



The Influence of the Estate System and Power Relations in the Late Feudal Parliament Seating Plan

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“We shape our buildings and then they shape us,” Winston Churchill said when the question of rebuilding Westminster and modifying the interior of the House of Commons came up and he expressed his support for preserving the former system.¹ Thus, according to the prime minister, a seating plan both expresses and determines the character and operation of parliamentarism. In light of this interconnection, in this essay I examine the formal characteristics of the late feudal Diet in Hungary between 1790 and 1848, as well as the power relations of the estates and strivings as they found expression within this system.

Keywords: 19th century, Hungarian Diet, late feudal parliamentarism, Estate system, use of space, seating arrangement of chambers

The Use of Space in Nineteenth-Century Modern Parliaments

The most striking difference in the seating plan in the Hungarian Diet before 1848 and that of representative parliamentary systems is the lack of both the horseshoe-shaped, that is, central pattern and the Westminster-style arrangement in Britain, with its benches which are facing one another. It is no coincidence that in the nineteenth-century continental parliaments, members of parliament sat on benches in closed, often ascending rows, reminiscent of ancient Greek theaters. The central arrangement of space (in the case of almost entirely closed circles, semicircles, and horseshoe shapes) helped ensure that each member of the assembly could sit at a nearly equal distance from the others, speak up, and see and hear one another, and it was the best way for the presidium, with which the semicircle came to a close, to chair the meeting, monitor developments, and notice if there were any need to intervene. Although the present paper does not lend itself to a comprehensive discussion of the use of space by representative institutions in the nineteenth century, a considerable amount of data indicates

1 Speech by Winston Churchill in the House of Commons. The meeting was held on October 28, 1943 in the House of Lords instead of the building of the House of Commons, which had been bombed. Accessed on March 24, 2021, <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources>.

that this was the prevalent arrangement in most of the chambers designed for the assemblies established as a result of the revitalization of parliamentarism after the period of absolutism, and Hungarian contemporaries were well aware of this fact.

In many respects, the French parliament, which by 1830 had consolidated after the whirlwind changes brought about by the revolutions, served as a role model. As Transylvanian Farkas Sándor Bölöni pointed out when recording his travels in Europe in 1830,

“the chamber of deputies [...] has public meetings [...] The chamber has the shape of an amphitheater, and the deputies sit on the right or the left, according to their views. The audience sits in the balcony. Opposite the *praeses*, the journalists jot down the discussions. The *Moniteur*, as the official paper, sits near the seat of the *praeses*.”

Bölöni also noted that the speakers stood on a pulpit erected in front of the presidium. “If someone wishes to speak on a subject, he gets on the grandstand to give his speech, mostly reading from his papers.”² A few years later, a similar description was provided by the young Bertalan Szemere (who was a member of the Diet a decade later and served as secretary of the interior in 1848), who did a lot to introduce the customs of parliamentarism in Hungary.

“The chamber is shaped like an amphitheater, with twenty white Ionian marble columns on each side, carved from a block, and a gallery of two rows behind them. There are ten rows of benches running parallel with the semicircle, and the windows on the vault, like the chamber itself, line up in a semicircle. The president’s seat and the marble pulpit are situated in the middle of the diameter.”³

Szemere ascertained the effects of arrangement and use of space on the members’ behavior and manner of speaking when he was learning about the British parliament and the discursive registers used there, as compared to French tradition. He suggested that the solemn tone of French speeches derives from the use of the pulpit: “In the [British] House of Commons, one does not hear the eulogizing pathos that pervades the French legislative chamber and which [...] may also be attributed to the grandstand, because standing on it compels one to speak solemnly, so to speak,” a behavior uncharacteristic of the speakers in the House of Commons.⁴

2 Bölöni, *Napnyugati utazás*, 114–15.

3 Szemere, *Utazás külföldön*, 127.

4 *Ibid.*, 267.

The newly established Belgian National Assembly also followed the example of Paris. As Szemere pointed out, “the chamber of delegates is the exact replica of the Parisian chamber.” Bölöni made the same observation, but he described it in more detail and included mention of minor differences as well: “The chamber of the congress is indeed fine. The seats of *praeses* and members are arranged the same way as in Paris [...] with the only difference being that the members can speak from their own place and sitting in the benches. *Pro et contra oppositio* members have the same arrangements.”⁵ It is a well-known fact that the central, almost entirely closed seating plan of the 1848 Frankfurt National Parliament is determined greatly by the oval floorplan of St. Paul’s Church, which hosts the assembly.⁶ The chamber of the Italian National Assembly, which became stable in 1861 after the events of 1848, was set up in Palazzo Carignano in Turin, with a floorplan similar to that of the Parliament in Frankfurt: in both chambers the seats were arranged in ascending rows in a semicircle.⁷ These assemblies, however, all showcased the situation after revolution so, to varying degrees, they all broke from the former feudal systems. The Parliament of Württemberg,⁸ for instance, was established as part of the modern constitution that the monarch forced against the estates, which were demanding the reinstatement of the “ancient” constitution.

The British seating plan, with its facing rows of benches, is undoubtedly the result of the arrangement of the canon choir of St. Stephen’s Chapel in the Palace of Westminster: members of the House of Commons simply sat in the stalls of the former choir when they took possession of the building. The customary arrangement, which expresses the two-party system and the division between government and opposition, remained unchanged during reconstruction in the early modern period and in the chamber newly built after the fire of 1834. In Szemere’s words, the chamber of the House of Commons

“has a door-shaped pulpit in the middle of one end, where the speaker [...] sits. In front of him, a desk covered in books and documents, next to which work three clerks wearing grey wigs. Along the longer walls, there are four ascending rows to the right and four to the left, with benches very close to one another and no desks in front of them [...]

5 Ibid., 388; Bölöni, *Napnyugati utazás*, 181.

6 *Grund-Plan vom Innern der Pauls-Kirche*, Deutsches Historisches Museum. Do 95/55; Wolff, *Paulskirche, Obergeschoß, Grundriß*, Museumslandschaft Hessen-Kassel, Inventar nr.: L GS 12545; *Das erste deutsche Parlament*, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Gr 2004/85.

