

*The Symbolic Role of Hungarian Noble Architecture in the Late 19<sup>th</sup>  
Century: A case study of the Andrassy and Károlyi families' country  
houses (Betlér and Nagykároly)*

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## Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to examine the symbolic and practical functions of the country house for the Hungarian aristocracy in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period of major social and political reforms. In my understanding, the country house was a tool in the display of power for the aristocracy and its architecture had symbolic meanings. Therefore, I build my first argument on the concept of *architecture parlante*.

However, primarily a home, the country house was subordinated to the practical needs of living (such as comfort and privacy) which were organized according to the newest technological developments. This is my second argument. Thus, this paper deals with the investigation and interpretation of the seemingly contradictory character of the country houses: permanent dialog with the past and modern design. In order to investigate and understand the way country houses fulfilled the symbolic and practical tasks I shall be looking at the spatial structure of the buildings, their interiors and the architectural morphology through art historical and social historical analysis and with the help of contemporary photographs and newspaper description. The most important sources in my analysis are the buildings themselves.

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## Introduction

The view of a country house for some people is pleasing; others immediately turn into Bolsheviks. Few people go further and think about family history, architectural style and architect. Even fewer investigate the way country houses were used, their social milieu and the symbolism behind them. Those under the spell of the “old times” find a separate little world around the country house, which however is not independent from the society and offers a promising field of investigation for cultural, social and art historians.

In the present thesis I would like to examine the symbolic and practical functions of the country house for the Hungarian aristocracy in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period of major social and political reforms. The role of the country house as a status symbol was vital for the aristocracy. It was a *sine qua non* of aristocratic membership, in many cases ownership of a country house was the condition of the title.<sup>1</sup> This situation did not change significantly even at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the structure of the society was changing and their top position was contested. In my understanding, the country house was a tool in the display of power for the aristocracy and its architecture had symbolic meanings. However, primarily a home, the country house was subordinated to the practical needs of living as well, such as comfort, which were organized according to the newest technological developments. The main problem that this paper deals with is the investigation and interpretation of the seemingly contradictory character of the country houses: permanent dialog with the past and modern design.

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<sup>1</sup> Ede Badál, *Kastélyok, kúriák Pest, Heves és Nógrád megyében* (Country Houses and Manor House in Pest, Heves and Nógrád Counties) (Budapest, 1987).

The research on country houses offers a good ground of analysis of the life of the aristocracy. This potential was first realized by Marc Girouard in his famous book, *Life in the English country house*.<sup>2</sup> Girouard offered a model for combining visual and written sources, and he drew exemplarily vivid pictures of the aristocracy's everyday life through the survey of country houses of the past five centuries. With the use of primary sources (family archives, literature, building plans and photographs) combined with the description of individual buildings and of social events Girouard looked into the social arrangements that shaped the plan of the country house. He is an architectural historian, but as the title of the book suggests he built on social historical approaches as well, being the first to write about the inner dynamics of the country house and about the activities not only of the owners but also of the servants. The book offers a valuable model for the critical use of literary and visual sources. After his book about English country houses, Girouard came up with its French equivalent, *Life in the French Country House*.<sup>3</sup> The two main models for aristocracy in their domestic building activity were the French and the English. By writing these books Girouard offered not just a ground for the comparison of the two, but also a chance for analyzing the influence of these models on the Hungarian country house. Based on a structure similar to his first book the author surveyed the life and living space of the French aristocracy with social insight and architectural connoisseurship.

If Mark Girouard provides a basic reading for the architectural history of the country houses, then Peter Thornton is a must for interior design.<sup>4</sup> *Authentic décor: The domestic interior 1620-1920* gives a detailed picture of the domestic interiors in Western Europe of three centuries. Each part of the book contains subheadings, which offer a survey of the general

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: a social and architectural history*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> Mark Girouard, *Life in the French Country House*, London: Cassell. 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Thornton, *Authentic décor: The domestic interior 1620-1920*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985).

architectural and artistic development, the planning and arrangement and finally the interior architecture and furnishing. What makes the book important for my thesis is the way Thornton utilizes visual images: he uses only illustrations from the time because only those can be considered authentic; no room survived in the way it was first designed. Aside from this, the text is rich in contemporary publications about interior design, which help me grasp the range of the contemporary aspirations.

In Hungary the research about country houses started in the 1930s with the work of Jenő Rados<sup>5</sup> and was continued by the book of József Biró<sup>6</sup>. The importance of both these books lies in the fact that their authors saw and photo-documented the chosen country houses in their original use and with original interior decoration. Although Rados and Biró limited their research to circa hundred buildings and did not concentrate on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their contribution is crucial for the country house research. The interest in country houses of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century developed in the beginning of the 1980s, thanks to Dénes Komárik and Anna Zádor.<sup>7</sup> The synthesis of the Hungarian country house architecture, however, is linked with the name of József Sisa, who, before publishing his opus on the subject wrote numerous articles.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jenő Rados, *Magyar kastélyok* (Hungarian Country Houses), (Budapest: Műemlékek Országos Bizottsága, 1939, c1931)

<sup>6</sup> József Biró, *Erdélyi kastélyok* (Transylvanian Country Houses), (Budapest: Új idők, 1997 [c1943])

<sup>7</sup> Dénes Komárik, “A romantikus kastélyépítészeti kezdetei Magyarországon” (The beginnings of romantic country house building in Hungary) in *Építés-Építészettudomány* 7 (1975, 3-4): pp. 341-451; Anna Zádor, *A klasszicizmus és romantika építészete Magyarországon* (Revival architecture in Hungary: classicism and romanticism) (Budapest: Corvina, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> Just to mention a few: József Sisa, “A vépi volt Erdődy-kastély Vas megyében” (The former Erdődy country house at Vép in Vas county), in *Műemlékvédelem* 21 (1977, 3): pp. 170-172; József Sisa, “Adalékok a magyarországi romantikus kastélyépítészethez” (Addendum to the Hungarian romantic country house building) in *Ars Hungarica* 8. (1980): pp. 103-125; *The Architecture of Historic Hungary* (ed. Dora Wiebenson and József Sisa). Cambridge, Massachusetts - London, England, 1998. chs. 7, 8; József Sisa “English Influence on Hungarian Romantic Architecture.” *The New Hungarian Quarterly*. 23 (1982, 87): pp. 182-185; József Sisa, “Der Schlossbau in Ungarn im 19. Jahrhundert” (Country House Architecture in Hungary in the 19th Century) In *Arx, Burgen und Schlösser in Bayern, Österreich und Südtirol* 9 (1987): pp. 203-207.

*Kastélyépítészet és kastélykultúra Magyarországon: A historizmus kora*<sup>9</sup> is central for my thesis, because it is an up-to-date and the most in-depth study of the Hungarian country house architecture. The author is an art historian, but influenced by Girouard, he tried to analyze the subject from the perspective of social history as well. The book is a pioneering work in its field and its richness in data (list of architects, buildings grouped according to different criteria, listed sources and detailed bibliography) makes it a brilliant starting point for my research about the Hungarian aristocracy and their country houses.

It is important to analyze not just the exterior and the interiors but also the spatial structures of the country houses. Csaba J. Fekete is an architect who is dealing with the development of representative spaces in aristocratic buildings. In his doctoral dissertation<sup>10</sup> he focused on the changes in the interior of the country house. He concentrated on the effect of the transformations in taste on the structure of the space within the building. The new functions opposing the traditions, the private vs. semi-public character of the country house and the place of the rooms within the building are just a few criteria given by Csaba J. Fekete. His work offers fresh methods and approaches for the present study.

Needless to say, parks are equally important in the context of country house building; they have always been part of the aristocratic life-style. The unity between nature and architecture is even more pronounced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the English garden was in

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9 József Sisa, *Kastélyépítészet és kastélykultúra Magyarországon: A historizmus kora* (Country House-Building and Country House Culture in Hungary: The age of historicism) (Budapest: Vince Kiadó, 2007).

10 Csaba J. Fekete, *Funkciószervezés és téralakítás a reprezentatív főúri magánépítészetben az 1720 és 1920 közötti Magyarországon* (Function Constitution and Space Conversion in Representative Private Architecture in Hungary between 1720-1920), PhD dissertation submitted to the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Department for History of Architecture and Monuments, 2007.



vogue. Although it is not central for the present study, the landscape gardening will also receive attention.<sup>11</sup>

My thesis builds on the assumption that architecture does convey a meaning. Since Ledoux, the concept of *architecture parlante* is often used in the art historical works, referring to buildings which with their overall architectural form as well as with their carefully calculated rhetorical power of ornamental elements speak explicitly of the structure's purpose or function; it is in search for symbolic forms. There is a large amount of works dealing with the architectural style of public buildings and the social message they convey, especially as far as national styles are concerned.<sup>12</sup> The *architecture parlante* can be identified in domestic architecture as well, and for this the country houses offer a fruitful opportunity. Opportunity which, although appearing sporadically in the above mentioned works, was not explored fully. The examination of this side of country house architecture can contribute to a better understanding of why these buildings evoke certain feelings and reactions. More importantly, by answering the questions of how country houses speak and what do they say, one can understand the symbolic importance of this building type, which had a special role for the Hungarian aristocracy in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century modernity.

My paper will deal with two country houses of two renowned families, but not on a comparative basis. When discussing Hungarian aristocracy one needs to keep in mind the regional differences between them, which manifest in their political views and in their economic situation. In this way the first reason why the Károlyi and Andrassy families are representative

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<sup>11</sup> A survey of the English garden is given by Adrian von Buttlar: *Az angolkert* (The English Garden)- Géza Galavics, *Magyarországi angolkertek* (English Gardens in Hungary) (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1999)

<sup>12</sup> Especially interesting are Akos Moravánszky, *Competing visions: aesthetic invention and social imagination in Central European architecture, 1867-1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, c1998); Anthony Alofsin, *When buildings speak : architecture as language in the Habsburg Empire and its aftermath, 1867-1933* (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 2006)

for the North-East Hungarian aristocracy The Károlyi family's country house building activity is impressive: within a period of less than hundred years they built or modified more than ten country houses.<sup>13</sup> The Andrassy family was not less active in this sense. The country house in Nagykároly was the family nest, while the building in Betlér was used mainly for recreational purposes. Thus at the same time it is possible to see a permanent residence and a summer/autumn residence, the accents of analysis in the case of the first being on the symbolic function, and on the comfort function on the latter case. For this analysis these two buildings are suitable. First because the style of the Károlyi country house fits into the architectural trend of the period, which had the primary role of the display of power; secondly, the interior furnishing of the Andrassy building was kept until nowadays, and has an impressive number (twelve) of bathrooms.

Such an analysis has two approaches: a social historical one looking at the role of the country house as a form of communication of the aristocracy; and an art historical approach which looks at the development of a building type taking into consideration the architectural forms as a manifestation of the owner's and the architect's vision. The phenomena of revivalism and eclecticism, the self-conscious examination of historical category of style in architecture will be examined as a product of a great revolution in the state of historical knowledge and of technological modernity. In order to investigate and understand the way country houses fulfilled the symbolic and practical tasks I shall be looking at the spatial structure of the buildings, (room arrangement within the plan, the relation of the rooms to each other) their interiors and the architectural morphology (the analysis of architectural forms).

The most important sources in my analysis are the buildings themselves, they are the object of the analysis. However, since both country houses underwent certain modifications and

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<sup>13</sup> Sisa 2007, p. 20

changes in function the examination would be impossible without original plans and contemporary images.<sup>14</sup> The latter are especially important in the discussion of the interiors, because these are the most fragile parts of a country house. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century collecting postcards was in vogue among well-to-do individuals. Thanks to this we have many illustrations of churches, villages, fortresses, country houses and sometimes the interiors, although this is rare. The enthusiasts of this hobby even commissioned photographers to make pictures suitable for postcards. The collection of Countess Teleki, Júlia Kende (1864-1937) is especially valuable for country house research, because her collection – comprising of more than 1500 postcards - specializes in this kind of buildings.<sup>15</sup> The collections of János Keglevich and of the photographer György Klösz are indispensable to the research.

Other significant sources are memoirs and contemporary newspapers. Both offer a good ground for the interpretation of architectural forms, since they were written by the users or the visitor. They often compensate for the limitations of other sources, thus offering a sense of the atmosphere, colour and usage of spaces. Naturally the interpretation of the sources will be made in view of the social context. The demonstration of my arguments will be supported not only by the rather descriptive art historical methodology, but also by sociological inquiries.

The thesis has three sections. The first one gives the frame of interpretation addressing the issue of how the building can convey symbolic message. A definition of the aristocracy and of the country house follows, placed in the context of the relevant literature. Also here a presentation of the social, economic and political situation of the Hungarian aristocracy will be given – a situation which was closely linked with the function of the country houses to stand for the authority and social power of the owner.

<sup>14</sup> Ibolya Erdei, *A gróf Károlyi család nagykárolyi kastélya*, (The Károly Family's Country House at Nagykároly), BA thesis submitted to the Babes-Bolyai University Cluj Napoca, History-Art History Department, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Hilda Horváth, *Régvolt magyar kastélyok* (Olden Hungarian Country Houses) (Budapest: Gemini, 1998), p. 7.

The core of my thesis consists of two main parts. Building on previous studies and examining the country houses I argue that the exterior of the buildings fulfilled the role of representation, of display of power. To this function certain features in the interior contributed as well, like the staircase or the reception hall. To demonstrate this I will put my analysis in the context of historicism, which as a by now accepted and researched architectural style offers a useful frame of interpretation for the architectural polyglotism. Looking at the country house as a whole in its surrounding and also by identifying the emblematic architectural elements I hope to explain the aristocracy's passion for historical styles.

The practical functions of the country house, to provide the best living conditions, are addressed in the next section. The general framework of this part is given by the 19<sup>th</sup> century modernization and technological innovation as well as by the quest for comfort. The main examination points are the size-function-location relationship of the different rooms and the increased importance put on hygiene. As identified in contemporary descriptions and on postcards the interior of these buildings is overwhelmed with furniture and decorative objects. This phenomenon, in my opinion can rather be put in the context of individualism and subjectivity than in the context of historicism.

This study is positioned at the junction of art and architectural history with social history and I am hoping to shed light on the links between the architectural language and social representation. Although the paper is based on case studies, the results of the investigation are illustrative for the whole Hungarian aristocracy. This approach and interpretational framework has its limitations and it does not do full justice to the social significance of the country house. However, it is intended to offer a new perspective.

## The Quest for Meaning

### *The Symbolic Meaning of Architectural Forms*

The reason why people think with admiration, curiosity, romantic feelings or with resentment about an olden country house surrounded by a nice park is that they associate the building with a certain social order, a certain way of life – the country house means something to them. The role of the country house as a status symbol for the aristocracy is without question. However, it is more interesting to investigate why the building can induce such feelings, how it is possible to have such a suggestive power.

The architecture as a source of evidence has been studied and used by art historians, archaeologists, historians of architecture, art sociologist and historians as well. For some writers, architecture - like all the arts - is an emanation of the *Zeitgeist*. For others, it should be understood as an expression of the underlying social order, or as an aspect of deep culture. Still others would interpret it as a self-contained sign system, with its own grammar, syntax, and ways of meaning. What unites these approaches, however, is the idea that architecture can be understood by analogy to language: a ‘code’ capable to communicate the architect’s ‘intentions’ to the users of their buildings. They have been applying different approaches and different methods, one thing however is common: they all tend to interpret the meaning of architecture by “reading” it.

From the perspective of art history, architecture as a form of art is capable to manipulate, to mean with its aesthetic characteristics; that is, it fits to a certain culture's beauty ideals and aesthetic value-system and has an imprint on the viewer with its technical, visual quality. Art history has developed discourses and tools particularly relating to representation, image construction, and visual narrative.<sup>16</sup> Peter Burke is exploring the value of images for historical analysis since "images can bear witness to what is not put into words." The most important approach in art history, the evaluation of the iconographical approach, is presented as a process of deciphering visual texts.<sup>17</sup> This is one way of interpreting architecture, but not the only one.

