

**Changes in the image of
man from the Enlightenment
to the age of Romanticism**

Changes in the image of man from the Enlightenment to the age of Romanticism

Philosophical and scientific
receptions of (physical) anthropology
in the 18–19th centuries

Edited by
DEZSŐ GURKA

Gondolat Publishers
Budapest, 2019

A kötet megjelenését a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia támogatta.
The publication of this volume was supported by the
Hungarian Academy of Sciences.



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ISBN 978 963 693 300 5

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Theory and experience

*The professors of the first Hungarian college of farming in Western Europe**

GYÖRGY KURUCZ

Introduction

The period of enlightened Habsburg monarchs, the reigns of Maria Theresia (1740–1780) and Joseph II (1780–1790), saw substantial efforts aimed at enhancing the economic performance of their realm, including Hungary which was an integral part of the Habsburg Empire.¹ In the first place, central government initiatives standardised and regulated the obligations and services of the peasantry both in the Habsburg hereditary lands and in Hungary in order to protect the most important tax paying layer of contemporary society against seigneurial excesses. John Bigland, a Yorkshire schoolmaster and popular historian states in the third volume of his comprehensive series *Geographical and Historical View of the World* published in London, 1810, that ‘The Urbarium of Maria Theresia may be considered as a curious monument in the history of society and far more interesting than the relation of a battle or a siege.’²

* Research and publication sponsored by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office, Hungary, Project No. 119577.

¹ For a comprehensive view of the period see the relevant chapters of H. Balázs, Éva: *Hungary and the Habsburgs 1765–1800. An Experiment in Enlightened Absolutism*. CEU Press, Budapest/ Cambridge, 1997. See also Beales, Derek: Joseph II. und der Josephinismus, in Reinalter, Helmut/ Kluebing, Harm (Hrsg.): *Der aufgeklärte Absolutismus im europäischen Vergleich*. Böhlau, Wien, 2002, 35–54.

² Bigland, John: *Geographical and Historical View of the World*. Vols. 1–5. Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, London, 1810, Vol. 3. 336.

Considering that Bigland's work was published during a long period of French wars, this sentence might have been deemed as rather perplexig, or even provocative in an age when reports or literary accounts of spirited leadership and inspired commanding should have by all means been more appealing to the English public than reading about the plight of the Hungarian peasantry. Not surprisingly, the author certainly felt that stories of tyrannical reign, conflicts and controversies might sell extremely well to his readership, so he chose to elaborate on the character of Joseph II and his arbitrary methods regarding his stance on his Hungarian subjects at a far greater length. Yet, the period concerned was much more complex than simply reducing its presentation to highlighting the stages of conflicts between enlightened monarchs and the disgruntled Hungarian nobility.

In this paper I would like to argue that following the death of Joseph II and the outbreak of the French Revolution, including the ensuing French wars on the continent, reformist ideas, notwithstanding the rejection of social reforms, were not only maintained, but their representation was undertaken by some members of the Hungarian nobility, especially by one man, Count György Festetics (1755–1819) who established the first college of farming in Hungary.³ His institute, called *Georgikon*, was seeking to adapt the special education, research, and methodology program of the University of Göttingen founded by George II (1727–1760) as well as integrating the simultaneously existing influences, primarily of Viennese, German, and English origin.⁴ At the same time, the *Georgikon* had a

³ Kurucz, György: Advanced Farming and Professional Training: the First Hungarian College of Farmin, in Vivier, Nadine/ Brepols, Turnhout (eds.): *The State and Rural Societies. Policy and Education in Europe 1750–2000*. Rural History in Europe 4. 2008, 195–214. See also Kurucz, György: *Keszthely grófja. Festetics György [Count of Keszthely. György Festetics]*. Corvina, Budapest, 2013.