7 “Opening of the Italian parliament.” *Vasárnapi Újság*, April 7, 1861.

8 Brandt, “Die deutschen Staaten,” 859.

by the way, the audience is allowed into the chamber if there is enough room, unlike in the French Parliament, where this is forbidden [...] On the speaker's right sit the ministers and their supporters [...] on his left sits the opposition [...] like two enemy camps."⁹

A few years earlier, Bölöni provided a similar description, adding that "[t]he members speak from their place [...] The speech is always directed to the speaker."¹⁰ This arrangement has persisted in its entirety and was later adopted by the Parliaments of other Commonwealth countries (e.g. Canada, Jamaica, Australia).

These seating plans conform to the particularities of modern parliamentarism. They express the duality of government and the assembly representing the nation, as well as the equality of the members within the parliament. As a remnant of the feudal system, the House of Lords, with its limited power, is located in a separate chamber. Considering the two models, it is the British parliamentary seating plan that emphasizes the two-party division of government and opposition. Churchill, too, argued in favor of keeping this arrangement by claiming that if British politics insisted on a two-party system, then the confrontational benches would clearly indicate the status of the MPs in the parliament: if one member sits on the other side, it will visually represent the change in his party affiliation, whereas the central arrangement with its contiguous rows meshes differences in party affiliation and enables the expression of transition, overlapping, and minor political differences.¹¹

In contrast, from the perspective of the focus of this essay, the Hungarian Diet before 1848 can be linked to previous customs maintained with certain degrees of continuity with feudal systems.

Assemblies which Preserved Feudal Characteristics

Some European assemblies of the era passed on their feudal characteristics, customs, and concomitant uses of space to nineteenth-century legislation. In these institutions, the seating arrangement was determined by estates, rank, and, among those of the same rank, the principle of seniority.¹² The latter was in fact transmitted to the more conservative upper houses of modern parliaments as

9 Szemere, *Utazás külföldön*, 266.

10 Bölöni, *Napnyugati utazás*, 251–53.

11 See the speech cited in the first footnote.

12 Szente, "A korai rendi gyűlések," 22 and 25.

well. In the nineteenth century French senate, for instance, “princes of royal blood, pairs by birth, sit right behind the chairman.”¹³

The plenaries of the Swedish Riksdag were rather unusual, as they placed the monarch and the assembly opposite each other, and the representatives of the four estates in two columns, sitting in benches reminiscent of desks in classrooms or church buildings. This seating plan persisted after 1789 and 1810, too: most of the members sat on benches lined up opposite the presidium. Although the four estates had their consultations and votes separately, the noble curia, for example, still used the same arrangement in its legislative chamber at the end of the century.¹⁴

From a Hungarian point of view, the Reichstag of the Holy Roman Empire is of particular importance, because also due to their shared monarch, it could influence the order of the Hungarian Diet developing in the seventeenth century. The historical assembly, which existed until 1806, was in fact not an elected representative body but a board of rulers of the provinces and cities with sovereign rights in the empire. The members and their delegates participating in the meetings surrounded the chamber, sitting parallel with the four walls. The seating arrangements conformed to the division into estates: the estates, forming three separate curiae within the assembly, had their own session halls, too, and during plenary meetings, they also sat separately, at a distance from one another. In the case of the latter, the speaker was the high commissioner of the emperor, the electors of the Holy Roman emperor sat on either side of him, and, perpendicular to them, down the long sides of the chamber sat the 120–150 sovereigns of the provinces. Members of the third curia, free imperial cities, sat in the back, opposite the emperor and the electorate. As for the first two curiae, ecclesiastical members were seated on the right and secular members on the left. Among the princes, with an individual vote of 96–98, those in lower ranks were grouped into an additional two ecclesiastical and four secular curiae, thus casting one individual vote each, that is, six more curial votes altogether. The seats closest to the emperor (or his delegate) and the speaker, as well as the ones on the right of the speaker were always considered more prestigious.¹⁵ On

13 Bölöni's outline of 26 points to the rules of the French Parliament, *Napnyugati utazás*, 136–37.

14 Képes, “Az 1809. évi svéd alaptörvény,” 196, 203; Janet, “Konungens sista afsked af Rikets.” The chamber for the nobility was arranged in this way even in 1900: Första kammarens plenisal i Gamla riksdagshuset, Stockholms Stadsmuseum. *Riksdagen i Gamla Riksdagshuset på Riddarholmen. Interiör av plenisal med ledamöter*. 1890–1905 Fotograf: Wiklunds, Ateljé. Wiklunds Ateljé BILDNUMMER: C 3236 Stadsmuseet i Stockholm.

15 Vajnági, “A Reichstag és a diéta,” 189–91.

the other hand, the seating arrangement corresponding to status and rank in the estates determined the figure of the speaker, as well as the order of speech and voting in each board and the entire assembly alike.¹⁶ The different curiae, however, had varying seating plans. There was enough room for the seven-nine prince-electors at one table in their chamber, while the princes sat in two times four rows opposite the presidium in their own session hall (much like in the Swedish assembly), and delegates of the cities were sitting by the walls.¹⁷

Apparently, the seating arrangement of the plenary meetings of the Imperial Diet was not unique among old Diets of the estates. When the French *États généraux* assembled again in 1789 after a hiatus of more than 150 years, the plenary meeting had the same seating arrangement despite the high number of representatives. A huge session hall was erected on Versailles Avenue. The throne and the seats of the royal family were placed on a platform at one end of the hall, with the tables and the chairs of the ministers and the chancellor right in front of them; the clergy sat on the right along the wall, opposite the nobility on the left, and representatives of the third estate sat in the middle, opposite the throne.¹⁸ However, this arrangement could only be implemented at plenary meetings held with the permission of the king, while the estates were expected to have their sessions separately when holding serious discussions; thus, the revolution began with the three estates demanding to become a homogenous national assembly.

