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### **Patronage, Photography and Politics: the Influence of Archduchess Isabella on Design Transformation of an Aesthetic**

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Aristocratic woman played an important role disseminating design, notably, Archduchess Isabella in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Her influence on the aesthetics, production and promotion of peasant inspired design was considerable at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Archduchess (1853-1931) came from the Westphalian Croy-Dülman family, her mother was the Belgium Princess de Ligne. (Figure 1). The Catholic Croy family regarded themselves as descendants of the House of Árpád, Hungary's first royal dynasty. In 1878 she married Frederick, a member of the wealthiest branch of the Habsburg family at the Hermitage Palace, Belgium. Her husband pursued a military career based in Pozany (today Bratislava) and they lived either at the former Grassalkovich Palace, Pozany or on their vast modern, well equipped, mechanised Habsburg estates.<sup>1</sup>



***Figure 1. Archduchess Isabella 1896. Photo: © Hungarian National Museum 67.1709.***

Isabella was ambitious, had a feel for politics and participated actively in the spheres of social, education and economic life. Her contemporaries recognised her beauty, intelligence, remarkably strong will and strong desire to dominate. Her ambitions carried her into the spheres of social and

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<sup>1</sup> Heiszler, Vilmos, Szakács, Margit, and Vörös, Károly. *Photo Habsburg: the Private Life of an Archduke*. Budapest: Corvina, 1989.

economic life. At the pinnacle of wealth and power the Archduchess was an able and gifted photographer. Her photography captured Habsburg family occasions, excursions, summer and winter holidays and parties, her guests and immigrants working on farming estates as they engaged in daily life and cultural events; an expensive pastime not indulged by most.

This paper discusses how Isabella used her business acumen, political insights and society connections to leverage assistance for poorer women. The context and extent of her influence on peasant inspired dress is developed. Intertwined narratives include themes of patronage, politics, education, gender and exhibition to explain the role of Isabella in the commercialisation of textile design in Hungary.

A variety of methods were used for this study in order to investigate the ways in which the Archduchess promoted embroidery and lace making. Systematic analyses of archive documents, bibliographic sources and textile artefact analyses were undertaken to make connections between social and material culture issues and textile provenance.<sup>2</sup> Textile collections at Glasgow School of Art, National Museum of Scotland, Robert Gordon University (Aberdeen), Duncan of Jordanstone University (Dundee) and the Embroidery Guild (United Kingdom) and exhibitions at the Nèprajzi Múzeum (Museum of Ethnography, Budapest), were viewed and cross referenced. Interviews and informal conversations were held during visits to Budapest, Bratislava and Cífer. The Habsburg photographic collection was viewed at the National Museum of Hungary.<sup>3</sup>

During the era 1860s-1920 a complex geographical situation existed as the Austro-Hungarian Empire went through a series of border changes and places changed names as different regimes came to power. In politics there was intense interest as the Hungarian government considered craft traditions as a key state obligation. The scene was set for politically motivated design and the promotion of textile making by official agencies. Subsequently, these attitudes drew support of the Austro-Hungarian government. It became apparent to those in power in Vienna, that the education of women would bring social and economic advantages to industry. A politicisation of the arts and crafts had begun. As 'traditional' lace making and embroidery handicrafts were encouraged in the home arts and crafts industry movements there was a paralleled intensified political interest.<sup>4</sup>

Tradition and traditionalism in textiles were principally associated with notions of folk art and nationalism. Peasant art was looked upon romantically by late nineteenth century intellectuals and artists and was seen to reflect the unspoiled character of a nation. Previous studies reported that Ruskin and Morris' criticism of industrial productions provided the inspiration and enthusiasm to artists to develop the novel style of art found in peasant textiles.<sup>5</sup> Eric Hobsbawm's much quoted view is peasants represented uncorrupted virtues, a simple way of life upholding century old traditions.<sup>6</sup> In the 1890s the Rev Davies when collecting for the Haslemere collection defined peasant work as 'made for love not money' or 'made to keep or at most to give.'<sup>7</sup> Peasant art or

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<sup>2</sup> Heffernan, Sandra. "*Design from Artefacts: Innovate or Imitate: Issues of Aesthetics, Collecting, Education, Making and Marketing in J & P Coats' Needlework Development Scheme: 1934-1962*" (Ph.D diss. Glasgow School of Art, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> This research began with the viewing of an untitled work in the Glasgow School of Art Needlework Development Scheme collection. The embroidered man's shirt, GSA NDS F3, is now known to be from the Isabella home industry.

