English, then she translated it into French, so that they could practice both languages. She endeavoured to demonstrate whatever she taught with pictures, thereby contributing to easier language acquisition in yet another way. She also liked teaching them poems, and in the evenings, she read aloud (Stevens, 2007, pp. 88–89, 113, 239).

In order to facilitate language learning and enhance erudition, Countess Nóra Lázár invited and hosted German youth in her castle at Meggyesfalva (Mureșeni, today Romania) through a German agency, to provide companionship for their grandchildren (Kornis, 2002, p. 55).

Language command was not only a necessity in foreign countries. In Transylvania, the language of society at the beginning of the 20th century was French, later German. The high nobility living there spoke mostly Hungarian at home, but they frequently mixed foreign words into their sentences (Kornis, 2002, pp. 28, 21).

The governesses also taught the children. For example, Countess Ilona Edelsheim Gyulai – as we could see – learnt school subjects from the Hungarian governess, while the foreign governesses taught her history and arts. Duchess Eugénie Odescalchi was the only girl to study the

<sup>3</sup>About the language learning of the aristocrats see Rébay (2021).



school subjects at home in German and French, while in Hungarian, she only learnt to read and write (Odescalchi, 1987, p. 32). In other families, home tutors proceeded governesses – when the girls grew older (Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, p. 16).

Another important tool for enhancing one's knowledge was reading. The girls could put their erudition to their benefit in social life, as well. Countess Katalin Bánffy, especially, read a lot. She recollected this as follows: *“My parents were especially lenient regarding my readings. My mother held the view that if the book is beautiful and artistic, then I'm welcome to read it. As for my father, when he saw the list of prohibited readings that the nuns had posted [she attended the school run by the sisters of Saint Mary Ward], he only laughed at it. Only one veto existed: “pulp fiction”* (Bánffy, 2010, p. 52). Count Katinka Andrassy's family had a stricter set of rules: every book could only get into the girls' hands after the mother's preliminary censorship; the girls read primarily German and French literature (M. Károlyi, 2011, pp. 22–23).

Rural life taught girls to know and love nature. Countess Ilona Gyulai Edelsheim enjoyed taming and caring for animals. She even possessed the skill to photograph wild animals. She also helped her father catch wild game for sale (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, pp. 23–26).

Thus, aristocratic women's education was not on a low level but differed from that of the men, among whom secondary school studies became common in the 19th century (cf. Wienfort, 2005, pp. 91–92). This difference, however, decreased with time, as higher (higher school for girls or secondary grammar school) studies became more and more typical among girls.

### The temporary, then alternative place of education: the school

Until World War 1, according to Wasson, girls of high nobility very rarely registered into secondary schools, neither as public students nor as private pupils (Wasson, 2006, p. 82). As for their intellectual education, it was much less thorough, rigorous, and purposeful than in the case of boys (Winkelhofer, 2009, pp. 108–109).

According to our sources, school studies did occur among girls of high nobility before 1918: Duchess Eugénie Odescalchi and Countess Katinka Andrassy spent approximately two years in an higher school for girls. These young ladies had extraordinary circumstances in the background: the mother's sickness and the father's death respectively. Neither of them acquired a Matura. According to her own confession, Countess Katinka Andrassy made her governess's life hell. *“Obviously, the best solution would have been to send me to a public school, but at that time in Hungary, out of the girls' schools, only the convent schools possessed the proper quality. However, due to our family's anticlerical views, my father would not send me to such a school under any circumstances.”* (M. Károlyi, 2011, pp. 52–53). Finally, after her father's death, she was registered into school at 14 years of age. First, she was a walk-in student, then a board-in pupil (M. Károlyi, 2011, pp. 85–90).

