

BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF LETTERS

DOCTORAL THESIS
(ABSTRACT – EN)

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Cluj-Napoca
2025

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HUNGARIAN DEPARTMENT OF ETHNOGRAPHY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HUNGAROLOGY STUDIES

**ORNAMENTAL PLANT CULTURE AND MIGRATORY
ARTIST-GARDENER SOCIETY IN HUNGARY
IN THE LONG 19TH AND SHORT 20TH CENTURIES**

– Case Studies of “Local” and “Foreign” Artist-Gardeners in Târgu Mureş –

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keywords: artist gardeners, ornamental plants, horticultural guilds, aristocratic estates, gardening societies, wandering gardeners, western influences, microhistorical research, horticultural heritage, historic gardens

In the realm of Hungarian (rural) horticulture, ornamental plant culture has been studied by researchers across various disciplines, with their efforts often overlapping. This has facilitated the exploration of different dimensions, strata (peasant, bourgeois, ecclesiastical, etc.), and historical periods (medieval, Ottoman occupation, modern, etc.), all within their respective historical, economic, social, political, and cultural contexts. In systematising and evaluating the research results on Hungarian (rural) ornamental plant culture by sector, institution, and individual – and in providing representative examples across different periods – I have aimed to offer a comprehensive overview of the theories and ideas that have shaped the study of ornamental plant culture. Ultimately, my goal has been to provide a broad historical perspective on the evolution of research in this field.

Beginning in the 19th century, with the emergence and growing independence of ethnography as a social science in Hungary, ethnographers soon joined botanists as key researchers of peasant and bourgeois ornamental plant culture. During this period, marked by the establishment and rapid expansion of the so-called “state sciences” (i.e., political and social science) in Hungary, significant attention was devoted to gaining knowledge of the country. The number of works on the nation’s history, ethnography, and psychology grew, and there was widespread recognition of the need for such publications. However, at this time, only a small number of researchers were focused on documenting the plants found in peasant or bourgeois gardens. When it comes to the study of Hungarian peasant flower gardens, Vince Borbás from Détár stands out as a true pioneer. He was the first to recognise that the selection of flowers in peasant gardens was not driven solely by appearance, colour, and form, but also by other factors that went beyond mere aesthetic considerations. In the early 20th century, ethnographers and scholars from related disciplines increasingly focused on ornamental plants. This period also marked the beginning of systematic research into the relationship between plants and humans, with greater emphasis on ethnographic and anthropological perspectives. Publications on fieldwork methodology not only outlined how researchers should collect data in the field but also explored how they could contribute novel insights through their work. Since then, a core objective of ethnography has been to continually define and refine the data it captures and processes. One notable figure from the early 20th century is Antal Bodor,

who, as an economist and economic analyst, was among the first to draw the attention of village researchers to the potential economic significance of ornamental plants, greenhouse and hothouse cultivation, and the wholesale flower trade. In his guide published in 1935, he already proposed a survey of estate gardens and greenhouses. Even so, it was not until the mid-1970s that surveys and collection guides focusing solely on rural gardening culture (and even the flowers in peasant and middle-class gardens) began to appear. The collection and methodological guides and surveys, as well as the research outlined within them, contributed to the inclusion of the basic issues of ornamental plant cultivation in the major Hungarian ethnographic syntheses (e.g., Hungarian Ethnographic Encyclopaedia [Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon], Hungarian Ethnography [Magyar Néprajz], etc.). These were complemented by the studies that emerged in the latter half of the 20th century. In the 20th and 21st centuries, Hungarian ornamental plant research has primarily focused on the origin, spread, and conditions of individual species. It is also in these areas that most of the (professional) debates have arisen in connection with the periodisation of individual elements. In recent decades, alongside the general academic and popular scientific works, numerous studies have focused on specific historical periods and aspects of Hungarian floral culture. The most comprehensive overview to date concerns five partly overlapping and interacting historical periods of (rural) floral culture: the Middle Ages, the Ottoman occupation, the Renaissance, the Baroque, and the era of bourgeoisification. Questions regarding the origin and spread of ornamental plant species have, in many cases, been addressed by researchers working at the intersection of ethnography and related disciplines. Noteworthy, however, most publications by ethnographers on Hungarian (folk/rural) ornamental plant culture are field-centric, with less attention given to taxonomy or the human aspects. Indicatively, they have rarely explored the operations of the horticultural guilds and associations or delved into the estate and urban garden societies of the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus far, these topics have been addressed only sporadically by related disciplines. The temporal and spatial distribution of the publications is uneven, and this discrepancy is mirrored in both the quantity and “quality” of the published data. In ethnographic publications, ornamental plants or Hungarian ornamental plant culture have rarely been treated as the main focus of research. Furthermore, there is a noticeable absence of works that concentrate on the individuals who cultivated or traded ornamental plants (e.g., professional horticulturists). While certain subfields and topics related to ornamental plants have been more thoroughly researched, many areas and themes remain underexplored. In the case of professional horticulturists, there has been little investigation