⁴ The narrative of 'Wissenschaft vom Menschen' originated with Göttingen appears to be suitable for grasping the radical change in science history tradition

seminal role in the processes of the instrumentalisation of contemporary Hungary's scientific life in the field of agronomics through the actual curricula compiled by professors who had studied and travelled extensively in Europe, including an established network of personal connections to foreign centres of knowledge, thereby adapting and disseminating advanced practices and technologies. Similarly, an ever increasing number of contemporary articles, books, or even unpublished manuscript reports and journals held in the former Festetics family archives tend to imply that the intellectual transformation of the country was underway from the early decades of the nineteenth century on indirectly contributing to the rise of a political reformist movement of the nobility with an ultimate aim of abolishing the hidebound feudal system and establishing a modern constitutional state.

The rise and levers of a new discipline

Count Festetics's ancestors came from Croatia and fought the Turks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, his grandfather, Kristóf (1696–1768), was educated at Hungary's Jesuit University of Nagyszombat (presently Trnava, Slovakia) and finally became a councillor of *Consilium regium locumtenentiale hungaricum*

styled as an 'anthropological turn', whereby the various fields of sciences, including their structures, representing 'secularised, naturalised and historicised man' in relation to his lifeworld and action spaces created new attitudes, methodologies, scientific practices and gradually arranged themselves into a new system. For various aspects and elements of the above in European context: *Die Wissenschaft vom Menschen in Göttingen um 1800. Wissenschaftliche Praktiken, institutionelle Geographie, europäische Netzwerke*. (Hrsg. Hans Erich Bödeker/ Michel Espagne/ Philippe Büttgen.) Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2008.

(Hungarian Governing Council, Statthalterei) which was an executive branch of the Viennese central government in Hungary.⁵

His son, Pál Festetics (1722–1782), followed his father as a loyal subject of the Habsburg dynasty, but he first read law at the Protestant university of Leipzig before completing his studies in Nagyszombat and becoming a clerk and councillor to the Court Chamber (Hofkammer) in Vienna, the central office of finances.⁶ Pál Festetics proved to be a reliable clerk, so later on in 1765 Empress Maria Theresa, Queen of Hungary, commissioned him to work out a unitary system of feudal tenancy applicable in the Kingdom of Hungary relating to the various rights and obligations of serfs and cotters to their landlords. He was subsequently rewarded for his services by being granted the title of count in 1772 and, at the same time, he was appointed Vice-President of the Hungarian Royal Chamber.⁷ With a view to future career prospects he had his first born son, György, educated in *Collegium Theresianum*, an elite training institute of the Habsburg lands as well as of Hungary and Transylvania, thereby offering a chance for acquiring a profound knowledge in administration, law, arts, classic and modern languages.⁸ György Festetics collected a private library of his own, which was independent from the family library, containing all the classics of state administration, a wide range of works of the Enlightenment, including the fashionable authors of contemporary Italian,

⁵ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (MNL) Országos Levéltára (OL) [Hungarian National Archives], MNL OL Festetics Levéltár (Lt) P 235 118. d. f. 140. Kurucz: *Keszthely grófia*. 65–67.

⁶ Szabó, Dezső: *A herceg Festetics család története [A history of the Prince Festetics family]*. Franklin, Budapest, 1928, 69–89.

⁷ MNL OL Festetics Lt P 245 5. d. IV. 3., 11. d. 8, 12.

⁸ MNL OL Festetics Lt P 245 24. d. Cerman, Ivo: Habsburgischer Adel und das Theresianum in Wien 1746–1784. (Wissensvermittlung, Sozialisation und Berufswege), in Cerman, Ivo/ Velek, Lubos/ Weidenbauer, Martin (Hrsg.): *Adelige Ausbildung. Studien zum mittel-europäischen Adel*. Meidenbauer, München, 2006, 143–168.

German, English and French literature. It should also be noted that the German translation of *An Inquiry into the Origins of the Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith was also listed in the catalogue of his library just two years after its publication in 1778.⁹