<sup>4</sup> In the Austro-Hungary Empire handlooms and dye quality were improved and the Hungarian Trading Company was incorporated to market the works of peasant crafters and local exhibits were fostered. Government supported the improvement of dyes.

<sup>5</sup> Tanya Harrod *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*. London: Yale University Press, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction; Inventing Traditions." In *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-2. 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Rev. Davies in Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*. London: Yale University Press, 13, 1996.

village aesthetics became a recognised design theme and was seen as a valuable source for progressive design.

The renewed appreciation of 'traditional' handicrafts such as lace making and embroidery brought together an awareness of the power of the exhibition and display to provide supplementary income to those living in rural poverty. Indeed patronage of art and design, sought to reconcile the problem by investing in the provinces, a policy of an indirect form of peasant relief. International exhibitions popularised national identity as a vital component in the evolution of style. Jacob Falke, the second director of the Vienna Ethnography Museum, organised a Home Industry section in the 1873 Vienna exhibition.<sup>8</sup> He praised Swedish designs and was encouraged to organise similar practises in Hungary. The museum directors of the time issued instructions to the women to copy designs using existing textiles as models. In 1879 he established an atelier for his wife, Mathilde, and Fralein Hofmanninger to compose designs for the students of the fachschulen schools to copy.<sup>9</sup> In his memoirs Frantisek Kretz, the museum official collecting for the Museum of Ethnography, Prague, stated, 'Efforts to modernise peasant art according to the regulations of composition have always met with unfortunate results. Copy or crystallize them but don't modernize them.'<sup>10</sup> Authoritative voices such as these were likely to be typical of influential male civil servants and museum personnel. They spread patriarchal views and trivialised women's design initiatives. Similarly, these attitudes towards women were shown in the collecting practices of museum officials. Kretz gave shiny trinkets to the women in exchange for rare embroideries.<sup>11</sup> They took advantage of illiterate peasant women. Peasants were not all elevated to the monetary economy through the 'sale' of their works.

An important element of the continuous development of decorative traditions and cultural heritage is represented by printed patterns which became part of the overall cultural heritage. Illustrations in newspapers and magazines became the living images embroidered on cloth. Susan Cahill in her thesis contends increased accessibility of print culture, travel and tourism and world's fairs enabled the women responsible for the craft organisations to integrate a pastiche of artistic influences in order to create a specific and distinct style of craft.<sup>12</sup>

In 1885 Etelka Gyarmathy's Kalotaszeg room at the National Industrial Exhibition and Fair in Budapest was one of the most admired in the home industry section.<sup>13</sup> A spectacular success, it influenced the taste of the European aristocracy, for example, Empress Erzsébet decorated her villa near Vienna with Kalotaszeg furniture and embroidery, endorsing her royal family's links with Hungary.<sup>14</sup> Isabella followed this trend decorating her hunting lodges. Gyarmathy had a remarkable influence on home industry motivated by social concerns. The *Izabella Háziipari Egylet* (National Cottage Industry) and the *Országos Háziipari Szövetség* (National Cottage Industry Cooperative) were formed in 1885.

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<sup>8</sup> M Kresz, "Ruskin, Morris, Crane and the Discovery of Hungarian Peasant Art," *New Hungarian Quarterly* xv (53): (1974) 198.

<sup>9</sup> A. Levetus, "Modern Austrian Lace," *The Studio* 27 (1902) 169.

<sup>10</sup> M. Kretz quoted in Kratina, R. "Textile Crafts. In *Primitive and Peasant Art*, edited by F. Payant. Syracuse, New York: Ceramic Studio, 1932.

<sup>11</sup> Rose Kratina, "Textile Crafts. In *Primitive and Peasant Art*, edited by F. Payant. Syracuse, New York: Ceramic Studio, 1932. 173

<sup>12</sup> Susan Cahill, "Crafting Culture, Fabricating Identity" (Thesis, Queen's University, Canada, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> I Gál, "Walter Crane in Hungary," *New Hungarian Quarterly* 6 (19) (1965) 230.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Stirton and Juliet Kinchin. 'The Hungarian Folk Art Debate in the British Press.' In *Britain and Hungary, Contacts in Architecture and Design During the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries*, edited by G. Ernyey. Budapest: Hungarian University of Craft and Design, 43, 1999.