into their individual characteristics, family histories, or the relatively frequent changes in their places of employment – which reflect migration and changes in their itinerant pathways. Historians and art historians have understandably focused on horticulturists who were involved in the design and creation of landscape gardens and estate parks, but only for as long as they were engaged in such projects. Both within Hungary and internationally, there is little knowledge of the horticulturists who became self-employed, including those who transitioned into entrepreneurial roles as commercial gardeners. In my doctoral dissertation, I have attempted to address some of the identified gaps through a historical overview of the research.

In the public mind, the former guilds are considered to be typical institutions of the old feudal (and clerical) system, being predominantly urban vertical and horizontal organisations and forms of labour. It is known that the guilds were usually established voluntarily by male representatives of market-oriented crafts or trades in specific professions or professional fields. Whereas in some parts of Europe such guilds emerged as early as the 9th century, in Hungary their appearance dates mainly to the 14th century. Research has shown that in non-industrial sectors too (including certain agricultural fields, such as gardening), guilds or guild-like organisations likewise emerged. Based on my research, it appears that there may have been ten or so such organisations for professional gardeners in medieval Hungary. Although the literature has recognised only a few such organisations, my dissertation highlights the existence, operation, and research significance of eight additional gardening guilds, alongside the two or three more widely known ones. Noteworthy, even in the case of the better-known gardening guilds in the historical Kingdom of Hungary (those in Bratislava [Pozsony], Pest, and Trnava [Nagyszombat]), ethnographers and other researchers have uncovered only sporadic data. Thus, a monograph based on the remaining fragmentary sources would be both timely and justified in the coming years. This is particularly true given that gardening guilds seem to have been quite numerous across the country. These guilds were not established for production purposes, but primarily to ensure professional training and to protect the market and sales. Initially, membership was limited to so-called kitchen gardeners, but over time, professionals producing and selling ornamental plants, as well as landscape gardeners, also joined. This phenomenon was not unique to Hungary or Europe.

Joining a guild was subject to specific conditions, with no more than 5–12 apprentices being contracted annually. Before becoming a full member (i.e., a master gardener), a candidate had to complete an apprenticeship. The three-year contract, which

outlined the apprentice's in-kind and monetary benefits, rights, and duties, was signed at the guild office. The apprentices, typically aged 18–19 (relatively old in contemporary terms), were required to pay a fee into the guild chest at this time. At the end of the three years, the apprentices paid another fee, which also covered the cost of their certificates. Upon completion of their training, the apprentices received either a student certificate or a release certificate, allowing them to embark on travels as journeymen. The three-year study tours typically took them through Austria (Vienna), Germany (Berlin), and sometimes Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, or France. Upon returning home, they could apply for admission to the guild as a master. Various documents had to be submitted at this time, verifying their identity, study tour, citizenship, and clean criminal record. At this point, another fee was payable to the guild, along with the requirement to submit an ornamental and functional garden plan, as well as a draft for the utilisation of a hotbed and greenhouse. Additionally, each candidate had to provide a verbal report on their knowledge of cultivation technology. If no objections were raised by the members regarding the candidate's acceptance, the guild's rules were read aloud to him, and he was formally designated a master. The chief guild master, along with another garden master, then presented him to the city council, after which he paid the master's fee. In contrast to some other well-known guilds, the rules of this guild prohibited the payment of a fee to maintain the so-called master's table during the initiation ceremony. From that point on, the new master was allowed to employ assistants and apprentices. Some exceptions to this regulation existed both for the sons of master gardeners and for those who had married the daughter or widow of a former guild member. Yet, such individuals were still required to fulfil the obligations of an apprenticeship, the journeyman years, and providing identification. Unlike the assistants, though, they were recorded as apprentices and enjoyed more favourable treatment. This meant their apprenticeship and journeyman years could be shorter, and they were only required to pay half the fee for their apprenticeship certificate.