The Diets of Austrian hereditary provinces are not uninteresting to this discussion either, although due to their smaller size and limited roles they may only be partly compared to the Hungarian Diet. It is a well-known fact that the parliament of the Austrian Empire, established in 1804, only came to existence in 1861, after the prior events of 1848, but the individual meetings of its provinces formally persisted from the early modern period of the estates, though they had limited authority and not much weight. The assembly of Tirol prepared issues on the agenda by dividing into “quarters,” but the members of these quarters came from different estates and the decision was made collectively. The *Landtags* (Provincial Diets) of all the other provinces had three or four curiae

16 Stollberg-Rilinger, *Des Kaisers alte Kleider*. For an analysis of the order for the Worms period, see the chapter entitled “Ordnung der Personen in Text und Raum,” 32–46. For the exact allocation of seats in the Regensburg mixed meetings, see the figure on page 197. On the expression of rank and authority in the last stage of the history of the assembly see 300–5; Schulze, *Reich und Türkenfahrt*, 337, 348.

17 On the chambers of the individual curia and the joint sitting: Becker, *Der Reichstag*.

18 Madame de Staël’s description of the opening of the assembly, supported by contemporary depictions: *Considérations*, 100. 1.

(Vorarlberg had two), which held their discussions not separately but as groups in the chamber of the *Landtag*. The curiae were physically separated from one another in the benches of the chamber. They voted individually—in order by estates or by taking turns—in a way that the votes of cities were always cast at the end.¹⁹ The hall of the Styrian provincial meeting was arranged diagonally: the speaker's table, where the minutes were kept, too, stood in the corner, the clergy's benches by the wall on the right, and the benches of the other estates surrounded the middle part of the hall in a quadrangle shape.²⁰

General Characteristics of the Use of Space by the Hungarian Diet

For members in the Hungarian Diet, the elongated shape of the chamber used did not lend itself to a horseshoe-shaped arrangement. The shape would not have ruled out the possibility of using the British Westminster style seating arrangement either, but it could not really prevail here. The arrangement conforming to the two-party alternating governments system, as well as to the parliamentary role of the king and the nation was considered so specific in Europe and suited the Hungarian public law system, still in a feudal state and not acknowledging the parties officially, so little, that its introduction was not even an issue back then.²¹

The Hungarian Parliament used three buildings between 1790 and 1848. The building in Buda shaped for this purpose only hosted two and a half Diets (1790, 1792, 1807) of the fourteen held. On the first occasion, the second half of the meeting took place in the old *Landhaus* in Lange Strasse in Pozsony (Pressburg, today Bratislava, Slovakia), the venue for the 1796 Diet for the entire duration of the assembly. From 1802 to 1848, the Diet used the parliament converted from the financial management building in Michaelstrasse in Pressburg. In all three buildings, the chamber of the Lower House had an elongated, irregular rectangular shape. The halls designated for the Upper House could have been more suitable for meetings, but few of the authorized participants actually attended the sessions.²²

19 Ruszoly, "A német tartományi rendi képviselő," 219.

20 Mat'a, "Der steirische Landtag," 163–218.

21 In contrast, in 1865, the newly built Hall of Representatives was designed in the English style, but due to its poor acoustic conditions, it was soon converted to a horseshoe layout. "Az új képviselőház gyűlésterme," *Vasárnapi Újság*, November 9, 1865.

22 Borsos, "A régi budai Országháza," 55–93; Kelényi, "A budai országgház," 36–42; Paulinyi, "A m. kir. belügyminisztérium," 16–38; Kumlik, *Adalékok*, 4–5; Horler, *Budapest műemlékei*, vol. 1, 413–15; Siklóssy,

Between 1790 and 1848, the Hungarian Diet maintained the previously designed seating plan. Besides division by estates, discussed below, this traditional arrangement also reflected the mindset of the political dualism of the king and the estates.²³ The chambers of the Diet were given a linear arrangement: in both houses the speaker representing the king sat at the short end, while along the entire length of the hall there sat the subjects, the estates constituting the political community, on both sides of a long line of tables, one line in the Upper House and three in the Lower House. From the speaker's seat, as if he were sitting at the head of the table, one could see the entire chamber without having to turn one's head. This solution was in accordance with the idea of head and body, and may also seem, at first glance, to be a practical one, corresponding to the shape of the hall. Of course, this meant that some members sat very far from the presidium and those sitting at the opposite ends of the table could barely hear one another. It is no wonder, then, that having a strong voice was a vital prerequisite for attending these meetings, and soft-spoken, gentle souls like Kölcsey had but the weight of their personal reputations to ensure them the attention of the gathering.

Another distinctive feature of the arrangement, in contrast with the European customs emerging at the time, was that deputies were seated by large tables on comfortable portable chairs, instead of closed rows of benches. In the early twentieth century, journalist Károly Eötvös, drawing on the memoirs of contemporaries, highlighted that more than any modern seating plan, this arrangement better suited the convenient, patriarchal circumstances of reputed noble members, who would have objected to being forced to sit at "school desks."²⁴ Indeed, portable chairs facilitated freer movement; Kossuth, for example, regularly gave his speeches at the last Diet by turning towards the presidium while standing behind his chair and holding its backrest.²⁵ This had a special significance because, as opposed to the clergy who spoke while sitting, members of both the Upper and the Lower House indicated their request to speak by standing up and staying upright.²⁶

In both houses, the place of the members was clearly determined by the authority of the estates, grouping by status within the estate, and, in the Lower

"Országházak." 689–96.

23 Gergely, "Ungarn," 1050–51. On the Diet in general, see Pajkossy, "Ungarn," 947–51.

24 Eötvös, "Hogy üljenek a követek?" *Pesti Hírlap*, May 16, 1906.

25 Eötvös, "Hogy üljenek a követek?" *Pesti Hírlap*, May 19, 1906.

26 Pardoe, *The City of the Magyar*, vol. 3, 227–28.

House, customs defined by geographical distribution as well. Similarly to the universal historical particularities mentioned above, the seats considered most prestigious were the ones on the right of and closest to the chairperson.²⁷ In this case, too, the seating plan indicated the rank of the estates and the prestige of members. There was another difference deriving from these arrangements, though, as compared to the later parliamentary period: both in the Lower House and partly in the Upper House as well, members were sat next to one other not on the basis of their political or party affiliation, but according to their place in the status hierarchy.