A more favourable approach to interpreting architecture is offered from the side of the sociology of art. In her book *Meaning and Expression: Toward a sociology of art*, Hanna Deinhard gives the defining features of a sociology of art. She argues that "the point of departure of the sociology of art is the question: How is it possible that works of art, which always originate as products of human activity within a particular time and society and for a particular time, society, or function - even though they are not necessarily produced as 'works of art' - can live beyond their time and seem expressive and meaningful in completely different epochs and societies?" And more importantly "how can the age and society that produced them be recognized in the works?"<sup>18</sup> Sociologists tend to consider art, and thus architecture as a language which is built up by diverse layers of communication. According to Deinhard all works of art include both "meaning" and "expression" as elements. "Meaning" is variable, independent of the visual aspect of a work of art (aesthetic, religious, philosophical or political), while "expression"

<sup>16</sup>Alina A. Payne, "Architectural History and the History of Arts," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58 (1999): p. 296.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The use of images a historical evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), Chapter Two.

<sup>18</sup> Hanna Deinhard, *Meaning and Expression: Toward a sociology of art*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 3.

is identified with the visual features of the work.<sup>19</sup> These two contribute to the timelessness of art, that is, it can be recognized as a product of a certain historical reality. Let us say we neglect the problems around what ‘historical reality’ is; still, we can not find *how* architecture can be interpreted from this approach. The methodological issues seem to be ignored.

Other sociologists go further and admit the difficulty of visual semiotics, trying to put them in context. We can not adequately understand any form of communication in a vacuum: “The attempt to develop a semiotics of buildings is rather like trying to understand the organization of language through a study of proper nouns.”<sup>20</sup> This inevitably leads to an incomplete and partial perspective on the phenomenon. Since “architecture is the par excellence instrument among the set of activities of the human,” the solution Preziosi offers is to look at architecture as a tool, a media through which thoughts, ideas and feelings are represented in a culture.<sup>21</sup> Representation is therefore central to the process by which meaning is produced. In Latin *representatio* means illustrating, in English and French the word ‘representation’ carries the meaning of a visual or conceptual image, a symbol or a metaphor.<sup>22</sup> In Hungarian the word ‘reprezentáció’ has a meaning of ‘reflection’ of something. The metaphors of representation are usually connected with the political power, a system of allegories, symbols which are created with the primary role of persuasion. Etiquette handbooks, portraiture, ceremonies, court pageantry and architecture all served the purpose of propaganda and legitimation.<sup>23</sup> Thus since the Middle Ages a specific imagery came to birth which supported the *power representation*. Because this art imagery belongs to the ruler or ruling group it automatically becomes the

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<sup>19</sup> Deinhard, p. 1-3.

<sup>20</sup> Donald Preziosi, *Architecture, Language and Meaning: The origins of the built world and its semiotic organization* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), pp. 1-3.

<sup>21</sup> Preziosi, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Allan Ellenius (ed.), *Iconography, Propaganda and Legitimation* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Ellenius, p. 3.

equivalent of supreme quality. Now art, as a system of signs, embodies the various cultural values of specific historical milieu.<sup>24</sup> Still, the question remains: *how?*

The idea that architecture conveyed social, intellectual and political meaning goes back to the eighteenth century. As early as 1752, the Comte de Caylus had suggested that the arts “present a picture of the morals and spirit of a century,” but was unable to develop the general insight into a more systematic theory.<sup>25</sup> A milestone in architectural history was Johann Joachim Winkelmann’s *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1763), where he argued that a piece of art is an index of the spirit of the time in which it was produced. However, the term *Zeitgeist* is connected with the name of Hegel, who developed the idea further. Since then through Wölfflin, Pevesner and Panovsky architectural styles were presumed to be indicative of social, intellectual and political developments.<sup>26</sup> According to these pioneering summaries gothic architecture was the expression of scholasticism; baroque and mannerism of Counter-Reformation and “Queen Anne” revival of middle-class identity.<sup>27</sup> Here one can already notice a next step in reading buildings: each architectural style was analogous to a language. However, as John Summers warned, the dangers of this approach lies in “seeking total consistency through all fields of intellectual, social and spiritual activity” and “concentrating on theoretically constructed types” instead of individuals and facts.<sup>28</sup> A next stage was the structuralist approach to architectural history, which was based on the assumption that architecture was a “sign-system” similar to written language and while this reading was present earlier in a metaphoric sense, now it was

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<sup>24</sup> Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holy, Keith Moxey, *Visual Culture. Images and Interpretation* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, c1994), p. xvi.

<sup>25</sup> Jeremy Tanner (ed.), *The Sociology of Art: a reader* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 6..

<sup>26</sup> Tanner, p. 6-7.

<sup>27</sup> Ervin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (New York: Meridian Books, c1957); Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* London: Penguin Books, 1990); Marc Girouard, *Sweetness and Light: The “Queen Anne” movement 1860-1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University press, 1984)

<sup>28</sup> David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, c1977), p. 6-7.



understood literally.<sup>29</sup> The units of buildings (doors, windows, walls, pillars) were seen as words. Unfortunately, neither the art sociological nor the semiotic analysis can offer a satisfying answer to how buildings mean. They both propose an aspect which can be useful, but both tend to ignore the multidimensionality of architecture. The post-structuralist approach seems to be the closest to the understanding of architectural meaning. They acknowledged the importance of the uses, by stressing the significance of space, and by emphasizing the ambiguities of architectural meaning.<sup>30</sup> The until now forgotten question of authorship and reception also came to the forefront and by adding it to the analysis they hoped to understand the meaning of the building.

One might notice that in spite of all debates, different approaches and explanations there seem to be a common agreement that architecture does convey meaning and this meaning can be interpreted. The metaphor of reading (literally or broadly speaking) is applied by all. However, it is not that buildings can not be understood as texts, but their very materiality differentiates them from other kinds of texts. Architecture had always had a special position within arts: it was three dimensional and primarily it served a functional role, next to an aesthetic one. Thus on the Vitruvian “triangle” *function* and *structure* support *beauty*. This function acknowledged, Nelson Goodman tries to give an answer to how buildings can mean. An important point is made by him is: “architectural works [...] are seldom descriptive or representational. With some interesting exceptions, architectural works do not denote - that is, do not describe, recount, depict, or portray. They mean, if at all, in other ways.”<sup>31</sup> He groups the verbs used in texts referring to buildings into four categories: “denotation”, “exemplification”, “expression” and “mediated

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<sup>29</sup> Geoffrey Broadbent, “A Plain Man’s Guide to the Theory of Signs in Architecture,” in *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965–1995*, ed. Kate Nesbitt (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996): p. 124-140.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Ballantyne, *Architecture theory: a Reader in Philosophy and Culture synopsis*, (2005), p. 231-242.

<sup>31</sup> Nelson Goodman, “How Buildings Mean,” *Critical Inquiry* 11 No. 4 (June, 1985): p. 642.

reference.”<sup>32</sup> The first means a depiction of something, a representation of it. The best example of this is the Sydney Opera House, where the aim of the architect was to represent sailboats. Reference by a building to properties possessed either literally or metaphorically is “exemplification,” but exemplification of metaphorically possessed properties is what he calls “expression”.<sup>33</sup> One needs to make a difference between literally descriptions and metaphorical descriptions. While some descriptions may be false literally (A gothic cathedral that sings), they can be true metaphorically. The metaphorical meaning of a building is delivered by “mediated references,” that is a chain of shorter or longer reference links. For example if a castle represents a tower, which in turn exemplifies forms of medieval rule and next rule is connected with power, than castles may refer to power.

On these layers of communication a building can express metaphorical meaning(s) through its iconography, ornamentation. Nevertheless, a building is primarily a building and at the end it *represents* only itself. That it can make reference to, or *symbolize* people, concepts, ideologies or beliefs is not any more the problem of linguistic, but of historical methodology.

Every history student is aware of the fact that sources, data, facts, events, every information has to be put in context. Without it art and event analysis remain largely a descriptive exercise, rather than explanatory one in which it is possible to highlight aspects of the relationship between art and society.

For analysing architecture a useful approach is suggested by William Whyte.<sup>34</sup> He emphasizes the importance of multiple focuses in this process, since – as mentioned before – the meaning of architecture is multidimensional. Thus, the evolution of the building is important

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<sup>32</sup> Nelson Goodman, p. 644.

<sup>33</sup> Nelson Goodman, p. 647.

<sup>34</sup> William Whyte, “How Do Buildings Mean? Some issues of interpretation in the history of architecture,” *History and Theory* 45 (May 2006): p. 153-177.

from its design and construction to its use. The meaning of the building is formed through a number of overlapping stages. These stages are assessed by Whyte as “translations”. The first stage is occupied by the architect(s), followed by draftsmen or engineers.<sup>35</sup> During these phases the buildings original conception might change (one or more times). Once the building is erected, its purpose, decoration, etc. might still change, as its inhabitants’ taste transforms. Accordingly, the study of personal lives and more importantly the examination of the relationship between environment and building placed in a cultural context are needed.<sup>36</sup> Next is the inspection of visual representations about the building (in painting, drawings, prints, etc.) followed by written sources as these give an insight to how buildings were interpreted by contemporaries or previous historians.<sup>37</sup> The historian’s job is to do the “translation”. “This is about translation: about the way in which an initial concept is translated from idea to plan, from plan to drawing, from drawing to building, from building to use, and from use to interpretation by users and viewers.”<sup>38</sup> Of course, just like translation, this process can only be understood in its context: “More than any other art, architecture makes us aware that [its] interpretation [...] has to be put together from a heterogeneous assortment of visual and kinesthetic experiences: from views at different distances and angles, from walks through the interior, from climbing stairs and straining necks, from photographs, miniature models, sketches, plans, and from actual use.”<sup>39</sup> The meaning of the buildings then can be found in the study of the transpositions: how an architect translates his/her vision into the design, how this design is modified according to the needs of the commissioner, how the users embody their values in the building, etc. In the examination of these transpositions in the present thesis the accent is put on the role played by the aristocrats.

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<sup>35</sup> Whyte, p. 170.

<sup>36</sup> Whyte, p. 171.

<sup>37</sup> Whyte, p. 172.

<sup>38</sup> Whyte, p. 172.

<sup>39</sup> Nelson Goodman, p. 650.

## *The Social Position of the Hungarian Aristocracy in the Second Part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

“In 1909 I was at Karlsbad spa with my relative, Leopold Berchtold<sup>40</sup>. One day Tardieu<sup>41</sup> asked Berchtold:

- In fact what nationality do you consider yourself? German, Hungarian or Czech? Because Austrian nationality does not exist.
- I am Viennese - answered Berchtold.
- But what side would you take if there would be a conflict between the peoples of the Monarchy?
- The side of the Emperor.
- And if the empire would cease to exist? - insisted on Tardieu.
- I would still remain what I am: an aristocrat.”<sup>42</sup>

There is an ongoing discussion in the historiography of elites about who they are, what role they have in society, what the difference between political and power elite is, how their social reproduction functions, etc.<sup>43</sup> One thing, however, is agreed: the aristocracy was the oldest, most prominent elite in society until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Certain core features of the aristocracy can be noted and a useful definition is given by historian Ellis Wasson.<sup>44</sup> Its main characteristic was to see itself as separate from and superior to the rest of the society, thus upholding a special group identity. The aristocracy had a compact basis consisting of a small circle of great families whose members constantly occupied the top positions in the

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<sup>40</sup> Count Leopold Berchtold (1863-1942), diplomat, foreign minister of the monarchy (1912-1915), he was considered one of the richest landowner in Austria-Hungary,

<sup>41</sup> André Tardieu (1876-1945), foreign affairs editor of the newspaper *Le Temps*, later three times prime minister of France.

<sup>42</sup> Mihály Károlyi, *Hit, illúziók nélkül* (Faith without illusions), (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1982), p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Just to mention a few: István Bibó, “Elit és szociális érzék” (Elite and social sense) in *Társadalomtudomány*, (1942, 2): pp. 192- 209; C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, (New York: Oxford University Press, c1956); Viktor Karády, “Az elitről és az elit kutatásának kérdéseiről a magyar társadalomtörténetben,” (About the question of elite and elite research in the Hungarian social history) in *Sic Itur Ad Astra*, (1995, 1-2): p. 130-144; Gábor Gyáni-György Kövér, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a reformkortól a II. világháborúig*, (The social history of Hungary from the Age of Reforms until World War II) (Budapest: Osiris, 2006), pp. 221-223.

<sup>44</sup> Ellis Wasson, *Aristocracy and the modern world*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), chapter “Defining Aristocracy”.

political, military and economic life. Positions within these three structures - political, military and economic – were interchangeable and thus the aristocracy possessed a monopoly of power. The socializing habits of the aristocracy (first of all marriage) were limited within the group in order to conserve their inherited social capital. Having a title was not enough - to be an aristocrat, an individual had to command great wealth and not least the ability to live in a grand fashion. The latter was facilitated by the enactment of a *fideikommiss*,<sup>45</sup> a contract granted by the monarch that preserved lands, castles, and contents of buildings against forced sale and bankruptcy. Complementing these objective distinctions, there were also more subjective criteria for membership in the aristocracy, like life-style, education, housing, taxation.<sup>46</sup> Finally, it needs to be emphasized that ownership of a country house was a *sine qua non* marker of aristocratic membership.

The position of the aristocracy within society and other elite groups was legally defined in Hungary, thus in this study there is no need to go into the far-flung debate over what comprises the elite and what its characteristics are. This does not mean, however, that a discussion of the Hungarian aristocracy can be neglected, especially taking into consideration that the meaning of the words is in constant change. In order to have a better understanding of what the aristocracy was, I shall begin with a contemporary definition of the word. According to the *Pallas Nagy Lexikona* in 1893, the aristocracy is a political ruling group based upon a nobility of hereditary origin which by its birth, wealth, titles and ranks occupies a privileged position in society.<sup>47</sup> The encyclopaedia notes that although the members of the nobility were legally equal, in practice the aristocracy meant only the princes, counts, barons and their family

<sup>45</sup> Aviticity, entail, hitbizomány, *majorate*, *foedum talliatum*.

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence Stone & Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, Edition Abridged ed.), p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> *Pallas Nagy Lexikona*, 1893, s.v. "Arisztokrácia", <http://mek.niif.hu/00000/00060/html/index.html> accessed 7th March 2010

members; those who occupied “the most distinguished place,”<sup>48</sup> “played the most luminous role in the social life,”<sup>49</sup> and were “the cream of the nobility.”<sup>50</sup> The nobles without titles generally were excluded from the aristocracy and even among them there was a strict hierarchical order. Simply put, all commonly considered aristocrats were nobles, but not all nobles were aristocrats.<sup>51</sup> However, because of the *de jure* – *de facto* opposition in the explanation, one can not be satisfied with the contemporary definition and a closer analysis of the social history is needed.

The special position of the Hungarian nobility within the Habsburg Monarchy was the result of the Crown’s interest to maintain the political stability in the empire and its position among the European powers. Stability was secured by the Crown through conferring noble status, land and other privileges to the elites, who became partners, rather than clients of the Crown. The result was an unusual composition of the Hungarian society – the number of the Hungarian nobility compared with other European nobility was impressive: nearly five per cent of the country’s inhabitants could show patent of nobility.<sup>52</sup> In order to understand the dynamics of the Hungarian society one needs to make a distinction between the aristocracy and the gentry, who formed the landowning elite. Landowning was closely connected with the nobility; however, not all nobles were landowners, which created a social and economic gap within the nobility. In 1895 estates over 1400 acres, which represented 0,2 per cent of the number of holdings, occupied more than 32 per cent of the country’s land.<sup>53</sup> Another reason for the gap was the requirement of the 1885 Law on the Upper House, which restricted membership to those

<sup>48</sup> “legkiválóbb helyet foglalják el”

<sup>49</sup> “legfényesebb szerepet játszáak az élet társas érintkezéseiben”

<sup>50</sup> “nemességnek színe javát”

<sup>51</sup> The cut-off point between nobility and aristocracy is inevitably a somewhat arbitrary one.