Archduchess Isabella visited Gyarmathy's workshops. Lou Taylor writes 'Princess Croy-Eugenie made the first large-scale sales abroad.'<sup>15</sup> They used their aristocratic contacts abroad to market peasant embroideries. The embroidery sales of her Hungarian Association of Applied Arts enabled the women of Kalotaszeg to be the first in Hungary to earn a livelihood from the sales of embroidery and integrate into Hungarian society. Isabella's business acumen brought a change in the practice of peasant barter, moving to a capitalist open market, selling the embroideries in the cultural capitals of the world: London, Vienna, Paris, Brussels and Madrid.

Significantly, the brightly coloured costumes of the Bélye estate's Sokác Slav immigrants from the south attracted Isabella's attention.<sup>16</sup> The estate spread north of the Drava river between Mohács (today in Hungary) and Eszek (today Osijek in Croatia). She often photographed the Sokác (Croatian) at work, harvesting, gathering hay, snapping corn. Her concern for the lower class women and appreciation of the creative textiles of the Sokác women on the Bélye estate inspired her to direct her energy toward a solution. Inspired by the costumes she worked to provide opportunities through embroidery and lace training initiatives for rural women to gain income. While based in Pozony Isabella began to learn Slovakian embroidery and dress her daughters wore embroidered Isabella costumes.

In 1892 the Budapest Art Gallery Exhibition displayed Czech, Moravian, and Slovak embroideries. The impact was immediate. With the Prime Minister's support an embroidery and drawing school was established in the village of Cífer, near Pozany.<sup>17</sup> It was organised under the Austrian influence of Charlotte Zichy, a lady-in-waiting at the court of Empress Erzsébet. The design and teaching was led by Mária Hollósy, an embroidery drawing and design graduate from the Budapest School of Applied Art.

In 1894, Hollósy's new two-piece dress, became the most popular summer and urban dress of aristocratic society, was patented and exported to Europe and beyond, sold by Liberty in London.<sup>18</sup> In 1895, charmed by the beauty of Hollósy's designs and their commercial success, Archduchess Isabella, directed more of her energy towards patronage and initiated the establishment of the *Women's Association for the Support of Domestic Industry in Pressburg* (now Bratislava) and surroundings, attracting the support of the Austro-Hungarian government. Established to encourage the Hungarian peasant's artistic instincts and love of work, a clause was introduced by Isabella, stating that the Association should 'display professionalism and maintain national character.' In June 1895, the German journal *Modenwelt*, published illustrations of the dress design complete with instructions to copy it. Isabella and her family wore Cífer home industry designs. The popularity of Isabella dresses extended to tennis wear for friends of the Habsburgs.<sup>19</sup> Fashion design was an important part of the programme highlighting the impact of wealth and power on fashion internationally. The design influence from the Isabella dress was widespread.

The following year, in 1896, as it gained an increasingly prestigious reputation, it was re-named the *Isabella Association*. The workshops were extended to villages and substantial headquarters were established in Pozany. Three hundred village girls and women worked for the association. Fifteen schools, all led by women who had received artistic training, were set up in villages in Upper

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<sup>15</sup> Lou Taylor, "Peasant Embroidery: Rural to Urban and East to West Relationships 1860 – 1914," *The Journal of Decorative Arts Society* 14, 50, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Vilmos Heiszler, Margit Szakács and Károly Vörös, *Photo Habsburg: the Private Life of an Archduke*. Budapest: Corvina, 1989.

