

## REVIEW

## The History of the Jankovich Family of Pribérd by Dénes Jankovich-Bésán

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Hungarian Archaeology Vol. 14 (2025) Issue 2, pp. 42–44.

*Dénes Jankovich-Bésán's versatile activities in archaeology and heritage protection involving the most diverse fields and also as a science organizer are widely known. However, with his recently published history of the Jankovich family of Pribérd, we see a completely new side of his outstanding research and systematization skills.*

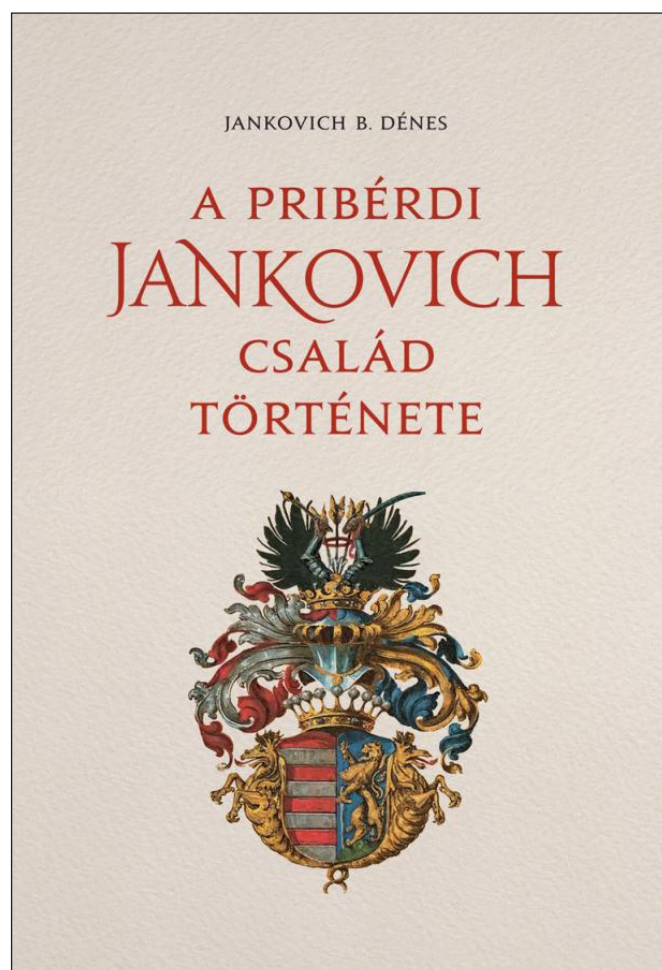
There are several factors that predestined the author to write the history of this prestigious ancient family. First of all, there is his personal involvement, since he is writing his own family history. Secondly, the project falls into his field of interest and education. He is a historian and archaeologist, who has gained knowledge in studying charters, and has previous publishing experience. Thirdly, he was predestined for this task by the general change in attitude that accompanied the social transformation in Hungary in the late 20th century.

Dénes Jankovich-Bésán is therefore the person who was best able to do this work, and had to do this work. The task of writing the family history was thus born with him, and his personal life enabled him to fulfil it. Fortunately, the topic and the author appear to have found each other.

However, it transpired in the data collection phase that the topic offers much more than family history. It is worth quoting the author's thoughts in the blurb on the back of the volume: *"With this book, my goal was not only to write our history in a narrower sense, but also to process the only surviving archival material of the Jankoviches of Pribérd and to publish the valuable data contained therein.*

*I trust that my family will understand my efforts, which will also be useful to researchers of local history, since in the 13 years of the project, previously unknown data on the history of 122 settlements in Slavonia and Hungary have been uncovered."*

The structure of the volume is logical and easy to understand, which is faithfully reflected in the detailed table of contents. At the beginning of the short introduction, it is clearly stated that the book *"contains the history of the Jankovich family of Pribérd (1584), the Jankovich family of Pribérd and Vuchin (1820), then count (1885), and the Jankovich-Bésán family of Pribérd, Vuchin, and Dunaszekcső (1888), later (1916) also*



Jankovich B., Dénes (2024).  
*The history of the Jankovich family of Pribérd.*  
Budapest.

Hardcover, 792 pages, with colour illustrations.  
ISBN 978-615-5766-74-9

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count, up to 1945”. Further details of the introduction – in addition to some useful structural and technical explanation – summarise previous publications emerging between 1894 and 2021 and dealing with the history of the family, their critical source value, and the possibilities offered by additional archival sources of local history. The author relied on this material in his undertaking. Of outstanding importance is the Szőlősgyőrök part of the family archive that escaped wartime destruction, which was transferred to the Kaposvár archive in 1953. The introduction is followed by a consolidated list of the literature and abbreviations.

The rest of the book comprises three large chapters and a database section.

