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Rebecca Gates-Coon. *The Landed Estates of the EsterhÖ¡zy Princes: Hungary during the Reforms of Maria Theresia and Joseph II.* Baltimore, Md. and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. xxi + 312 pp. $48.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-4785-1.

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Published on HABSBURG (March, 1996)

In the eighteenth century the Habsburg Empire was a major power in Europe. One of the essential pillars of that somewhat fragile political and social structure was the anational aristocracy. About one-third of the total land area of the Monarchy was owned by a few hundred families of which this class was composed. By the end of the century one of them, the Esterhazy, owned ten million acres of Hungary, including over one hundred villages, forty towns and thirty castles.

The Esterhazy family rose to prominence in the late sixteenth century Habsburg Empire. The first truly outstanding representative of the family was Nicholaus Esterhazy who by marriage became the proprietor of vast estates in Hungary. As a reward for championing the Catholic cause and serving the Habsburgs faithfully, he received more land which included Eisenstadt in northwestern Hungary, the eventual centre of the Esterhazy estates. Nicholaus' eldest son, Ladislaus, died fighting the Turks and the family leadership passed to Nicholaus' second son Paul. In 1687 Paul became prince of the Holy Roman Empire. The title was inherited by successive generations. In 1721 the titular leadership of the family devolved on Paul Anton, who was ten-years old at the time. Paul Anton and his younger brother Nicholaus, to some extent the heroes of Gates-Coon, were heirs to enormous wealth and a glittering array of family honors and titles until 1790, when Nicholaus died. (xvi-xvii).

The Landed Estates of the Esterhazy Princes: Hungary during the Reforms of Maria Theresia and Joseph II is a well researched and elegantly presented local history. Some of the estates of the Esterhazy family are discussed, but not all. The author concentrates on the northwestern holdings of the family. Two princes are described but no attempt is made at biography. The history of Hungary serves as a background to this local history rather than as the main subject of the essay which runs through 194 pages out of a total length of 312 pages. Since there is a abundance of material on the Esterhazys it would have been wiser to concentrate on the social and economic history of the Esterhazy estates, or the history of the family, including the Haydn connection. Of course, arguments can be presented to the contrary.

Why would anyone want to read about Anton and Nicholaus Eszterhazy, two extremely rich aristocrats without political influence in the affairs of the Habsburg empire? The princes did not belong to the inner elite of the Habsburg aristocracy, nor were they privy to the workings of the government in Vienna (p.188). The main text of the study shows, contrary to the conclusions (p.193), that the Esterhazys cared little for Hungarian politics. Moreover, whenever there was conflict between the Habsburgs and the Magyars they took the side of Vienna or remained neutral. Anton and Nicholaus showed no outstanding skills at estate management. They took no more credit in the support of musical life on their estates than did their fellow aristocrats. Neither were they the ones who recognized the commercial importance of Jews and settled them on the family estates. Why write the biography of such dull and unimportant persons? The life and work of Haydn has been well documented and written by musical and other specialists of the past two hundred years. Rebecca Gates-Coon wisely wrote about Haydn's life on the estate, concentrating on the connection with the family. This concentration makes chapter seven an excellent one.

There are other good snapshots of life on the Esterhazy estates. The reader is introduced to the problems of estates managers, peasants, Jews, Gypsies and vagabonds passing through the lands. The pictures, however, are taken from above, with the help of archival documents written by princes and managers. For example, the reader learns about the anti-Semitism of the two princes, the peasants and the town folks, but not about the economic contribution of the Jewish business community to the wealth of the Esterhazys, especially in the field of marketing.

One puts down this book upon reading it with mixed impressions. Both specialists and generalists will find much useful in the work but both will find it lacking in focus.

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Citation: Peter I. Hidas. Review of Gates-Coon, Rebecca, *The Landed Estates of the EsterhÖ¡zy Princes: Hungary during the Reforms of Maria Theresia and Joseph II.* HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. March, 1996.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=340

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