



## The Role of Nobility

### *A Review of the Volume*

*László Zubánics: Vitézi végek dicsérete. A nemesség szerepe a XVI–XVIII. századi Északkelet-Magyarország társadalmi fejlődésében*<sup>1</sup>

[Laudation of Heroic Deaths. The Role of Nobility in the Social Development of 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup>-century North-Eastern Hungary]

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‘Not knowing the past makes it more difficult to find one’s way in the future. Families belonging to various social strata and different cultural areas perceive this simple statement as a very differing lifestyle direction and a tradition regulating the details of everyday life’ – formulates György Mikonya the essence of the subject. Research on family history – in our case, the history of noble families – can enrich historiography by adding a number of fine details that seemed to have been lost almost entirely by the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In recent times, there has been a considerably increased interest in research on nobility as an important social category, which cannot be accidental, however, as history talks about the past while addressing the present, and by relying on research results it tries to help us better understand the path leading up to the present as well as the principles of development. Nevertheless, we may have a unified relationship with our history only if, besides an education of an adequate standard, we are able to acquire the historicity of thinking – namely that we always take stock of people, events and contexts while taking account of the pace, time, and circumstances. It is by all means necessary that we review the events of the Late Middle Ages–the Early Modern Period within the appropriate context and raise awareness of the fact that the nobility – as representative

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of a significant social group – played an integral part in shaping the events. Unfortunately, not even the socialist period of Hungarian historiography was able to overcome the ‘teething troubles’ in connection with studying the history of nobility. Only those noblemen and aristocrats could become socially ‘accepted’ who were in some way linked to a liberation movement (István Bocskai, Imre Thököly, Ferenc Rákóczi II, etc.).

There is a considerable Hungarian-language literature on the subject. Among the general works, there is a ten-volume writing that stands out, entitled *Amagyar nemzet története* [The History of the Hungarian Nation]. The series was published in the edition of Sándor Szilágyi (1827–1899) on the thousandth anniversary of the foundation of the Hungarian state, and its authors endeavoured to take into account socio-historical aspects besides romantic nationalism as well as political history and history of ideas. A major trend of the era was the so-called economic and social history school with Károly Tagányi, Sándor Takáts, Ignác Acsády, and Ferenc Kováts as the most important representatives, who primarily dealt with issues of economic and social history. Among the historical schools of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *Geistesgeschichte* school hallmarked by the name of Gyula Szekfű is definitely worth mentioning, which may be basically considered as having a conservative approach. The four-volume work of Hóman and Szekfű, *Magyar történet* [Hungarian History], somewhat polarizes the oppositions of the political and popular concepts of nation. The post-1945 Hungarian historical science in many ways carried on the traditions and trends of the interwar period. Institutional forms remained unchanged at first, but soon historiography too had to adopt the Marxist historical approach of the government. In this context, the nobility was ‘assigned’ the role of the oppressive, parasitic social order in the service of the Habsburg oppression, betrayer of national interests, to which the leaders of feudal uprisings (disregarding their aristocratic status) were the only exceptions. Besides the specifically Marxist–Stalinist historiographical trends, at first, some other trends were also given a growing space. Among these, the constitutional and legal history trends and the so-called history of ideas trend are noteworthy.

Owing to its specific social development, the Kingdom of Hungary had undergone a transformation by the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, shifting from the western edge of Eastern Europe to the eastern edge of Western Europe. The Ottoman conquest itself as well as the actions taken against it have repeatedly confirmed the necessity of nobility as a social class providing protection for the country. Based on the ideological background of ‘noble nation’, the nobility has forged an extremely strong sense of self. Imbued with Christian ideology, the Hungarian nobility was unable to reach a compromise with the Ottoman Empire, but it retained certain possibilities of cooperation and manoeuvring, and as a state policy instrument thereof the Principality of Transylvania came into existence,

carrying in itself all characteristic features of East-European dichotomy: while recognizing the sultan's sovereignty, it continued to be a representative of Western values. Joining the Habsburg Empire was some sort of historical necessity as the maintenance of border strongholds in time of peace practically consumed the annual income of the country, leading up to a situation where a potential Turkish incursion could only be repelled with the support of foreign funds and with the use of military force. Given that neither the nobility nor the dynasty had sufficient resources to get the upper hand, the period under discussion is technically an age of forced cooperation and compromise up until the shift in the balance of power that took place in the 1560s–70s.

