

The Fate of the Archives of Prince Esterházy Family in the 20th century

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Keywords: the Archives of Prince Esterházy Family, private archives, princely family, second world war, Pál Esterházy, István Hajnal, János Hárich

The history of the Prince Esterházy family has been at the center of my research for a long time. With my colleagues, members of the Pál Esterházy Research Team (Péter Király, Erika Kiss, István Monok and Edina Zvara), we have been visiting archives, libraries and processing datas since 2015, which always bring new surprises. One of the most interesting experiences was getting acquainted with archival documents concerning the archives (the National Archives of Hungary, the Archives of Prince Esterházy Family, P 114, so called Generalarchiv), which included the files and correspondence of the Esterházy archivists. In particular, Lajos Merényi's (1854–1919), József Gaszner's (? –1922), István Hajnal's (1892–1956) and János Hárich's (1904–1990) administrative dossiers, historical records and official reports gave a big boost to research that stopped short of sources. The family archives, which have been growing for more than 300 years, were severely traumatized in the 20th century – understanding its history is essential for today's researchers.

The Archives of Prince Esterházy Family itself has two main parts today: one in the National Archives of Hungary in Budapest and the other in Fraknó (Forchtenstein, Austria), between the cold and thick walls of the Esterházy Castle, today owned by the Esterházy Privatstiftung. The latter, as private archives, are subject to different rules and its researchability is not as self-evident as it is with public archives. For keeping the archives in two states in two places have historical reasons, which Imre Ress described in detail in his studies.¹ At the

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¹ RESS Imre, „Das Esterházyische Hauptarchiv in Eisenstadt zwischen Verwaltung und historischer Forschung (1790–1918)”, in *Burgenländische Forschungen. Sonderband XXII. Archivar und Bibliothekar, Beiträge zur Landeskunde des burgenländisch-westungarischen Raumes*, (Eisenstadt: Amt d. Burgenländ. Landesregierung, 1999) 407–419.; RESS Imre, „Hajnal István, a kismartoni hercegi levéltáros”, *Korall*, (2004) 15–16. sz. 284–315.

economic ones stayed in place while the legal-historical-family-related part moved to the palace in Kismarton (Eisenstadt, Austria). The Treaty of Trianon 1920 also tore apart the empire of the Esterházy princes: some of the estates were transferred to the newly created province, Burgenland, Austria, and the rest to Hungary.

After the unexpected death of his father Prince Miklós Esterházy, in April 1920, the young Prince Pál (1901–1989) was forced to make a difficult decision. Does he leave the most valuable part of his family archives in his palace in Kismarton, in the area given to Austria by the terms of the treaty, or does he try to remove it until the peace comes into effect? With his family council he decided to move it. The time was urgent in August 1921 – the Austrian troops were ready to march to Kismarton – so the not simple task was carried out by archivist József Gaszner. The archives were taken to Eszterháza in Hungary, and even the most valuable pieces were selected from the library's stock, the musical instrumental collection and musical notes were also transferred. However, Eszterháza proved to be only a temporary station. In February 1925, as a final repository, Prince Pál Esterházy designated his palace of Tárnok Street in Buda Castle (Budapest, Hungary), following the suggestion of the historian István Hajnal, his new archivist. This another move was made in August 1926. It's history and the conversion of some rooms of the Tárnok Street palace into archives can be found in the reports of Hajnal. Not only the Eszterháza material, but also the other documents remaining in Kismarton, were transferred to Buda, however the huge archive in Fraknó was impossible to move, so it remained there. This amount of documents could not fit into one railway wagon, so the Prince's staff had to rent two wagons. The sealed boxes outside Hajnal were accompanied with the attendance of an officer and two hunters. By that time, the furniture was ready in the palace, iron racks were ordered from the Factory Schlick, and the documents were conveniently located in two rooms. The court room housed the main archive (so called repositories), the family correspondence, and the collection of seals and medals. In the other room there were the music documents with the Haydn manuscripts, estate records, receiver and patronage documents, map and plan collections. And in the library room in addition to 4,000 volumes, there were inventories of the old archives, estates, buildings, and art treasures.²

Thus, from 1927, the peaceful work in the Esterházy archives was secured. Hajnal had diverse responsibilities included providing legal information to the Esterházy fidei-commissum, writing family history, monitoring the press, expanding the library, and handling requests from researchers. At Hajnal's

² RESS, *Hajnal István, op.cit.* 311–315.

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request, a new archivist, János Hárich, was employed in 1928. He was a young man dedicated to music and that year he began to create an independent music (*Acta musicalia*) and theater history collection (*Acta theatralia*) inside the main archives, taking advantage of the international interest in Joseph Haydn and the Esterházy Opera. In addition, he organized the main archives, such as the sorting of 17th-century family documents. His carefully typed registers on the copper engraving collection or on the correspondence of László Esterházy (1626–1652) and Pál Esterházy (1635–1713), his catalogs of Haydn's manuscripts, his historical summaries of the musical life of the Esterházy's and history of garden in Kismarton to this day have been preserved.