<sup>52</sup> László Péter, “The Aristocracy, the Gentry and their Parliamentary Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Hungary” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (Januay, 1992), p. 79.

<sup>53</sup> Iván T. Berend, György Ránki, *Hungary, a Century of Economic Development*, (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1974), pp. 41-42.

magnates who paid at least 3000 fl. land tax annually. This meant that, although according to Werbőczy's *Tripartitum* in 1514 all nobles of Hungary had equal rights, 72-74 per cent of the nobles were deprived of their hereditary rights of Upper House's membership.<sup>54</sup> Generally speaking, there was a religious difference as well between the aristocracy and the gentry. The former was composed by Catholic titled nobles, while the latter of mostly Protestant provincial nobles.<sup>55</sup>

There is no precise data concerning the number of Hungarian aristocracy. William Godsey put together a tentative list of 474 aristocratic families in Austria Hungary in the Dualist period.<sup>56</sup> The closest estimation of the Hungarian aristocracy is that in 1885 there were around two hundred families, because in that year 698 peers were invited to the Upper House (they represented 204 families). Out of them 8 were princes, 158 were counts and 38 were barons.<sup>57</sup> Upper House membership was the most trusted mark of peerage; this can be supplemented by analyzing the National Casino membership list. One can infer great deal about the role of the Hungarian aristocracy that the Chamber of Deputies in the period 1887-1910 was composed of 14 per cent aristocracy, 48 per cent nobility and 29 per cent other categories.<sup>58</sup> Thus the political role of the traditional elite is unquestionable. A proof of their economic power is that in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century half of the land was in the hands of 1% of the population - the aristocracy.<sup>59</sup>

William Godsey's article is investigating the social composition of the aristocracy – “court nobility” as he calls it- in the Dualist period from the perspective of their endurance. His argumentation follows the admission of the nobles into court offices and he concludes that in

<sup>54</sup> Károly Vörös, “A főrendiház 1885. évi reformja”(The Reform of the Upper House in 1885) in László A. Varga (ed.), *Rendi társadalom, polgári társadalom* (Salgótarján: Nógrád Megyei Levéltár, 1987), pp. 401-403.

<sup>55</sup> This aspect is not researched in depth.

<sup>56</sup> William D. Godsey, “The Social Composition of the Habsburg Aristocracy in the Dualist Era” in *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 71, no.1 (March, 1999): p. 62

<sup>57</sup> Gyáni- Kövér, 2006, p. 101.

<sup>58</sup> Gyáni- Kövér, 2006, p. 116.

<sup>59</sup> Gyáni- Kövér, 2006, p. 118.

spite the aristocracy's connection to modern economy, they maintained a sceptical distance between themselves and the new social groups.<sup>60</sup> Despite aristocratic involvement in modern aspects of the economy, the basis of aristocratic *Weltanschauung* and prestige during the period in discussion remained landowning. While for the *nouveau riche* acquisition of an estate followed the success in financial or commercial markets, for the aristocracy proprietorship of great estate seems to have preceded and facilitated their involvement in the business world. The institution of the entailed estate furnished the best means by which a family could maintain a venerable social position over many generations. This gave a sense of continuity and permanence which contributed to the "aristocracy's collective identity and buttressed its sense of the immutability of time that seems to have marked its mentality."<sup>61</sup> In addition to acreage, the entail invariably included at least one castle, the furniture, pictures, books, and art objects, as well as the family jewel collection and sometimes even an urban palace, which were part of what shaped the differentiated mentality of the aristocracy.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the social structures of Hungary underwent major reforms: a modern system of private property was introduced, the principle of legal equality gradually undermined hereditary privileges and a constitutional system of government was about to be formed. According to the principle of legal equality, land ownership was no longer tied to noble status and aviticity was abolished.<sup>62</sup> However, as László Péter has argued, these reforms in 1848 were "a social programme, rather than established legal fact," because although clan inheritance was abolished, the system of royal land donation remained and although the law declared equal taxation, the nobility as a legal status was not annulled.<sup>63</sup> In spite of the fact that

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<sup>60</sup> Godsey, pp. 86-88.

<sup>61</sup> Godsey, pp. 81-82.

<sup>62</sup> László Péter, pp. 81-82.

<sup>63</sup> László Péter, p. 82.



after 1867 ‘legal equality’ started to acquire a firm place in the vocabulary of politics and law, the social status of the titled nobility, and even of the ordinary nobility, was not undermined. The political reforms did not bring different results either: the monarch retained much of his traditional autocratic power, the 1848 franchise was not extended during the Dualist era and thus the proportion of the electorate remained for seventy years around six per cent of the total population. No wonder that László Péter calls Hungary’s new political system a “parliamentary oligarchy of noble landowners.”<sup>64</sup> In the period between 1867 and 1918 out of sixteen prime ministers only one came to office without the patent of nobility.<sup>65</sup>

These figures are in line with a much criticized theory of Arno Mayer which stresses the nobility’s capacity to survive until World War II.<sup>66</sup> Mayer argued that the nobility remained the dominant class in the era of modernity and emphasized their important role in society and in the development of the economy. Because they owned the majority of the land in Europe and because the middle classes were politically divided and undeveloped, Mayer thought that the aristocracy in all of the European countries held far too much power, and it was their efforts to keep power that led to World War I.<sup>67</sup> However, this theory was challenged for its generalizing approach towards the European bourgeoisie, which as we know now was not underdeveloped in all parts of Europe and the majority of land was not owned everywhere by the aristocracy. In spite of this criticism, Mayer’s theory offers a working basis for my study, since the Hungarian society was relatively weak in industrial entrepreneurship in this period.<sup>68</sup> Mayer addressed not only the field of economy; his chapter “Official High Cultures and the Avant-Gardes” offers an especially useful and challenging framework for the discussion of the country houses. He notes

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<sup>64</sup> László Péter, p. 88.

<sup>65</sup> Sándor Wekerle (1848-1921)

<sup>66</sup> Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime*, (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

<sup>67</sup> Mayer, pp. 4-5, 17-18,

<sup>68</sup> Although it must be mentioned that a comprehensive survey about this was not written yet.

that the high culture of Europe “mirrored the perseverance of the pre-industrial civil and political societies,” and in form, content and style the artefacts “celebrated traditions supportive of the old order.”<sup>69</sup> In this way the historical styles were part of the storehouse of symbols and images that served to thwart and disguise the present and to provide the aristocracy with an inexhaustible reservoir of symbols with which to glorify and reinvigorate its privileged position.<sup>70</sup> Landed nobility insisted on time-honoured metaphors and emblems.

Dominic Lieven’s *Aristocracy in Europe 1815-1914*,<sup>71</sup> addresses the issue of how the aristocracies - notwithstanding its title- of Britain, the German state and Russia resisted, accommodated and succumbed to the competition of the industrial class, and argued along the lines that the aristocracies were held together by their sense of mission as a ruling class. The more recent book of Ellis Wasson argues along the same lines by means of a comparative approach. The *Aristocracy and the Modern World* encompasses the whole of Europe, presenting the aristocracy as a political, cultural and social force that endured well into the twentieth century, rather than petering out with the First World War.<sup>72</sup> Both these books in general read well, but the generalizations they contain are true only as regards the highest aristocrats. The arguments of the two books have the inevitable weaknesses of a synthesis: they tend to generalize about the whole European aristocracy. Knowing the difficulty of writing a comparative synthesis about the aristocracy one can applaud the initiative of these authors. Moreover, these works offer a theory to be tested and adjusted to the special conjuncture of the Hungarian case. A comprehensive test would go beyond the scope of the present study;

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<sup>69</sup> Mayer, p.189.

<sup>70</sup> Mayer, pp. 190-191.

<sup>71</sup> Dominic Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe, 1815-1914*, (New York: Macmillan, 1992)

<sup>72</sup> Wasson, pp.

nevertheless, looking at the role of the country houses will shed light on certain aspects of the question of aristocratic endurance.

There is a large amount of literature about the social and economic life of the new emerging social groups, especially the middle class and the new rich entrepreneurial group which indirectly offer information about the aristocracy as well.<sup>73</sup> For example, in her article Julianna Puskás elaborates on the role of the Jewish renters in the development of Hungarian agriculture in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Jews invested their accumulated wealth in renting land from the aristocracy on which they often established modern farming systems.<sup>74</sup> In this way the aristocracy, even though lacking the entrepreneurial spirit, benefited from the modernization, simply because it owned the majority of land. From this contractual relation both parties benefited: the new rich temporary obtained the status symbol of the aristocracy – the land, while the aristocracy could continue its luxurious life without being directly involved in the modern economy- for example by building large, opulent homes. If people strove to enlarge the size of their estates and to use the income to build larger and more elegant houses, it was because they were essentially *prestige-maximizers* rather than *profit-maximizers*.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> The studies of Péter Hanák, Vera Bácskai, Gábor Gyáni, György Kövér, Pál Léderer need to be mentioned here.

<sup>74</sup> Julianna Puskás, “Zsidó haszonbérlok a magyarországi mezőgazdaság fejlődésének folyamatában az 1850-es évektől 1935-ig” (Jewish renters in the process of the Hungarian agricultural development from the 1850s until 1935) in *Századok* (1992, 1): pp. 35-59.

<sup>75</sup> Stone, p. 75.

### *The Representational Function of the Country House*

The land and the country house not only offered security, but also signified power and status. The relation between the size of the estate and the size of the country house was not always direct; in this way even a smaller landholding required the construction of a country house. The importance of the country house is shown also by the fact that even nobles without large estates aspired to build an elegant home, not to mention the German, Jewish or Hungarian entrepreneurs, who often got noble title after acquiring land and building a country house. The country house was a status symbol - but not only- of the Hungarian aristocracy. Because the Hungarian society was based on agriculture, only those who had enough land to cover the expenses could build a luxurious home. In this way the country house became a mark of well being, of noble living.

In order to understand the importance of a country house for the aristocracy a brief survey on the development of this building type follows. In Hungary, until the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the country house architecture had a leading role, apart from the ecclesiastic architecture. The simple reason for this is that next to the clergy, only the aristocracy was in the financial situation to invest money in elegant, large buildings.

The Hungarian term *kastély* is derived from the Latin *castellum*, which during different historical periods changed its exact meaning. Originally, in the middle ages it meant a fortified building complex; at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century it denoted a noble home, because the fortifications in most of the cases were owned by aristocracy. Its primary function was to provide

secure shelter in the times of the Turkish attacks. The renaissance *várkastély*<sup>76</sup> already lost its practical function of protecting from the enemy; however, it kept its bastions and towers, characteristic of military architecture. Later on, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the *vár* (fortress) and *kastély* (castle) parted, and the latter received a representational function, its peak occurring in the ceremonial baroque period. Because the *kastély* is situated in the countryside its equivalent in English is country house<sup>77</sup> so this term will be used in this study. Now, I shall turn to the definition of the country house in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The country house is a free standing noble home which has one or more floors, has well-designed architecture and is surrounded by a park.<sup>78</sup> During the eighteenth century the country house had special social designations: on the one hand it was the embodiment of ancestral patrimony and the external symbol of the dignity and authority of its owner, and on the other - a means for living the life of a country gentleman. To fulfil these symbolic as well as practical functions the country house had to possess three qualities, aptly summed up by Sir John Vanbrugh as “state, beauty and convenience”.<sup>79</sup>

The country house had administrative functions: it was the center of the landed estate from where the management of the several thousand acres was carried out, the revenues of which helped to support the seat and its inhabitants. A good deal of food and drinks for consumption was produced in the farms around the country house. As already mentioned, the connection between the size of the property and the size of the country house was not always direct, because in many cases a large building was erected on a relatively small land for the sole reason of prestige. This was especially characteristic for the Austrian nobility, as Princess Eugenie

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<sup>76</sup> Fortified castle.

<sup>77</sup> *country house* could be another alternative, however it tends to mean a smaller, less representative seat.

<sup>78</sup> Hilda Horváth, *Régvolt magyar kastélyok*, (Old Hungarian country houses) (Budapest: Gemini Kiadó, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted: Stone, 1986, p. 199.

Odescalchi notes in her memoirs somewhat ironically: “Ja, er hat ein Schloss mit einem schönen Sonnenuntergang.”<sup>80</sup> Hospitality was part of the function of sociability. This in part was a means of displaying generosity and authority and in part to facilitate useful political or matrimonial contracts. Besides of having people to talk with, the aristocracy considered generous hospitality the hallmark of a gentleman, in spite of the fact that the economic costs were high. The recreational functions of the country house, such as riding, hunting, tennis, billiard, bowling were not cheap hobbies, not to mention landscape gardening, private zoos and collections of, for example Italian renaissance sculptures.<sup>81</sup> The latter two activities connoted a representational function. The country house was a showcase for the display of power and prestige: it was built to impress the visitor. This was achieved by such features as being built on a hilltop with special attention given to the façade and to the reception hall and by having an imposing staircase linked with the public rooms where the formal entertainment is offered.

In short, the country house had to be pleasing to look at and practical to live in.

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<sup>80</sup> Eugenie Odescalchi, *Egy hercegnő emlékezik* (A Princess Remembers) (Budapest, 1987), p. 23.

<sup>81</sup> The case of the Károlyi country house in Füzeradvány is an outstanding example.

## The Quest for Power

After having sketched the general framework of the functions of the country house let us turn our attention to the case studies and see how these symbolic and practical functions were present there. This chapter addresses the issue of symbolic architectural forms and will explore the tools for conveying a message through iconography.

First, a discussion of the role of historicism follows. Here historicism will be discussed as an art historical term, not as a historiographic approach. Although it was questioned as an equally important architectural style, especially by the art historian Lajos Fülep,<sup>82</sup> by now historicism occupies its well deserved place in art historical writing. Therefore it is needless to enter into the debate and description of what historicism consists of, especially because there are fine works on it.<sup>83</sup> I will engage in the interpretation of the chosen architectural style for the Nagykároly and Betlér country houses and I will try to find an answer to the question why Count István Károlyi or his architect, Arthur Meinig choose that the neo-gothic style for the transformation of the building and what we can deduce from the interesting stylistic mixture at Betlér. My main argument in this chapter is that neo-gothic fulfilled a special place in country house architecture – an argument which will be supported by the investigation and interpretation of the “feudal” symbols in the frame of representation of power and prestige. Moreover, the popularity of the

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<sup>82</sup> Lajos Fülep, *Magyar művészet* (Hungarian Art) (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1923); Árpád Tímár, “Fülep Lajos historizmuskritikája” (Lajos Fülep’s Critique of Historicism) in *Romantikus kastély: tanulmányok Komárik Dénes tiszteletére*, Ferenc Vadas ed. (Budapest: Hild-Ybl Alapítvány, 2004), p. 525-531.

<sup>83</sup> Ilona Sármany-Parsons, *Historizáló építészet az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchiában*, (Historicist Architecture in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy) (Budapest: Corvina, 1990), Miklós Kalmár, *Historizmus, Századforduló: a polgári építészet kialakulása* (Historicism, Turn of the Century: The development of bourgeois architecture), (Budapest: Könyvkiadó, 2001); *Magyar építészet. Klasszicizmus, Historizmus* (Hungarian Architecture: Historicism), Pál Ritoók ed., (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2003); Emese Révész, *A magyar historizmus*, (Hungarian Historicism)(Budapest: Corvina, 2005)

neo-gothic is linked with the aspiration of the aristocracy to the most modern trend, the picturesque.