As postulated by Géza Pálffy, researcher of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian history, the investigated period was a time full of conflicts and quests for compromises, which the nobility could successfully exploit for its own benefit. What poses the biggest problem in terms of the objective consideration of the matter is that the majority of historians look into the processes exclusively from the perspective of the Principality of Transylvania as 'the bastion of Hungarian national independence and the symbol of independent Hungarian statehood'. However, as Pálffy correctly observes, 'the (political, military, and administration) history of the two states, the kingdom and the principality, led mostly by Hungarians cannot be put down – even despite their frequent contacts – within the framework of a model or a concept'. Naturally, the history of the three regions cannot be strictly separated, all the more so because their struggles took place on each other's territories, in the one-time unified Kingdom of Hungary. Recent studies throw into the shade the concept of the country's unification as setting out from Transylvania, a view consistent with the earlier romantic historical approach, and the various armed conflicts are more and more often classified into the category of anti-Habsburg struggles.

16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup>-century feudal Hungary was founded on the separation of powers between the ruler and the estates, and the stability of this power-sharing arrangement was occasionally tested by external factors (wars, the Reformation, etc.). Historian László Szegedi believes that on the model of *Rzeczpospolita Polska* we may talk about a certain republic of nobles within the Kingdom of Hungary too, where power was divided among the different spheres (the monarch and the nobility) of the feudal state. In their efforts to resolve conflict situations arising within the feudal society as a result of dissatisfaction with the monarch's policy, the nobility had recourse to external forces and endeavoured to create a balance of power, for which an important prerequisite was seeking compromise. Out of political necessity, the nobility of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg dynasty pursued a policy of compromise on numerous occasions (1608, 1622, and 1647). The will to maintain border protection against the Turks, thus ensuring the survival of the Kingdom, and the political, military as well as

financial (administration) interdependence existing since the 16<sup>th</sup> century were the primary factors giving the grounds for adopting such measures. There is an immense historical record of the ‘oppression’ theory in the Carpathian basin according to which, due to the Hungarian character (majority population) of the state dominating the area from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, both the indigenous minority and the immigrant population entering the region in later periods recognized early on that they could attain social advancement only if they tried their best to adapt and assimilate to some extent to the state-forming nobility of mostly Hungarian ethnic origin. It is therefore a good idea to clarify the concepts first, meaning that the causes of assimilation are not to be searched for in oppression but in the intention to seek social advancement. As historian László Tőkész suggests, the ‘oppression’ theory is nothing but one version of the conflict-centred (‘class struggle’) historical approach – and not without a good reason as throughout the existence of class societies there have always been disagreements and conflicts. Nevertheless, it would be a historical anachronism to project the toolkit of national awakening onto earlier periods. As Tőkész formulates: ‘Throughout centuries, the Hungarian nation was the dominant political–economic–cultural force in the Carpathian basin because it produced most of the élite of an agrarian world, the aristocracy and the nobility.’

For long centuries, the true nature of the Hungarian nation in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period was defined by István Werbőczy’s *Tripartitum*. According to this, by the inhabitants of the kingdom (regnicolae) that make up the Hungarian nation, that is, by the concept of Hungarian nation, we should understand the nobility, all those who were admitted to the ranks of Hungarian nobility by their ancestral right or with regard to their individual merits, in recognition thereof, and by this right they also benefited from political power and exercised political rights. In cases of admission to the Hungarian nobility, the historical period under investigation took no notice of the individual’s national origin and mother tongue. If someone had rendered good services to the Hungarian king, that is, to the Holy Crown and thus – in recognition of his extraordinary accomplishments or merits – was granted admission by the king to the ranks of nobility, then he could become member of *natio Hungarica* (the Hungarian nation). Consequently, the beneficiary entered the privileged ranks of nobility, bringing along his heirs and his entire family. At this point, we should emphasize once more that one could enter the ranks of *natio Hungarica* based upon individual merits alone. Any beneficiary who was this way advanced from the ranks of common people (the plebs) was personally granted a privileged place in the nobility and the possibility to exercise political rights pertaining to this newly obtained status, in return for which they had to show uncompromising loyalty to the current Hungarian state and its sovereign. In determining their identity, the Hungarian nobility considered the awareness of their ancient family

origins that can be traced back to the first settlers as a factor to be taken into account, if not the decisive element.