Alongside the classical guilds mentioned earlier, an increasing number of horticultural associations began to emerge from the mid-19th century onwards. After the dissolution of the guilds in the Kingdom of Hungary, many new societies were established. In Pest, alongside the still-active gardening guild, the National Hungarian Horticultural Society (Országos Magyar Kertészeti Társulat) was founded in 1853. After a brief period of inactivity, it was re-established in 1858 through the efforts of Gábor Prónay. The Society, which brought together both horticulturists and ornamental gardeners, met significant societal needs. It dissolved in the late 1870s, leaving horticulturists without a

professional association until the formation of the National Hungarian Horticultural Association [Országos Magyar Kertészeti Egyesület] in 1879. The gardener guilds, which had continued to operate under an inflexible and increasingly outdated regulatory framework, were abolished by Article 83 of Act VIII of 1872. It is known that the Pest gardener guild was transformed into the Pest Gardening Society (Pesti Kertésztársulat), which continued to operate with 60–70 members. In the decades following the dissolution of the guilds in 1872, various horticultural clubs, societies, associations, and federations were established across Hungary. For example, the National Association of Hungarian Ornamental Gardeners and Horticulturalists (Magyar Műkertészek és Kertgazdák Országos Képző-Segélyező Culturegylete), which had its headquarters in Szeged from 1892, also preserved several elements of the guild structure: instead of founding masters, there were founding members; the king (who issued patents) was replaced by a secular or ecclesiastical landowner or a city council; the Ministry of Agriculture replaced the city council; the guild's patents were replaced by the society's rules, and its articles by paragraphs; the guild and master books by the society's minutes; and the master, assistant, and apprentice books by the membership rolls. The journeyman boards were replaced by technical journals, guild halls by headquarters, guild meetings by society gatherings and general assemblies, and the (prohibited) master banquets by various balls and social events. These new bodies continued to employ a lawyer or legal representative, as well as a secretary. They had their own seals and were initially composed only of men. Members could apply for a so-called "journeyman's book", which allowed them to embark on a European study tour. Women were still excluded from membership until the 20th century. In some instances, and despite laws prohibiting such developments, rural initiatives arose with the aim of reviving the earlier gardener guilds. However, the founders and members of the mid-19th-century horticultural societies typically recoiled when anyone compared them to the old guild structure or criticised them by associating them with the dissolved guilds.

Apart from a few sporadic cases, Hungary did not develop an organisational structure for gardeners (or one specifically for ornamental gardeners) that would have provided professional training to ensure quality and meet the country's needs. Even in the 1890s (i.e., a considerable time after the dissolution of the guild system), gardening apprentices with three or four years of experience were still being issued their "master's certificates" by the so-called industrial authority, often with the "master" being someone with no knowledge of horticulture or merely a representative from the leather or iron industry. The

situation did not improve even with the introduction of horticulture courses at various educational institutions in Hungary by the end of the 19th century. After the abolition of the guild system and until the outbreak of World War II, numerous unsuccessful efforts were made to create specific legislation to protect the interests of ornamental gardeners. These initiatives were overseen by the two major associations at the time: the National Economic Union of Hungarian Gardeners (Magyar Kertészek Országos Gazdasági Szövetsége) and the Transylvanian Association of Professional Gardeners (Erdélyi Hivatásos Kertészek Egyesülete).