Duchess Eugénie Odescalchi remarked that for her, only two schools could come into question: the Sacré Coeur Institute at Pressbaum, and the boarding school run by the Salesian Sisters in Vienna. (She was the only girl of high nobility to complete her school studies in German and French; maybe that's why a Budapest location never came into question.) Her mother opted for the latter school because it lay situated closer to the sanatorium where she was treated. Countess Katinka Andrassy, however, chose to attend a school the Notre Dame de Sion institute for girls' education, another school that functioned with a French-speaking 'convictus' (boarding school). She was probably registered into this strict school, which became very



popular in aristocratic circles,<sup>4</sup> due to her difficult-to-discipline nature. Furthermore, her mother thought the ecclesiastical education would improve her matrimonial chances.<sup>5</sup>

The school was unusual for both girls but for different reasons: for Katinka, it was the religiousness, certain rules, the memorising method of learning, whereas for Eugénie, dressing up fast constituted the main difficulty. In spite of all these, both girls felt happy in their school. After the schoolyears, both Eugénie and Katinka continued their home schooling under the guidance of private tutors (the former girl engaging in Hungarian history, literature, constitutional studies, and the latter initially engaged in literature history and history, then commerce studies) (Odescalchi, 1987, pp. 53–61, 74; M. Károlyi, 2011, pp. 85–101, 113, 148).

We can see examples of taking up school studies also among Transylvanian aristocrats. Countess Irma Lázár, who was born in the 1890's just as the above-mentioned girls, studied in the higher school for girls at Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca, today Romania), managed by the famed teacher de Gerando Antonina, which she “immensely enjoyed” (Kornis, 2002, p. 275).

Following World War I – in unison with Wasson's opinion – we can indeed witness the increasing value of school certificates. (And what is more, some of these girls even attended kindergarten [Kornis, 2002, p. 64]!) Primary education frequently proceeded more and more often in schools: at the village elementary school near their castle as well as in elementary schools in towns (Nádasdy, 2008, p. 57, 64; Bánffy, 2010, pp. 40–41; Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, p. 62; Kornis, 2002, pp. 55, 64, 148, 199). For example, Baron János Kemény's children attended a school in Kolozsvár (Kemény, 2019, p. 196).

The girls pursued their education in higher-grade schools; that is, in girls' civic schools or higher schools for girls; then – more and more frequently – in girls' secondary grammar schools, but many of them also attended language master training. Among the Catholics, besides the Notre Dame de Sion Institute of Buda, the schools of Sacré Coeur in Pest were also popular, where the girls registered as private or regular students (Kornis, 2002, pp. 65, 83; cf. Rébay, 2002, pp. 191–192). In these institutes, they could meet acquaintances and relatives – even among the nuns. Girls of high nobility also studied in other secondary grammar schools for girls in Budapest, primarily with the sisters of Saint Mary Ward (Kornis, 2011, pp. 55, 180; Bánffy, 2010, p. 42). Calvinist girls could also study in the Baár-Madas school. Transylvanian girls registered into the Marianum at Kolozsvár, as well, besides the institutes in Budapest (Kornis, 2002, pp. 18, 127, 199, 247, 351). This paints quite a colourful picture, indeed. As for the school regulations, these children, accustomed to freedom, mostly had a hard time familiarizing themselves with them. It seems that the strict daily routine at home gave them more freedom than the school regulations (Nádasdy, 2008, p. 136, 138; Kornis, 2002, pp. 180, 247).

We found several examples for foreign study tours, aimed at perfecting the girls' language command: Baroness Mária Gerliczy and her sister attended secondary schools in Austria, Paris<sup>6</sup> and London. In the latter two cities, they also acquired a language teaching certificate

<sup>4</sup>We will deal with the schools of Sacré Coeur and Notre Dame de Sion within the framework of a separate writing, supported by our empirical research results.

<sup>5</sup>Her younger sister Klára (1898–1941), who was much more adaptable, remained a private student. She took her examinations at the “higher school for girls” (felsőbb leányiskola) in Budapest's District 4 (1911/12 – Class 4) and also in the capital city at the Pálné Veres girls' secondary grammar school of the National Woman Training Society (Országos Nőképző Egyesület) (1912/13, 1913/14 and 1915/16) (Bittera, 2020, p. 10.)

<sup>6</sup>In Pressbaum and Paris, they studied at the Sacré Coeur schools.



(Kornis, 2002, pp. 156–157). Countess Mária Magdolna Windisch-Graetz spent a year in Belgium (Ostende), in the Sacré Coeur school, to study French (I. Károlyi, 2017, p. 59). Two lady members of the Count Apponyi family completed their studies in the Sacré Coeur Institute near Vienna (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, p. 34). The lady members of the Count Nádasdy family also learned languages abroad in the years after World War I (Nádasdy, 2008, p. 20).