### *Ancestry and Historicism*

As already discussed in the first chapter, the economic, social and political power of the aristocracy during the dualist period was still significant and this is proved by the number of country houses they built. However, a large part of the building activity was modification of old ones according to new aesthetic and comfort criteria.<sup>84</sup> During the whole 19th century the country house represented a special type of residential building. Firstly, it mirrored the individual taste of the commissioner: personal pretences and architectural ideals were realized because s/he had the financial means for it. Architecture was a natural part of the education of male aristocrats, thus many of them had a well grounded knowledge in it. Adding to this, the development of the railway made it possible to travel easier and to bring home architectural plans from abroad. The individual taste of the commissioner was even more pronounced on the building since architectural education in Hungary was not developed in the period.<sup>85</sup> An outstanding case is Count Ede Károlyi's country house at Füzérradvány, which will be mentioned later, or Gyula Andrássy the Elder's influence on his country house at Tiszadob. Secondly, the period of historicism gave unprecedented freedom to both the architect and the commissioner. This was the time when there was no canon set for the style of buildings and only the economic and social condition of the commissioner drew the limit. Mixing architectural

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<sup>84</sup> András Hadik, "Kastélyépítészet Magyarországon (1867-1918)" (Country House Architecture in Hungary) in *A műemlékvédelem elméleti és gyakorlati kérdései*, (Tusnád, 1996), p. 36.

<sup>85</sup> Palatine József Technical University started the education of architects only in 1871 at the Department of Architecture and Engineering, thus making it in Hungary the first, and until the nineties the only place where architects were trained.



styles was considered natural by the people of the period and it often happened that each façade was designed differently according to its symbolic role.<sup>86</sup> “The question of the style is the most important”, argued art historian Imre Henszlmann (1813-1888) in the debate over the building of the Hungarian Academy of Science.<sup>87</sup> Thus the style, as a form of expression, was the result of a conscious, calculated decision because it had political and ideological connotations. From the 1830s onwards antique, gothic, renaissance, baroque and rococo architecture and interior design coexisted without clash. The aristocracy could choose the architectural style of the country house according to what message they wanted to communicate. In most of the cases they preferred English neo-gothic models, as the examples of the Nádasdy country house in Nádasdladány and the Brunszvik country houses in Martonvásár show. Nevertheless, in the second part of the century French and German neo-renaissance country houses appeared, just to give place again at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to French neo-gothic.<sup>88</sup> The two most well known examples of French neo-gothic are the Andrásy country house at Tiszadob and the Károlyi country house at Nagykároly.

What made the neo-gothic style popular?

There are three answers to this question, answers which will all contribute to a better understanding of the connection between the social position of the aristocracy and the symbolic power of the architecture. Firstly, the gothic was a fashionable architectural trend of the period because of the “anglomania”<sup>89</sup> that can be traced in Hungary as early as the age of reforms and Count István Széchenyi’s writings. He was the one to promote first the modern equipment and

<sup>86</sup> The Eördögh country house in Nyírábrány is an early example; Ferenc Kazinczy wrote frustrated about it in one of his letters: “the four sides of the building is the result of four different tastes: one is Greek, the other gothic, the third and the fourth I don’t even know what is it.” Dr. János Váczy, *Ferenc Kazinczy levelei*, vol. 9 (The Letters of Ferenc Kazinczy) (Budapest, 1909), p. 146.

<sup>87</sup> Emese Révész, *A magyar hitorizmus* (The Hungarian Historicism), (Budapest: Corvina, 2005), p. 17.

<sup>88</sup> András Hadik, 1996, p. 36.

<sup>89</sup> László Országh, “‘Anglomania’ in Hungary, 1780-1900” *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, 21 (1981, No. 82): pp. 168-179.

functional organization of the country house in Hungary. According to him a comfortable, healthy home should be situated in a silent surrounding, should be odourless and without smoke; it should be warm in winter and cool in summer with as much light as possible; the rooms arranged separately according to their function were easily cleanable, airing without draught.<sup>90</sup> It is not a surprise that the Hungarian aristocracy wanted to take over not just the technological innovations, but the architectural frame within which these were placed. Moreover, in England the gothic, as a result of the writings of Pugin and Ruskin became increasingly associated with Christianity and truthfulness and thus with exemplary behaviour.<sup>91</sup> The aristocracy, which considered itself the leader of the society, first of all by showing a good example, welcomed the neo-gothic style. The popularity of the neo-gothic was not an isolated phenomenon reaching only Hungary, but the whole Central Europe, as Dénes Komárik pointed out as early as 1975, thanks to connubial connections.<sup>92</sup>

The exterior of the neo-gothic building tends to speak in a symbolic language which incorporates the firm belief of the aristocracy as being on a different level than other social groups. The belief that they had been placed by providence in their position of authority in the society manifested in their attitude as well: “Streben Herrschaften auch?” - asked one seven year old Esterházy child his governess,<sup>93</sup> illustrating the conviction of aristocrats that they are superhuman. This faith was planted into them by the Catholic education, according to which they are ruling from God’s grace and nothing can take their power away. The system of aviticity further secured this belief. The country house originally served the protection of the family and often of the surrounding settlement. In the place of the Károlyi country house in Nagykároly

<sup>90</sup> Count István Széchenyi, *Buda-pesti por és sár* (Dust and Mud in Buda-pest) (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1995), p. 62.

<sup>91</sup> Girouard 1979, p. 273.

<sup>92</sup> Komárik, 1975, p. 451.

<sup>93</sup> Károlyi, 1982. p. 9.

there was a fortified castle because the region was often the place of war. So was the case in Betlér, where the 19<sup>th</sup> century country house was erected by the unification of a 15<sup>th</sup> century and a 16<sup>th</sup> century fortified castles. In case of danger the people could find shelter inside the fortified walls. Thus the building became a mark of authority and control. Certain symbols of power can be identified on a country house, which originate from medieval architecture and were widely used by neo-gothic designs. How, these (for example the tower) became symbols of power will be addressed individually in the right place of the chapter.

Another reason why the neo-gothic style was used so widely for country house architecture was its association with the style of the ancestry, thus it was used as a promoter of the prominence and a reminder for the glory of the family. The older the family title was, the more honoured the aristocrat was and of



**Pic. 1.** The Károlyi country house from north-west.

course the more proud. However, a practical reason why the aristocrats were trying to prove their genealogical tree to be as old as possible, each member having title was to gain access to the court and to court offices. Only those who could produce twelve noble quarterings (i.e. eight paternal great-great-grandparents and four maternal great-grandparent) had the right to attend the court. Those who wanted to be accepted in the court needed to present their ancestral three to the

Great Chamberlain.<sup>94</sup> The Star-Cross Order for women aristocrats had no less strict admission requirement. Petitioners for admission had to submit documented proof of descent from sixteen nobly born ancestors (i.e. all great-great-grandparents).<sup>95</sup> Obviously, this could not be proven in every case, and in many cases document forgeries took place. However, building or transforming a country house in the “style of the ancestors” could be used to support the document. In this way neo-gothic architecture became a symbol of the ancestry, of the continuity of rank.

A less personal interpretation was that of the association of the neo-gothic with the glorious past of Hungary. However, not only in Hungary, but in other European countries as well an architectural movement started in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century under which the neo-gothic became the symbol of national pride, of national architecture.<sup>96</sup> The quest for a specific national language in architecture originated earlier than the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it reached its peak then thanks primarily to the growing interest in archaeology and positivist historiography.<sup>97</sup> The romantic affinity to the middle ages was in close connection with the desire of personal representation. There are many exemplary cases to illustrate this. Two of them will be mentioned here.

In 1891 two English ladies visited and travelled through the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and made diligent notes and sketches about what they saw. One of their hosts, “Count F.” impressed them with his outfit, which obviously had an effect on his attitude:

“Our host, seeing our eagerness to sketch anything and everything, withdrew in company with Sándor, and returned shortly, in all the splendour of the national costume befitting his rank as a magistrate and member of a noble family. He seemed to have gained several inches in the dress, and looked like some majestic creature who had suddenly stepped

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<sup>94</sup> Godsey, p. 66

<sup>95</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>96</sup> Dénes Komárik, “A gótizáló romantika építészete Magyarországon” (The Gothic-Romantic Architecture in Hungary) *Építés-Építészettudomány* 14, (1982: 3-4), p. 277.

<sup>97</sup> Sisa 2007, p. 56.

from the middle ages; the slant rays of the sun gilding the white eagle's feather in his cap, the heavy folds of his shoulders, while gold tasselled top-boots of a cunning cut, gave a most shapely look to his leg and foot. The dress seemed to have called to life all the pride and fire latent in his easy-going face, to have suddenly aroused the reverse side of the Magyars. These garments are only worn upon state occasions. The form never changes but the colour and jewels vary with the family. I can hardly imagine a finer sight than a regiment of nobles, mounted on horses draped in their respective colours, riding along in the sunlight; and such a spectacle, I am told, is still to be seen on royal occasions."<sup>98</sup>

Indeed, the second example is from the most famous occasion of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian history, the coronation of Francis Joseph as King of Hungary in 1867. The following description of the event is coming again from an English lady. Miss Mary Elisabeth Stevenson was the governess of Count Gyula Andrassy and Countess Katalin Kendeffy's three children for five years between 1864 and 1869; in this way on June 8, 1867 she could see the coronation march from the Sándor Palace, where the Andrassy family was then living. A similar fascination as in the previous source can be found in her account for the medieval atmosphere of the Hungarian noble men's wear:

"The lords were waiting just under our balcony so I had plenty time to examine their accoutrements. From this view one can imagine oneself in the middle ages. There was hardly anybody who did not have some special accessory, jewellery, fur, etc. Baron Wenckheim had a wonderful plumed hat on which huge emeralds were hanging; Prince Esterházy's harness and saddle-cloth was full with gem; and their clothes! I could see gilded and silvered brocade, all colours of velvet everywhere."<sup>99</sup>

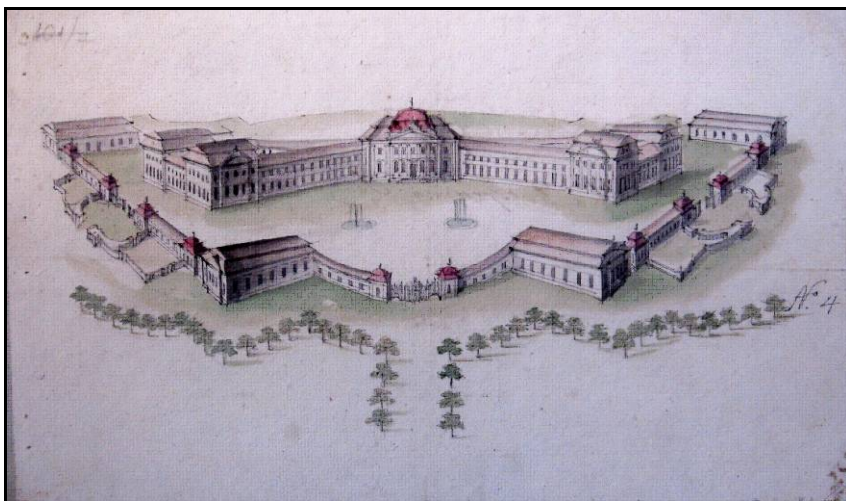
The preferences for medieval customs and garments were of course completed by architecture as well. Let us turn now to the manifestation of this fondness for neo-gothic in the case of the Károlyi country house. The question now is if and how the fortified castle type of country house was announcing the glorious past of the Hungarian nobility, the cult of the ancestors and the continuity of the title in the case of the Nagykároly country house?

<sup>98</sup> Margaret Fletcher, *Sketches of Life and Character in Hungary*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1892), p. 71-72.

<sup>99</sup> Mary Elisabeth Stevens, *Levelek az Andrassy házból (1864-1869). Egy angol nevelőnő levelei* (Letters From the Andrassy House (1864-1869): The letters of an English governess), András Cieger ed. (Budapest: General Press 2007), p. 214.

### *Ancestry and Symbols of Power*

The Károlyi country house at Nagykároly is one of the largest of this type in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Its importance, however, lies not only in its size but also in its *history* and *past* which were so important for historicist architecture. The Nagykároly estate was the main family domain, where they had a building originating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A fortified castle was build in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which then underwent different modifications.<sup>100</sup> These modifications all served defence purposes, because Nagykároly was a border castle. However, one of the plans for modification is especially interesting from our point of view, even though it date back to 1783. Count Antal Károlyi ordered a plan for remodelling his country house as a representative residence matching his wealth and nobility from the Viennese architect, Franz Sebastian Rosenstingl.<sup>101</sup>



**Pic. 2.** Franz Sebastian Rosenstingl, plan for the Károlyi country house, 1783.

<sup>100</sup> Samu Borovszky (ed.), *Szatmár vármegye és Szatmárnémeti. Magyarország vármegyéi és városai.* (Szatmár County and Szatmárnémeti. Hungary's counties and cities), (Budapest: Országos Monografiai Társulat, 1908), pp. 183-184.

<sup>101</sup> Kristóf Fatsar, "Franz Rosenstingl kerttervezői tevékenysége Károlyi Antal szolgálatában," (Franz Rosenstingl's Park Planing Activity in the Service of Antal Károlyi) *Ars Hungarica*, 27 (1999, 2): p. 298.

Although not realised, the plan shows the aspiration for an “architecture parlante” from the side of the owner. The design follows the baroque plan type, but it is more than that. It symbolizes the sparrow hawk from the coat of arm of the Károlyi family. According to the description attached to the plan the two sections of the building are stretching diagonally like the wings of the heraldic bird.

What we see here is what Goodman called meaning by “denotation.”<sup>102</sup> The architect-landscape designer paid attention to the surrounding as well and arranged the line of trees leading to the main gate in the same form. The function of the building as speaking for the owner’s social and economic power<sup>103</sup> was achieved not only by the symbolic shape of the ground plan, but also by the desire to impress the visitor with the size and sophisticated hierarchy of the building parts. The arms of the building were leading – most probably – to a sumptuous reception hall. Count József Károlyi, son of Antal carried out the modernization of the building between 1793-1795, which according to his teacher and personal advisor, László Henyei’s description “was transformed into a comfortable palace in which he [József Károlyi] could live and receive his guests fitting his wealth and dignity.”<sup>104</sup> This is another proof for the importance of the residence as a status symbol for the aristocracy. Moreover, even though neither Antal nor József Károlyi lived there - they only visited the estate a couple of times in their lives - they still considered important to build a stately country house at the periphery of the country. They could not have had anything else in mind than the display of power.

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<sup>102</sup> See p. 13.

<sup>103</sup> Count Antal Károlyi (1732-1791) had numerous titles and took active part in the social life of the country (donations for building schools, churches, water regulation and even for the court) which shows he was well situated financially. See József Szinnyi, *Magyar írók élete és munkái* (The Life and Works of Hungarian Writers)(Budapest: Hornyánszky, 1891-1914), s.v. “Károlyi Antal”, <http://mek.niif.hu/03600/03630/html/index.htm> (accessed June 2, 2010).

<sup>104</sup> Gábor Éble, *A nagykárolyi gróf Károlyi család leszármazása* (The Geneology of the Count Károlyi family from Nagykároly), (Budapest: Franklin Nyomda, 1913), p. 53.