The Seating Arrangement in the Upper House

In the House of Lords, the palatine (always a prince of the dynasty from 1790 on) sat at the head of the table, which was placed in the middle of the chamber and ran its entire length. To his right, the whole right side was reserved for the first estate, the prelates; right next to the palatine there sat the most prestigious high priest, the prince primate of Esztergom; then the archbishops of Kalocsa and Eger, and then all the bishops. Among them, the exact place of the diocesan bishops was determined by the date of their consecration, as part of the principle of authority. Titular bishops, who were elected but not yet consecrated or had no operating diocese, sat farther down. Superiors of the ecclesiastical convents in bishops' ranks, abbots with mitre, the arch abbot of Pannonhalma, the grand provost of Zagreb (at the same time, the prior of Vrana), and the grand provost of the Premonstratensians of Várad sat at the far end of the table.²⁸

The left side of the table was reserved for the barons holding high offices. Their first group was divided according to the rank of their office: the lord chief justice (*judex curiae*) was followed by the ban of Croatia, the master of the treasury (*magister tavernicorum*), and then, the court officials, in accordance with the date of their appointment (*magister janitorum*, *mg. pincernarum*, *mg. dapiferorum*, *mg. agazonum*, *mg. curiae regiae*). Further down there sat the county governors: supreme *comites* (lord lieutenants or county high sheriffs), first hereditary and sempiternal, then the other in the order of their inauguration, and finally the governor of Fiume, and the deputy of Croatia in the Upper House. Until 1840,

27 Szijártó, *A Diéta*, 101–4.

28 Pardoe, *The City of the Magyar*, vol. 3, 218–19; Paget, *Hungary and Transylvania*, vol. 1, 174–75; Kovács, *1843–44-ik évi alsó tábla kerületi napló*, vol. 1, 55; Lupkovics, *A magyar rendi országgyűlések*, 36–37; Pálmány, *A reformkori országgyűlések*, vol. 1, 14–15, 23.

orthodox archbishops and bishops, who were granted participation in the Diet only in the late eighteenth century, also sat at this section of the table. The row of the high priests turned back to the side of the secular members of the Upper House at the end of the table.²⁹ It must be noted, though, that many of the bishops and the office-holders did not stay continually at the venue of the Diet, and this was even more so the case with those lords who did not hold any offices but had titles by birth, such as dukes, counts, and barons.³⁰ For this reason, discussions were sometimes held in smaller rooms, in a more informal way even. In January 1826, for instance, due to the low number of participants and the cold, the palatine held the meeting in his own chamber; and there is also some evidence of chairing from one's sickbed.³¹ Titular (non office-holder) lords only had some single chairs without tables with no precise arrangement on both sides of the chamber, right in front of the rail dividing the assembly and the audience.³² There were, however, some signs of seating arrangement according to agreement in opinions among titular peers: those of the same view often favored sitting close to one another, and those remaining for a longer time customarily preferred using the same seat. But the somewhat stubborn lords were not really willing give up some of their independence and function in a more disciplined manner, like a party, or were only willing to do so towards the end of the era, so their seating arrangement, or the lack thereof, may be considered a tendency prevailing only to a degree and not a rule *per se*.

Not only did the seating plan have a symbolic meaning but it also determined the degree of influence on decisions; the palatine could best hear the speech of prestigious members among all the speeches considered from the perspective of rank, so the voices of those sitting in the far end of the chamber did not count much as compared to those of *regni barones* and officeholders. Men of the court and the royal government thus had an opportunity to monopolize discussions and decisions. Partly due to the principle of authority and the court policies, and partly because of most lords being loyal to the court, it was rather surprising when a member of the Upper House, especially one without an office,

29 Pulszky, *Mein Zeit, mein Leben*, vol. 1, 220–21; Vaszary, *Adatok*, 8; Pardoe, *The City of the Magyar*, vol. 3, 239–40.

30 Paget, *Hungary and Transylvania*, vol. 1, 178. On the frequent absence of more famous personalities, see Pulszky, *Mein Zeit, mein Leben*, vol. 1, 240.

31 Széchenyi, *Napló*, 449; Szigjártó, *A Diéta*, 141.

32 Kovács, *1843–44-ik évi kerületi napló*, vol. 1, 56.



Figure 1. Groitsch, A. J. The chamber of the Upper House in Pressburg, 1836.
(Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest)

acted individually and expressed his opinion.³³ The Transylvanian Bölöni, too, described the members of the Upper House as obedient to the royal authority:

“The palatine comes out of the adjoining room, followed by the primate, and all the lords, frightened like pupils, run to the table and sit down in silence. The host of bishops settle on one side of the long table, the dignitarians on the other side, the ‘regalists’ at the back [...] The subject is finally discussed, if we may refer to the speaker’s will and the bishop’s approving bow as a discussion, and soon [...] the submissive bill concerning the serves is ready.”³⁴

The seating plan in the Upper House, imposed strictly at the table but less formal in the back, was eventually modified. Rearrangement took place in 1843; the main aim was to isolate the audience from the decision makers and drive them

³³ The boring meetings of the upper table were only enlivened by speeches made by the opposition: Pulszky, *Mein Zeit, mein Leben*, vol. 1, 221.

³⁴ Bölöni, *Napnyugati utazás*, 99. On the solemn and ceremonial atmosphere, see Paget, *Hungary and Transylvania*, vol. 1, 177.

out of the chamber, although they were later allowed to take the empty seats.³⁵ A considerable transformation was made at the end of the era, but several customs connected the seating plan persisted. According to the magazine reporting on the Diet of 1847–1848, the long table in the middle was kept (b) but, running parallel with it along the chamber, three rows of six long tables were placed on each side, gradually ascending and having a gap in the middle (c and d), to be used by the supreme *comites* and high priests who could not get any seats at the middle table. The rest of the seats were given to lords without an office. A bit farther back from the presidential seat (a) there were two smaller tables perpendicular to the others: orthodox bishops were seated at the table on the right (e) and the archivist at the one on the left (f). Right behind the palatine's chair in the middle, by the wall, sat his officials (E) and, on their two sides, the shorthand writers (g and h). Four out of five window niches were given to newspaper reporters (k). Along the long side of the chamber overlooking the courtyard, members of the Lower House could be present as audience on a stand behind a rail (l), while by the wall opposite the presidency, likewise separated by a railing, the audience could sit in ascending rows (m).