Several of the girls painted as a pastime (M. Károlyi, 2011, p. 36); some of them even pursued serious studies in this field – within Hungary or abroad. Katalin Bánffy studied in Tibor Gallé's painting school in Pest; beside this, she also attended a home care course (Bánffy, 2010, pp. 132–134). Countess Ilona Széchenyi first studied painting at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts, then at the Budapest Academy of Fine Arts (Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, p. 46). Countess Erzsébet Teleki was the apprentice of Péter Rátz, a member of the Nagybánya Artist' Colony (Kornis, 2002, p. 149). The Baron Vécsey sisters studied music for years after their schooling under the guidance of a private teacher (Zsoldos, 2014, p. 228).

We found in the sources examined two examples for university studies: Countess Éva Toldalagi studied art history, psychology, and philosophy at Kolozsvár (Kornis, 2002, p. 352), and Baroness Klára Apor first pursued architecture studies, then foreign commerce studies in Vienna, until she was expelled from the occupied Vienna for political reasons. Following this, she worked as a German, French and English translator in Budapest. However, she herself also remarked that *“the working lady's role was as yet unknown in the world of our Park Club [the aristocracy's popular casino].<sup>7</sup> Sometimes, after a difficult workday, I tried my best to appear fresh on the cocktail and the balls, since in principle, that was the place where I was supposed to find a husband. It was beyond my understanding why my mother forbade me to talk about studies, career, let alone work, considering that even in the Viennese aristocratic circles, young people diligently planned their future.”* (quoted from Kornis, 2002, pp. 56–57). Klára Apor wanted to become a diplomat, so she attended lectures at the Institute of Foreign Affairs, and she spent the summer of 1943 at the University of Lausanne with a scholarship (Kornis, 2002, pp. 56–57). However, Countess Ilona Andrassy (1917–1990) wanted to become a doctor, but her parents did not allow her to start her university studies. Instead, after graduating from the Sacré Coeur girls' secondary grammar school in Pest in 1937, she worked as an unpaid intern in a ceramic factory. During the Second World War she worked as a nurse. After 1945 she had to work for a living (Erdős, 2015, pp. 91–97).

Between the two world wars, a few of these girls foresightedly – counting on the deterioration of their financial and social status – acquired a degree in some kind of a trade: Baroness Mónika Huszár completed a stenographer and typist school (Kornis, 2002, p. 181), while Baroness Mária Atzél studied to become a seamstress – at the same time attending the secondary grammar school (Kornis, 2002, p. 83). Countess Krisztina-Zsófia Károlyi attended a husbandry school at Kiskunfélegyháza (Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, p. 94). Countess Éva Toldalagi registered into a nurse-training course besides the university – these were already the World War years. When the battles ceased, she travelled to Pest, where she studied stenography and typing. Her husband was in captivity, so she would have needed a livelihood (Kornis, 2002, pp. 352–353).

<sup>7</sup>One of the rare cases is that of Count Geraldine Apponyi, later the Albanian queen, who worked at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest probably for financial reasons. She sold catalogues and cards (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, p. 34).



Before World War I, all this was still rather surprising. It was after her first ball season that Countess Katinka Andrassy came up with the idea of preparing for the business school exam providing a bookkeeper and store manager qualification that entailed a three-year-study, due to the lack of a Matura. With these endeavours she hoped to secure her independence. To her greatest surprise, her parents did not go against this utterly unusual decision; they hired a university student to help her, who taught her mathematics, among other things. Finally, she never took the exam; she got married, and thus no longer needed to prepare for her coveted independent life (M. Károlyi, 2011, pp. 147–152).