Belonging to the nobility was most importantly determined by the equal legal status of those belonging to the community, by possessing the same rights. Compared to these – owing to the feudal perspective –, those other factors that could have determined a certain connectedness, such as common mother tongue, ethnic identity, or religion, proved to be of secondary importance. In the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, the ranks of the Hungarian nobility were swollen by individuals with highly varied national origins, who became Hungarized in their lifestyle and language use as well partly because they deemed it proper and a practice to be followed and partly because they had mingled with noble families of Hungarian nationality.

Starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, research on the formation, functioning, and internal structure of social élites has become a focal point of social science studies. Therefore, the nobility inevitably gets central stage given that towards the end of the Middle Ages—in the Early Modern Period its members played the role of the social élite. While in the early stages origin and wealth were the conditions of social advancement, these were replaced and completed in later times by socially useful activities (first of all, extraordinary military achievements, gaining royal favour, or – in more peaceful times – outstanding literacy or even intellectual achievements, e.g. by way of an ecclesiastical career), which greatly contributed to the development of social mobility. When studying nobility as a social élite, both vertical and horizontal mobility processes can be traced. During the investigation, it was found that the nobility was the social category that could perform socially useful activities owing to its financial background; by redistributing the duties of the realm, it operated the political institutions – that could be considered almost democratic within the framework of the ‘noble democracy’ – of the county system forming the lower part of the feudal state.

Following the expansion of the Ottoman Empire and then the country’s division into three parts in 1541, the nobility became the beneficiary of the created internal conflict situation within the Hungarian society. Due to the persistent threats (attacks launched by the Turkish army and the Principality of Transylvania), this social group once again became a social necessity since it was able to mobilize economic as well as military forces. The estates of the Kingdom of Hungary and of the Principality of Transylvania practically lived in a symbiotic alliance since upon a shift in the social status quo they could count on the neighbouring state’s military intervention. In effect, the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the long 17<sup>th</sup> century was the age of compromises when most of the arising political problems were resolved at the negotiating table. With a view to our subject under analysis, North-Eastern Hungary, its location near the border had its own particular significance, technically

predestining it for the role of a buffer zone. The large landed noble families in Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa, and Máramaros counties had estates on both sides of the national border, which was slowly becoming stable, what made it important for them to consolidate their relations.

Since during the Habsburg rule the official centre of the Kingdom of Hungary operated in Vienna and the princes of Transylvania did not have a permanent residence, the castles and mansions of high-wealth and influential aristocratic families often functioned as regional educational and cultural centres. The 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup>-century political, economic, and cultural prosperity could have virtually not taken place without the active contribution of the nobility.

In the period under analysis, the representatives of the nobility were practically present in all key areas of the Kingdom of Hungary, the Principality of Transylvania, and the territories of Hungary controlled by the Ottoman Empire. The noble families inhabiting the counties of North-Eastern Hungary (Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa, and Máramaros) are the protagonists of the volume under review. The socio-political, socioeconomic, and cultural-religious processes taking place on the territory of North-Eastern Hungary between 1526 and 1657 constitute its subject-matter, with an outlook on the role of noble families and their influence exerted on these processes.

Its geographical borders are formed by the territory of those counties of North-Eastern Hungary that belong to present-day Subcarpathia (Ukraine). These are the one-time Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa, and Máramaros counties (some of their territories currently belong to Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania). Following the double royal election (1526) and then Hungary's division into three parts (1541), the new borders took shape at a slow pace, as a consequence of numerous conflicts. Therefore, the areas of the Uzh, Latorica, Borzhava, and Tisza rivers as well as of their tributaries (and the noble counties established there) should be marked as a geographical research area.

The author formulated the topicality and importance of the research, set the objectives to be accomplished, assigned the task, designated the subject, object, and methodological bases of the study, and pointed out those scientific innovations that can promote the practical application of the results achieved. László Zubánics's work also refers to some parallels along which the dissertation may be connected with the scientific research topic, and he presented those scientific fora (conferences) where he brought his research results before professional circles for evaluation.

The opening chapter is dedicated to the presentation of sources and historiography. In his work, a great number of research methods were adopted, outstanding among which is historicism that made it possible to place the nobility as the subject of investigation in a defined historical, geographical, and economic setting, therefore allowing us to obtain objective results in the course of

the research. Integrating the elements into appropriate systems may be regarded as yet another important result since in the different regions of the Kingdom of Hungary as well as of the Principality of Transylvania the nobility was affected by very similar circumstances it could not disregard.