The count who moved back to the old family seat after almost hundred years of abandonment was István Károlyi (1845-1907). After having lived for a while with his mother, Countess Karolina Zichy in Florence and for a year in Paris he returned to Hungary in 1867, when he married Countess Margit Csekonicus.<sup>105</sup> He had an active social life being the director of the National Casino, member of the Jockey Club, and of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Governing Board, as well as a deputy of Szatmár County in the Parliament. He was popular among the aristocrats as several descriptions show. A somewhat idealized portrait is drawn in the *Vasárnapi Újság* where he is presented as the perfect Hungarian noble man:

“He is a manful lord, gallant and elegant; good host and good foreman who moves as comfortable on the fields as on the salon's parquet. He is handling the gun and riding the horse perfectly; the game which he targets rarely escapes. Besides he is like a parent to his dependents, a just master of his clerks and an ardent supporter of the Hungarian industry.”<sup>106</sup>

To top this in 1903 the *Szalon* magazine wrote: “István Károlyi, as his speeches prove, in spite of being an aristocrat he is thinking with the soul of a Hungarian.”<sup>107</sup> Having such a good reputation, it does not come as a surprise that he aspired and decided to build a splendid home out of the old family seat. His choice fell on the neo-gothic style. Although there are no sources left from him which would explain his choice of style, it is not hard to understand taking into consideration the already described inclination of the time for the Middle Ages. As Ibolya Erdei already pointed out one source of inspiration for István Károlyi could have been the Andrassy country house at Tiszadob.<sup>108</sup> This was completed three years earlier (between 1886 and 1890) than the start of the construction in Nagykároly started and was designed by the same architect,

<sup>105</sup> Albert Sturm (ed.), *Magyar Országgyűlési Almanach 1901-1906*, s. v. “Károlyi István” [http://www.ogyk.hu/e-konyvt/mpgy/alm/al901\\_06/98.htm](http://www.ogyk.hu/e-konyvt/mpgy/alm/al901_06/98.htm) (accessed June 2, 2010).

<sup>106</sup> Iván Relle, “A trónörökös-pár Nagy-Károlyban,” (The Crown Prince in Nagykároly) in *Vasárnapi Újság* 21. (1884, 42.) p. 670.

<sup>107</sup> “A nagykárolyi kastély,” (The country House in Nagykároly) *Szalon Újság*, 8 (1903, 12.), p. 6.

<sup>108</sup> Erdei p. 23.



Arthur Meinig.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, just like Count Gyula Andrassy the Elder who got inspiration from the country houses on the Loire-Valley during his exile in France, so did Count István Károlyi who as mentioned also spent one year in Paris. The similarity between the two buildings is impressive; the only difference is that the Károlyi country house is larger. Both of them benefited from the expertise of Arthur Meinig; he was considered the “country house specialist” of his period.<sup>110</sup>

The Nagykároly country house was imitating the 15<sup>th</sup> century French châteaux with its castellated architecture, numerous towers, water moat and crenellations. The most dominant element on the building which is central for the present argumentation is the tower. The tower is a widely used symbolic-heraldic element, which represent to the continuity of the family title and is the symbol of ancestry.<sup>111</sup> Marc Girouard argues that the tower was an ideal sign of dignity, because as opposed to porticoes and fortifications it offered dignified, prestigious outlook without being aggressive.<sup>112</sup>



**Pic. 3.** The Károlyi country house from south-east.

<sup>109</sup> Sisa 2007, p. 224.

<sup>110</sup> József Rozsnyai, *Meinig Arthur építész munkássága* (Architect Arthur Meinig's Activity), BA thesis submitted to the Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem, Art History Department, 2001, p. 59.

<sup>111</sup> Mojzer Miklós, “Torony, kupola, kolonnád,” (Tower, Cupola, Colonnade) *Művészettörténeti füzetek* I. Budapest. 1971.

<sup>112</sup> Girouard 1979, p. 274.

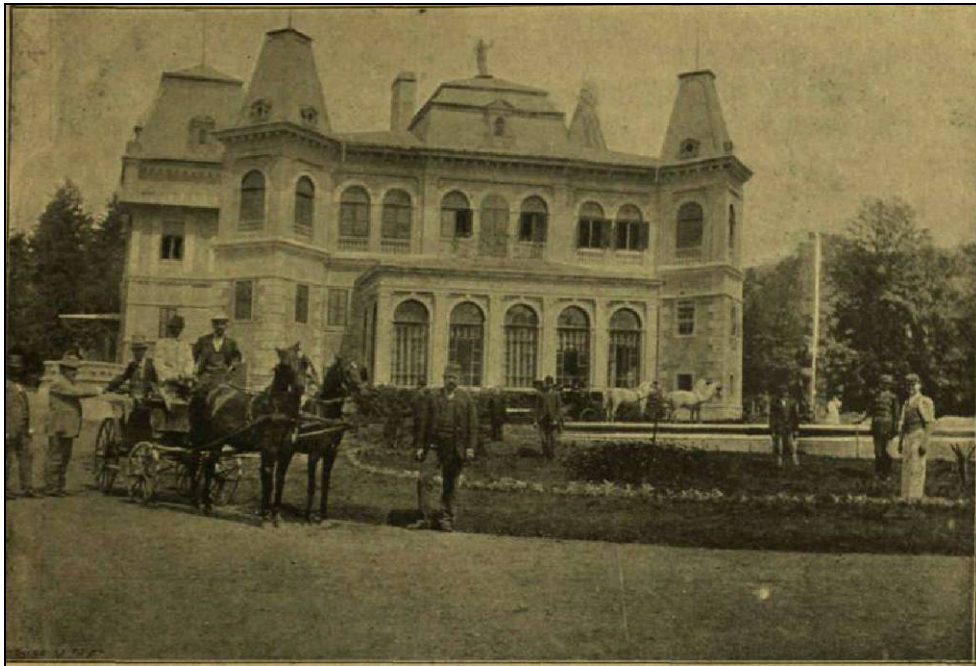
The country house in Nagykároly had towers on all the façades. The popularity of towers was in line also with the cult of the castles in Hungary as the carriers of national glory. Thus, Count István Károlyi ordered the modification of his newly inherited country house according to the same principle. The majority of the old walls of the building were kept and the architecture enriched with several towers and other decorative additions. The new entrance was opened on the façade facing the town of Nagykároly and was emphasized by a three floor tower on the right side and a bastion-like tower on the left side. According to the main principle of historicism, the romantic character of the building was emphasized by the variety of architectural details. Therefore, the windows of the tower on the right side of the main façade had different shapes on all three floors. The coat of arm of the family was placed also on this tower. The Károlyi's received their title of baron in 1609 and they used their symbol, the sparrow-hawk, from the 14<sup>th</sup> century in their blazon. The sparrow-hawk, holding a heart in its claws is surrounded by a winged dragon biting its own tail.<sup>113</sup> Later this was complemented by the nine pearled crown, the symbol of counts, title received in 1712. The bastion type tower on the left side of the façade made the connection between the old and the new front façade. Under its conic roof it had battlement with loopholes, and also asymmetrically positioned windows. Above the main gate a balcony was designed which was topped by a tent roof and had two smaller towers placed on cantilevers. In this way the plain façade acquired a dynamic look.

The façade facing the park is as monumental as the main façade. The dominant architectural element was a fortified tower, having crenellation on the top; this was the tallest among all. "From its seven towers one rises above the others like a bastion. When the lord is at

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<sup>113</sup> Béla Kempelen, *Magyar nemes családok* (Hungarian Noble Families) (Budapest: Arcanum, 2001), 5. vol., p. 379.

home a flag is swinging on it. At night it is wonderfully lit by electric lights.”<sup>114</sup> This is an interesting example of how new technology is put in the “service of the past”. The ornamentation of the windows on this tower followed the gothic model: they had the shape of pointed arches flanked by small pilasters and decorated with climbing leaves. On the forth floor of the tower there is a large sparrow-hawk incorporated in the coat of arm. On the north side fragments of the original drainpipe can be seen which had dragon shape. At the left corner of the rear façade is the “truly pointed styled” chapel to complete the neo-gothic picture.<sup>115</sup> The towers dominated picture of the Károlyi country house was part of the language of history.<sup>116</sup> Towers, moreover, could combine dignity with usefulness and the water tank could be placed in the service of plumbing. This was the case in Nagykároly, where the electric center and the water tank for irrigating the large English garden were also hidden there. The sparrow-hawk was not missing from its top.



**Pic. 4.** The Andrassy country house from south.

<sup>114</sup> Samu Borovszky, *Szatmár vármegye monográfiája* (Monograph of Szatmár County) (Pest, 1908) p. 184.

<sup>115</sup> Idem. p. 184

<sup>116</sup> Anthony Alofsin, *When Buildings Speak: Architecture in the Habsburg Empire and its aftermath, 1867-1933*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006) ch. 1.

The Andrassy country house at Betlér was not built in neo-gothic style. It was built in a mixture of neo-baroque and neo-renaissance, none of which styles have towers in their architectural program. Still, the country house in Betlér had towers on all the corners of the building, even a monumental one which contained the main staircase. How can this be explained? Again, a little architectural history is needed. On the estate in Betlér there were two fortified buildings, one dating from the 15<sup>th</sup>, the other from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>117</sup> The Andrassy family received it as a royal donation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and from then continuous modifications were made on it. The building sold in 1824 was bought back by Count Manó Andrassy after 1882 and from then on it was used as a summer residence, but also in hunting periods.<sup>118</sup> Manó Andrassy and his architect Sándor Fort<sup>119</sup> connected the two existing buildings with an additional floor and a tower for the staircase. In addition, two other towers were built on the corners of the building. According to a contemporary description “The five towers of the country house are copying the ‘Ne Bojsza’ tower from the castle of Vajdahunyad. On the sides of the main entrance are standing bastions with cannons, one cannon is Bosnian, the other has the name of Bebek<sup>120</sup> and coat of arm with the year 1547 on it.”<sup>121</sup> Although the Count chose neo-renaissance as the style of the building, the already existing towers were kept and even heightened. The Count was famous for his interest for sciences and history, thus it comes as no surprise that he also paid attention to the power of symbolic architecture. The canons in front of the main entrance and the towers were an unmistakable tool for this. In the case of the towers in Betlér, however, another point needs to be mentioned, which will be addressed in detail in the

<sup>117</sup> Beatrix Basics, *Az Andrassyak világa: Betlér és Krasznahorka* (The Andrassy World: Betlér and Krasznahorka), (Budapest: Rubicon Könyvkiadó, 2005), pp. 53-54.

<sup>118</sup> Sisa 2007, p. 200.

<sup>119</sup> Fort's activity is still under research. See Beáta Bordás, *A Szentkereszty család 19. századi építkezései (Árkos, Budapest)* (The Building Activity of the Szentkereszty Family in the 19th Century: Árkos, Budapest), paper presented at the 13. Transylvanian Student's Scientific Conference, Cluj Napoca, May 14-16, 2010.

<sup>120</sup> Bebek was the name of the family who owned the building until the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>121</sup> Miklós Markó, “A betléri kastély” (The Country House in Betlér) in *Vasárnapi Újság* XLII. 1895, vol. 45, p. 743.

next chapter. As in Nagykároly's the water tank-tower, the towers had a very practical function: the bathrooms were located in them.

As mentioned, the main staircase is in the four floor high tower, which is placed on the left side of the main façade and has a mansard roof. The exterior of the tower, as the exterior of the whole building uses a mixture of stylistic elements from renaissance, baroque and Tudor-style. However, the interior of the main staircase is pure neo-gothic, using coffered timber roof and wooden tracery decoration with pointed arches. The red marble stairs lead up to the main reception space stuffed with candelabra, antique furniture, statues, and artefacts showing the main hobby of a noble man: collecting antiquities. The contemporary description of the Andrassy country house notes further symbols of the nobility:

“In the staircase the five small and three large windows have coloured stained glass decorated with coats of arms, made in Ede Kratzmann's workshop. On every window there are two blazons: an ancestor of the Andrassy family and his wife. Among the maternal ancestors Gabriella Pálffy, Etelka Szapáry, Valburga Csáky, Szeráfin Batthyány, Rebeka Nádasdy, Erzsébet Balassa, Zsófia Serédi és Zsófia Betz have their coat of arms depicted.”<sup>122</sup>

The technique of stained glass has its roots in the Middle Ages and had a revival in the historicism. The difference is that while originally it was used in ecclesiastic architecture, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it started to be used in domestic architecture as well, commemorating family members. Beside of the traditional portrait gallery this was a new means for representation, for hanging on the past. Both in Nagykároly and in Betlér a moat surrounded the building, which although with a lost its function it was kept as it was fitting to the imagery of traditional landlord's home.

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<sup>122</sup> Markó 1895, p. 744.

## The Quest for Comfort

As already demonstrated in the first chapter, in spite of the fact that the country houses were an important marker for socio-economic status and especially the exterior architecture which was subordinated to the prestige display, they primarily functioned as living spaces. The rooms opened to the public contained the symbols of nobility, but the architects paid attention to the functional organization of the rooms, the sometimes the museum like interiors were complemented with the most modern furniture and most importantly they were equipped with the latest technological innovations.

The analysis of the interior of the country houses from the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century offers another confirmation that the aristocracy was still on the top position of the society in economic sense. The richness and sophisticated arrangement of the interiors speak for themselves. Nevertheless, these arrangements in the private rooms reflected the latest fashion and not the nostalgic “looking back to the past.” As argued by many authors dealing with this issue, the keyword of the period was the “comfort”.<sup>123</sup> Thanks to the 1851 World Exhibition in London the technological innovations spread all around Europe. Adding to this the 1873 World Exhibition in Vienna and especially the 1876 Munich Art Exhibition contributed to the propagation of rich and colourful interiors. All these were primarily used by the aristocracy and other well to do people. If we look at the contemporary descriptions and photographs in most of the cases we can see the luxury of these interiors.

If one considers the interpretation of furniture, regardless of the period /s/he needs to think in terms of function and technology. Furniture is also an indicator of social status.<sup>124</sup> This

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<sup>123</sup> Girouard 1979, p. ; Sisa 2007, p. 79.

<sup>124</sup> Edward Lucie-Smith, *Furniture: a concise history* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 8-12.

aspect is the most evident in the case of those climbing the social ladder, but it played a central role in the case of the aristocracy as well. Another category in which furniture and interiors can be examined is the way it is used to make personal and subjective statements about the individual.<sup>125</sup> People tend to think about “individualised” furniture and interiors only after the Arts and Crafts Movement, the De Stijl and the Bauhaus, but as we will see in this chapter the subjectivity in room furnishing was propagated already at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and established itself firmly in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The multiplicity of stylistic choices existing in the period led to the breakdown of previously fixed categories and sometimes isolated pieces of old furniture acquired special value. Only with taking into consideration this aspect of the room arrangement can one understand the seemingly cluttered mixture of various style of furniture. In the furnishing of the interiors the contemporary guide books for decoration had an important role. The aim of this chapter is to offer a description of the interiors in Nagykároly and Betlér country houses and interpret them in the context of historicism and 19<sup>th</sup> century modernism.

### *Representation and Comfort*

The main argument of this chapter is that in the case of the interior, representation and function can not be divorced. Unlike the outside, the inside should be not only representative, but also comfortable. This inseparability of symbolic and functional roles will be the guiding principle when exploring the meanings and functions of various parts of the interiors. The mix of furniture found in the country houses under discussion here is by no means random. It combines a *modern*

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<sup>125</sup> Idem. p. 12.; Gábor Gyáni, *Parlor and Kitchen: Housing and Domestic Culture in Budapest, 1870-1940*, (Budapest: CEU Press) pp. 66-70.

way of furnishing the space according to *individual* taste. In this way the furniture embodies both the modern notion of comfort and the traditional aspiration to represent social status. In the words of Jakob von Falke interior decoration, like dress, is a reflection of a set of larger societal conditions, or *Volksgeist*.<sup>126</sup> Just like an outfit the interior design of the house is a sort of “garment of its inhabitants” that would embody their values, social standing and cultural background.