### The contents of education

Therefore, a general erudition as a result of the girls' studies remained important because they were expected to conduct witty and charming conversations in the world of salons, on the occasions of the frequent soirées (Winkelhofer, 2009, pp. 108–109). As Countess Mária Magdolna Windisch-Graetz remarked: *"We were kept very strictly, we had to take schools and studying very seriously, as well as languages, music, etc. My parents' house was always full of interesting people, so this way, we could absorb culture and tradition; thus, we had a first-rate education."* (I. Károlyi, 2017, p. 42). Countess Erzsébet Nádasdy also corroborated the significance of learning through conversations: *"In those times, the child only spoke when asked, and then they had to give a sensible answer; they couldn't moan and groan, shrugging their shoulders. Thus, among the adults, the children observed them, listened to what they said and learned from their talk. And they even formed their own opinion."* (Nádasdy, 2008, p. 46).

In Baron Huszár's family, the parents subscribed to newspapers for their children: separately for the boys and the girls (Kornis, 2002, p. 177). The children in Count Kornis's family read the newspapers titled *Magyar Lányok* (Hungarian Girls) and *Cimbora* (a famous children's literature magazine) (Kornis, 2002, p. 247). This offered one more way to extend their knowledge.

The girls also engaged in arts. Those living in cities frequented museums, theatres and concerts already at a relatively young age (Stevens, 2007, pp. 278, 126, 278, 315; M. Károlyi, 2011, p. 23; Odescalchi, 1987, pp. 30, 35, 57; Kornis, 2002, p. 275). They learnt to play the piano (Nádasdy, 2008, p. 85; Stevens, 2007, p. 151; Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, pp. 22–23; Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, p. 37).<sup>8</sup> Some of them improved their knowledge at a music conservatory (Kornis, 2002, p. 82). Some of them – as we have mentioned before – studied painting, but this was not very frequent, the reason being that these families only employed a private tutor in this art in case of an apparent talent (Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, p. 24).

Countess Mária Magdolna Windisch-Graetz writes about her grandmother, born Countesse Valerie Dessewffy (1843–1912): *"She was an extraordinarily talented woman. She played the piano, composed music, painted and sculpted wonderfully well. If she had lived in our world, she surely would have become a renowned artist. As it is, in her age, ladies were confined to their family and society, and thus, the various talents and interests that they had were frittered away."* (I. Károlyi, 2017, p. 48). Countess Ilona Károlyi Széchenyi, however, who was born in 1898, managed to accomplish all this: she became a professional painter (Károlyi Széchenyi, 2005, p. 7).

<sup>8</sup>The Edelsheim Gyulai sisters learned piano as children, but they didn't like their teacher, so their parents agreed to stop quit early. Ilona later practiced for pleasure and even acquired pieces (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, p. 37).



As we could see, in the girls' education, their parents placed the main emphasis on languages and liberal arts education, including arts. However, they also considered practical skills as important. For example, girls of high nobility had to know how to manage a large household. And what is more, slowly maturing enough to be married off, Countess Katinka Andrassy also gained some insight into the mysteries of cooking and baking, in accordance with her mother's wishes. For example, she was assigned the task of coordinating the next day's menu with the chief cook (M. Károlyi, 2011, pp. 112–123). Other girls also recounted how they learned to cook and do gardening. Baroness Éva Bethlen even had to learn how to process the meat gained from the pig slaughter (Kornis, 2002, p. 127). In Baron Huszár's family, every girl had their own vegetable and flower garden. And in the wintertime, they had to help the gardeners in the greenhouse with the flowers. They also had to learn to weave, spin, and do needlework (Kornis, 2002, pp. 175, 177). In the Edelsheim Gyulai family, the girls learned to sew, but they could not set foot into the kitchen; their parents deemed cooking skills to be unnecessary for them in their adulthood (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, p. 33).

