

Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

THE WORLD OF THE BLASKOVICH
THE HISTORY AND LIFESTYLE OF A GENTRY FAMILY
FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE 18TH CENTURY TO THE MIDDLE OF
THE 20TH CENTURY

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DEBRECENI EGYETEM

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1. The subject and aim of the dissertation

In my dissertation I want to show the history of an exceptionally successful and ambitious family, which represents the layer of lower nobility on the way of becoming bourgeois. The history of a family whose members were educated and always open to renew their farming methods and developed a unique collection in Tápiószele in the 20th century to present the history and lifestyle of a gentry family.

As a resident of Tápiószele I have been able to trace since my childhood how the value-preserving and culture-transmitting spirit of the Blaskovich-brothers have determined the identity of the people of the village. Moreover, the Blaskovich still belong to the collective memory of the Tápió-region, their intellectual and material heritage have affected up to now the everyday life of the people living there. The Baroque chapel of the family is in Tápiószentmárton. At the permanent archeological exhibition of the National Museum the Scythian gold deer found by the Blaskovich brothers, which is one of the two items excavated in Hungary, is displayed. The most important tourist attraction of the region is the horse riding park of Tápiószentmárton, which is based on the myth of the wonder mare of the Blaskovich. In the 20th century, their most significant contribution was in the field of cultural heritage. In spite of the destructions of two world wars they were able to save their family art collection and, in 1940, they opened it for the public. The Blaskovich Museum in Tápiószele is the only mansion museum of lower nobility in Hungary today. Due to the mercy of fate I have been managing the museum for nearly thirty years so I have actively contributed to cultivating the intellectual and material heritage of the Blaskovich family.

In Hungarian genealogical research the material of the Blaskovich family established by Sámuel Blaskovich of Ebeczk represents an unparalleled value with its complexity. With the majority of noble families it is a wonder if the building of their one-time estate has remained besides documents and photos. It rarely occurs that the 18th century documents of a family of lower nobility are preserved in the state archives, while those of the 19th and 20th centuries can be found in a public collection completed with not only original photos but also with original personal articles used by several generations. Thus they represent a special and valuable historical resource. We may rightly claim that there are no other gentry families in Hungary besides the Blaskovich of Ebeczk, whose history is based on a wide resource like this with so many objects to complete the written and iconographic material.

The treatise is more than a traditional family history. It is a family history examined from the aspect of social history with a cultural historical perspective. Thus the research

followed two tracks. One was the social historical line (the history of the descendants of the person who was ennobled, property relations, presenting the social status, exploring the social network and the marital strategy of the family), the other was the cultural historical line in which I present the living conditions of each generation in details and examine the circumstances that determine the way of living. The special importance of this point in case of the Blaskovich is that the 19th century furniture of one of their homes can still be seen at the beginning of the 21st century.

With my treatise elaborating the history of the Blaskovich family of Ebeczk I would like to improve the results of Hungarian family and social history.

2. The resources, methods and structure of the dissertation

The dissertation has mainly been done on the basis of undisclosed archive resources or ones only published by me. The elaboration is based on two main groups of resources. One is preserved in the Archives of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County under the name of Documents of the Blaskovich and related families (1422-1839). Elemér Blaskovich presented all the family records to the Archives of Szolnok in 1917.

The other large size resource, which no one else has elaborated apart from me, is kept in Blaskovich Museum of Tápiószele. The documents in the Historical Archives of the public collection range from the beginning of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century. From a genealogical point of view an especially valuable part of the Blaskovich family records kept in the Historical Archives of the museum is the obituaries. The records related to the public role and 1848-1849 activity of Gyula I. Blaskovich mean another important unit as well as the economic documents of the properties of Erk, Tiszaújhely, Prandorf and Tápiószele. Official and private correspondence are also valuable part of the rich material. In a family historical aspect the change of letters between the family members are of great importance, especially those related to Gyula II. Blaskovich, Aladár, Antal, György and János, Sándor II. and III. as well as Ernő III. Interesting resources of the material of Tápiószele are the diaries and notebooks with fund and economic entries, art collection acquisitions, hunting episodes. However, the most important of all is the war diary of János Blaskovich with events recorded from 1944 to 1947. The other parts of the family documents, first of all the records of the museum founder brothers can also be found in the archives of Blaskovich Museum, Tápiószele.