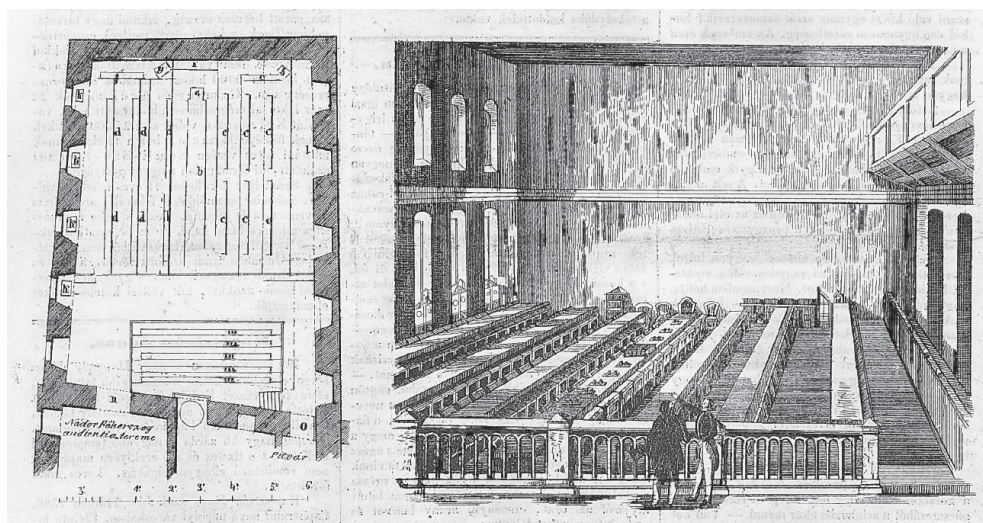


Figure 2. *The seating plan of the Upper House after rearrangement in 1843 (1847–1848)*
 (“Országgyűlési rajzok 1,” *Ábrázolt Folyóirat* January 8, 1848, 12.)

35 Molnár, *Batthyány*, 76; Révész, *Die Anfänge*, 39; X. [orsz.] ülés a Fő RR-nél június 24-én 1843. *A főrendeknél tartott országos ülések naplója*, 5–6.

The Seating Arrangement in the Lower House

In the Lower House, the duality of the monarch and the estates, status within the estate, and geographical considerations likewise determined the distribution of seats. The seat of the chairing *personalis* (chief justice of Royal Court of Appael) was positioned on a wide podium, a few steps above the floor, at the corner-stoved end of the rectangular chamber. Right behind it, members of the Royal Court of Appeal, formulating the documents of the Diet, had a table, standing on its own before 1832. Perpendicular to the speaker's table, three rows of tables reserved for the delegates were lined up along the entire length of the chamber.³⁶ As seen elsewhere, the "upper seats," i.e. the ones closest to the speaker on his right were reserved for the clergy, the representatives of chapters. At the middle and left-side tables, close to the speaker, there sat the delegates of the nobility, elected by the general assemblies of the noble counties, two from each county. The upper seats of the middle table were taken by delegates from counties situated along the Danube River in the western part of the country, while delegates from the eastern region, from counties by the Tisza River, sat at the table on the speaker's left. The two delegates of each Danubian county customarily sat next to each other, while the ones from the Tisza region always sat opposite each other. However, this had no political significance whatsoever.³⁷ In the previous century this was the usual seating arrangement for chapters and counties, so the only divergent seating plan, which was used at the 1741 Diet, is considered to have been an exception, perhaps a mistake made by the source recording the meeting.³⁸

Groups that had a collective privilege but no individual noble titles were placed farther from the speaker, in accordance with their lower rank.³⁹ This way, the secondary status of cities was indicated by the fact that their delegates sat at the far end of the counties' tables. The only exception was the two delegates of each privileged free district incorporated in 1791 (*Jászkeunság* and *Hajdúság*), who sat right after the chapters' delegates, at the farther end of the right-side table.⁴⁰ The few empty seats at this table were given to delegates of absent members of the Upper House; this, however, did not indicate their rank but the roles

36 Pardoe, *The City of the Magyar*, vol. 3, 220. Paget, *Hungary and Transylvania*, vol. 1, 28.

37 Lupkovics, *A magyar rendi országgyűlések*, 37–38.

38 Szijártó, *A diéta*, 570–73. The exception: 472.

39 Pardoe, *The City of the Magyar*, vol. 3, 221.

40 Kossuth, *Országgyűlési Tudósítások*, vol. 1, 23.

customarily attributed to them. As a matter of fact, although under the law these delegates also had a voice in the Lower House, in the nineteenth century, the delegates of the counties did not even let them speak, let alone vote. The noble deputies of the counties looked at the latter with jealousy and disdain, considered them “servants” of the lords, and contested their legitimacy as participants. The most these delegates could do was inform the lords they substituted, who had the right to vote in the Upper House anyway, and so the lower nobility tried to neutralize the influence their lords had through them.

A change in the situation of delegates sent by absent members of the high nobility is likewise interesting: while in the first half of the eighteenth century they were seated closer to the speaker, between the counties-chapels and the cities, i.e. they were higher in rank than the latter, after 1790 they were pushed to the far end of the chamber. Opposite the speaker’s podium, in the other end of the long chamber by the angled short wall, there was another part separated by a railing. From there, a staircase led up to the gallery reserved for the audience, below which the rest of the audience and the delegates of the high nobility with no room at the table were crowded together.

The Impracticability and Rearrangement of the Seating Plan

As noted earlier, this arrangement, which conformed to the shape of the chamber and to power relations among the estates, was not without problems. For those seated far from the speaker, the unfavorable position hindered their effective participation in the discussion; furthermore, since decisions were often made not by counting the votes but by the speaker listening to the participants’ opinion and considering it on the basis of their rank, the influence of those sitting in the back was limited during decision-making as well.