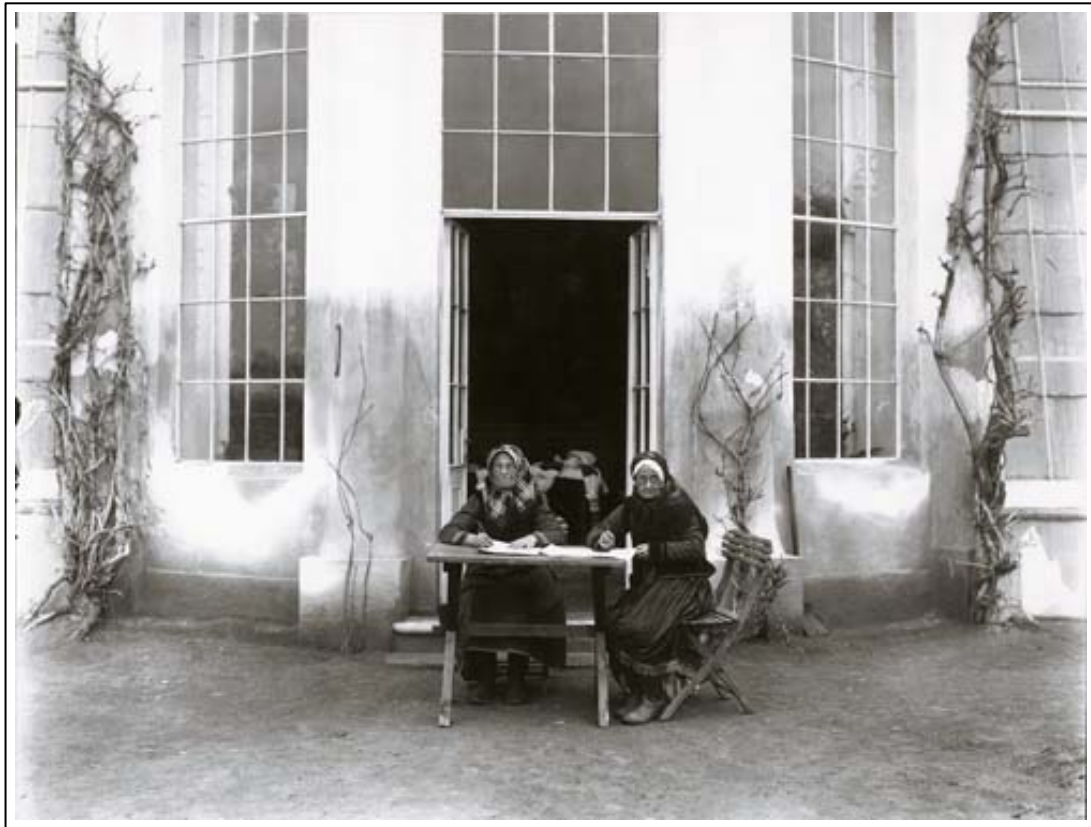
<sup>17</sup> Eva Cisárová-Mináriková, *Mária Hollósy, 1858-1945*. Bratislava: Phare, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Just as there was an Isabella shirt for girls there was a boy's shirt named *Albert* after Archduchess Isabella's only son.

<sup>19</sup> The enduring 1894 Isabella dress design continues to be imitated today for the tourist industry and is exported to the USA.

Hungary. The school accepted commissions for dresses and sacred textiles and exhibited in Vienna and Budapest.

In a different venture, Isabella used her talent as a promoter of successful high profile ventures. At the World Fair in 1900 in Paris she popularised Hungarian embroidery for costumes and the home. Hollösy's lace designs received international acclaim winning several prizes, including the Grand Prix. Also, Hollösy exhibited in Vienna, Brussels, Madrid, St Petersburg, Glasgow and London. Such was her reputation she was commissioned by Oscar Kokoshaka.



**Figure 2. Women of Cifer drawing embroidery patterns. 1898. Photo by Isabella.  
Photo: © Hungarian National Museum 85-817.**

Isabella understood some of the complications involved in the solutions, and using her business acumen sought to negotiate publicity and interest consumers so the producers might overcome the 'extraordinary isolation and removal from markets. As a skilful photographer she obtained press coverage and promoted the Cifer school in the *Sunday Journal* in 1898. (Figure 2). In true entrepreneurial fashion the Archduchess drew on her extensive aristocratic connections. Orders were received from the noble Austro-Hungarian families of Hapsburgs, Zichys, as well as from the Belgium, French, German, Spanish, and Dutch aristocracy. As a wealthy and powerful group of people set the fashion the elite were imitated after a period of time by the less wealthy.

Isabella used her high society connections to promote the Hungarian home industry work. In 1902, she was supported by the Princess of Wales and the Austro-Hungarian ambassador, London, to ensure the association's domestic activities grew rapidly. Norman and Stacey's Tottenham Court Road Emporium sold Arch-duchess Isabella's *The Society for the Encouragement of Hungarian Industries* dress and embroidery. The quality of the exhibited embroideries, the commercial appearance of the fabric and lack of traditional character was questioned in a report in the *Art Journal*. It contended that rather than fostering an indigenous Hungarian embroidery industry it was

‘grafting of a possibly unsympathetic industry on a people who are unable to express in it what artistic feeling they may possess.’ The quality of the work deteriorated through the copying and duplication of design in the state industries or a inferior standard of work may have been sent to London.