In my research, I focused on the descendants of former ornamental gardener families (where documented) and – with the exception of the Chwoik family – I was able to locate their immediate relatives and acquaintances. The primary goal was to conduct interviews with them and gather and record any egodocuments and objects in their possession that might provide information dating back several centuries. In respect of these gardening families and ornamental gardeners, however, I had to contend with a relative lack of sources and their rapid deterioration. It transpired that a large portion of the relevant archival records had been destroyed in fires (mostly during the two world wars). All this hinders researchers seeking to reveal and present individual life paths based on traditional historical and archival sources.

It is now virtually impossible to fully explore the activities of the ornamental gardeners who were active in Târgu Mureș [Marosvásárhely] (and of horticulturalists in general) or to reconstruct their practices in detail. Success in this endeavour depends not only on the perseverance of the researcher and the archivists assisting their efforts, but also on whether relevant documents containing significant information fortuitously come to the researcher's attention – and whether they are later made aware of them. Furthermore, many of the family-owned records, ego-documents, and other sources have been lost over the decades. Repeated discarding of material, combined with frequent and often devastating floods at the gardeners' estates or residences, took a heavy toll. A significant portion of the documents that could have been used as sources for studying ornamental gardening society in the 19th and 20th centuries was destroyed by both unintentional and deliberate actions. Since many of the flower gardens in question were established near rivers (to take advantage of irrigation), many of these documents were inevitably lost to flooding over the centuries. Despite the irreplaceable loss of valuable archival and family sources, the life and migration histories of certain members of these gardening families can still be traced using ethnographic and micro-historical methods. After gathering and reviewing various

sources, including textual and audiovisual materials, the first step was to examine professional and popular works published in recent decades on the relevant topics. At the same time, targeted “keyword” searches were conducted in the card catalogues of libraries and in the directories and research guides of data and archival institutions. However, research into ornamental gardening families and the identification of their members is greatly hindered by the fact that, in many written sources, even within a single document, the Hungarian-sounding or “foreign” family names of ornamental gardeners were recorded in different ways. Moreover, starting in the early 20th century, there was a widespread trend of “foreign” families Hungarianising their names, often in multiple stages. In the absence of sufficient documentation, this further complicates the identification process and the tracing of migration routes, posing a significant challenge for researchers attempting to uncover and present life paths based on traditional historical and archival sources.

It should also be noted here that I viewed the plants bred and cultivated by the ornamental gardeners, as well as the gardens they created, as an important source – which I refer to as the “material heritage” (the plants and the garden as sources). The documentation of these aspects was further justified by the fact that many public parks and gardens, most of which were created in the 19th and early 20th centuries, are now reaching their natural age limit. Where these gardens have survived, they are now undergoing a rapid decline similar to that of archival materials over the past few decades.

For the purposes of my dissertation, I considered the case study to be both a research method and a methodology, with case analysis (“casing”) serving as a tool for drawing general conclusions, thereby connecting the collection of empirical data with theory development. However, the case studies were not designed with the intent to make general conclusions. Instead, their primary aim was to illuminate and explore processes and contexts. Based on the sources I uncovered, case studies of various dimensions and depths could be created, with the selection of cases and the resulting studies guided by different criteria. By presenting the members of the gardening families discussed, I sought to demonstrate through specific examples (i.e., case studies) that historical research can be enriched by applying the perspectives, research questions, and classical collection methods of ethnography. The focus here is not on the garden, landscape, or ornamental plants, but on approaching the subject from the perspective of the individuals who created the gardens and tended to the ornamental plants – namely, the ornamental gardeners. Research results can be further enriched by gathering, interpreting, and processing the available written and

visual sources (e.g., egodocuments, mostly still in the private possession of descendants, which have thus far eluded the attention of historians and art historians):