Partly due to the objection of those in a favorable position, their contemporaries recognized the impracticability of the seating arrangement. Sometime between 1820 and 1833 Palatine Archduke Joseph as the President of the whole Diet had a floorplan made to rearrange the two chambers in Buda⁴¹ but as the king chose Pressburg, the estates eventually stuck to the traditions because of the temporary circumstances. Thus, however, repeated complaints were made about the seating arrangements. On November 27, 1830 delegates

41 Borsos, “A régi budai Országháza,” 90; Trentsensky. *Projectum Conclavium Tabularum*. Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Budapest Főváros Levéltára. BMT. 89.

of Temes and Torontál (characteristically two counties that were liberated from Ottoman rule late and reincorporated even later, so their delegates were seated at the far end), asked the president to “do something about the placement of the delegates seated far, as because of the distance they could not always hear the speech of those sitting in the front, and thus could not effectively participate in the discussions of the Diet. A host of similar complaints were made by the other delegates who were seated far from the speaker owing to customary laws,”⁴² but eventually rearrangement was postponed to the next Diet.

These complaints may have been the reason for the palatine’s aforementioned attempt to rearrange the chamber in Buda, but the issue came up at the beginning of the 1832 Diet in Pressburg as well. The palatine suggested that the impracticable seating plan of the chambers be transformed based on the experience of the previous Diet.⁴³ Presumably, the estates felt it was necessary to protect and express their autonomy from members of the Upper House, which would also indicate the significance of the differences between the estates, and they did so by rejecting the palatine’s initiative: they “sent back” the palatine to the members of the Upper House, saying that they had the right to sit wherever they wanted to. This was obviously an exaggeration, as customs strictly limited them in this respect as well, so in the end they implemented the changes by mutual agreement.⁴⁴

In the new seating arrangement (1833), delegates of the clergy were placed on the speaker’s platform, at separate tables on the two sides of the Royal Court

42 Bertha, *Országgyűlési társza*, 196–97.

43 *Plan for the repair of the gallery of the “Hall of the Lords” in Pressburg (early 1830s)*. MNL OL Plan Library, plans excepted from fonds of the government authorities. No. Ministry of Commerce Plans (T 14) No.2/Sz/39/1–4.

A méltóságos főrendek termének belső elrendezése iránt készített tervek. MNL OL Plan Library, Various blueprints (T 15) No. 42/1–4.

Planum exhibens modernam et projectatam mensarum-tabularum-sessionalium dislocatione in sala incl. statuum et ordinum, una et projectum calefactionis. MNL OL Plan Library, Various blueprints (T 15) No. 42/5.

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Pozsony, a Magyar Királyi Kamara épülete, országgyűlés színhelye, ülésterem [1830] alaprajz. MNL OL Plan Library, Various blueprints (T 15) No. 42/7–10.

Erklärung der Numern in dem beiliegenden Plan Pozsony, a Magyar Királyi Kamara épülete, országgyűlés színhelye, ülésterem [1830]. MNL OL Plan Library, Various blueprints (T 15) No. 42/11.

44 Eötvös, “Hogy üljenek a követek?” May 17, 1906. Kossuth and Kölcsey both mention the reorganization of the sitting order, but neither mentions the conflict with the palatine. Kossuth, *Országgyűlési Tudósítások*, vol. 1, 14. (Sitting of December 19, 1832); Kölcsey, *Országgyűlési napló*, 15–16, 21.

of Appeal.⁴⁵ The reason for this was partly because the palatine and the president intended to help them out in their difficult situation in the increasing debates on ecclesiastical policy, and separate them from the delegates of counties, who often attacked them.⁴⁶ As for the three long tables, the one on the speaker's right was still reserved for the free districts and delegates of those absent, the now free seats of the clergy were given to some deputies of the Danubian counties, and those representing the counties by the Tisza were sat at the inner side of the table.

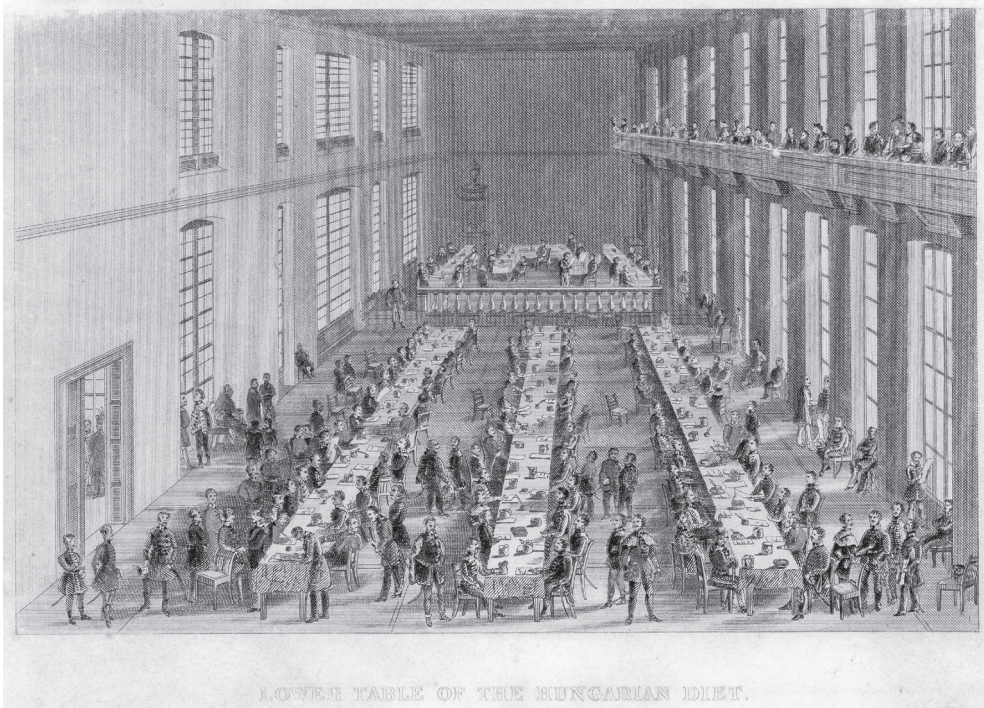


Figure 3. The chamber of the Lower House after 1833. Groitsch, A. J.
(Hungarian National Gallery)