The neo-gothic style was popular in the exterior of the building for the mentioned representational purpose, but it was rarely used for the interior. It was by no means easy to create a comfortable, cosy atmosphere with the large pointed arch windows and massive furniture. Neo-gothic when used in the interiors, it appeared in the public rooms, in the reception hall, in the library and in the chapel. These spaces were accessible for everybody who entered the building, thus they played a role in the representation and as we saw, neo-gothic style was suitable for this function. Thus as already mentioned the main staircase in Betlér was designed in neo-gothic style. The role of the reception hall as the first space to impress the visitor was crucial. In the Andrassy country house not just the hall was packed with artworks, but the probably surprising presence of two stuffed animals was meant to amaze the guests. By this the visitors realized that they are in a special place, a space where the power and exoticism was present:

“Here stands on two feet high giant stuffed black bear, holding in one of his paws a flat basket, as if he is asking for the guests’ visit card; there is also a huge crocodile, and in his opened mouth there is an opened wooden box, in which he also awaits the visitors’ cards. Both of the giant animals were shot by count Manó Andrassy, one of them in the Oláhpaták estate, the other in the East. Beside the walls there are short, cosy eastern divans, covered with expensive carpets, bear-, tiger-, panther- and other skins.”<sup>127</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Jakob von Falke, *Die Kunst im Haus: geschichtliche und kritisch-ästhetische Studien über die Decoration und Ausstattung der Wohnung*, (Wien: [s.n.], 1871) p. xxiii.

<sup>127</sup> Markó, 1895, p. 743.



The same function in Nagykároly was fulfilled by the hall, which was the place for the grand staircase, as well as for the Italian marble fireplaces with the family's coat of arm. This hall is known to be the largest in the Hungarian country house architecture. The reason for this is that the baroque inner courtyard was roofed-in, thus the owner obtained a two storey high hall supported by arcades. With the creation of the hall the whole composition and room hierarchy changed, making the communication between the spaces easier and obtaining a large room with multiple functions as the contemporary photographs testify it. The hall had a central location and was entered directly from the front door through a vestibule (for protecting from draught) as in the Middle Ages. These halls are sometimes top-lit, but in the case of the Károlyi country house the light is coming in through three large neo-gothic windows with view on the park. As the contemporary photographs testify, this hall was not used only for balls and receptions but also as a living room. Although the space with the staircase fitted perfectly to the descent of the mistress in her evening splendour into the party below, most probably it was not the most comfortable to live in and to really use, aside from summer time. Its size made it unfitting to settle comfortably and it was difficult to heat it. Also as it was in a central position, it was hard to prevent people passing through it from one side of the house to the other, thus it did not offer privacy, which was so important. The "living-hall" in Nagykároly had a neo-renaissance style dark red coloured leather deep-buttoned sofa suite with an oval table. In the middle of the room there was a composition of plants with a palm tree in the center. Palms became increasingly dominant in the 1880s.<sup>128</sup> Although Margaret Fletcher during her visit through Hungary in 1892 mentioned that "I never once saw flowers used decoratively"<sup>129</sup> Nagykároly seems to be an exception. The presence of the billiard table in the southern corner of the hall and the sitting suite makes it to

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<sup>128</sup> Thorthon, p. 339.

<sup>129</sup> Fletcher p. 12.

have a more manly character. In front of the fireplace an inglenook is created with a little table and armchairs. Scattered around the room there are different type of chairs, it is noteworthy to mention one in a gothic style. In spite of the fact that the outside architecture of the Károlyi country house was neo-gothic, the representative interior spaces were not; they showed a typical eclectic picture with the dominance of the neo-renaissance in the main reception hall. As the gallery on the first floor formed the passage that led to the salon, to the bed rooms and to the guest rooms, it is hard to imagine that the hall served as a place for small chats and gatherings. It is more likely that it fulfilled the role of reception and representation. The dining room opened from the eastern part of the hall. This was the second largest room in the building and it was part of the public rooms, to which the chapel was attached on the north-eastern side of the building. Unfortunately there is no information survived about the interior design of this room.



**Pic. 5.** The  
“living-hall” in  
Nagykároly

The dining room in Betlér which is located on the south-eastern corner of the in the first floor has an interesting decoration. It is thought about this room to have a manly character, achieved primarily by the dark wainscot. In Betlér the walls are decorated with thirty-six 18<sup>th</sup>

century portraits of soldiers, the so called Nádasdy cavalrymen. The soldiers have the same pose and similar uniform. The explanation of why these paintings are here and arranged in this way is the fact that the country house in Betlér was in the possession of the Nádasdy family. When Count Manó Andrassy bought back the building he kept this room, since one Andrassy, Charles I, was part of the Nádasdy cavalrymen. Moreover, the room has valuable furnishing: an oval table with early 18<sup>th</sup> century stuffed dining-chairs which have decorative printed-painted leather cover. This rare interior design of the dining room is complemented by carved renaissance chests on the side of the walls and with scenes from the Seven Years' War above the doors, fitting the character of the room. A white porcelain stove is standing in one of the corners. The little adjacent tower was furnished as the *credenza* for the silver and glass wear.

As mentioned we are in a better situation concerning the furnishing of the Andrassy country house. The building was primarily used as a summer residence and in hunting periods. Count Manó Andrassy often had famous guests visiting, thus even though it was not a year round residence he paid attention to the representative functions of the house. Aside of the main neo-gothic staircase the public rooms were divided between the first and the second floor. Thanks to a description from 1895 the rooms can be located on the ground plan and most of their original furniture can be identified. To continue with the public representative rooms in the Andrassy country house, the next to be presented is the hall on the first floor, which was a truly historicist space.<sup>130</sup> The presence of the two stuffed animals was already mentioned, now lets us see what other elements contributed to the colourful mixture between the past and the present.

“After climbing up the red marble stairs with ornate balustrade, we find the large chamber filled with rarities, like copper and wrought-iron chandeliers, enormous

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<sup>130</sup> In 1910 Count Géza Andrassy, the son of Manó made modifications on the house: the painting gallery was turned into the library and the portrait gallery in the hall on the first floor was changed. I will not deal with these modifications in this paper, because they fell outside my period of examination.

candelabrum, flower stands, Eastern ore-vessels and greatest pieces of applied arts furniture, coming from World Exhibitions.”<sup>131</sup>

It is well known about Count Manó Andrassy that he travelled through Western Europe, North Africa, spent long time in India and China making sketches and collecting continuously. The whole house was full of his collection and hunting trophies. Hunting was a special noble activity and was a significant part of the aristocracy's social life. In Betlér a chronicle of hunting can be read on the walls of the country house. These occasions were not exclusively for the family members, but were often frequented by political figures so special attention was required for the arrangement of the rooms for accommodating guests. An even bigger emphasis was put on the guest rooms when a high rank visitor was expected. In 1887 the Serbian King Milan visited Betlér with his son for bear hunting.<sup>132</sup> Today's tea salon was named after King Milan.



**Pic. 6.** The reception hall in Betlér.

<sup>131</sup> Markó, 1895, p. 743.

<sup>132</sup> *Betléri vadászatok* (Huntings in Betlér), (Rozsnyó, 1908). pp. 38-44.

The reception hall was no exception to this as we can see from the description and from the picture. The aristocracy was collecting these in previous periods too, but in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century thematically organized, carefully arranged collections were put together. In the same period as the National Museum and before the Fine Arts Museum was established, count Andrassy already had a rich collection open for the public. Aside of being a hobby, this collection was an important part of the representation which not only noble guests could see but in some cases tourists as well. According to the contemporary press the country house had so many rare artworks that it would be a pity for the tourist travelling through this region to miss it.<sup>133</sup> The fact that the country house was open for the public follows an English pattern, where tourist guides were written promoting the most famous country houses.<sup>134</sup> This can be considered an exception, because the Hungarian aristocracy was considered to live a mimosa-like lifestyle as the famous “Answer to a Democratic Letter” published in 1898 in the *Magyarország és a nagyvilág* confirmed.<sup>135</sup> What is not mentioned in the 1895 description about the hall and can be seen on the photograph is the family portrait gallery on the walls of this hall. The individuals can not be identified because of the quality of the picture but it is obvious that what we see is the emblematic portrait gallery of the family ancestors. The most famous of the kind is the portrait gallery of the Nádasdy family at Nádasdladány.<sup>136</sup> The space in Betlér functions as an introduction to the family’s past (the portraits of the ancestors point to how far the family can lead back its ancestors) and present (the collections speak for the hobby and interest of the owner). The interior conveys both social status and exoticism at the same time,

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<sup>133</sup> Basics, p. 126.

<sup>134</sup> Wasson, p. 23.

<sup>135</sup> Sisa 2007, p. 132.

<sup>136</sup> József Sisa, *A nádasdladányi Nádasdy kastély* (The Nádasdy Country House from Nádasdladány), (Budapest: Műemlékek Állami Gondnoksága, 2004).

expressing the individual character of the owner which is thus organized according to Falke and the modern concept of domestic space arrangement.

The next room in the Andrassy country house which fulfilled a representative function was the painting gallery which was located at the center of the second floor and was the largest room within the building. Fortunately we have a photograph of the interior before it was turned into a library,<sup>137</sup> thus we know that the gallery was lit from above and had a Northern renaissance style of furnishing covered with textile having a palmette decoration. From two newspaper source we know what paintings could have been seen there. The 1886 article is a chronicle about the new acquisitions of the Count:

*“A female portrait of Munkácsy painted in München, a Landscape from Mészöly, Hungarian country fair from Lajos Ébner, Sheeps from Béla Pálik, The Plain from Ligeti, Two Women from J. N. Broze.”*<sup>138</sup>

The list and the description of the gallery can be complemented from the 1895 article:

*“The magnificent painting gallery has Italian, Netherlanders, recent French and German art works. Further paintings are from Madarász, Lotz, Vajda. Interesting and large pieces are the Attila’s Death, The Coronation of Queen Elisabeth, the Congress of Berlin (in copy), The Election of Árpád (from an Austrian painter), neat painting from Count Manó Andrassy: Two homeless children on the street. It is worth mentioning the two life-size paintings of Gyula and Manó Andrassy, their wives’ paintings and the king and queen’s busts. Above both the painting gallery and all other rooms’ doors on the second floor there are oil battle scenes from the 1848-49 freedom fight. In the center of the room a superb round inlaid table is standing depicting Napoleon with his generals.”*<sup>139</sup>

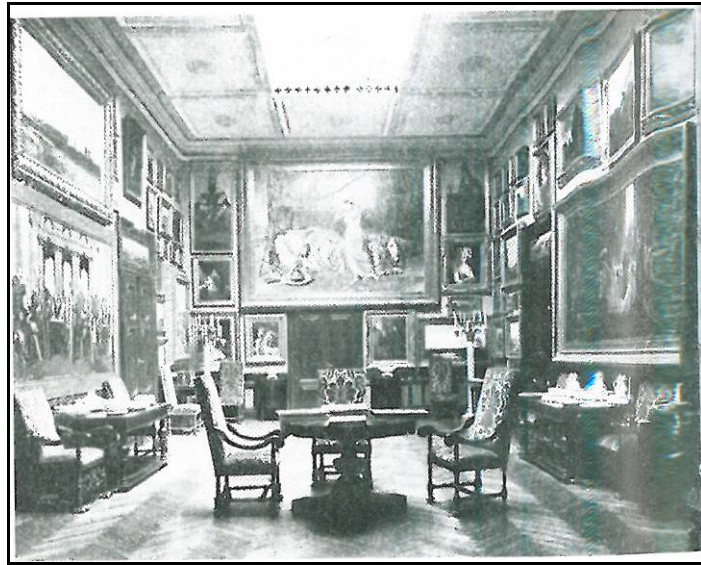
This list, but especially the number of paintings today scattered in the rooms are convincing about the Count’s interest not just in exotic objects but also in painting. In the country house

<sup>137</sup> Samu Borovszky, *Gömör-Kishont vármegye. Magyarország vármegyéi és városai (Gömör-Kishont County. Hungary’s counties and cities)*, (Budapest: Országos Monografiai Társulat, 1903), p. 37, published in Sisa 2007, p. 92.

<sup>138</sup> Rozsnyói Híradó, June 4, 1886,

<sup>139</sup> Markó 1895, p. 743.

there are paintings from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The family archive was kept in the room opening from the gallery.



**Pic. 7.** The painting gallery at Betlér

In what follows, the thesis will turn its attention to the purely functional organization of space. The guiding framework will be the division between, on the one hand, the servants' and the owners' wings and, on the other, the tendency that the rooms were divided and furnished according to gender. The modern technological innovations were also influencing the spatial arrangement and the lifestyles of the aristocrats. The line of narration will describe and analyse the two buildings separately; nevertheless where suitable it will make cross references to the key aspects.

In Nagykároly, thanks to the creation of the central hall, the old enfilade system was completely changed. We can divide the sections of the building into three parts: the service sector, which was located in the south-western wing of the ground floor, the public representative spaces (hall, dining room, chapel and the salon) which had a more limited access,



since it was located on the first floor and finally, the private rooms of the count and countess.<sup>140</sup> According to the contemporary fashion the servants were separated from the owners, both of them having their own privacy. This was the result of the technological developments like the bell system, thanks to which the maids and servants did not need to live next to their masters or mistresses. There is no exact information about a bell system in Nagykároly, but looking at the structure of the plan the smooth flow of daily activities can not be imagined without one. While the south-western part of the old building was kept for the service rooms (kitchen, pantry, laundry, bakery and the bed rooms of the servants) the remaining rooms of the south-eastern part was designed to accommodate guest. The area of a country house in which technology and organization were especially on show was the servants' wing.<sup>141</sup> It had begun growing bigger.<sup>142</sup>

On the first floor the structure of the new part was transformed satisfying the needs of the count and the countess. They occupied the north-eastern wing, while the other rooms were guest rooms. In the center of this wing there was the salon of the countess from where, in the two directions, hers and the count's suite opened. There is a contemporary photograph about the salon in which we can see the scattered, scarcely grouped seat-furniture with floral upholstery. The group of Louis XV style chairs and armchairs was completed by a *tête-a-tête* which was known also as a "gossip bench" or "courting sofa" as it enabled the occupants to conduct a proper conversation. Courting sofa was something of a misnomer as few mothers would dare let a potential caller sit that close to one's daughter. The female character of the room is accentuated with the tapestry which has large flowers on it.

<sup>140</sup> The description is following the plan of Arthur Meinig from 1892.

<sup>141</sup> József Sisa, *A szolga és a gyerek a kastély társadalmában* (1840-1914) (The Servant and the Child in the Country House) *Korunk* vol. 16 (2005, 12): p. 30-37.

<sup>142</sup> Girouard 1979, p. 176.





**Pic. 8.** Salon  
in  
Nagykaroly

The room is made even more sophisticated by a fine Rococo standing clock and a large Persian rug. The rococo gained the widest acceptance of all styles for interior decoration. Its forms were rounded and comfortable and in an age of great domesticity they were important. In the Andrassy country house a parlour on the first floor has a rococo painting by Zsigmond Vajda on the ceiling with little putties. The bedroom of the countess in Nagykaroly opened from the salon to the east and had a boudoir attached. The boudoir was considered a typically female room, a small salon. The small niche of the boudoir was situated in the corner tower, thus offering privacy and intimacy. The count's rooms opened from the other side of the salon. Both of them had separate bathrooms, and there was another one for the guests in the third wing. The count had the so called "Úri szoba" which was the male salon or study. The walls were full with paintings, among them there was a painting of Crown Prince Rudolf painted by Benczúr.<sup>143</sup> The packed room has

<sup>143</sup> Borovszky Samu, p. 184.

a desk with a modern chair. The tapestry most probably had a darker nuance, but it is also vegetal and it can be put in connection with the “Makart style” which was popular in the 1870s not just among the Viennese people. The division of space according to gender is inherited from the previous period, when husband and wife were having suites sometimes even in the two separate wings of the building. This did not change significantly, but there was a tendency to move the apartments closer, usually on two separate floors. In these cases usually the husband had his rooms on the ground floor and the wife just above it. The two were connected by a small spiral staircase.