Péter Bodor was a “local” (Szekler-Hungarian) ornamental gardener whose horticultural activities have not been preserved in local memory; nor have historians given them adequate attention until now. Today, his life and work are recognised by scholars in various fields – such as ethnography, literary and music history, technical and natural sciences, history, local and cultural history, and church history – and are documented in major biographical and artistic references, as well as in travel guides. Streets in Târgu Mureş [Marosvásárhely] and Budapest bear his name, along with a theatre group and a cultural society in his native village of Sângeorgiu de Pădure [Erdőszentgyörgy], where plaques and a memorial room are dedicated to his memory. However, little is known about his garden-building activities. Through this dissertation, I hope to inadvertently contribute to the broader recognition of one of the “thousand trades” of the “Szekler handyman” – ornamental gardening. Bodor had an extensive clientele across Transylvania, having worked as an ornamental gardener at several estates, yet he was never able to achieve professional independence or autonomy.

Ornamental gardeners coming from the west initially served the Hungarian aristocracy as employees, but through their earnings, they sought to become partially or fully independent. They established their own commercial horticultural businesses in the emerging cities, growing produce for sale in the market. The second case study examines the story of the Koha ornamental gardening family of Czech origin, whose path to independence unfolded in several stages. Their case is typical, model-like, and representative of the turn of the 20th century: family members who initially worked as estate employees, usually as garden designers or landscape architects, later became urban gardeners in the burgeoning cities or head gardeners at the newly established holiday resorts and spas. In these cases, both as employees and employers, as followers and leaders, they contributed to shaping the character and economic life of each settlement. In my view, they represent the transition between estate landscape gardeners and commercial ornamental gardeners.

In the case of the Chwoika family (originally from Bohemia) and the Öllerer family (originally from Austria), there is a substantial amount of documentation about how they gained independence after years of service on estates, how they then established businesses and opened flower shops, and how – particularly in the case of the Öllerers – the family firm diminished in significance during the years of dictatorship, ultimately becoming

subordinated to the interests and goals of communist economic policies. In the 19th century and at the turn of the 20th century, the floral demands of the nobility and their families, as well as the operation of castle and estate gardens and parks, were served by a large number of gardeners working in a hierarchical structure. Being a gardener often came at the cost of limiting or completely abandoning the personal sphere. However, this was not the only reason for presenting their cases in separate subchapters. My hypothesis is that the ornamental gardeners may well have influenced nearby rural settlements and villages in many aspects. Local people not only worked as day labourers or as other employees in the ornamental gardens; they also occasionally acquired technological and other knowledge from the gardens. Noteworthily, the ornamental gardeners played a documented role in the introduction and dissemination of certain ornamental plants in the surrounding villages.

In the final case study, my goal was to highlight a phenomenon that may initially seem atypical or extreme, but in my view, was fairly widespread during the years of communism. This time, the focus shifts from ornamental gardeners to Gemma Teleki (de Szék), a countess who worked as a day labourer at Attila Lázár's nursery and supported herself by selling flowers on the street. She serves as a telling example of how, during the dictatorship, members of the aristocracy who neither emigrated nor were subject to internal exile and who had once been among the main employers of ornamental gardeners, found themselves working as assistant labourers or day labourers in various horticultural businesses from the 1950s until the fall of communism. While I referenced several individuals from noble families employed in various horticultural businesses in other parts of the dissertation, Countess Gemma Teleki's story allowed me to analyse – through an ethnographic lens – how she was perceived locally in Târgu Mureş [Marosvásárhely] and Transylvania, as well as to explore her flower-selling activities.

Based on the case studies included in the dissertation but drawing also on the results of other case studies that were excluded (such as those pertaining to the Patek, Thyma, Pityinger, Odjakov, Korcsev, and other ornamental gardening families) and my archival research in recent decades, I concluded that, since the mid-1800s, the term “ornamental gardener” has referred to a horticultural expert who is professionally engaged in the cultivation and trade of ornamental plants. These gardeners often also took on tasks such as land planning, landscaping, garden design and maintenance, flower arranging, as well as decorating venues for social events and more. They were involved in plant breeding and provided professional advice, thereby not only serving the landowners of rural estates and representatives of the aristocracy but also meeting the growing demand for flowers and

ornamental plants among urban citizens. The prefix “ornamental” long referred to the artistic and innovative aspects of this field of work, emphasising creative attitudes, innovation, and design alongside the ordinary horticultural and breeding work. In this way, it elevated ornamental gardening to the realm of the arts, placing its practitioners alongside craftsmen, artisans, and artists.