Farther away from the presidium, the counties were given the seats of the chapters at the right-side table and were seated as follows: the Danubian counties of Sopron, Nógrád, Komárom, Hont, Baranya, Esztergom, Tolna, and Turóc on the outer side; Sáros, Szabolcs, Borsod, Torna, Máramaros, Csanád, Torontál from the region of the Tisza and the Slavonian Verőce (Virovitica) county on

45 Pardoe, *The City of the Magyar*, 220.

46 Eötvös: "Hogy üljenek a követek?" May 17, 1906.

the inner side. On the left, the rest of the counties from the Tisza sat opposite each other, as usual. This was important because the delegates first in rank sat on the right, and those elected at second place were placed on the left. Also, back then the records of the Diet did not specify the name of the delegates, but only a number and the name of the county they represented. It was only after 1839 that the two delegates of a county were regarded as equal.⁴⁷ The delegates sat at this table in the following order: Abaúj, Zemplén, Ung, Szatmár, Szepes, Gömör, Heves, Bereg, Ugocsa, Bihar, Csongrád, Békés, Arad, Temes, and Krassó, Pozsega (Požega) County in Slavonia and the district of Turpolje. By the table in the middle, delegates of some Danubian counties followed the old traditions and sat (in contrast with delegates from the Tisza region) next to one another: close to the speaker on his right sat the delegates of Pozsony county, then of Vas, Zala, Somogy, Győr, Fehér, Moson (all Danubians), followed by the two delegates of Bács, originally seated on the other side due to having been organized belatedly and thus having to make do with the seats they received here. On the left side of the middle table, the seats were given to the rest of the counties by the Danube: Nyitra, Trencsén, Liptó, Bars, Veszprém, Zólyom, Pest, and Árva. At the end of the table, facing the delegates of Bács, there sat the two delegates of Szerém county, similarly demilitarized and established late from its earlier position as a frontier region.⁴⁸ The rearrangement did not help two complaining counties much, as Temes and Krassó could only come two seats closer to the speaker. The new seating plan gained significance also due to the fact that the order of chairing at the *non-official* “circular” meetings of the Lower House, which were always led simultaneously by one Danubian delegate and one from the Tisza instead of the *personalis*, was determined by the seating arrangement. From 1833, these preparatory meetings, which were reminiscent of the Committee of the Whole House in Britain, were relocated to the plenary chamber due to the stuffy air at its previous location, and from that date on they were held in the same order as the official plenary except the presidency.⁴⁹ What

47 Révész, *Die Anfänge*, 101.

48 On the allocation of seats for the three tables, see Pulszky, *Mein Zeit, mein Leben*, vol. 1, 221–22. On the different seating arrangements for the delegates from the Tisza and Danube, see Révész, *Die Anfänge*, *Ibid.*, Kossuth, *Országgyűlési Tudósítások*, vol. 1, 24.

49 Pálmány, *A reformkori országgyűlések*, 26–27. Gergely, “Ungarn,” 1048; Ferenc Kölcsey’s letter to Zsigmond Kende, Pozsony, May 17, 1833. In *Kölcsey Ferenc levelezése Kende Zsigmonddal*, 99; Kossuth, *Országgyűlési Tudósítások*, vol. 1, 391; Paget, *Hungary and Transylvania*, vol. 1, 164–65; Pulszky, *Mein Zeit, mein Leben*, vol. 1, 223. On the British parallel to the district meeting, see Dobszay, “Az országgyűlés bizottsági,” 201–2.

did not change at all, however, was the situation of cities, free districts, and the delegates of absent members of Upper House.

The next rearrangement in 1843 was a big step towards a more practical central arrangement, although it was not fully implemented.⁵⁰ The conditions of the meeting were considerably improved but the custom of seating by the principle of estates and regions still prevailed. The presidium, the Royal Court of Appeal, and the clergy were moved to a long narrow platform with rails, erected by the longer wall of the chamber overlooking the courtyard. In the corner on the right, the gallery was reserved for the ladies, while the other galleries could be reached through a door in the corner of the other shorter end of the chamber. Next to the stove standing in the corner to the speaker's left, a staircase led up to the lords' gallery. On the lower level, at both ends of the chamber, there were two large podiums with rails taking up almost one-third of the area which were also set aside for the audience. The first two rows on the left were given to the delegates of absent members of the Upper House, who were now distinctly separated from the inner section of the chamber where the discussions took place to indicate their roles as observers, not decision-makers. The window niches provided room for the desks of reporters, as well as of the palatine's and the chancellor's commissioners. Finally, the speaker and members with the right to speak and take part in decision making in the middle two-thirds of the chamber could hear one another much better.

On the platform running the length of the chamber, the two rows of seats on the right of the presidium were reserved for the members of the Royal Court of Appeal, while the other two on the left were given to the delegates of Croatia and then the chapters. At the table behind the Croatian delegates and by the side of the second row of chapters, the secretary of the president prepared the minutes during official and circular meetings too. Those with important roles, i.e. the delegates of counties, cities, and free districts, sat at thirteen tables positioned crosswise in the long chamber, perpendicular to the president's table. Two of them, somewhat wider than the others, stood in the middle with seats on both sides; while the other, more narrow tables (six on the right and five on the left) only had seats on one side so that the delegates would face the middle of the chamber.

50 The most detailed description of the layout was given by Ferenc Kovács, who indicated the exact location of each stone. Kovács, *1843–44-ik évi kerületi napló*, vol. 1, 109–18. “Határozat az üléseknek a karok és rendek teremébeni elrendelése iránt” és annak módosítása. MNL OL, Regnicolaris Levéltár. Archivum Regni. Diaeta anni 1843–44. (N 68) Fasc. L. No. 22. l) (fol. 28.) and m) (fol. 39.)

