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# Archducal gardens of Hungary in the 19th century

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**Abstract:** The "Hungarian branch" of the Habsburg dynasty, as one of the most significant member of the political and economical elite of Hungary in the 19th century, was well known of their commitments to garden art and botany. It is due to the effort and patronage of the family members that significant plant collections, ornamental gardens and nurseries were established at Alcsút, on the Margaret Island or in Fiume. This paper presents new details related to these archducal gardens that can be drawn from contemporary field descriptions and publication work of Archduke Joseph and his employees.

**Keywords:** Archduke Joseph, Alcsút, Fiume, Margaret Island, glasshouses, acclimatization

## 1. Introduction

In the 19th century, the second most prominent dignitary of historical Hungary was the palatine, which position was held by members of the Habsburg imperial family since 1790. In the person of Palatine Joseph, posterity can honour not only an exceptional statesman but also a bountiful supporter of Hungarian culture. The prominent role of the archduke and his successors in garden art is also well known, and their activities and results were recently summarised in a comprehensive study [1]. Their strong relation to the horticultural field, however, was not a mere coincidence and not only a part of up-to-date aristocratic education. On the

contrary, following the Habsburg family's traditions to master a specific "civil" profession beside the political vocation, Palatine Joseph and later his grandson, Archduke Joseph was encouraged to reach highly educated level in horticultural field and botanical lore [2].

The building history of the Habsburg's ornamental gardens like Buda, Alcsút, Margaret Island or Fiume is mostly well known to contemporary professionals. At the same time only a few papers deal with the presentation of the horticultural plantations operated apart from the ornamental gardens, either with the botanical collecting activities or acclimatization experiments of the owners and their head gardeners. The aim of the current paper is to present some new aspects of the archducal garden estates by describing the establishment of the horticultural plantations of the archducal gardens.

## 2. Materials and Methods

It is a well known fact that most elements of the Habsburg legacy at Alcsút perished due to the historical events, therefore the small number of the remaining archive illustrations and other sources are of great scientific importance. The recent publications concerning the estates of the Archduke treat the details of the building history of the ensembles, presenting them mainly on archive map sources, post-cards or other written sources. Several less known archive illustration and the horticultural publication activity of the Archduke, however, are not, or just superficially mentioned and analyzed. Due to the nature of the scientific topic, the current methods are also related to the research of archive sources, and are complemented by analyzing and comparing the contemporary publications, articles, descriptions to the few number of archive visual data.

The hereinafter presented sources can be located in the nowadays poorly read professional literature from the turn of the century and in the archives of the Ferenc Entz Library (Budapest). Most of the illustrations were published in the official periodical of the Hungarian National Horticultural Society (OMKE), like the ones on the famous palm house at Alcsút [3-4], or those on the versatile horticultural elements (orchid-house, gardener's lodge, rosary, glasshouses, hotbeds) of the Margaret Island [5]. Further prominently valued archive illustrations on the archducal estates were published in the horticultural monograph (1900) of Károly Schilberszky [6], who was a contemporary lecturer at the Horticultural Institute of Budapest. Also to be highly valued, the few archive pictures and a description form 1904 on Alcsút by Jenő Füredi [7] (student of the Horticultural Institute around 1900), who spent his apprenticeship under János Hatos, the Archduke's last head gardener in Alcsút. Comparing this latter description to the site plan published in Schilberszky's monograph, it is possible to track the arrangement of the perished horticultural yard within the ornamental garden.

Besides the above mentioned sources, further valuable pieces of information are provided concerning the plant use due to a plant inventory [8] and a nursery bulletin [9] compiled by Archduke Joseph and his head gardener, János Hatos. On the design of the Alcsút palm house and its specific plant collection we can read in the 50th Jubilee Yearbook of the OMKE [10-11] while the tree planting of the roads nearby the family residence was described in a contemporary manorial report compiled by the estate manager of the archduke [12]. Moreover, dedicated to the professionals of his time, Archduke Joseph himself reported detailed taxon lists on the results of his acclimatization experiments performed in his garden at Fiume, [13-15], which gives an overview of the exotic plant applications.