From the available sources, four major roles and responsibilities fulfilled by ornamental gardeners at the turn of the 20th century were identified: producer, trader, creator, and intellectual. These roles were present to a varying degree for each ornamental gardener, depending on their activities and where they found themselves in their professional careers. The roles and responsibilities were closely interconnected. On occasion they were supplemented by other activities – which could, however, be entirely absent. Naturally, some roles (such as creator and intellectual) were closely related and overlapped, while others (such as producer and intellectual) were less obviously connected.

The ornamental gardens created by landscape gardeners – alongside castle parks, urban public parks, spa gardens, promenades, walkways, groves, amusement park gardens, forest parks, landscaped areas, and cemeteries – became communal spaces for public recreation and leisure in the modern sense. It is no coincidence that the leaders of rural estates, as well as those of the burgeoning Hungarian cities, in their efforts to align with Western models, initially sought out foreign (i.e., more distinguished and better-trained) professionals instead of local ones. At the time, the word “foreign” in Hungarian public discourse typically referred to regions outside the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Austrian part of the Monarchy, and the term “foreigner” denoted a person coming from those areas.

Due to their extensive expertise, ornamental gardeners quickly earned the respect and admiration of the local community. Through their ideas and creativity, they not only sparked curiosity and astonishment among their Hungarian peers but also encouraged reflection and offered new insights. Often eccentric in their behaviour, they engaged in a variety of unusual activities and hobbies. Their unconventional thinking and innovative, profound ideas likely meant that they were never fully understood, appreciated, or valued by the broader society.

Over nearly two hundred years, the profession was passed down – much like in other trades – through the male line of the family, often spanning four, five, or six generations. Initially, women were involved in the family business only as assistant gardeners or florists. However, in the first three decades of the 20th century, the first female

horticulturalists with formal qualifications began to emerge. A significant number of ornamental gardeners continued their work throughout the 1950s to 1980s, either in their small household gardens or in leadership roles within collective and state-run farms. However, their descendants were mostly guided toward other career paths.

This dissertation offers only a brief overview, a glimpse of members of this small but vibrant social group and their role within society. The conclusions elaborated in more detail above can be synthesised in the following points and theses:

[THESES 1.]

Questions regarding the origin and spread of ornamental plant species have, in many cases, been addressed by researchers working at the intersection of ethnography and related disciplines. Noteworthy, however, most publications by ethnographers on Hungarian (folk/rural) ornamental plant culture are field-centric, with less attention given to taxonomy or the human aspects.

[THESES 2.]

By presenting the members of the gardening families discussed, I sought to demonstrate through specific examples (i.e., case studies) that historical research can be enriched by applying the perspectives, research questions, and classical collection methods of ethnography. The focus here is not on the garden, landscape, or ornamental plants, but on approaching the subject from the perspective of the individuals who created the gardens and tended to the ornamental plants – namely, the ornamental gardeners. Research results can be further enriched by gathering, interpreting, and processing the available written and visual sources (e.g., egodocuments, mostly still in the private possession of descendants, which have thus far eluded the attention of historians and art historians).

[THESES 3.]

In non-industrial sectors too (including certain agricultural fields, such as gardening), guilds or guild-like organisations likewise emerged. Based on my research, it appears that there may have been ten or so such organisations for professional gardeners in medieval Hungary. These guilds were not established for production purposes, but primarily to ensure professional training and to protect the market and sales. Initially, membership was limited to so-called kitchen gardeners, but over time, professionals producing and selling ornamental plants, as well as landscape gardeners, also joined. This phenomenon was not unique to Hungary or Europe.

[THESES 4.]

