

*Beloved Children. History of Aristocratic Childhood in Hungary in the Early Modern Age*, ed. Katalin Peter, Budapest 2001, Central European University Press, 271 pp., genealogical tables, index of personal and geographical names.

This book, apart from its introduction and the historical background presenting the specificity of Hungarian history of the 16th–18th cc., written by K. Peter, is composed of 4 chapters, each by another author. These chapters can be treated as separate studies devoted to particular problems. They are: *The First Ten Years of Life* (Katalin Peter, pp. 39–98); *Orphans of Noble Birth* (Ildiko Horn, pp. 99–162); *Count Adam Bathiany and His Children* (Istvan Fazekas, pp. 163–198); *The Marriage Policy of the Esterhazy Family After the Death of Palatine Miklos* (Judit Fejes, pp. 199–250). Hence it is not a monograph in the classical sense of the term, whose preparation would require an extensive archival inquiry and regular research, also of a demographic–statistical character; it presents a certain number of examples, acknowledged by the authors as typical of the era. Its basis consists of such sources as family archives — especially correspondence, diaries, inventories, instructions.

The authors consciously distance themselves from the animated international discussion going on for several dozen years on the subject of childhood, its perception, duration and mutual relations between parents and children. Merely

a few English-language works from this field are cited in the footnotes (H. Cunningham, L. Davidoff, R. Wall, A. Pollock). There is no reference whatsoever to the "father" of this subject — French historian Ph. Ariès, whose by now classical work *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris 1960) inaugurated the exchange of opinions and inspired many researchers (among others L. Stone, P. Borscheid, E.-J. Teuteberg, P. Laslett), to take up research in this field. The editor — Katalin Peter — and her co-authors assume that love for children has been a natural, inborn trait common to all people from the beginnings of history and they do not treat it as a product of the historical development of culture. They explain the fact that they chose the early modern age not because of changes that took place at that time but because of the greater number of sources that made research easier. Indeed, the fragments of life in aristocratic Hungarian homes reproduced by them testify evidently to deep parental love as well as the good, perhaps even privileged position of children in the family. Deep sorrow and despair after their loss due to premature death was a common experience. Polish source materials abound in the same kind of data; I wrote about it in the article *The Foundation of the Old Polish World: Patriarchalism and the Family* ("Acta Poloniae Historica", vol. 69, 1994, pp. 37–54), and in the book *Staropolskie obyczaje — Old Polish Customs* (Warszawa 1994, esp. ch. IV, p. 73 ff.). These opinions were also confirmed by the conference organized by the Institute of Archeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, in May 1998 on the subject of the child and childhood as well as by studies published in the special issue of "Acta Poloniae Historica" (vol. 79, 1999, ent. *Childhood and Youth in Historical Perspective*). While approving of the principal thesis, one must say, however, that one should better avoid general formulations made *a priori*, especially as the studies presented in the book under discussion concern mainly the 17th c. Was the situation alike in the 18th c. as well, or perhaps some changes had taken place? Should not one take into consideration the different mentality, customs and manners in the French and English families, where it was e.g. in the common use among the aristocracy to send babies to the countryside to be nursed and brought up, while in Poland, and as the book under review shows, in Hungary too, children of the magnates were brought up in the family circle (although, of course, resort was taken to wet-nurses as well), under the personal supervision of their mothers and fathers. Such behaviour certainly influenced the emergence and consolidation of emotional ties between parents and their offspring.

The book, as it has been said, does not comprise any statistical data, although the introduction contains some general information concerning the demographic structure of Hungarian society, such as the predominance of young people (p. 10), the marriageable age (it was lower than in the West; 18–20 years for women, 20–22 for men; among the aristocracy even younger age was accepted, p. 11 ff.). The difference in age between the spouses was generally small (p. 11), unlike in Poland.

It seems interesting, though hardly at all probable that women showed no fear of childbirth (pp. 13, 57); the authors reach this conclusion because they have found no trace of such fear in their sources. However, the *ex silentio* conclusions are frequently deceptive. Polish sources (diaries, letters) present many formulations testifying to a great fear experienced by women in face of the forthcoming labour, up to the apprehension of death itself; they often contain the appeals to their husband to be present at this difficult moment, and to the members of the family to take care of the children in case, mother should die in labour. The frequent deaths in childbirth were a continual memento for all women, even young and healthy, since even these qualities did not guarantee a safe delivery in view of the state of medicine at that time.