## 3. Results and discussion

The castle of Alcsút was built as a residence for the archducal family at the beginning of the 1820-ies. The surroundings of the building were gradually turned into an ornamental garden due to the work of several prominent head gardeners (Károly Tost, Vilmos Jámbor, Pál Zednik and János Hatos) of the era. During twenty years following the death of Palatine Joseph in 1847, the park benefited only minor development till the lordship of Archduke Joseph who mastered the estates for almost half a century (1867-1905). It is well known that under the auspices of head gardener Vilmos Jámbor, important new developments were achieved: in 1869 the old lake was enlarged and reshaped and in the next year an artesian well was drilled to feed it. In 1871-72 the large palm house designed by Miklós Ybl was established next to the residential house [16].

It is less well-known, however, that a so-called “external plant nursery” (on 16 cadastral acres) and a “reserve garden” was also founded by Jámbor and the horticultural establishment within the garden was essentially transformed. The productive areas occupied, since the Palatinal times, the lawns in front of the southern facade of the castle building and the orangery. The plant houses were made of wood till the 1880s when Vilmos Jámbor pulled them down and built new iron-frame glasshouses to the eastern side of the orangery. On the approximately 1 acre territory of the horticultural plantation, new functional buildings were erected (Fig. 1), presented here on the basis of the contemporary publications of Füredi and Schilberszky [17].

An engine-house providing water supply was placed near the gate opening towards the Vértesboglár road. On the right side of the plantation, there was an approximately ~85 m long wooden cold-house with water pipe heating system, to the left of this building, several rows of hothouses. The longish cold-house was divided into three parts where exotic plants were grown grouped, respectively, in

different sections of Ericas, Azaleas and Camelias. The cold-house and the hothouses were connected by underground passages to facilitate safe transport of the plants.

Furthermore, the hothouses were also separated according to cultivation manner in the following order: a forcing house for different *Palms*, *Anthurium* and *Nepenthes* was standing closest to the engine house; after it, an orchid-house was established (cultivating orchids was one of the main specialities of the plantation) and a fern-house, followed by a mixed hothouse (where a large *Marantha*-collection was cultivated) and finally a temperate house. To the East, there was the orangery built at the same time as the castle (nowadays the only remaining built element of the whole horticultural establishment) and the palm house connected to the main building.

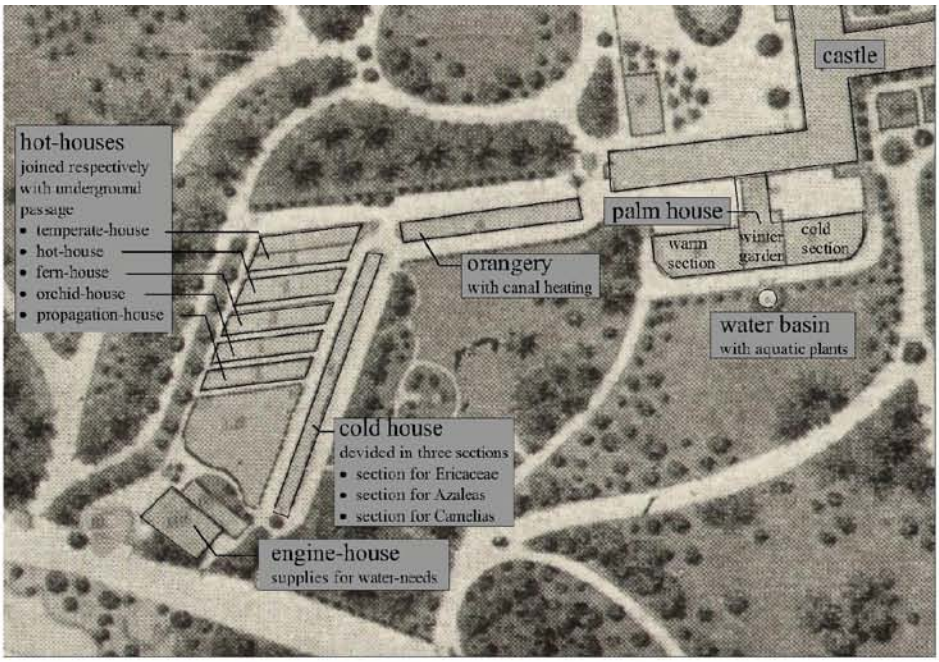


*Figure 1*: Arrangement of the indoor cultivation houses at Alcsút in the late 19th century