At the end of the three years, the apprentices paid another fee, which also covered the cost of their certificates; along with the requirement to submit an ornamental and functional garden plan, as well as a draft for the utilisation of a hotbed and greenhouse. Additionally, each candidate had to provide a verbal report on their knowledge of cultivation technology. The chief guild master, along with another garden master, then presented him to the city council, after which he paid the master's fee. In contrast to some other well-known guilds, the rules of this guild prohibited the payment of a fee to maintain the so-called master's table during the initiation ceremony. From that point on, the new master was allowed to employ assistants and apprentices.

[THESES 5.]

In the decades following the dissolution of the guilds in 1872, various horticultural clubs, societies, associations, and federations were established across Hungary. For example, the National Association of Hungarian Ornamental Gardeners and Horticulturalists (Magyar Műkertészek és Kertgazdák Országos Képző-Segélyező Culturegylete), which had its headquarters in Szeged from 1892, also preserved several elements of the guild structure: instead of founding masters, there were founding members; the king (who issued patents) was replaced by a secular or ecclesiastical landowner or a city council; the Ministry of Agriculture replaced the city council; the guild's patents were replaced by the society's rules, and its articles by paragraphs; the guild and master books by the society's minutes; and the master, assistant, and apprentice books by the membership rolls. The journeyman boards were replaced by technical journals, guild halls by headquarters, guild meetings by society gatherings and general assemblies, and the (prohibited) master banquets by various balls and social events.

[THESES 6.]

Apart from a few sporadic cases, Hungary did not develop an organisational structure for gardeners (or one specifically for ornamental gardeners) that would have provided professional training to ensure quality and meet the country's needs. It is no coincidence that the leaders of rural estates, as well as those of the burgeoning Hungarian cities, in their efforts to align with Western models, initially sought out foreign (i.e., more distinguished and better-trained) professionals instead of local ones. At the time, the word "foreign" in Hungarian public discourse typically

referred to regions outside the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Austrian part of the Monarchy, and the term “foreigner” denoted a person coming from those areas.

[THESES 7.]

Many of the family-owned records, ego-documents, and other sources have been lost over the decades. Repeated discarding of material, combined with frequent and often devastating floods at the gardeners’ estates or residences, took a heavy toll. A significant portion of the documents that could have been used as sources for studying ornamental gardening society in the 19th and 20th centuries was destroyed by both unintentional and deliberate actions. Since many of the flower gardens in question were established near rivers (to take advantage of irrigation), many of these documents were inevitably lost to flooding over the centuries. Despite the irreplaceable loss of valuable archival and family sources, the life and migration histories of certain members of these gardening families can still be traced using ethnographic and micro-historical methods.

[THESES 8.]

In many written sources, even within a single document, the Hungarian-sounding or “foreign” family names of ornamental gardeners were recorded in different ways. Moreover, starting in the early 20th century, there was a widespread trend of “foreign” families Hungarianising their names, often in multiple stages. In the absence of sufficient documentation, this further complicates the identification process and the tracing of migration routes, posing a significant challenge for researchers attempting to uncover and present life paths based on traditional historical and archival sources.

[THESES 9.]

The plants bred and cultivated by the ornamental gardeners, as well as the gardens they created, can be viewed as an important source – which I refer to as the “material heritage”. Many public parks and gardens, most of which were created in the 19th and early 20th centuries, are now reaching their natural age limit. Where these gardens have survived, they are now undergoing a rapid decline similar to that of archival materials over the past few decades. Surveying and documenting them is therefore essential, since their value as sources is considerable.

[THESES 10.]

Since the mid-1800s, the term “ornamental gardener” has referred to a horticultural expert who is professionally engaged in the cultivation and trade of ornamental plants. These gardeners often also took on tasks such as land planning, landscaping, garden design and maintenance, flower arranging, as well as decorating venues for social events and more. They were involved in plant breeding and provided professional advice, thereby not only serving the landowners of rural estates and representatives of the aristocracy but also meeting the growing demand for flowers and ornamental plants among urban citizens. The prefix “ornamental” long referred to the artistic and innovative aspects of this field of work, emphasising creative attitudes, innovation, and design alongside the ordinary horticultural and breeding work. In this way, it elevated ornamental gardening to the realm of the arts, placing its practitioners alongside craftsmen, artisans, and artists.

[THESES 11.]