Yet, after a short stint at the Hungarian Royal Chamber, György Festetics decided to give up his career as a clerk and joined a cavalry regiment. Although Festetics served thirteen years in the Imperial-Royal Army, he was forced to quit as a lieutenant colonel on account of his involvement in the Hungarian nobility's movement following the death of Joseph II. Festetics was especially incriminated for it was him that had drawn up a petition with his fellow officers to submit it to the Diet of Hungary demanding that Hungarian regiments be stationed in Hungary, their officers be Hungarian, and the language of command be Hungarian as well. He was court martialled, but there was not enough evidence to condemn him for high treason. In September 1790 he was transferred to the Austrian Netherlands, then to Northern Italy. Finally, Emperor Leopold II (1790–1792) accepted his resignation in 1791 and Festetics returned to his debt-ridden estates at Lake Balaton in central Transdanubia.¹⁰ On his father's death in 1782 his indebtedness was up to 1,1 million florins, approximately 60–70 000 pound sterling according to the contemporary exchange rate, but Festetics had had to service a staggering debt of 2,2 million florins by the early 1790s. However, this substantial increase of his outstanding debts was largely due to the purchase of further estates, since he regarded the overall European conflict, the French wars of the Habsburg dynasty

⁹ Kurucz: *Advanced Farming*, 197–198. Smith, Adam: *Untersuchung der Natur und Ursachen von Nationalreichtümern*. Bd. 1–2. Weidmann und Reich, Leipzig, 1776–1778.

¹⁰ Kurucz: *Keszthely grófja*, 128–144.

as an extremely favourable opportunity to increase his incomes by selling the produce of his lands.¹¹

Nevertheless, the growing demand for agricultural goods would not have improved Festetics's situation, unless he rationalized the management of his estates. He knew he was unable to carry out the necessary reforms without trained professionals, so in 1792 he employed János Nagyváthy (1755–1819), a respected agriculturist and the author of the first comprehensive farming book in Hungarian. It was probably the mid-1790s that Festetics came to the idea of employing trained stewards and bailiffs in his estates. Yet, it also became apparent that the number of skilled professionals was quite limited as there was no regular training on a higher level in Hungary. Although a short lived department of agriculture had been set up by Emperor Joseph II in Buda University in the 1780s, Nagyváthy himself attended lectures there, there existed only one specialized institute of education, which, however, did not offer college level training. It was run by Sámuel Tessedik (1742–1820), a renowned Lutheran minister educated in German universities in Upper Saxony, who founded a school in his parish in order to teach peasant youths the basics of farming.¹²

Before publicly announcing his intentions of setting up a 'school of industry' Festetics contacted Peter Jordan (1751–1817), Professor of Vienna University, one time student of Göttingen University, asking him to prepare an outline for a regular system of subjects to be taught at a would-be college of farming. This *Entwurf* is quite unique in the sense that it does not provide a set curriculum. It rather offers a synthesis of related fields of disciplines. For example,

¹¹ Kurucz, György: Adósság, hitel, törlesztés. Festetics György pénzügyi helyzete 1782 és 1818 között [Debt, credit, repayment. The finances of Count György Festetics between 1782 and 1818], *Századok* 140: 2006/3, 539–565.

¹² Kurucz: *Advanced Farming*, 200–203.

Jordan argues for an integrated presentation of the results of a new discipline, that is, agricultural chemistry.¹³

It should also be noted that in 1797 Festetics justified the founding of his specialist school by referring to England's advanced level of farming in his report submitted to Palatine Archduke Joseph (1795–1847), Head of the Hungarian Governing Council. Festetics expounded that all the modern nations have been surpassed by England in this field as well as well, that is, *omnes autem superavit Anglia*.¹⁴ For this reason, it is rather telltale that he did not fail to mention Sir John Sinclair (1754–1835) and Arthur Young (1741–1820), the President and Secretary of the Board of Agriculture, who were instrumental in disseminating the results of modern farming, including the role of Albrecht Thaer (1752–1828) of Lower Saxony in transferring and transmitting the methods of modern farming technique and animal husbandry.¹⁵ Festetics's real objective with his institute based on the Göttingen ideal of the synthesis of theory and practice was best recorded by an erudite English doctor, Richard Bright (1789–1858), when he made a tour of Hungary during the Congress of Vienna. 'The object of this institution for promoting the theory and practice of agriculture is to form useful and well instructed officers and accountants for the management of estates from young men of superior class, and common workmen and overseers of particular branches from the sons of peasantry, and likewise to allow those who possess farmlands an opportunity of obtaining

¹³ MNL OL Festetics Lt P 279 5. d. ff. 259–268.