The critical analysis of the available sources played a crucial part during the study, just as indicating the correlations between the historical personalities and processes. In terms of modelling the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup>-century demographic and any related socioeconomic processes, adopting statistical methods became indispensable, while the work of experts specialized on the subject was also a key element to consider as they could provide proper methodological inputs. Based on the annual conscriptions of wealth (*dicales conscriptiones*), these methods also assisted in successfully calculating the number of inhabitants in the counties under study and obtaining an appropriate picture of the settlement structures.

The author examined the available archival sources based on the following categories: 1) sources created for purposes of historical recording (chronicles, annals, memoirs, itineraries); 2) sources created in the course of daily activities (diplomas, contracts, letters, lists, registers, testaments, various other documents); 3) temporary sources (legal provisions, laws, statistics).

In the following chapters, the author takes under scrutiny the formation of nobility as a social category and the major stages of its development, also examining the socio-political conditions prevailing among the nobility of North-Eastern Hungary and the role of religion with regard to the changes in the daily life of the nobility.

Starting from the Early Middle Ages, a small class of people had the leading role in the European societies. They are the nobility, who – varying from country to country (England: close to 1%; France and the Holy Roman Empire: 1–3%) – amounted to 1–2% of the total population. In Central Europe, these indices were significantly higher: Bohemia – 3%; the Kingdom of Hungary – 4–5%; Rzeczpospolita – 7–8%. These are by all means high indicators compared to the European conditions but nevertheless fairly low values considering society as a whole since part of the contemporary society (in our case, the *gens hungarus* – the Hungarian nation) was represented exclusively by the privileged classes. During the research, it was concluded that even after the country's division into three parts Royal Hungary preserved its specific local administrative form, the county system. This legal continuity meant at the same time the continued existence of the feudal character of the nobility. Representatives of the nobility were not only the leaders but the beneficiaries of this system organized based on wealth and privileges. Although local authorities acted as local representatives of the different levels in the governance of the state (legislation, execution, jurisdiction), their interests rarely conflicted with those of the central power. With the development of the feudal state in its final stages, the separation of

state functions had been initiated by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, wherein the diet as the single legislative forum played a central role, and its representatives were elected by the members of the nobility at the county assemblies – additionally, the announcement of the relevant decisions was again made by the nobility. The decisions taken by the diet were to be sanctioned by the monarch, and if the king did not wish to convoke the diet, the county authorities had the power to refuse the implementation of the decrees judged by them as unlawful. This interdependence worked out perfectly well until the 1657 Polish and then the 1660 Turkish invasion, when the Principality of Transylvania lost its political and military weight as an ‘interstitial safety valve’.

Noble counties constituted the lowest foothold of this social order. The collective decision-making body of the county nobility was the general assembly (*generalis congregatio*), where all noblemen with an estate in the county had the right to participate, meaning that it was a ‘democratically’ functioning local political decision-making – and decentralized local legislative – body. The triple function (self-governance, execution, jurisdiction) of the noble county was performed by the appointed and elected officeholders; these were the county head (named by the monarch), the deputy county head or vice-ispán (at first, only one, then two), the noble judges (*iudex nobelium*) at first, there could be four, but then their number increased), and the jurors. As a rule, county heads could carry out the management of 1–2 adjacent counties. Within the region under study, the management of Zemplén and Ung as well as of Szabolcs and Szatmár counties were usually centralized in the hands of a single family each: while in the former case the Drugeth family, in the latter one, the representatives of the Báthory family filled the office of the county head. With the development of the noble county, the frameworks of jurisdiction also underwent some changes. The legal order of the county courts, developed in mediaeval times, remained in function up until the year 1848.