For the next decades Hárich played an important role in the princely archives. He studied history at the university and then received his doctorate in 1928, and from 1930 to 1946 he was the head of the Esterházy Archives. From 1946 there were hard times: he did not find a job, then worked at the National Archives of Hungary, but in 1949 he was removed during the Mindszenty and Esterházy trials. He was arrested for a short time, then he was a cultural worker at the Electric Works, and music teacher between 1953 and 1957. He emigrated to Austria in 1958, where he was employed again as archivist in Kismarton. He died there in 1990.³

Like Hajnal, he wrote reports to the prince on the state of the archives and the library. He regularly commuted between Budapest and Fraknó, especially during the first period of his activity, when he collected hundreds of music and theater history sources from the archives of Fraknó and took him to the Tárnok street palace in Budapest. Hárich, by the way, also highly valued the archives remaining in Fraknó. For the exceptional materials in the 19 ground and first floor rooms of the castle he also made lists and catalogs and even a floor plan for easier search.

The bombing of Budapest in 1942 forced Pál Esterházy to take protective measures to secure his collections. This also affected the Archives in the Tárnok Street, and on the order of the Prince, Hárich deposited the most important documents in the National Archives of Hungary in October 1942. Two years later, in October 1944, another deposit was added, but there was still material in the Tárnok Street too. At the end of the second world war, the Esterházy Palace suffered severe damage, some of the furniture and treasury were destroyed, while the library and archives were preserved. Pál Esterházy did not leave

³ Otto BIBA, „János Hárich (1904–1990)”, *Haydn Yearbook*, 18(1993) 111–114.

Hungary, but moved to an apartment on the Pest side. He married Melinda Ottrubay, the celebrated ballerina of the Opera House, in 1946 and they lived quietly.⁴

However, the communist system did not leave him and his family alone. He was arrested at Christmas 1948 and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on charges of organizing the overthrow of the democratic state order and republic as fourth defendant of the Mindszenty trial.⁵ On February 10, 1949, János Hárích, was also arrested. In parallel with these events, on December 15, 1948, archaeologist László Gerevich began excavating the ruins of the Esterházy Palace. In January 1949, in the cellar of the palace, which was more than ten kilometers long, were found the boxes containing the princely treasures. These were transported to the Museum of Applied Arts, where in the following decades, Joachim Svetnik and his colleagues restored the artworks that could still be saved.⁶

The property, unaffected by the bombing, was handled by a new government organization – the Ministerial Committee on Endangered Private Collections – set up on July 11, 1946, under the leadership of Erik Fügedi. This investigating authority has successfully secured and transported abandoned aristocratic collections to museums. The Esterházy Palace was inspected on December 13, 1949: it surveyed pictures, books, newspapers, musical notes, engravings, furniture and archives were then distributed to museums and libraries. The summary report of December 1949 on the Esterházy Archives said: „The archives of the Esterházy family (formerly Kismarton) contains 2000 medieval diplomas (in the value of 400,000 forints), documents of Palatine Miklós and Pál (in the value of 67,000 forints), Turkish letters, 17th century royal correspondence. The greatest value in this area is undoubtedly the documents of Pál Esterházy, the Foreign Minister of 1848. This material, which to this day was unknown, cannot be overestimated.”⁷ The archives – such as „repositories, self-

⁴ HANNA MOLDEN, *Griff és rózsza. Esterházy Pál és Ottrubay Melinda, egy hercegi pár története*, (Budapest: Elektra Kiadóház, 1999) 164–166.

⁵ GERGELY Jenő, „Dr. herceg Esterházy Pál a Mindszenty-perben”, in *Esterházy Pál 1901–1989. Az utolsó herceg a szélsőségek évszázadában*, szerk. Stefan August LÜTGENAU, (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2008) 87–131., 104–127.

⁶ HORVÁTH Hilda, *Nemzeti kincstárunk az Esterházy hercegi kincstár 20. századi története*, (Budapest: Iparművészeti Múzeum, 2014) 60–67.

⁷ ERIK FÜGEDI, „A veszélyeztetett magángyűtemények miniszteri biztosának összefoglaló jelentése, 1949. december 21.” – Hungarian National Archive (hereinafter: MNL OL) XIX-I-1-h 380. d. 2. t.1620/3/1950.; KERESZTES Csaba, „Műkincsek ebek harmincadján. Veszélybe került műtárgyak Magyarországon 1944–1949”, *Archívnet*, 15(2015) 1. sz. Online: archivnet.hu – December 2019.; FARKAS Kornél, „Műtárgymozgások 1945–1949”, *Századok*, 151(2017) 147–188.