**Pic. 9.** “Úri” szoba  
at Nagykároly

In Betlér the bedrooms were put on two floors, the count had his apartment on the first floor, while the countess on the second floor. Both of their apartments were located on the south-eastern side of the building. In the center of the count’s apartment there was the billiard room where there was a piano as well. According to the contemporary description

“To the left from the staircase there is an anteroom decorated with family portraits, here stands a huge, overwhelmingly beautiful Rákóczy-case, decorated with paintings. From

here to the left we arrive into a billiard room, where two extraordinary carved cases with glass-doors catch the eye; the first one is full with objects from the Bronze Age, the other one with old and precious pipes from the greatest craftsmen's workshops. In one corner there is a piano, in the other corner a huge old white marble stove with a tall mythological sculpture on the top of it. On the walls there can be seen the portraits of historical figures and old family portraits, amongst them the count's Madonna-like grand-grandmother: Valburba Csáki (wife of count József Andrássy), who died in 1797, at the age of 28.”<sup>144</sup>

To the right from the billiard room opened the study and the bedroom together with a dressing room and bathroom. The description in the study noted numerous trophies, guns and other collections connected with hunting. The tower on this corner of the building was furnished as an armoury. The bedroom had a large “Arabian bedstead” or half-tester bed with blue silk cover. On the second floor, next to the painting gallery was the grand salon which had a mosaic ceiling made of larch. The description does not talk about the furniture in the salon, but mentions the great view from the balcony to the fountain in front of the country house and to the mountains. From the grand salon to the left opened the drawing room of the countess, which “was lavishly furnished” and contained portraits of Count Károly Andrássy and his wife, Etelka Szapháry, of Count Gyula Andrássy, Count Manó Andrássy's and his wife Gabriella Pálffy's life-size portraits. This drawing room is connected with the tower, which is furnished as a boudoir. To the right side from the grand salon opens the King Milan salon, as during his visit he was accommodated in it.

Here is the time to mention the most important element of the Andrássy country house in Betlér: the bathrooms. There were twelve in total and had fine decoration of Dutch landscape motifs. As already mentioned in the previous chapter the towers in Betlér did not fit into the architectural language of the building, but they remained and they served the very practical function of accommodating the bathrooms. In this way every apartment had a bathroom, still the

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<sup>144</sup> Miklós Markó, 1895, p. 743

odour and other uncomfortable factors remained isolated from other rooms. Moreover, the so important privacy was provided to each guest. Hospitality was an important function served by the country house. The Andrassy country house primarily fulfilled this function, since it was not a permanent residence. This can be one of the explanations for the surprisingly high number of bathrooms. Because many guests were coming in the hunting season it needed to provide everybody with comfortable accommodation.

Thanks to the visit of Crown Prince Rudolf in Nagykároly for hunting we have details regarding not just the arrangement of a couple of rooms, but also the colour scheme in them. This is a valuable piece of information since the contemporary photographs can not capture this aspect. For the visit of Rudolf and his wife in 1884 the whole town was making flutter preparation and apparently this affected the country house as well:

“The Count [István Károlyi] set forth for sumptuousness; the new furniture, new carpets, decorative objects and finery, carriages are extolling the Hungarian industry and the craftsmen from Nagykároly. In the country house lavish is combined with taste and comfort with practicality. Those six rooms which are furnished for the crown prince and his wife can be envied by any palace. The middle bedroom with its light rose coloured furniture, with a delicate alcove is the quintessence of the luxury. The princess’ rooms are on the right side, the prince’s on the left side. Each of their apartments is composed of two rooms: salons and toilette-rooms. The first furniture covered with blue silk and red satin, the prince’s is decorated with simple brown and yellow suite. The sixth room is the dining room, which is separated into two by a flower stand. The smaller part serves as a reading room having many newspapers and magazines on the wide oak table.”<sup>145</sup>

In the description above the two keywords of this thesis appear: *lavish* and *practical* which characterized the country house. One more short aspect of the analysis is missing which is left last, because it affects the exterior and the interior of the building simultaneously: the picturesque.

<sup>145</sup> Iván Relle, “A trónörökös-pár Nagy-Károlyban” (The crown prince in Nagykároly) in *Vasárnapi Újság*. XXXI. (1884, 42.), p. 670.

### *Modernity and the Picturesque*

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England a new aesthetic ideal in garden planning and country house architecture started to gain popularity. The picturesque has its origins in antiquarianism and in the concept of irrational beauty perception; it had strong connections with the romantic sensibility of the 18th century. Thanks to the popularity of the Grand Tour more and more people visited Italy and made sketches and paintings about the antique ruins. Thus, the origin of the picturesque architecture and landscape design as a matter of fact can be found in the paintings of Lorrain, who created the “natural” landscape. The popularity of the picturesque is in strong connection with the Gothic Revival movement and the castle revival. The underlying idea behind the concept was the playfulness, asymmetry, jagged profiles and contrasting scales. At the same time it aimed at a way of composing that was in harmony with nature.

Picturesque manifested itself in two ways within the country house: through the ground plan and through the exterior architecture. Its interpretation can be made in the framework of modernity and in the framework of historicism. On the one hand, country houses with picturesque battlements, pointed windows and curious mouldings can be seen as a nostalgic manifestation of the past. On the other hand, the irregularity of the plan and the difference in room sizes can be understood as a progress in planning.

The first argument was partly discussed in the context of neo-gothic as the style which embodied the most meaning connected to the past glory. The main principle of the picturesque was the asymmetry and the romantic character achieved through a putting together of different architectural elements. The neo-gothic was perceived as a disorganized architectural style, which

was born spontaneously and carried the message of romanticism. The Károlyi country house, although convincing and consistent in its exterior architecture at first sight, was not more than skin-deep. The towers, battlements and gothic arches masked quite successfully the building's original formal character, but if one looked at the plan the baroque enfilade system was easily readable. Nevertheless, the aim to create a romantic chivalric look was facilitated by the surrounding as well. Embedded in an English garden, the building at Nagykároly managed to convey the message of being a medieval castle. The Andrásy country house in Betlér did not try to mask itself into a picturesque building, but the fashionable English garden was not absent. In the large park there are Chinese pavilions, grottoes, a hermitage and a freemason pavilion. The ambulatories in the park are leading through these locations.

The manifestation of the picturesque can be followed on the plan of the building as well. In Nagykároly even though the old enfilade system is visible, the size of the rooms in the new part are different. Thus the salon is the largest as it is a meeting place for more people, while the bedroom and especially the boudoir of the countess have much smaller size offering the required privacy. In this way the demand for greater comfort and privacy was ideally served by the irregular picturesque plan. In a building with different sections one could hive off into separate wings the different components of the household – the family, the servants and the service area, the nursery and the guests. Bachelors were in turn kept separated from unmarried lady visitors.<sup>146</sup>

Acceptance of the picturesque concept of irregularity and asymmetry in the plan of a house soon affected the way people looked at its furnishings, which in turn led to the furniture being disposed in a similar irregular manner. The process begun with the arrival of the sofa-table and of the round table out of the centre of the room and continued with mixed sets of chairs. First

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<sup>146</sup> *Magyarország és a Nagyvilág*, III.-1898, Budapest, December 31, p. 8.

of all furniture was pulled out from the wall and organized in a disorderly manner. Also, many styles of furniture were mixed and in the “antiquarian interior” such mixed styles were to be perfectly acceptable. In short, inside the building, aside from the size of the rooms, the picturesque manifested itself in the organization of the furniture and decoration as well: “Indeed, if you wanted to create a new building that was truly picturesque you could not go far wrong if you couched it in the Gothic style, making it look as if parts have been added at various times.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Girouard, 1979, p.150.

## Conclusions

In the present thesis I examined the symbolic and practical functions of the Hungarian country house in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the social historical studies about the period under investigation of this thesis talk about the bourgeoisie and its climbing on the social ladder. In western scholarship there are works about the “survival” of the aristocracy, but in Hungary basic research on that topic is missing. For this reason, this paper investigates the aristocracy’s role, place and status within society mainly through art historical interpretations. It turns out that the aristocracy did survive – the modernizing forces did not change essentially its status. Moreover, the architectural activity of these people tends to speak in an argumentative way.

My paper dealt with two country houses of two renowned families, but not on a comparative basis. The reason for the case selection of the Károlyi and Andrassy families is the fact that they are representative for the North-East Hungarian aristocracy with their impressive house building activity. Nothing can prove better the economic well being of the aristocracy than the fact that one million florin was spent on the Károlyi country house.<sup>148</sup> This information refers only to this building, but if one looks at the whole country house building activity in Hungary in the period it becomes evident that the aristocracy was not losing power.

The country house in Nagykároly was the family nest, while the building in Betlér was used mainly for recreational purposes, which puts the accent of analysis in the former case on the symbolic function, and on the comfort function in the latter case. These two buildings are especially suitable for this analysis because the style of the Károlyi country house fits into the

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<sup>148</sup> Erdei, p. 25.



architectural trend of the period and the interior furnishing of the Andrassy building was kept until nowadays and is exemplary to the quest of the aristocracy for comfort.

The country house was a tool in the display of power for the aristocracy and its architecture had symbolic meanings. The neo-gothic style served a double function: it was the manifestation of the old and the new at the same time. The aspiration of the aristocracy for legitimacy from the past was supported by using this style, which was the symbol of not just national glory and pride, but also personal achievements. Thus, it served as a perfect tool for social representation. However, being primarily a home, the country house was also subordinated to the practical needs of living, among which the most important was the comfort; hence it was organized according to the newest technological developments. The aristocracy was initiating the technological developments until the turn of the century for the simple reason that they had the financial means to do it. Correspondingly they had the chance to travel and experience the latest trends in architecture, gardening, clothing, etc. What they saw – mostly in England – was the popularity of the picturesque, of the asymmetry. No other architectural style could better express playfulness and “naturalness” than the irregularity of the gothic. The “back to the nature” principle was put in practice by the English landscape gardens, which was present both in Betlér and in Nagykároly. The end of 19<sup>th</sup> century favoured the picturesque design not only in garden planning but in architectural organization as well. Asymmetry in the architectural masses, artificial ruins and pavilions in the park, water ditches, little balconies were all subordinated to the romantic, medieval outlook.

The research also showed the tendency to furnish the rooms according to individual taste, following Jakob von Falke’s advise, who propagated the neo-renaissance style the most. Thus, neo-renaissance seems to be the favourite style for interior furnishing. There are numerous pieces

of furniture of the kind in the Nagykároly country house, but the difference between them and the genuine renaissance furniture is the comfort level. The 19<sup>th</sup> century furniture was made primarily to serve the comfort of the user. It remains a question whether it was a spontaneous development or they followed Falke's advice, who unambiguously pronounced his preference for it in the interior furnishing. Since Falke wrote his book for and about the bourgeoisie it is a question how much he had an impact of the aristocracy's ways of furnishing their country houses. It is more likely to think that the mixture of furniture existent in the rooms is the result of a conscious collection which fitted in the period's obsession for antiquities, at least in the case of these two buildings.

The research also showed that the collection of rarities and the surprisingly large number of bathrooms made the Andrassy country house a unique building in the Hungarian context. The fact that it was open for the visitors makes it a special case within the Hungarian country houses and shows the exceptional character of Count Manó Andrassy. He played an important role not just in the context of his country houses, but also in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century modernisation. It could be the center of another research to see in what way a personality affects the development and the life of a smaller region. I am aware of the fact that the approach and interpretational framework adopted has its limitations and it does not do full justice to the social significance of the country house. However, I believe that it shed light to the way a country house could mean to the people visiting it and to the owners. The direction of the further analysis is certainly leading to the urbanism, as the aristocracy lived a dual life, partly in the capital, partly in their country houses. Especially as far as comfort is concerned the examination and comparison of the country house with an urban palaces is indispensable.

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78.32 Betlér foyer

2018. 1953 Nagykároly hall

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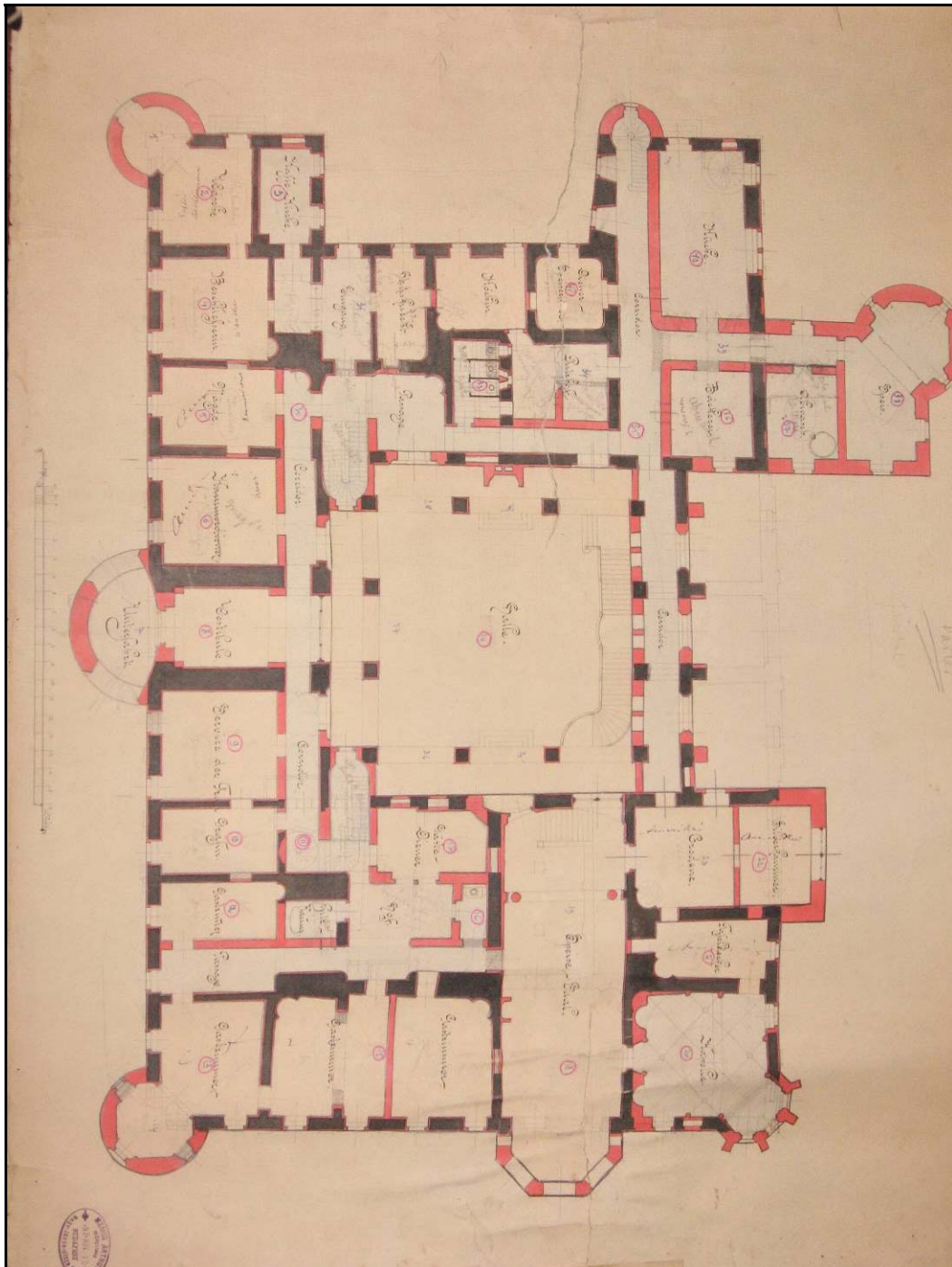
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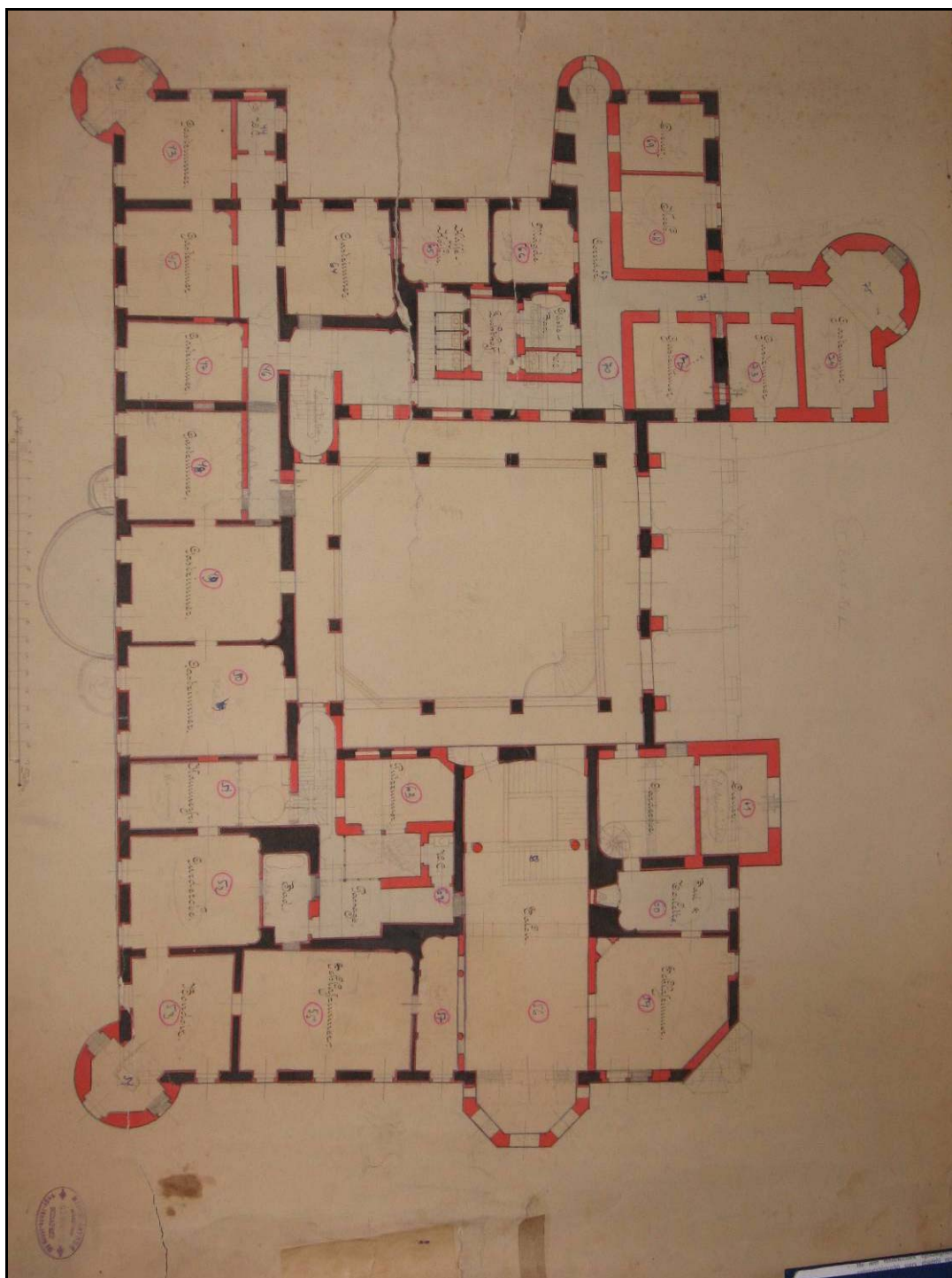


