

Önkép és múltkép: A reprezentáció színterei Nádasdy Ferenc és a 17. századi főúri elit műpártolásában [Self-representation and history: The scenes of representation in the art patronage of Ferenc Nádasdy and the aristocracy of the seventeenth-century Hungarian Kingdom]. By Enikő Buzási. Budapest: Martin Opitz Kiadó, 2024. pp. 576.

Research on aristocratic representation and material culture has garnered significant attention in both earlier and more recent historiography. The relationship between art, self-representation, and political strategies has preoccupied historians for decades, leading to diverging interpretations across various historical disciplines. The monograph under review is an expanded version of Enikő Buzási's dissertation, defended in 2021, which builds on years of research in Hungarian art and architectural history with a focus on the Hungarian high nobility. The volume aims to summarize and introduce the self-representation strategies and tools employed by the Hungarian high nobility in the seventeenth century, particularly highlighting Ferenc Nádasdy, a key yet ill-fated figure in early modern Hungarian history. Ferenc Nádasdy III was born in 1623 and was executed for high treason and conspiracy against the absolutist rule of Habsburg Emperor Leopold I in 1671 in Vienna. His great-grandfather, Tamás Nádasdy, was a skilled military leader and a loyal supporter of the Habsburgs who had served as the captain of the Transdanubian districts and had defended Hungarian territories against the advancing Ottoman Empire. Ferenc Nádasdy was a prominent aristocrat and one of the wealthiest barons of his time. He held the title of *országbíró* (seneschal), making him the second most important leaders in the kingdom after the *nádor* (palatine), who was the ruler's deputy. Additionally, he was a patron and collector of the arts, which won him the nickname "the Hungarian Croesus" due to his substantial wealth and varied collections.

Buzási provides a comprehensive examination of Nádasdy's role within both Hungarian and Habsburg artistic, architectural, and collecting spheres, addressing his residences within the kingdom and the empire, alongside the artworks and their intended iconographic messages. Through a detailed analysis, she offers an in-depth exploration of Nádasdy's collecting habits, his activities as a patron, and his social networks within the Habsburg court. This review assesses the book's methodology and its contributions to early modern Hungarian art, social history, and material culture.

The book is organized into nine chapters, each of which is further divided into subchapters that examine not only the art and representation of Ferenc Nádasdy but also his family and other notable aristocratic families in early modern Hungary, such as the Batthyány and Zrínyi families. Buzási constructs a rich and thorough contextual background for each chapter by incorporating a broad range of primary sources and accurately referencing previous research. This involves a group of researchers examining Ferenc Nádasdy's court from various perspectives, including the structure and operation of his estates, and also their musical culture.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, in the domestic context, Buzási also refers to significant studies by Orsolya Bubryák (2013, 2017) on the theme of collections, family history, and representation, as well as the tremendous amount of research done on iconography and the genealogy of Hungarian noble families by Gizella Cennerné Wilhelmb (1997) and Géza Galavics.

The first two chapters explore the role of artists and craftsmen within Hungarian aristocratic circles, analyzing their connections to the Habsburg court and the Austrian nobility. Initially, Buzási discusses the practices of Nádasdy's contemporaries, providing insights into local customs before focusing on his strategies. To support her arguments, she examines primary sources, such as invoices for construction work, artists' biographies, payment records, and personal correspondence, connecting Nádasdy to the Austrian court and demonstrating the ideals he sought to convey by employing artists with international backgrounds and references.

The next six chapters highlight the strategies that Nádasdy used as a high-ranking political figure in his residences in Keresztúr, Sárvár, and Pottendorf, alongside the artistic elements of his approaches to self-representation. Buzási analyzes the interiors and objects within Nádasdy's primary residences, drawing on documents from monasteries, architectural plans, inventories, and economic records, to assess their relevance to his family's life. She also explores the messages conveyed through portraits, murals, altarpieces, and objects in Nádasdy's collections. The iconographic meanings of specific artworks are evaluated in connection to Nádasdy's self-representation as a key official in the Hungarian Kingdom, emphasizing his political career as seneschal. Additionally, the book

---

1 Supported by the OTKA-programme, interdisciplinary research in topics conducted by the following researchers: Péter Király (Music in the Court of Nádasdy); Erika Kiss (The Repository and Goldsmith Collection of Ferenc Nádasdy); Katalin Toma (The Structure and Administration of Nádasdy's Court); Noémi Viskolcz (The Literary and Bibliographic Patronage of Nádasdy); Enikő Buzási (Iconography and Artistic Collections in Nádasdy's residences).

illustrates how Nádasdy sought to honor his ancestry and promote his family's legacy while actively engaging in collecting and commissioning works of art.

