

Esterházy Pál és Esterházy Orsolya levelezése [The correspondence between Pál Esterházy and Orsolya Esterházy]. Edited by Noémi Viskolcz and Edina Zvara. Budapest: MTA KIK–Kossuth Kiadó, 2019. 352 pp.

The work under review is the first in a new series (*Esterházyana*), though it is certainly not without precedent. It fits well into the series of works containing the correspondence of prominent couples in the Early Modern era (for instance, the correspondence between Tamás Nádasdy and his wife Orsolya Kanizsai, the correspondence between Pál Nyáry and his wife Kata Várday, and the correspondence between Miklós Esterházy and his wife and the daughter of Kata Várday, Krisztina Nyáry). It also constitutes an important addition to the systematic study and publication of documents concerning the Esterházy family and, in particular, Pál Esterházy. Pál Esterházy's philanthropic and literary activities were thoroughly covered by participants in the 2013 Rebakucs conference, whose presentations were published as a volume of articles two years later. Esterházy's private life, however, has for the most part been considerably less visible to the research community. Notably, this edition, it seems, will not reveal the secret face of Pál Esterházy either, for although it offers a written record of his 30-year marriage, it seems to provide little more than the morsels of two separately lived lives. As the editors note, "the correspondence is an interesting but often one-sided record of a long marriage. Much is left unsaid in the letters, as if they both had other, separate lives" (p.48).

János Hárích, who compiled Pál Esterházy's extensive correspondence and other documents, estimated the total collection of letters to number some 7,000 items, 362 of which belong to the correspondence between Esterházy and his first wife, Orsolya Esterházy. This volume presents this body of documents. The primary materials are preceded by four texts. A foreword by István Monok is followed by the "Introduction and Overview of the Research History" by Noémi Viskolcz. Here, it might have been worthwhile to have offered more detail on the lessons to be drawn from the letters and other issues of interest from the perspectives of culture and cultural history. Viskolcz rightly notes that the letters give one considerably more insight into Orsolya's life, even if she was sometimes terse in her phrasing. Orsolya Esterházy was unable to spell foreign words correctly, and her handwriting suggests lack of regular practice, though it perhaps would be an exaggeration to call it ugly. There was a rapid

deterioration in the quality of her handwriting in the 1670s, which Viskolcz suggests may have been the consequence of a medical issue, perhaps a trauma. Indeed, Viskolcz convincingly links this decline to certain events mentioned in the family documents. The rules according to which the letters were transcribed are precise and seem to have been consistently observed, but I will discuss this in more detail in the section on questions concerning transcription.

The introduction is followed by a historical overview entitled “Pál Esterházy and Orsolya Esterházy,” also by Noémi Viskolcz. After Orsolya Esterházy became an orphan at a relatively young age, the fight for control of her property and wealth, the measures surrounding the papal dispensation, and the secret marriage and resulting family scandal all illustrate that, from the outset, the Esterházy family subordinated everything to its marriage strategy. There was no question of a marriage based on love, and indeed one is hard pressed to discern even a trace of the kind of mutual respect that one finds, for example, in the exchange of letters between Tamás Nádasdy and Orsolya Kanizsai. While the introduction promises a glimpse into the history of a long marriage, the letters bear witness to the way in which Pál and Orsolya lived apart for 30 years. It is perhaps not the job of the people who have assembled this collection of primary source materials to deal with such matters, but anyone who wants to subject this body of documents to a meaningful analysis will have to include other aspects that are essential to the study of women’s fates in the seventeenth century. Orsolya very clearly did not learn foreign languages, nor did she move much in society, and the fact that she was often pregnant (she gave birth to at least 17 children) may have been a hindrance, but as the editors of the volume themselves observe, most of the noblewomen of the time were not as drastically cut off from both the culture and society of their time as she was, and it was Pál, her one-time guardian and then husband (who is portrayed as a benevolent man), who may well have been responsible for this. In any case, the question merits more thorough discussion in a comparative framework, if only because the insights thus gained might prompt us to reconsider our image of Pál Esterházy. To give just one example, Pál Esterházy kept admirable control of the family’s papers, incomes, and expenditure, and he kept meticulous records of all items (thus offering a veritable treasure trove for historians today). However, this is perhaps only half the story. The portrait of Pál as a skillful organizer with an almost obsessive compulsion to write seems more complex when one considers that the newly widowed Esterházy kept careful records, down to the last penny, of the costs of his wife’s funeral without, however, bothering to mention when it was held.

The intricate history of the family is followed by a discussion by Erika Kiss of Orsolya's dowry. The text contains many passages which were cited in the preceding essay, and it might have been preferable for a more cautious editor to have eliminated this redundancy and make the narrative more coherent. That said, Kiss's contribution is a strong piece of writing, clearly linked both to the letters and to the research that has been carried out in recent years to inventory the Esterházy treasures (I am thinking here first and foremost of the 2006 and 2013 exhibitions). This discussion of the fates of the jewelry, the trousseau, and items of clothing offer some context for the letters and also can be compared with and added to the inventories accessible today, first and foremost Pál's inventory list, which was previously thought to be jewelry designs.

Turning to the transcriptions of the various texts, several observations can be made. In accordance with the principles underlying the publication of these kinds of texts, the editors have put together a partially standardized text. While the resulting texts preserve features of the language and spelling of the time, we are nevertheless confronted with texts which have never been seen before and which are difficult to search, since they are not entirely standardized. The data concerning the letters (serial numbers, sender, addressee, date) are given, followed by the texts of the letters themselves, the details of the envelope (or the exterior paper in which the letter was sent) and the autograph, and the precise archival notation used today. The texts are clear and legible, but there are some inconsistencies in the use of an exclamation mark in parentheses (“(!)”) to call the reader's attention to particular details. In the case of text written by Orsolya, for instance, the editors have used this to indicate passages in which she confused the vowels “a” and “o,” for instance spelling the Hungarian word “szolgálatomat” (“my servant”) incorrectly as “szolgálotamat.” However, no indication is given to indicate spots in the texts written by Pál in which he made similar mistakes. It might have been preferable simply to have explained these features of the texts in the introduction instead of cluttering the transcriptions with these kinds of markings. The notes of the critical apparatus and the explanatory notes are not separated from each other, but rather are given in footnotes numbered consecutively. Most of the explanatory notes provide useful information, but again it would have been helpful to have paid a bit more attention to consistency and coherence. For instance, at times the editors seem to think they know, in connection with mention of an approaching coronation, which coronation the texts are referring to (p.345), while at other times they do not (p.333). It also might have been preferable to have included a prosopography as an appendix.

Last but not least, the book is a very impressively designed publication and is clearly the result of conscientious, attentive work. It includes an array of lovely illustrations which have been judiciously selected and it has been attractively typeset. It is a work worthy of the Esterházy family and legacy, and it will serve as an immensely useful source for scholars on the era.

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