Chapter 1 presents the problems connected to the birth and upbringing of children in the first, earliest period of their lives. Katalin Peter draws attention to the great weight attached to having offspring among the aristocratic Hungarian

families, since this ensured a continuation of the family and its future, as well as the growth of prestige as a result of profitable marriages of children; among other causative factors the author also mentions the need to satisfy the instinct and parental love. She reaches the conclusion that the birth of a daughter was received with the same joy as that of a boy, although a son was more expected and desired. There was no discrimination against daughters in the parents' attitude to children. At the beginning girls were taught together with their brothers. Only older children were separated — boys were sent to school, while girls remained at home and were taught mainly by their mothers. Parents, including fathers, devoted much time and attention to their children, played with them, took them on their journeys, to the sessions of Parliament, on visits. Corporal punishment was seldom applied, there was no cruelty towards children, too severe teachers and pedagogues happened to be fired. Children were more spoiled than scolded, they frequently received presents (among others many toys), games were organized for them, and scrupulous care was taken of their suitable diet and health. The death of a child — a very frequent phenomenon — was felt as a real tragedy, though pain was seldom expressed in words and personal descriptions; such attitude corresponds to the Polish behaviour expressed in sources, where notes about a loss of a child are usually dry and laconic, which by no means signifies the writer's indifference. All in all the picture of a young Hungarian aristocrats's childhood is quite idyllic, in many points it diverges advantageously from relations in a Polish magnate family, where e.g. contacts of the father with his children were less frequent and punishment more severe. Nevertheless there are many analogies between Hungary and Poland as is shown by the comparison between Katalin Peter's data with those presented recently by Urszula Augustyniak in her book ent. *Dwór i klientela Krzysztofa Radziwiłła (Krzysztof Radziwiłł's Court and Clientele, Warszawa 2001)*.

*Chapter 2* deals with orphans; Ildiko Horn says there were lots of them in the early modern era. The author illustrates this statement with examples of two families: Esterhazy and Rakoczy (p. 99 ff.). In the years 1600–1650, 43 children were born to the Esterhazy family, 15 of whom died in their infancy, and 28 reached maturity; 18 of them were bereft of one or both parents; 5 lost their fathers, 4 mothers, 3 — both parents. Throughout the 17th c. 17 children were born to the Rakoczy family, 12 of whom reached maturity. Ten of them were orphans, 6 complete, three without a father, one without a mother. The author stresses the role of circumstances influencing the fate of orphans, such as the moment of their bereavement, the loss of father or mother, or complete bereavement, the behaviour of kinsfolk and guardians, and sometimes conflicts arising between them and the orphans. Many examples illustrating the fate of concrete orphans form a general picture, which shows that the orphaned children led a rather difficult existence (emotional disturbances that influenced their characters, financial problems, a worse education, obstacles in their career).

*Chapter 3* (Istvan Fazekas) presents the profile of Adam Batthyany on the basis of one of the richest private family archives in Hungary (a huge collection of letters, notes, instructions, precise lists of expenditures, guests and visitors etc.). These materials allow one to reconstruct the very interesting figure of a 17th c. Hungarian magnate, Calvinist, later converted to Catholicism, a lover of books and collector of art objects, father of 10 children; he took care to give them a thorough education (first at home, then in Jesuit schools at Sopron and Graz, journeys abroad) and ensure their career. It seems, we have to deal here with attitudes and actions typical of the early modern aristocracy not only in Hungary but also in the whole of Central Europe (especially Poland).

The last, *Chapter 4*, by Judith Fejes, analyses the marriage policy realized by the Esterhazy family in the 17th c. Their marriages were designed to confirm the social status of the family, to increase its political influence as well as to save its estates from division, and even to enlarge them. An interesting account has

been given of the family solidarity and the system of its clientele, connecting the magnate patron with his relatives and friends.

The book, in keeping with its title, devoted to the situation of the child in a Hungarian magnate family and the relations between parents and children, contains at the same time a lot of information on various other issues, as e.g. the co-existence of religious denominations, relations between spouses, the situation of women, the living standard of the magnates (lower than that of their European counterparts), the furnishings of castles, the social structure of the magnate courts, preoccupations and interests — in a word the everyday life of the Hungarian high nobility in the 17th c. The book is very valuable to researchers, especially since the language barrier makes the studies of Hungarian history generally difficult of access. *Beloved Children* is a book to be consulted in many comparative studies.

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