As ‘traditional’ handicrafts such as lace making and embroidery were encouraged in the home arts and crafts industry movements there was a paralleled intensified political interest. Designs arose from local peasant culture and handicraft tradition and paved a clear direction for itself with successes in exhibitions both locally and international. An increasing amount of literature has been published on issues of the ‘purity’ and ‘authenticity’ of textiles. Eric Hobsbawm wrote that movements which revive traditions are a visible break in tradition.<sup>20</sup> Lou Taylor’s view is that motivations for re-interpreting dress were undeniably romantic and nationalistic.<sup>21</sup> Taylor confirmed that many of the peasant embroideries seen in Europe from the 1890s onwards were not authentic but were ‘improved’ versions made in the Home Industries.<sup>22</sup> Discussion of the construction of ‘authenticity’ as an ambiguous term became more directly associated with those who could claim identity.

Photographs of Isabella textiles held in British collections are examples of design development informed by diverse influences delining through the process of copying. A Glasgow School of Art Needlework Development Scheme (NDS) man’s shirt and an Embroiderers’ Guild NDS blouse acquired from Isabella, Budapest, are influenced by the style of design from Bukovina, of Greek origin (the Greek king pattern). Labels on two Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen NDS embroideries made by the state co-operative *Háziipari Hangya Szövetkezet*, (National Hungarian Home Industry Society) claim authenticity, however the designs of the embroideries show a strong influence from Madeira embroidery. This style of embroidery design developed quickly as Madeira was a popular holiday destination of the aristocracy.

Another early NDS EG *Isabella* design, also illustrates the evolution of design. It is a late nineteenth century bonnet mostly stitched in an oriental technique, trimmed with tinsel lace showing a style and technique analogous to fifteenth century Russian designs. Patterns were not derived ostensibly from Hungarian sources but the Hungarian character of the maker was used to authenticate the work.<sup>23</sup>

A comparison of other dress objects show them to be derivatives of those in Archduchess Isabella’s collection. In 1918 the Isabella industry relocated to Budapest from Pozany. The architect Dušan Jurkovič collected popular examples of art for use as models, when in 1919, Jurkovič instigated a state organisation charged with the promotion of textile design and manufacture in the new Czechoslovakia (after it fell into Nazi territory), and the home industry came under state control, renamed Detva. A NDS apron in the Embroiderers’ Guild collection is a further derivation of the Jurkovič example. These works show only limited degrees of design variation and a decline in quality rather than objects displaying continual re-invention.

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<sup>20</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction; Inventing Traditions.” In *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 7-8. 1983.

<sup>21</sup> Lou Taylor, “Displays of European Dress and Textiles in the Paris Exhibition- 1862-1900.” In *The Lost Arts of Europe*, edited by D. Crowley and Lou Taylor. Haslemere, Surrey: Haslemere Educational Museum, 2000. 30

<sup>22</sup> Lou Taylor, “Peasant Embroidery: Rural to Urban and East to West Relationships 1860 – 1914,” *The Journal of Decorative Arts Society* 14, 48, 1991.

<sup>23</sup> NDS EGT 395.





***Figure 3. Sokác Slav immigrants at Bélye estate selling works by the roadside 1913.  
Photo: © Hungarian National Museum 85-1024.***

Isabella's goal was to help the poorer classes of the people, especially during winter and to promote sales. (Figure 3). She emphasized the handmade and sartorial preference for a 'Hungarian' style typified the promotion of textiles consumption during that era. Undoubtedly Isabella used her high society connections and photography skills to promote the Hungarian home industry work. She remained devoted to the making and selling of textiles and textile art and combined her resolve with an astute sense of market, an awareness of social and political conditions encouraging both designer led industries and others that relied on patterns and textile artefacts as models.<sup>24</sup>

Designs were developed influenced by migration, travel, patronage, occupation and trade. Paradoxically the design only became static when promoted by the state in the interests of nationalism, when the many influences on design were overlooked. Today, ethnic design is considered typical of a specific nationality, characteristic of another culture. Most designs are no longer exclusive to a particular culture or part of a world, as in the fashion world everything goes everywhere.

<sup>24</sup> Isabella continued her prominence and impact in society by exhibiting her photographs. In 1905 Isabella exhibited at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International exhibition of photographs. Critics received her images for 'artistic atmosphere and handling of landscapes, which were given titles like poetry, water surface, lake shore and haven.



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