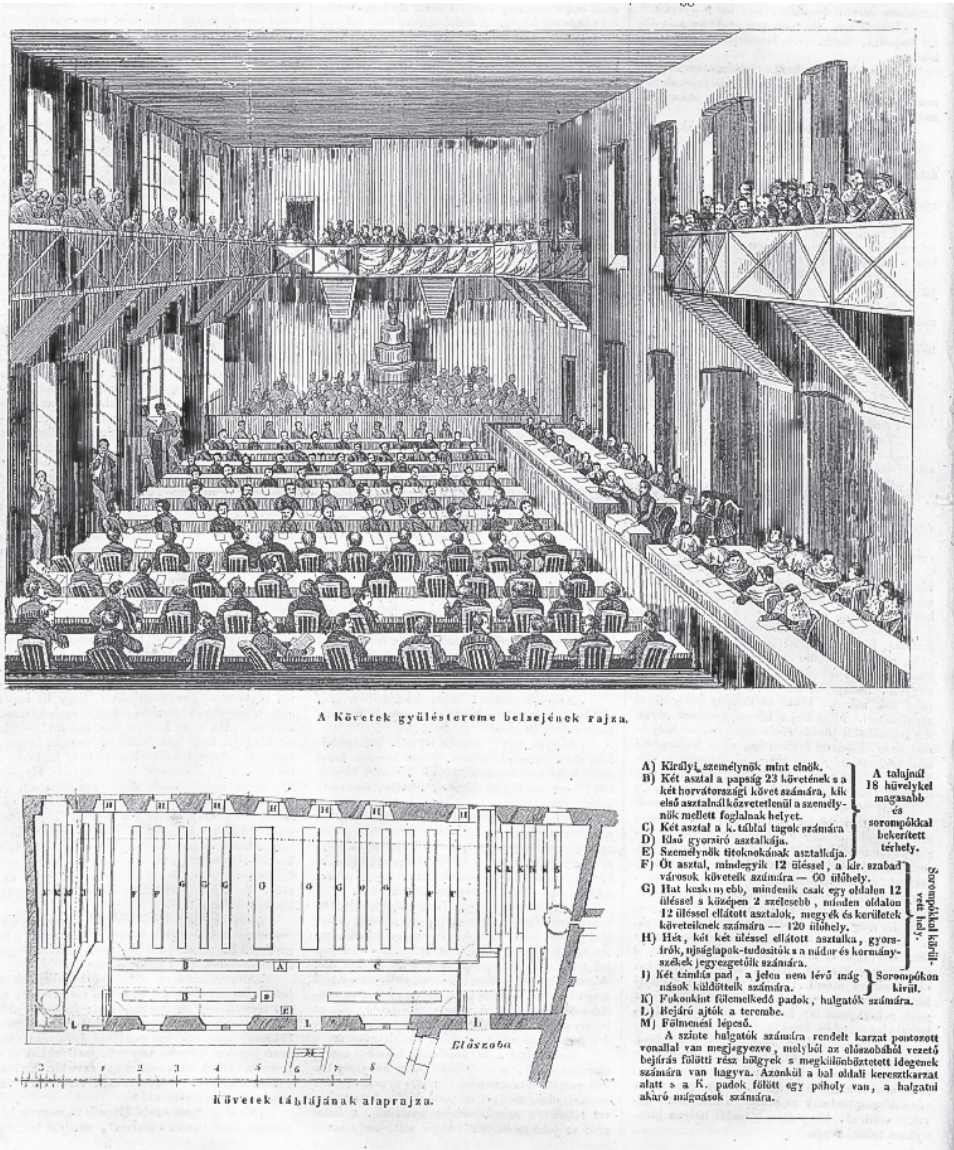


Figure 4. The seating plan of the Lower House after the rearrangement of 1843 (1847–1848) (“Országgyűlési rajzok 2,” *Ábrázolt Folyóirat*, January 15, 1848, 20.)

The arrangement by estates and geographical regions, on the other hand, was left unchanged. In a random order, the Danubian counties were seated at the inner tables on the speaker's right side of the chamber, and the counties from the two regions by the Tisza had seats at the inner three tables on the left. Behind the Danubians sat the delegates of the three Slavonian counties, as well

as of Fiume and Buccari, while the free seats at this table and at three others behind them were given mainly to delegates of the free royal cities from the Danubian regions. Behind the counties by the Tisza and next to the delegates of *Jász**kun* and *Hajdú* free districts, some seats were left empty for the counties and regions reannexed from Transylvania. These, however, could not be taken by those authorized, due to being hindered in their activities as delegates by the government. Most of the seats here and at the other two tables behind them could be taken by cities situated in precincts by the Tisza. Delegates of Croatian-Slavonian cities were placed in the railed area at two tables on each side, far from one another, probably on the only seats left.

From several perspectives, the new arrangement followed traditions and customs, but could still modernize the seating plan: separating the audience more strictly and pushing the deputies of the Upper House to the galleries made the process of negotiating clearer and posited the circle of the actual decision-makers spatially. Delegates with a more significant and populous background of voters were seated in the inner two-thirds of the chamber, so they could hear the speaker and one another much better and discuss issues more effectively. Still, even in this tight circle, prestige ranks persisted among the estates: in the middle there were the counties, then the districts, and then the cities at the peripheries. This arrangement reflected the weight of the actors, which derived from their position in the estate system.

The weak status of the cities found expression not only in their unfavorable placement at the peripheries but also in the fact that, corresponding to their geographical position, they were seated in two times two and a half rows far from one another. Thus, their delegates could hardly hear the colleagues speaking in the other end of the chamber, and the two groups could not communicate and negotiate with each other during the meetings. In the case when united action was discussed at preliminary private meetings, separateness was not a problem, but if something unexpected happened during the plenary it was considerably more difficult to react consistently. Earlier they were placed at the end of two long tables but at least close to one another, but now they were seated far from one another, so the rearrangement, which indeed had a positive effect on the whole of the assembly, in their case led to disadvantages from the perspective of representing the interests of the estate.

In the rearrangement of the seating plan, certain elements of the practices used in Western-European parliaments were slowly introduced: separating the audience, combining central and linear arrangement, and creating ascending

rows facilitated discussion in the Upper House as well. Nevertheless, despite overall beneficial modifications resulting in a more practical arrangement of seats, the seating plan, still greatly influenced by traditions, showed no signs of modern political dividedness following the new trends. Although all those recollecting the period mention the presence of party-like formations and groups in the body of delegates, it was not manifested in the seating arrangement. The delegates believing in the same notions or making the same efforts did not yet sit close to one another. The traditional expectation of consensus among the estates, denouncing “division” and “discord” were not yet overridden by the beginning of the development of a modern party system made visible in the seating arrangement.

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