¹⁴ Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (OSZK) [National Széchényi Library], Department of Manuscripts, Quart. Germ. 1240 ff. 79–84v.

¹⁵ Brunt, Liam: Rehabilitating Arthur Young, *Economic History Review* 56: 2003/2, 265–299; Mitchison, Rosalind: *Agricultural Sir John. The Life of Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster*. Bles, London, 1962; Klemm, Volkert: Die Entstehung eigenständiger Landbauwissenschaften in Deutschland (1800–1830), *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 44: 1996, 162–173.

such knowledge as may enable them to improve the agricultural interests of the country.’¹⁶

The first professor who had a lasting influence on the actual practical training in Keszthely was Ferenc Pethe (1762–1832), the professor of mathematics and economics. Pethe had considerable experience of Western Europe. The one time student of the Reformed College of Debrecen, East of Hungary, had studied theology in Utrecht, and then travelled extensively in England, France and Switzerland. On returning to his country he edited, printed and published the first Hungarian agricultural journal, *Vi’sgálódó Magyar Gazda* [Inquisitive Hungarian Farmer] between 1795 and 1797. He was subsequently invited by Festetics to become a professor of his newly founded college. He drew up an eleven course rotation combining the elements of the classical Norfolk rotation, that is wheat, turnips, barley, clover, with maize, rye, potatoes and lucerne, which was well suited to the ecological characteristics of Central Hungary. Festetics sent the rotation plan to Albrecht Thaer who acknowledged it, even called it ‘musterhaft’, that is, commendable. After leaving Keszthely he published several books on farming and edited an agricultural periodical, and it was him that translated and published *Elements of Agricultural Chemistry* by Humphry Davy a year after it had been published in London, that is, in 1815.¹⁷

Nevertheless, there is further evidence that Festetics systematically tried to rely on advanced English methods and the curricula of his school promoted productive techniques. His family library

¹⁶ Bright, Richard: *Travels from Vienna through Lower Hungary*. Constable, Edinburgh, 1818, 361–362.

¹⁷ Süle, Sándor: *Kisszántói Pethe Ferenc*. Akadémiai, Budapest, 1964; MNL OL Festetics Lt P 279 23. d. ff. 183–183v; Davy, Humphry: *A földművelési Kémia gyökere. Egymásból fojó Letzkékben mellyeket A Földművelés előmozdítására igyelő Társaság előtt tartott Sir Humphry Davy. Anglusból fordította s Jegyzésekkel bővítette Kisszántói Pethe Ferentz A Pallérozott Mezeigazdaság Írója*. Nemzeti-Gazda-Hivatal, Bécs, MDCCCXV.

contained a large number of contemporary English farming books, some of which were borrowed by the professors. It should be noted that he possessed the surveys of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Leicestershire, Northumberland and Middlesex.¹⁸ His book agents working in Vienna, Leipzig, Pest and Buda regularly delivered the most sought after literature of the time. Also, his library was enriched by an English aristocrat whose donation of farming books was transmitted to Keszthely by Andrei Afanasievich Samborski (1732–1815), the confessor of Grand Duchess Alexandra Pavlovna (1783–1801), the first spouse of Archduke Joseph, the Palatine of Hungary. At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Festetics intended to have an adaptation of *Grundsätze der deutschen Landwirtschaft* by Johann Beckmann of Göttingen University translated for the *Georgikon*. His choice was by no means unfounded since he had a collection of series edited and published by Beckmann.¹⁹

As regards Festetics's recognition and the reputation of his college abroad, his correspondence or even articles of learned journals prove that his activities and his school were quite well-known in the German principalities, Switzerland, France and even in England. As early as 1802 Count György Festetics was elected Honorary Member of the *Göttinger Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*.²⁰ Also, from 1801 onwards Professor Pethe was succeeded by other professors of economy who had graduated from Göttingen, János Asbóth (1768–1823) and György Károly Rummy (1780–1847), respectively.²¹

¹⁸ György, Kurucz: Az „új mezőgazdaság” irodalma az egykori Festetics-könyvtár anyagában [The farming literature of the 'new agriculture' in the former Festetics family library], *Magyar Könyvszemle* 106: 1990/1–2, 32–44.