The detailed descriptions of the perished glasshouses [18] contain several plant lists or mention the remarkable taxa that were represented there. The most significant indoor plants of the collection were of the following genera: *Araucaria, Marantha, Camelia, Latania, Todea, Phoenix, Dracanea, Cycas, Crescentia, Musa, Bambusa, Pandanus, and Chamaerops*, some of them being represented by giant specimens (Fig. 2). The large variety of exotic plants can also be imagined after the plant summary presented in Table 1. [19]:

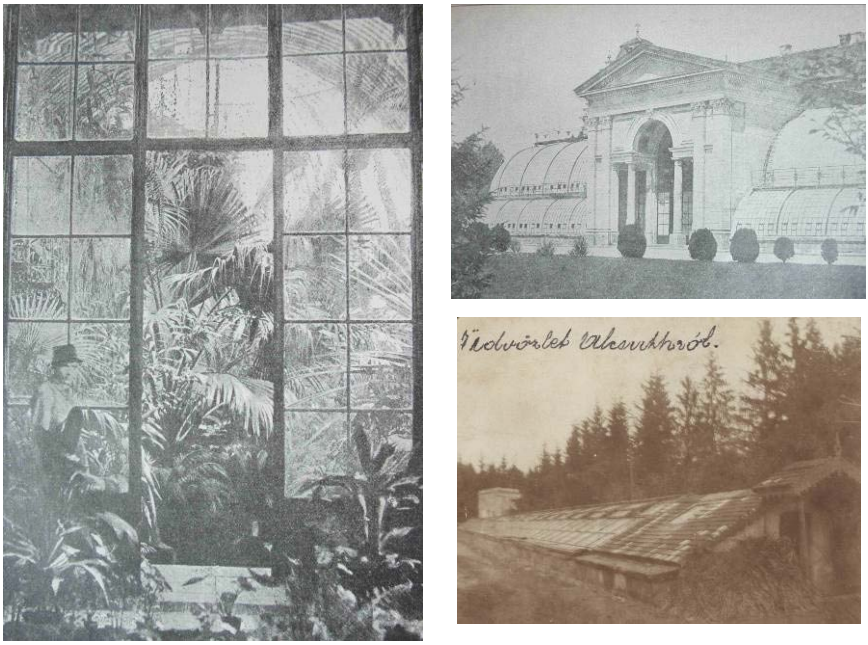

*Figure 2*: Inner and outer view of the palm house and a small glasshouse at Alcsút

*Table 1*: Representative taxonomic groups in the glasshouse collections at Alcsút

| Taxonomic group | Approx. N° of taxa |
|---|---|
| Orchidaceae | 272 |
| Theaceae | 240 |
| Aroideae | 102 |
| Filicinae | 97 |
| Palmae | 77 |
| Scitamineae | 40 |
| Malastomaceae | 27 |
| Lycopodiaceae | 15 |
| Pandaneae | 10 |
| Cycadeae | 9 |

Beside the ensemble of Alcsút, it was also Archduke Joseph's result that the ornamental gardens and nurseries of Margaret Island and the subtropical plant collection in Fiume (today Rijeka, Croatia) were developed in the second half of the 19th century. The contemporary craft highly approved the Archduke's horticultural activity not only because of the establishment of the ornamental gardens, which they "treated even vanishing compared to his merits in plant acclimatization experiments" [20].