For the genealogical research I used primary and secondary resources. The primary ones involve the 18th century parish registers (of the dead or baptized) of Deménd (Demandice today) kept in the archives of Besztercebánya, the Registers of the Dead and Baptized of the Roman Catholic Parish of Tápióbecske and the birth and death certificates kept in Blaskovich Museum. Concerning the descent and genealogy of the family there are important data in the Royal Books (Libri Regii) of Hungarian Chancery Archives kept in the Hungarian National Archives, in the documents containing proofs of nobility (section O) and smaller family units (section P) and in the Archives of Genus Károlyi. I also used the material of the Map Collection of National Széchenyi Library and that of the cadastral maps of the Land Office of Nagykáta.

I made use of the documents of Pest County Archives, Heves County Archives and Nógrád County Archives to show the genealogy of the Blaskovich and the social responsibility of the family members. The minutes of noble assemblies, magistrate registers, the files of the chief constable court of Tarna, books of mortgaging and files of noble insurrection were also studied.

Indispensable data were gained for the treatise from the genealogical works of Iván Nagy and Béla Kempelen and the classic as well as later works introducing the nobles of Pest, Csanád, Szolnok, Nyitra and Pozsony counties. During my research, I reached important data from the student registers of universities, lists of names and addresses of Budapest, various military drafts and almanachs.

Besides searching and elaborating the generations of the Blaskovich family I also focused on showing the lifestyle and properties of the family. For the description of 18th century properties I used the documents of the archives of Szolnok. Apart from primary sources I made use of epigraphic sources as well to make genealogical data specified. The family graveyard of Tápiószentmárton and the epigraphs of the gravestones of Nézsa and Tápiószele meant an important supplement for me.

I also documented the earlier venues of the life of the family on a collecting tour of my own. I went to Deménd and Felsőbaka (Prandorf) (both in Slovakia), Nagybánya (Romania), Erk (Heves county), Szent Tamás puszta near Törökszentmiklós, Kengyel, Makó-Királyhegyes, Nézsa (Nógrád county), Tápiószentmárton and Budapest – Reáltanoda Street and Szerb Street. Visiting the sites I widened the methods of my historical exploration. During the visits I took photos, which helped me to enlarge the iconographic material and to specify the special literature. To elaborate the 20th century lifestyle of the family I made use of the method of oral history. Among the most important secondary sources are the 19th

century newspaper articles on the members of the Blaskovich family as well as reports and news written by the family members themselves.

The period my dissertation deals with spans from the beginning of the 18th century to the mid 20th century. Concerning the earlier history of the family I do not have authentic data. Neither do I explore the lifestyle of the last generation in the second half of the 20th century because I did not mean to digress in the direction of museum history. In the treatise I discuss the family history in chronological order.

My dissertation on family history consists of six large chapters. After the introductory chapter, which deals with general issues of special literature concerning the subject, the second part is about the process of descent and emergence then comes the presentation of the economic and social roles of the Reform Age generations. In the fourth chapter I show the descendants concerned in the bourgeois transformation together with their family-social connections. The middle-class generation appears in the fifth unit, with special emphasis on the branch which founded the museum. Finally, my dissertation is closed with a summary. At the end of the treatise the list of sources and special literature can be found. In the appendix there are six genealogical tables of the generations of the Blaskovich of Ebeczk. The picture attachment is a selection from the rich iconographic material of the Blaskovich family completed with the photos I took on my collecting tour.

In my genealogical work the more dominant line explores the history of the direct ancestors of the museum founder brothers, György and János Blaskovich. I give the detailed career of Gyula Blaskovich, the grandfather, whose activity of 1848-49 is well beyond the framework of family history because he took an active part in the age of change, the process of bourgeois transformation. The generation system of the Blaskovich of Ebeczk strongly diversified by the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries so in the first half of the 20th century I only present the history and life style of the museum founder branch.

3. The results of the research. The most important statements of the dissertation

On the basis of the dissertation, it can be stated that though the career of the Blaskovich family started late, it can be regarded characteristic among Hungarian lower nobility. It was Sámuel Blaskovich who took the first step for the advancement of the family. His social position and education as well as the start of his official career were similar to those of the Grassalkovich and the Belezsnays. However, the Blaskovich family could not reach the height of aristocracy either at that time or later. The history of the family can only be dated

back with certainty to the age of Rákóczi. István and Sámuel, the two brothers who lived then, chose different careers – just like the members of the Csáky, Andrassy, Eszterházy and Forgách families – to emerge. István Blaskovich became the captain of Rákóczi while his younger brother, Samuel became a district administrator (the position was similar to that of a sheriff) thus remaining on the Habsburg side. According to the family memories, Sámuel Blaskovich requested and received new nobility and a coat of arms in 1712 because of the descendant who had compromised himself in the war of independence of Rákóczi.