In the European societies of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, the lands and the taxes as well as different types of tallages paid by those living on them constituted the economic mainstay. The various tax censuses give us a true image of the contemporary modes of tenure and population ratios. Among the primary sources, annual (so-called *dical*) conscriptions take up an important place. This sort of tax, the *dica*, was a direct state (royal) tax collected from the non-noble population, which was named after the tax collection procedure. The collected taxes would be carved in tally sticks, or *dicas*, i.e. rectangular pieces of wood, for each and every homestead (hereinafter also: portal). Originally, *dica* taxes were collected by portals, that is, after each gate (gate tax) under which a loaded hay wagon was able to pass through. Once national taxation had become an established procedure, a generally accepted taxable base – serf plot/portal (*sessio*) or plot-spread across the country and became the new norm on the



basis of which serfs would pay urbarial tax to their landlord and the taxes to the state. On a countrywide basis, the state determined the value of a serf plot at 40 (Hungarian) Gold Forints.

The 16<sup>th</sup> century brought along significant changes to the population of the Upper Tisza region: subsequent to Hungary's division into three parts and, within that, the development of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Principality of Transylvania, this region became subordinated to two separate political formations. The borderland status substantially affected the economic processes in the region, which was further increased by the fact that these territories most often remained safe from Turkish invasions, entailing a rise in the population growth rate also aided by the increased resettlement activities. Due to its geographical location and the limited arable lands suitable for agricultural exploitation of the Upper Tisza region, not any aristocratic latifundia in the traditional sense were formed here – middling noblemen would dispose over 20–30 portals in this area. Socioeconomic studies indicate that on most of the estates there were no farmsteads functioning, and the peasantry did not pay the allowances in money but in kind to the landlords, which significantly slowed down the process of the primitive accumulation of capital. Resettlement activities had a central role in increasing the territories of the estates originally forming clusters in the river valleys, thus contributing not only to a growing population but also to an increased coverage of agriculturally cultivated areas. The present-day settlement structure characteristic of Subcarpathia has developed along the lines of these resettlements.

The need to belong to the *gens hungarus* – as a ruling class – grew especially strong in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and acquired its final form in the wording of István Werbőczy. In accordance with the contemporary concept of nation, all subjects of *regnum Hungarica* (the Kingdom of Hungary and its partner states) were part of the *gens Hungarica*. As a matter of course, this also implied cases when a given individual or group had different origins, languages, or customs (*lingua et moribus*).

Being part of the 'noble nation' indicated at the same time some sort of privileged category, wherein a person (also subject of the Hungarian king) could speak Romanian (Vlach) or Slavonic (Slovak, Ruthenian) while still proudly claiming themselves as a Hungarian nobleman. In order to succeed in the state or in the county, the low number of Vlach and Ruthenian nobility in the region tried its best to assimilate into the ranks of the Hungarian nobility, adopting its language, customs, and religion as well. It is therefore not accidental that all noblemen owning (or intending to acquire) larger estates converted to Catholicism and did their share as patrons in founding and supporting monasteries/convents, churches, orchantries. Following the development of the Principality of Transylvania, the Reformation became the dominant religion in the area, where

after, inspired by the principle of '*cuius regio, eius religio*', the re-Catholicization of prominent landlords aimed not merely at ensuring the restoration of the state religion but at preparing the ground for union with the church among the Rusyns belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church.

The author was also engaged in studying the specificities in the development of the prominent noble families of Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa, and Máramaros counties, particularly the internal social stratification of the Upper Hungarian nobility and the process of donating noble titles and coats of arms, while through the family history we gain an insight into the everyday life of the region's prominent noble families.

It has been found that in the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the internal fragmentation of the nobility took place leading to seemingly insurmountable financial and social gaps between the lower and the upper strata of society. Certainly, the expansion of the nobility was also an established routine, but it had its own set of rules.

In relation to the appearance of the Turks on the Balkans and along the southern borders of Hungary, the nobility's engagement becomes necessary once more, this time with a view to the country's military defence and security. The 16<sup>th</sup> century brought about important changes for the different groups of the Hungarian society as well: it did not only amplify social disparities among the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and the peasantry but it gave rise to huge financial-social and cultural differences within the nobility itself. On the other hand, the transition between the lower strata of the nobility and the upper strata of the peasantry was merely an apparent one.

Under contemporary Hungarian law, social advancement into the nobility could take place exclusively through royal favour (either of the current Hungarian king or of a prince of Transylvania), whose outward manifestation was the issuance of a grant of arms. Initially, ennoblement was accompanied with donations of landed property, which tradition, however, had become extinct by the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Naturally, the nobility itself made efforts to prevent its ranks from being flooded by 'misplaced social elements'; among others, dietal decisions dealt with issues of ennoblement.