These latter professional works were first accomplished during the development of the gardens at Fiume around 1860-1880s, where the winter was mild. After the success of the first years, the Archduke continued his experiments in his other gardens (like Alcsút or the Margaret Island), situated more to the North with more continental climate and harder winters. According to the archduke's own statement, he would love to be the first Hungarian who successfully "breeds palm trees in open air". Therefore he did not built just one glasshouse at Fiume (only for curing the damaged plants), but he was testing there the resistivity of the outdoor planted exotic taxa. The plants were brought from all around the world by maritime transport, thanks to plant hunters (like Jules Van Mol from Belgium) and seed merchants who were regularly employed in this era by fanatic botanical collectors. To give an overview on the scale of the acclimatization trials, the main exotic elements of the taxon list published by Archduke Joseph [21] are summarized in Table 2.

*Table 2*: Taxonomic groups of the acclimatized exotic plants in Fiume till 1885

| **Taxonomic group** | **Approx. N° of taxa** | **Acclimatized since** |
|---|---|---|
| Conifers | | |
| Abies | 15-17 | ~1870s |
| Araucaria | 3 | ~1880s |
| Cedrus | 8 | ~1870s |
| Cephalotaxus | 3 | ~1860s |
| Cupressus | 10 | ~1860s |
| Cryptomeria | 2 | ~1870s |
| Pinus | 10 | ~1860s |
| Thuya [sic] | 8 | ~1870s |
| Torreya | 2 | ~1880s |
| Palms | 6 | ~1870s |
| Yucca, Agave, Dracaena, Cycas | 10 | ~1870s |
| Cactus | 8 | ~1870s |
| Filices | 7 | ~1870s |

The above table does not contain the large number of evergreen shrubs and perennials that also took part of the trials, but worth in itself a separate study.

Evidentially most of the conifer acclimatization was successful, as the plant inventory on the garden of Alcsút, published a decade after the experiments, even contained a larger number (approx. 80) of conifer taxa.

An exotic indoor plant collection and several outdoor plantations were also created on the Margaret Island, where the local head gardener of the Archduke (György Magyar) created in three decades one of the biggest and best organized horticultural establishments of the country (Fig. 3).


*Figure 3*: Details of the horticultural establishment on Margaret Island, Budapest (orchid-house, gardener's lodge, hotbeds and rosary)

The head gardener's territory was situated in the middle of the island, surrounded by large arboreal plantation. According to contemporary description [22], the horticultural site was in a constant change except its main buildings. In the centre the main office, the head gardener's lodge, the apartment of the undergardeners and a huge cellar was built, this latter served as winter storage for ornamental plants. In front of the main building, a 600 sqm large glasshouse was standing which was used for mixed functions (propagation, forcing, conservation, etc.). To the left side of it a 1500 sqm hotbed-area was created. Apart from these

elements, separate glasshouses were built in the neighbouring areas, each for specialized plant cultivation (like palms, orchids, chrysanths or bulbous plants).

On the whole Margaret Island the Archduke employed about 80 permanent workers (amongt them, the head gardener, one supervisor, ten undergardeners and several apprentices), but this number could be doubled in the vegetation period. The large number of workers is not that surprising if we take into account that, on the average, 120.000 pieces of *Convallaria*, other 100.000 pieces of *Tulipa*, or over 20.000 pieces of *Hyacinthus* were forced here per year, only as the part of the bulbous plantation. If we describe the island's horticultural values, we must not forget about the famous rosary of the Archduke, which was his favourite collection here with around 16.000 planted out specimens over 1400 taxa. Above that, the island's nursery also supplied several dozens of roses and other arboreal species for commercial purpose.

## 4. Conclusion

In many ways the Archduke's professional activity is exemplary for the posterity that could not be described or summarized in one paper. Beyond the immense work of developing Hungary's remarkable gardens over decades, we must acknowledge as his merit the acclimatization of several dozens of exotic plants, the sponsorship of the horticultural crafts and the patronage of the biggest horticultural society in the country over decades. Thanks to the Archduke's professional essays and significant publication activity, nowadays it is still possible to be informed on the results of his acclimatization experiments in Fiume, or on the planting and forcing practice of his era. It is regrettable, that no other than the Archduke's horticultural heritage was mostly damaged in Alcsút, and the actual layout of the Margaret Island no longer reflects those splendid times of the early 20th century. Certainly, today's horticultural experts owes to study more the details the Habsburg's horticultural heritage, and should find the way to preserve and manage it in the most honourable manner.

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