After receiving the diploma of nobility in 1712, generations acquiring and augmenting properties, holding public offices at the county, or bearing arms and getting married beneficially changed each other for one and a half decades until 1848-49. Their estates were in Hont, Nógrád, Borsod, Heves and Pest counties and they held various public offices in these counties either as a vice-notary, a district administrator, a chief district administrator, a sub prefect or a judge of the County Court.

Due to effective husbandry, merits in official career and good family relations, the 18th century members of the Blaskovich family (Sámuel and József I) rose to bene possessionatus layer of lower nobility. With the royal gift of 1738 they augmented their properties in Nógrád and Hont counties. Augmentation of property through marriages was typical until the middle of the 19th century though the Blaskovich also purchased some land from the Kubinyis, the Almássys, the Podmaniczky and the Keglevich.

The members of the family were always careful in managing the property, had ambitions in public life and politics and held art values in high esteem. There were several talented people in the family. Ernő Blaskovich, the famous thoroughbred breeder, Gyula II. Blaskovich, the art collector, Sándor Blaskovich writer and his son, Sándor Junior, the composer as well as György and János Blaskovich, the museum founders, are the most outstanding persons.

The Blaskovich of Ebeczk were similar to the noble families which traditionally pursued military career, participated in public life or had some business. The first group was represented by István Blaskovich lieutenant-colonel, Pál Blaskovich general sergeant, Pál II. Blaskovich hussar officer, and György Blaskovich, the lieutenant of Imperial and Royal Hussars Regiment. The list of those who held some kind of public office is much longer. Among them there are district administrators, judges of the County Court, sub prefects and representatives. Besides Hont and Pest county offices held by Sámuel Blaskovich, who started emergence, and his son József, the majority of the men living in the Reform Age held other public offices as well. The highest official position was reached by Gyula Blaskovich, who

became the lord lieutenant of Heves county. What indicated the standing of the family was that József II. Blaskovich was elected to be the judge of County Court in as many as three counties. It was an attractive purpose and the top of political career for a landowner nobleman to get a parliamentary mandate. In the era of dualism, several family members, Pál II. Blaskovich, Sándor Blaskovich, and, from the wives' spouses, István Huszár, Sándor Almássy and Béla Máriássy had parliamentary mandates and did their legislative duties for a longer time. However, it was the son of a Blaskovich-girl who reached the highest position in political life. Amália Blaskovich's only son, Benjamin Kállay became joint Minister of Finance in the time of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. The third type of noble careers, ecclesiastic profession, was only represented by the half-brothers of Gyula II. Blaskovich.

From the mid-19th century individual life stories of the Blaskovich family of Ebeczk two behaviour patterns can be seen in accordance with national trends. One was the model of standing at the side of progress. In a fateful period of Hungary not only the men of the Blaskovich but also the women's spouses joined the service of the country. During the time of the war of independence of 1848-49, they fought or worked in the second line though as active leaders at a county level. Gyula I. Blaskovich, sub-prefect, had the most important role during the political transition but Pál, his brother, Ágoston Wartersleben, his brother-in-law, and also István Huszár and Sándor Almássy took an active part in the fights. Mór Perczel, Pál II. Blaskovich's brother-in-law, also played an important role in the national events. For Gyula Blaskovich, who had made great sacrifice for the matter of independence and organized the national guard as well, the surrender meant a personal failure. He could not get over the collapse of the revolution, broke down both mentally and physically and, presumably, committed suicide. The other type of behaviour was also present within the Blaskovich, as Bertalan and his family remained faithful to the Habsburg-dynasty all the time.

In my dissertation I also mentioned how sensitively and quickly the members of the family responded to the social-economic changes of the age. The emergence and the bene possessionatus existence of the family were facilitated by the well-thought-out marital strategy. The adaptive and ambitious family members developed their husbandry, and together with it, their housing conditions to a high level. In the middle of the 19th century, there were people among the Blaskovich who were touched by new ideas, modern individual and community interests as well as circumstances demanding changes. They were able to think in a modern way, to become useful for the country and to choose the way of middle-class development.