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contained volumes, diplomas, 67 running meters” – are listed through five typed pages.⁸

Esterházy's properties were nationalized under the new Fideicommissum Act of 1949 (the final abolishment of this institution) and the archives were transferred to the National Archives of Hungary. There, the former system was left unchanged, ie it was formed since the end of the 17th century, with two exceptions: medieval diplomas and maps were treated separately. István Bakács, Iván Borsa, Emma Iványi, László Magyarai and Lajos Pataky took part in organizing the Esterházy archives material. The first inventory was published in 1956, and in 1978, with the development of the concept, another reviewed repertory was published.⁹ The Archives of Prince Esterházy Family currently consists of 54 fonds, 26 series – covering 326 running meters.¹⁰

The music and theater history collections created by Hárích in the early 1930s were transferred to the National Széchényi Library in 1949. „The arrival of the princely archive (manuscript and musical notes, other music and theatrical materials – fortunately the cabinet with them) came unexpectedly and unprepared for the Music Collection. It is certain, however, that Jenő Vécsey recognized at the very moment of the transposition that the library had acquired invaluable materials in the history of music.”¹¹ It is clear from Vécsey's reports that the materials were taken from the National Archives of Hungary. So the deposits from 1942 and 1944 were handed over by the archives. Of these, 70 records have been given to the Theatre History Collection in the Széchényi Library and are still preserved there.

⁸ MNL OL XIX-I-13-5/3 (5.d.)

⁹ BAKÁCS István, *Az Esterházy család hercegi ágának levéltára*, Levéltári leltárak 2, (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, 1956)

¹⁰ KÁLLAY István, *Az Esterházy család hercegi ágának levéltára. Repertórium*, Levéltári leltárak 66, (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, 1978)

¹¹ VÉCSEY Jenő, „Az OSZK zenei gyűjteményének fejlődése az elmúlt tizenöt évben”, *OSZK Évkönyve*, 1958, 80–97., 87.

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Parts of the Archives of Prince Esterházy Family before and after 1945

1926–1945	After 1945	
The main archives in the palace (Tárnok street, Buda)	The National Archives of Hungary	Collection before 1526 (medieval diplomas)
		Prince Esterházy Family Archives
		Collection of plans (maps and drawings)
	National Széchényi Library	Collection of Manuscripts
		Music Collection
		Theatre History Collection
	Collection of Maps	
Archives in Fraknó	Esterházy Privatarhiv Forchtenstein	

The history of the Esterházy archives could be completed here, but unexpectedly around the change of the socialist regime, in the early 1990's several princely documents appeared at antiquarian bookstores. The good condition of the manuscripts and books allegedly rescued from the ruins of Tárnok Street palace contradicted the seller's story, as they were not damaged. The owner's seal was cut off from Haydn's works and the manuscript of *Harmonia caelestis*, published in Vienna in 1711, however it can be stated that they are from the former music collection created by János Hárich. According to experts, a former princely employee kept the small collection, and after his death the heirs sold it. The documents were purchased by the National Széchényi Library.¹² A similar case was encountered by theater historian Mátyás Horányi in the 1960's. He discovered the sketchbooks of Pietro Travaglia – painter and designer of the opera and puppet theater of Eszterháza between 1771 and 1798 –, in the collection of a stage designer of the Operetta Theater in Budapest. This was also obtained by the Széchényi Library.¹³ It is probable that members of the prince's family and staff may have retained additional documents, which are now privately owned. Apart from these latter cases, it can be said that the relocations after 1920 and the war years did not cause as much damage to the Esterházy archives as did other similar archives. The Archives of Prince Batthyány Family was partially destroyed by the Soviet army in Körmend, and the remains were burnt in the buliding of the National Archives of Hungary in 1956, after a bomb

¹² Ágnes SAS, „Rediscovered Documents from the Esterházy Collection”, *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 34(1992) 167–185., 168–169.

¹³ STAUD Géza, *A magyar színháztörténet forrásai*, 3. rész, Színháztörténeti könyvtár 9, (Budapest: Színháztudományi Intézet, 1963) 12.

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hit.¹⁴ The Archives of Prince Esterházy Family in Budapest is easily accessible to researchers, and its vast stock offers adventures for everyone.

My major publications on the topic:

KUNT Gergely és VISKOLCZ Noémi, „Fejezetek az Esterházy hercegi család levéltárának kutatástörténetéből (1847–1945)”, I. rész (1847–1870), *Turul* 91(2018) 3. sz. 107–113.

KUNT Gergely és VISKOLCZ Noémi, „Fejezetek az Esterházy hercegi család levéltárának kutatástörténetéből (1870–1900)” II. rész (1847–1870), *Turul* 92(2019) 1. sz. 9–23.

VISKOLCZ Noémi, „Az örökségvédelemről 2019-ben az Esterházy-kincsek példáján”, in *Európai, nemzeti, lokális kulturális örökség és identitás*, szerk. ÚJVÁRI Edit, (Szeged: Szegedi Egyetemi Kiadó és Juhász Gyula Felsőoktatási Kiadó, 2019) 75–88.

VISKOLCZ Noémi, *A herceg történése. Hajnal István az Esterházyak szolgálatában 1922–1930*, (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2019)

¹⁴ KOLTAI András, „A Batthyány család körmendi központi levéltárának kutatástörténete”, *Levéltári Közlemények*, 71(2001) 1–2. sz. 207–231.