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## Appendix

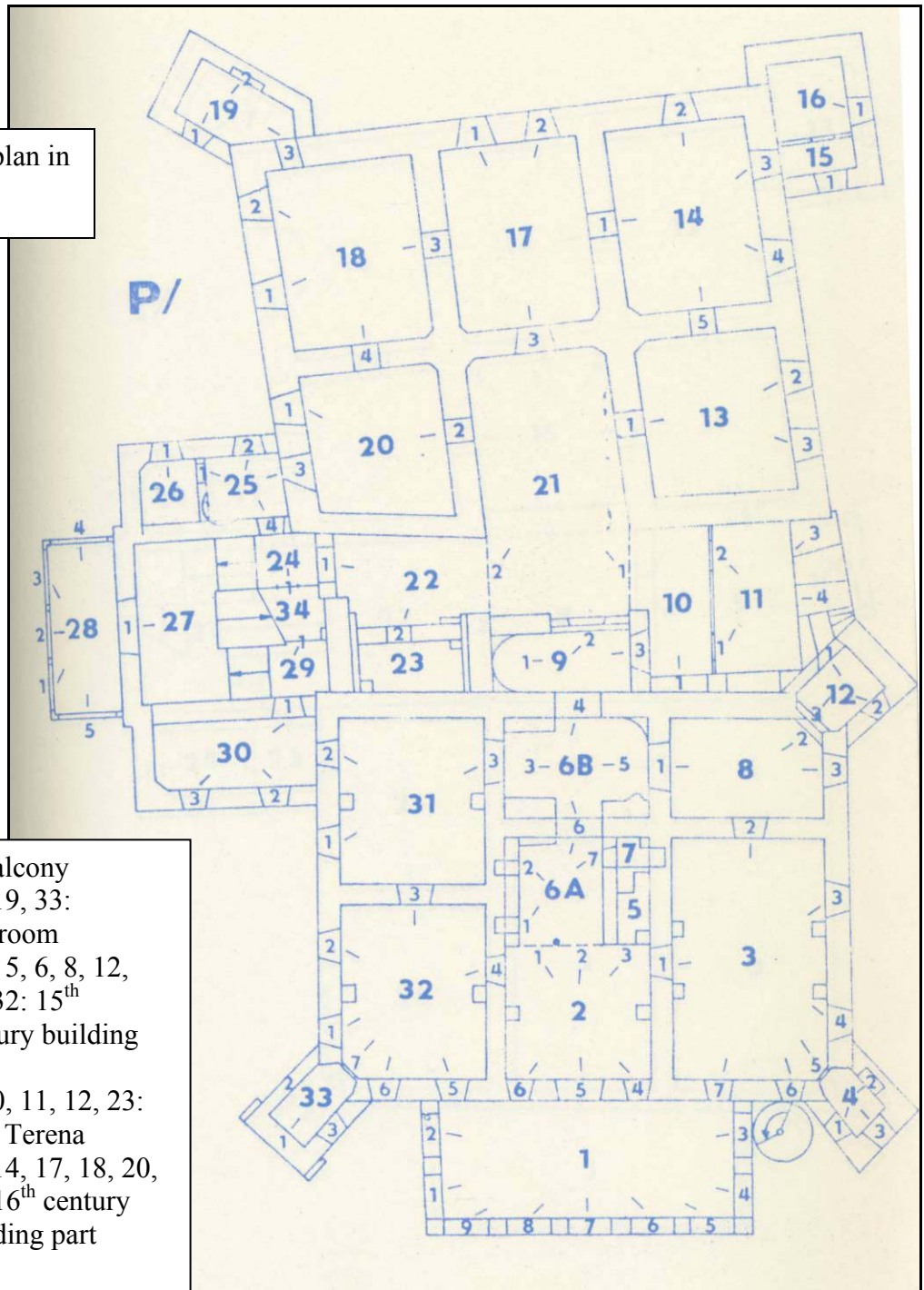


**I. a.** The ground floor plan of the Károlyi country house.



**I. b.** The first floor plan of the Károlyi country house.

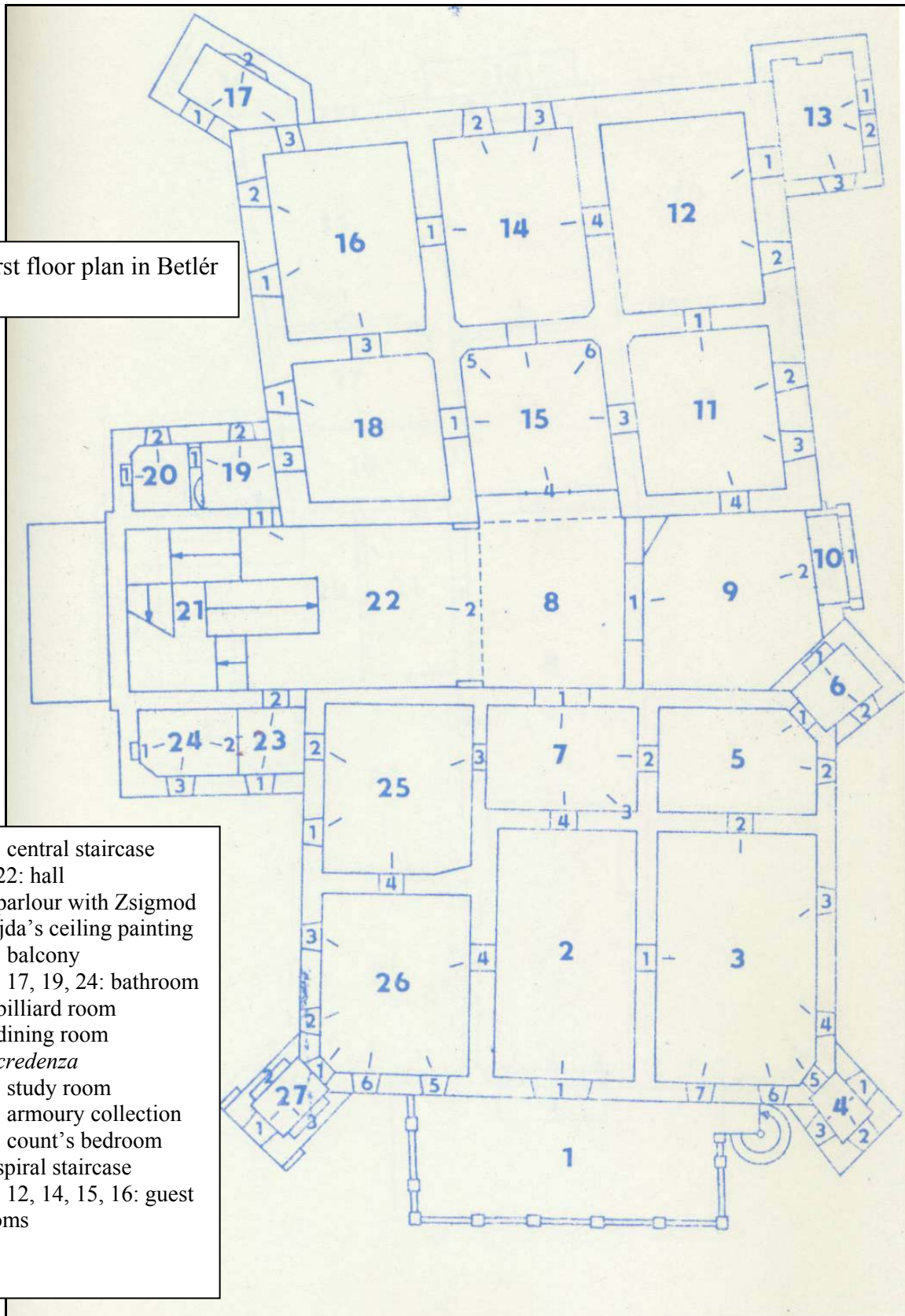
**II. a.** Ground floor plan in  
Betlér



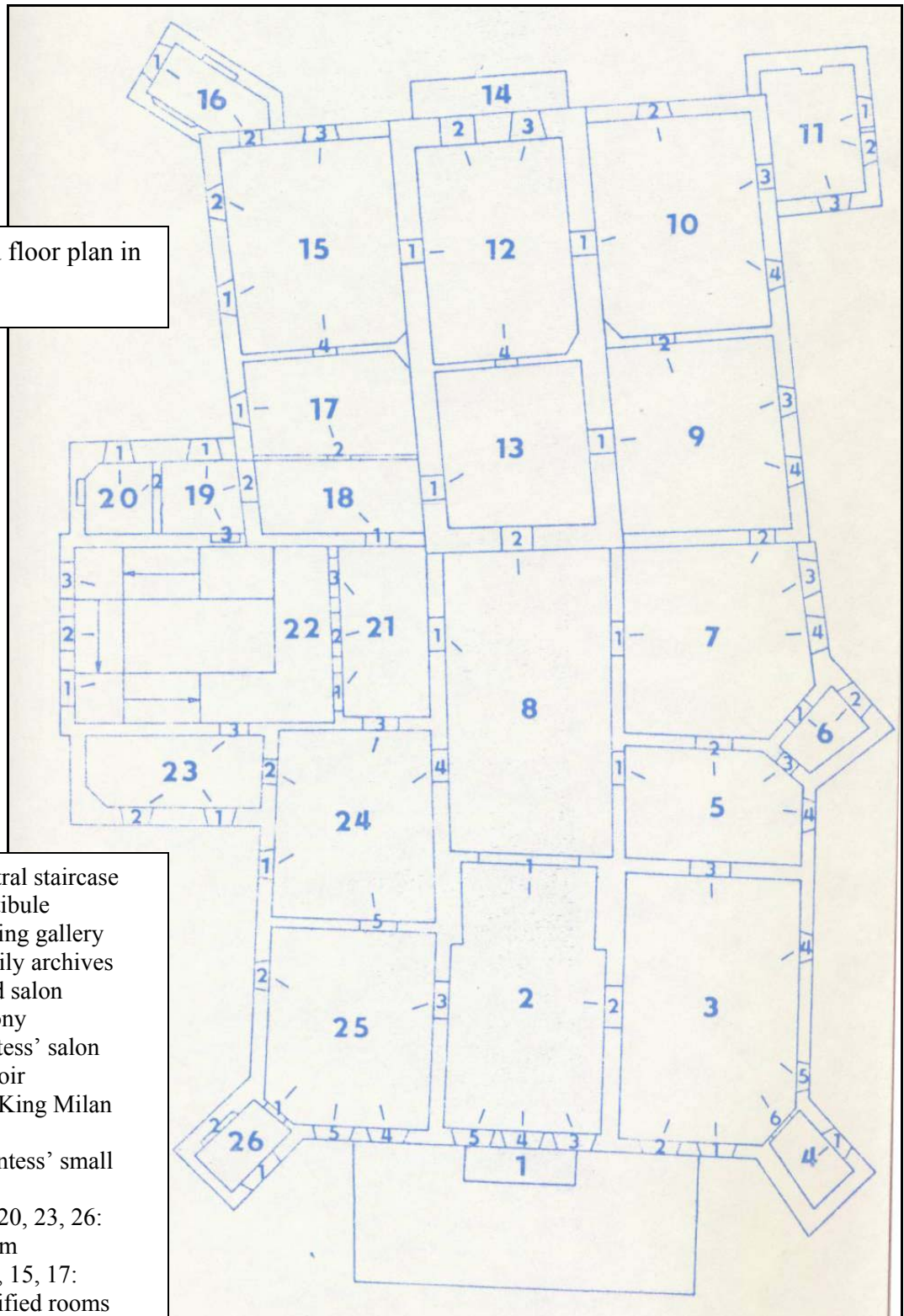


**II. b. First floor plan in Betlér**

- 21: central staircase  
 8, 22: hall  
 9: parlour with Zsigmond Vajda's ceiling painting  
 10: balcony  
 13, 17, 19, 24: bathroom  
 2: billiard room  
 3: dining room  
 4: *credenza*  
 26: study room  
 27: armoury collection  
 25: count's bedroom  
 6: spiral staircase  
 11, 12, 14, 15, 16: guest rooms



**II. c. Second floor plan in  
Betlér**



- 22: central staircase  
 21: vestibule  
 8: painting gallery  
 13: family archives  
 2: grand salon  
 1: balcony  
 3: countess' salon  
 4: boudoir  
 24, 25: King Milan  
 rooms  
 12: countess' small  
 salon  
 11, 16, 20, 23, 26:  
 bathroom  
 5, 9, 10, 15, 17:  
 unidentified rooms





The staircase with the family portrait gallery in Betlér



The dining room in Betlér





Bathrooms in Betlér





Gothic windows and the  
tallest tower in Nagykároly



The chapel



The grand staircase in  
Nagykároly