In the Blaskovich family's history spanning centuries I have presented people whose aim was to enrich the built heritage, to support progressive national ideas, to establish Hungarian horse racing and to collect and publicize cultural values. We can observe with the generations of the end of the 19th century and those of the 20th century, how manifold social phenomena and various roles were built and combined on one another. The family members have two groups. The descendants of István and Miklós Blaskovich's had the life style of rich country noblemen with a few bourgeois elements while others had an intellectual-civic way of life, which, however, preserved some connections with the land or noble traditions. Up to the middle of the 20th century, when they left their properties, the Blaskovich of Tápiószentmárton, Nagykirályhegyes and Nézsa had lived the life of well-to-do proprietors. Sándor II. Blaskovich and his son as well as the brothers of Tápiószele, György and János Blaskovich chose an intellectual way of life.

On the basis of the history of two and a half centuries we can see the main ambitions of the Blaskovich, which were good and effective husbandry, augmentation of property, forming beneficial marital relations sometimes with the result of getting a higher rank, holding public roles and active participation in the public life of the county and the country. Through all generations, the Blaskovich managed their properties really well, using modern methods therefore emancipation of serfs did not shake their financial safety. It is worth mentioning the land acquisition strategy of József I. Blaskovich, the sub prefect of Hont, József II. Blaskovich, his grandson, judge of the County Court, and Bertalan Blaskovich, who established estates spreading over several counties. Ernő and Miklós Blaskovich were more than successful landowners, having a good business sense, they joined in horse racing, which contributed to the economic recovery of the age.

From the last third of the 19th century, the Blaskovich family became famous for their thoroughbred breeding, especially the estates of Tápiószentmárton and Nézsa. In the history of horse breeding and especially horse racing several stallions or mares of Tápiószentmárton origin are recorded, which justifies the high level of breeding of that time. Among the great number of outstanding horses the thoroughbred mare, Kincsem, became a great name, which brought fame to his breeder, the name Blaskovich and Hungarian thoroughbred breeding as well.

In the Blaskovich family I found several donors. In the 18th century the members of the family mainly contributed to the Roman Catholic Church, for example, they built a chapel. In the 19th century, however, they contributed to progressive national efforts as well. József II. Blaskovich gave a significant donation, exceptionally significant even among landowning

noblemen, to support the foundation of the military academy. Bertalan Blaskovich contributed to publishing the periodical named Aurora edited by Károly Kisfaludy. Then Amália Blaskovich supported the education of women and the Hungarian literature of that time. Among the descendants there was a member of the Hungarian Royal Society of Natural Sciences, a founder of the Hungarian Society of Applied Arts, one displayed his art collection at the national millennial exhibition then, in the first half of the 20th century, there were organizers and sponsors of the archeological excavations near the Tápió.

The way of life and the quality of their homes reflect that the generations of the Blaskovich remained wealthy through disciplined, hardworking and successful farming even in spite of dividing the lands and giving dowries to the daughters. Each generation took great care of educating the children. This statement is especially true in the 19th century, when personalities like János Laky, Teréz Karacs and Mihály Táncsics taught the Blaskovich children for several years.

Concerning the social status, the Blaskovich family had split in two by the beginning of the century. The descendants of Tápiószentmárton, Gyapjú, and Nagykirályhegyes remained in the upper layer of the middle class, moreover, a few of them (Ernő I. Blaskovich, Miklós and his descendants) lived the life of aristocracy while those having a double, intellectual and noble, way of life either from inner inclination or outer force, sank in their social status. This social process can be traced in the case of the museum founder brothers of Tápiószele. However, through their activity their names have been preserved in the national memory. The social roles of the Blaskovich family have been completed by György and János Blaskovich, the two descendants living and working in the 20th century, who left the uniquely rich material of the only mansion museum of the country on the Hungarian nation.

4. Publications and lectures on the subject of the dissertation

Studies

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4. A Blaskovichok világa, egy köznemesi család története, Magyar Heraldikai és Genealógiai Társaság, Budapest, 2010. március 11.
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2. Local History Album, essays, Tápiószele, 1999 (ISBN 963 03 9056 6)
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