One way of advancement into the nobility was marrying a nobleman's daughter. Although not too often but once in a while this was the case, and so the serf could himself become a nobleman by virtue of the filial quarter that was due to the wife. This category is termed *agilis* (agile), that is, 'nobles' in-laws' (noble after his wife or mother).

The 16<sup>th</sup> century marks a significant turning-point in Hungary's development: subsequent upon the 1526 defeat at Mohács followed by the central part of country coming under Turkish sovereignty, the counties in the north-eastern part of Upper Hungary found themselves in the buffer zone of two states, the Kingdom

of Hungary ruled by the Habsburgs and the Principality of Transylvania. The constant state of threat and, hard on the heels of it, building up the system of border strongholds revalued the social worth of military service members, wherefrom a direct line led to advancement into a higher social class, the nobility. The inherent element of extending the legal status of nobility – donation of landed property – gradually faded away, whereas a great number of families could come by significant landed properties in return for assistance and services rendered to the Crown, a fine example of which is passing on the royal estate of Munkács as a donation.

By the period under discussion, the process of social stratification of the nobility had already been completed, and consequently the Upper Tisza region comprised all categories from aristocrats disposing over 1,000 portals to one-plot/petty noblemen. Given that arable lands formed the basis of agriculture, the concentration of the nobility can be observed primarily in the lowland areas and the river valleys. Apart from borderland skirmishes, large military operations did not disturb the area; therefore, thanks to resettlement activities too, the working-age population was on the rise, and the previously uninhabited regions of the Carpathians were gradually filled up with new settlers.

Although theoretically the idea of ‘*unaeademque nobilitas*’ (united nobility) still persisted, considerable disparities emerged within the nobility itself. We can witness future aristocracy setting up camp at the top of the nobility. In the area under analysis, we can see no changes in respect of the former large *latifundia* owners since the positions of the dominant Homonnai Drugeth family in Ung County as well as of the similarly powerful Perényi family in Ugocsa County remained constant. The gentry, however, formed a much larger social group. Of course, just as in the case of the nobility, one could not find uniformly accepted rules here either as the category of landed nobility had different criteria in the various regions of the country. The *benepossessionatus* (the well-to-do stratum) formed the upper ranks of the gentry, which was the élite class of county nobility – they were the principal breeding ground for the deputy county heads and the noble judges in the county. Members of the minor nobility constituted another large category (curial nobles/curialists [owning a curia/manor house], ‘one-plot’ nobles, armalists,<sup>2</sup> and nobles living on peasant plots), also called lesser nobles or taxed nobility. Curialists usually had a single plot in their possession that they cultivated themselves, without the use of external manpower. There, were several settlements in the region populated first of all by this category of nobility. The former *cnezes*’ (or *knezes*) descendants turned Ruthenian and Romanian nobles made up a peculiar category within the nobility of Upper Hungary.

Having undergone significant changes throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hungarian historical science identified a great number of relevant research topics as subjects

2 Nobles with only letters patent, i.e. without landed property.

of its investigation, among which studying the development, functioning, and internal structure of the social élites figures prominently. This is no coincidence, for in Hungary of the Reform Era the nobility was one of the generating forces behind social development, what rendered analysing the political and economic bases of their social role almost inevitable. Aristocratic archives entering into public use and a sound knowledge of the historical past found their way on the top of the agenda particularly in connection with the millennial anniversary of the foundation of the state. This is when the publication series presenting the counties and cities gets released, which in turn fails to include the most peripherally located counties in North-Eastern Hungary: Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa, and Máramaros. Indeed, some minor aspects of the nobility issue emerge in the local monographs (the works of Tivadar Lehoczky, István Szabó, András Komáromy, Vilmos Bélay, and Pál Engel) addressing the history of the counties under analysis here, but a relevant synthesis, a treatment covering all walks of the social category represented by the nobility is yet to be published.

It is therefore László Zubánics's monograph a highly relevant writing since the author points out the role played by the nobility, and he does so through shedding light on aspects never before studied so profoundly by the scientific community. Following the Kingdom of Hungary's division into three parts, the nobility was the segment of society actually ensuring a historical continuity that connected the parts, held them together, and in cases of external threats urged their cooperation as well. As integral part of this very same cooperation, we may witness the struggles for freedom starting out from Transylvania, most of which set themselves the goal of safeguarding feudal rights and religious liberty.