¹⁹ Kurucz: *Keszthely grófja*, 199–201; MNL OL Festetics Lt P 279 21. d. f. 346., MNL OL Festetics Lt P 279 30. d. ff. 286–287v.

²⁰ MNL OL Festetics Lt P 279 30. d. ff. 514–514v., Göttingen Archiv der Akademie der Wissenschaften Pers. 12 Nr. 41., MNL OL Festetics Lt P 279 35. d. fol. 38v.

²¹ Kurucz, György: Peregrinatio oeconomica. Georgikoni tanárok nyugat-európai tanulmányúttjai a 19. század első évtizedeiben [Peregrinatio oeconomica. The

Both professors sent articles and reports to Göttingen and their articles were reviewed and published in *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* on a regular basis. It is also likely that they were the authors of anonymously published articles in the *Literatur Zeitung* of Jena on several public events and exams organized by Festetics in Keszthely.²² It should be noted that Festetics had a remarkable correspondence with Professor Lenz of Jena University who had previously asked the Hungarian aristocrat to become the Chairman of the Mineralogical Society of Jena.²³

After Festetics had died, his son Count László Festetics (1785–1846) continued to keep old contacts alive and establish new ones with the greatest authorities of contemporary scientific life. He sent Pál Gerics (1792–1863), Professor and Director of Georgikon on an almost five year long study tour. Gerics, a physician graduated from the University of Pest and having studied sciences in the *Polytechnisches Institut* of Vienna, travelled via Silesia and Upper Saxony to Berlin in 1820. Among others, he met Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) and was received by Karl Asmund Rudolphi (1771–1832), the founder of modern entomology. Then, with the help of Albrecht Thaer, Gerics visited several learned societies as well as having discussions with Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), Friedrich Benjamin Osiander (1759–1822), Johann Tobias Mayer (1752–1830) of Göttingen University.²⁴ Then he visited the University of Gent, travelled extensively in Holland, finally crossing the

study of Georgikon professor sin the first decades of the 19th century], *Századok* 151: 2017/5, 1007–1010.

²² *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* 1814. II. 745–747., 1815. II. 1319–1320., 1816. III. 2022–2024. *Intelligenzblatt der Jenaischen Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 1815. 22. 171.

²³ Gurka, Dezső: A 18–19. századi magyar mineralógus-peregrináció művelődéstörténeti konnotációi [The cultural-historical relevance if the peregrination of Hungarian mineralogists in the 18th and 19th centuries], *Századok* 151: 2017/5, 1052–1054.

²⁴ Kurucz: Peregrinatio oeconomica, 1018–1020.

Channel to spend several years in England where he was a regular visitor of learned society meetings. In Norfolk Thomas Coke (1754-1842), Earl of Leicester showed him around personally in his model farm of Holkam, but the Hungarian scientist met Sir John Sinclair (1754-1835) as well when he visited Edinburgh.²⁵ Another professor of the agricultural college of Keszthely, József Lehrmann (1791-1845), specialized on horticulture and viniculture also made a long study tour financed by Count László Festetics. He left Vienna the same year as Gerics, then he visited all the famous princely gardens. He also travelled to Holland and followed Gerics to England. He visited Kew Gardens, and met several English experts, attended society meetings. He returned to Keszthely after visiting all the famous wine growing regions of France.²⁶

Conclusion

To briefly sum up the education and adaptation programme of the Georgikon, Count György Festetics definitely had a strong vision of relying on the Göttingen ethos of creating the unity of theoretical and practical training at all levels of his college of farming by employing former graduates of the *Georgia Augusta*. Also, he deemed it absolutely necessary to establish a formal network of personal connections to the renowned modern universities of his age, including other centres of knowledge and learned societies all over Germany, Holland, England, and France, thereby maintaining a continuous circulation of professional knowledge. For this reason, both he and his son considered the study tours undertaken by students and professors as a form of long term investment which had its returns in the forthcoming decades as far as production, including specialist training was concerned.

²⁵ OSZK Department of Manuscripts Quart. Hung. 3727/5, 6.

²⁶ Kurucz: *Peregrinatio oeconomica*, 1018–1023.