Physical education and outdoors recreation also played an important role in the girls' lives, but it is not clear whether the life reform movement played a role in this, alongside the rural lifestyle. When they were younger, they went for regular walks (Stevens, 2007, p. 231), played catch-me-if-you-can, ran in competition, and bathed (Nádasdy, 2008, p. 71). The Windisch-Graetz countesses learnt to ride horses, play tennis, ride the bicycle, swim and row. In the winter, they rode the sleigh, skied, and skated (I. Károlyi, 2017, pp. 42, 56). The Count and Countess Károlyi even built a natatorium for their children, they also rowed, played tennis, and rode horses (I. Károlyi, 2017, pp. 61–62). Other people also recounted these girls' tennis, swimming and primarily, equestrian skills (Bánffy, 2010, pp. 22, 39–40; Nádasdy, 2008, p. 31; M. Károlyi, 2011, pp. 46, 77; Odescalchi, 1987, pp. 47, 69, 107; Károlyi Széchenyi, 2011, pp. 17, 24, 51; Kornis, 2002, pp. 177, 179, 247). Countess Ilona Edelsheim Gyulai proved far more courageous and skilful than her sisters, so she dedicated a lot more time to sports. She rode well, skated, skied, and later she also learned to fly. She loved wandering in nature, showing an interest in the animal world (Edelsheim Gyulai, 2001, pp. 23–26, 41, 56).

Many of the girls attended dance lessons, already acquiring the basics during their children's balls (Bánffy, 2010, 48; I. Károlyi, 2017, p. 57; Stevens, 2007, 331; Odescalchi, 1987, p. 37). The older girls in the Transylvanian families went onto excursions into the mountains in the summertime (Kornis, 2002, p. 157).

Countess Katinka Andrassy's mother placed a great emphasis on a healthy lifestyle: the girls had to brush their teeth three times a day for three minutes each; in the morning, they had to take a 15 °C bath and in the evening, a 20 °C bath. They also practiced the Kneipp-cure. Following John Locke's principles, they were always dressed very flimsily. All year round, they were forbidden to wear stockings and gloves, in order to strengthen their physique (M. Károlyi, 2011, p. 25–26).

The importance of religion varied among the aristocrats: two extremes were the Count Andrassy and the Duke Odescalchi family. Eugénie received regular classes from a religion instructor after she reached the age of 6, while the Andrassy girls only attended church on Sundays because they had to show a good example to the village's residents, but they weren't religious (Odescalchi, 1987, pp. 31, 68; M. Károlyi, 2011, p. 89). In the Baron Vécsey family analysed by Zsoldos, education was Catholic, as in the Odescalchi family. In the last decades of the 19th century, the girls attended Catholic convent schools (Sacré Coeur in Vienna and Pest),





and after her work as a lady-in-waiting, Maria herself became a nun and also worked as a teacher (Zsoldos, 2015, p. 118).

One thing that was mostly missing from the girls' instruction was sexual education: "*Girls in families of high nobility grew up like birds in cages, under the supervision of governesses who had served the families for generations. Before their marriage, the girls were not left unattended for a single minute, they did not know anything about life. They believed, indeed, that storks bring the children.*" (Kuylenstierna-Andrássy, 2015, p. 21).

## SUMMARY

In summary, while before World War I, in Hungary, just as in other countries, girls of high nobility were typically educated at home, focusing on foreign languages and liberal arts instruction, but also attaching importance to physical exercise and allowing for artistic studies, following this era, we can witness an enhancement in the girls' education level: they engaged in secondary school studies, either as private or regular students, and some of them even went on to study at academies or universities. Thus, the wariness towards public schools (see Stekl, 2004, p. 72) gradually vanished. As appropriate study venues, very few institutions were acceptable – mainly in Budapest. Only a few girls attended schools abroad; these girls most likely registered into one of the Sacré Coeur schools for girls' education. This attitude shift first occurred in Transylvania, which became a part of Romania. In the increasingly difficult political and economic situation, being able to receive and entertain guests – just as Baroness Gizella Kemény did it – no longer sufficed. The Matura or a professional skill, such as a language teacher's degree, seemed to be a safe investment. (What is more, even for the daughters of the middle class, this tendency started to become the norm.) Keeping this in mind, the aristocracy guarded their traditions, their countryside lifestyle, and the advantages originating from home schooling. Most of the girls were raised in bubble, in a sheltered world, and as Countess Mária Magdolna Windisch-Graetz put it, lived in comfort and safety, and they still had enough time to live (Windisch-Graetz, 2017, p. 263). Keeping a strict distance between children and their parents increasingly loosened up. A strict but loving treatment became typical. The role that different pedagogical (such as reform pedagogical) and psychological trends (such as behaviorism) played in this change in this basically conservative, traditional social stratum is difficult to pinpoint.

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