The final two chapters focus on the construction of aristocratic identity through genealogies and family myths, highlighting their roles in shaping historical narratives and collective memory. Buzási notes that many prominent members of the Hungarian aristocracy began creating genealogies during this period, driven by a sense of feudal identity and alliance. The appendix includes a comprehensive list of names, places, and sources cited, along with a German-language abstract of the chapters, facilitating translation.

By centering the monograph on Ferenc Nádasdy, Buzási addresses a significant gap in the historiography of the Hungarian aristocracy and its role in shaping the Hungarian Kingdom's image through representation. She provides a meticulous analysis of Nádasdy's self-representational strategies, successfully integrating his artistic and architectural patronage within both local and international contexts. The breadth of the sources analyzed allows readers to grasp Nádasdy's aspirations in crafting his and his family's public image. Buzási carefully evaluates relevant secondary sources by Hungarian historians of architectural, social, political, and art history, and she structures her discussion methodically. Throughout the text, she candidly addresses the challenges of researching Nádasdy due to the destruction or loss of sources. Despite these obstacles, she conducts extensive background research on Nádasdy's use of artists, craftsmen, and his patronage of architecture and art, effectively presenting all information available from incomplete datasets. The study progresses logically from the employment of artisans to the arenas of self-representation, without neglecting Nádasdy's collecting traditions and patronage of the arts.

However, at times, the inclusion of background information feels excessive, overshadowing the aims stated in the book's title. In the first two chapters, the sheer quantity of details regarding various artists and their works draws attention away from Nádasdy himself, while discussions on the patronage of other Hungarian aristocrats, though valuable, often deviates from the central topic. Furthermore, the structure in these sections does not effectively link Nádasdy's practices to those of his peers. While Buzási's idea of describing Nádasdy's residences and reconstructing their floor plans and furnishings is compelling, overly detailed descriptions of secondary matters distract from the primary focus. For example, following the discussion of the origins of the frescoes in the Sárvár stateroom, the thorough analysis of potential inspirations from similar frescoes in Günzburg, which Nádasdy might have seen on his way

to Regensburg in 1653, feels tangential, as do the biographical details and the summaries of events concerning related individuals, such as Maria Katharina.

On the other hand, the locations of each residence in the life of the seneschal offers a refreshing perspective on his self-representation, supported by well-reasoned discussions of portraiture and galleries of royalty and members of the aristocracy. Buzási effectively establishes a foundation for understanding Nádasdy's emphasis on loyalty to the Habsburgs, which explains his extensive collection of Habsburg portraits and his neglect of Hungarian monarchs. A similar explanation may lie behind his portrait collection of contemporary, influential political figures, of which there are no other examples from the 1600s. Buzási's analysis of the picture of the Franciscan church *Patrona Hungariae* and its iconography strengthens her argument that Nádasdy's sought to project an idealized image to Western European powers, emphasizing unity among Hungary's feudal orders. In these chapters, Buzási offers strong iconographic analyses that remain focused on self-representation, yielding some of the book's most compelling arguments. Ultimately, the study illustrates the methods and strategies available to a Hungarian nobleman in constructing his image within a society in which social position and relationships with the Habsburg court were crucial.

While one could venture a few critical observations, Enikő Buzási's monograph is a significant contribution to the study of art and architectural history in early modern Hungary, particularly for scholars interested in iconography, aristocratic propaganda, and the history of collections within a Hungarian context. While the book occasionally over-explains certain points, it offers valuable insights into how art and architecture were used to construct narratives of the past, and it offers a methodical exploration of the various methods of effective self-representation and also exemplifies rigorous historical research through its extensive use of sources. The illustrations included in the book effectively complement the text, providing rich visual context for the material discussed. Additionally, the editorial quality is high, making the book enjoyable to read. Overall, this monograph represents an important scholarly achievement, deepening our understanding of the motivations behind the propaganda and self-fashioning practices of the Hungarian high nobility.

Andrea Márton  
Eötvös Loránd University  
lovalandrea@gmail.com