From the available sources, four major roles and responsibilities fulfilled by ornamental gardeners at the turn of the 20th century were identified: producer, trader, creator, and intellectual. These roles were present to a varying degree for each ornamental gardener, depending on their activities and where they found themselves in their professional careers. The roles and responsibilities were closely interconnected. On occasion they were supplemented by other activities – which could, however, be entirely absent. Naturally, some roles (such as creator and intellectual) were closely related and overlapped, while others (such as producer and intellectual) were less obviously connected.

[THESES 12.]

The ornamental gardens created by landscape gardeners – alongside castle parks, urban public parks, spa gardens, promenades, walkways, groves, amusement park gardens, forest parks, landscaped areas, and cemeteries – became communal spaces for public recreation and leisure in the modern sense.

[THESES 13.]

Family members who initially worked as estate employees, usually as garden designers or landscape architects, later became urban gardeners in the burgeoning cities or head gardeners at the newly established holiday resorts and spas. In these cases, both as employees and employers, as followers and leaders, they contributed to shaping the character and economic life of each settlement. In my view, they

represent the transition between estate landscape gardeners and commercial ornamental gardeners.

[THESES 14.]

In the 19th century and at the turn of the 20th century, the floral demands of the nobility and their families, as well as the operation of castle and estate gardens and parks, were served by a large number of gardeners working in a hierarchical structure. Being a gardener often came at the cost of limiting or completely abandoning the personal sphere, and how they gained independence after years of service on estates, how they then established businesses and opened flower shops, and how the family firm diminished in significance during the years of dictatorship, ultimately becoming subordinated to the interests and goals of communist economic policies. Over nearly two hundred years, the profession was passed down – much like in other trades – through the male line of the family, often spanning four, five, or six generations. Initially, women were involved in the family business only as assistant gardeners or florists. However, in the first three decades of the 20th century, the first female horticulturalists with formal qualifications began to emerge. A significant number of ornamental gardeners continued their work throughout the 1950s to 1980s, either in their small household gardens or in leadership roles within collective and state-run farms. However, their descendants were mostly guided toward other career paths.

[THESES 15.]

Members of the aristocracy who neither emigrated nor were subject to internal exile and who had once been among the main employers of ornamental gardeners, found themselves working as assistant labourers or day labourers in various horticultural businesses from the 1950s until the fall of communism.

[THESES 16.]

The ornamental gardeners may well have influenced nearby rural settlements and villages in many aspects. Local people not only worked as day labourers or as other employees in the ornamental gardens; they also occasionally acquired technological and other knowledge from the gardens. Noteworthy, the ornamental gardeners played a documented role in the introduction and dissemination of certain ornamental plants in the surrounding villages.

[THESES 17.]

It is justified to describe the community of “foreign” ornamental gardeners, who were constantly on the move and in a state of perpetual flux across Hungary’s territory, as a real, semi-open micro- and/or meso-society – or, more specifically, as the society of ornamental gardeners. This characterisation is supported both by everyday understanding and by social scientific definitions and interpretations. They were united by a shared sense of belonging, as well as by relationships that were historically enduring, often involving close family (biological) ties, friendships, and professional (cognitive), interest-based, business, and economic connections. Furthermore, their shared institutional and relational systems, common interests, cultural backgrounds, education, and experiences set them apart from other groups in their milieu. Their “foreign” or “alien” identity and a shared awareness of their “foreign” origins further distinguished them from those around them. They lived according to defined patterns and rules, and their members had an influence on individual decision-making. Countless interactions occurred within this community, and based on their shared living space, common environmental influences, and similar traditions, they developed various forms of cooperation with one another.

In the future, alongside continuing the case studies and in-depth research on specific ornamental gardening families, I aim to conduct a more detailed and systematic examination of this thesis, validating it and exploring the functioning and structure of Hungary’s migratory/itinerant horticulturalist society. My dissertation can be seen as the first step, a partial result, in a long-term research endeavour.

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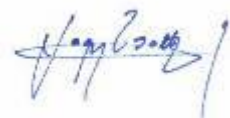
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