Entitled *Three Hundred and Sixty Years – Rise and Fall*, the first chapter reviews the family’s history from the earliest times to 1945. The first mention of the Jankovich family name, which is undoubtedly of Croatian origin, appears in Hungarian sources in 1421, and in the 15th century there are further mentions. However, none of them can be unequivocally linked to the later Jankovich family of Pribérd. (Nevertheless, the connection cannot be ruled out.)

Most of the 16th century data only provide indirect evidence that some members of the family served in Bosnia, Dalmatia, and Croatia. For example, Tamás probably served as vicecomes in Bosnia, and when Bosnia fell under Ottoman rule, he fled to Sibenik and settled on his estate called Pribérth. His son Pál also died in Sibenik in a battle against the Turks. The sources also know of a György Jankovich who served in Kanizsa. He is the one with whom the family’s name *Pribérth* first appears. However, this is not a familiar place name in Dalmatia or any other South Slavic area, which makes the location of the Pribérd estate unidentifiable. Nevertheless, the family’s continuity can be substantiated starting from the 1584 mention of György Jankovich from Pribérd to the present day.

Among the 17th-century family members, it is worth noting the adventurous life of János Jankovich, who first served as a diplomatic courier and chamberlain, and when released from Tatar captivity, entered the service of the Zrínyis. In 1633, he became the captain of Légrád near the Dráva River and tried to protect his inherited estates under Turkish rule. In the last third of the century, after János’s death, his son István managed to permanently acquire these estates in Somogy and Baranya Counties. His successors, in turn, extended the family estates to Slavonian territories.

By the first half of the 18th century, István Jankovich III had been among the top ten taxpayers in Somogy County, with his estates in Slavonia constantly growing and expanding. One of his daughters married a member of the Baron Pongrácz family, the other married a member of the Count Niczky family, and his second wife was Baroness Viktória Majthényi. The good connections helped him in acquiring the title of nobleman. At this time, the Jankovich family were among the country’s largest landowners, and in 1789 they also acquired the Vuchin estate in Slavonia, consisting of a market town and fifty villages.

The Jankovich family lived its heyday in the 19th century, owning more than 115,000 hectares at the beginning of the century. Although 1838 saw the start of the the division and fragmentation of their estates, some family members nevertheless held important positions and continued to be influential. László Jankovich, for example, served for twenty-five years as the comes of Somogy County; in 1885 he received the title of count and was admitted to the House of Lords. József Jankovich II was also a significant landowner, who received the lands of the Bésán family that in 1887 had been left without an heir. In these two branches of the family, both László and József had three sons, so in the last third of the century, the estates were divided again, and the Vuchin estate was sold.

In 1916, the Jankovich-Bésán branch also received the title of count, thus all members of the Jankovich family of Pribérd entered the high nobility. Between the two world wars, the family’s wealth was steadily dwindling.

The second chapter of the book deals with the management of the estate, detailing the conditions in Slavonia and Hungary separately, and devotes much space to the modernization of individual farms. In connection with the latter, the author discusses serf labour, mechanization, water regulation, transportation, game management, horse breeding, the Jankovich racing stable, and social conditions.

The entire third chapter deals with culture and health, also introducing the characteristics of the architecture and furnishings of the castles the family built.

The largest part of the volume is taken up by the database, which contains details that are outside the main line of the family history. However, organised into separate chapters, the data preserved over the centuries offer interested readers and researchers a rich storehouse of a wide range of topics. The first part deals with the granting of titles and the use of coats of arms and noble given names. This is followed by a genealogical chapter, which contains the most complete family tree to date. The chapter entitled *Biographies* commemorates prominent members of the family from George I (1584) to Baron János Bésán (1810–1887). The following chapter titled *Estates A–Z* offers a significant local history treat with the history of its 126 settlements and estates. These are the estates where the Jankovich family had interests. The chapter entitled *Related and Unrelated Families* contains a list of the earliest occurrences of the Jankovich surname, basic data on the families of spouses, and diagrams of family relationships. The chapter entitled *Medieval Charters* contains documents from before 1526 held in the family archives. The database is concluded with a collection of newspaper articles entitled *Interesting Stories* that enrich the family history. The volume is concluded with detailed summaries in English and Croatian.

The writing and publication of the book required long, persistent, meticulous work and – typical of today's undeservedly limited publishing opportunities in Hungary – significant financial sacrifice on the part of the author. The outcome of the project is a beautiful and well-designed hardcover A/4 size book with exceptionally rich internal content, considerable length (792 pages), a separate genealogical sketch, and a large number of colourful illustrations. Edited by Archaeolingua Publishers, the volume was proofread by Dénes Sokcsevits and Ferenc Végh; the summary was translated into English by Katalin Sebők, and into Croatian by Oszkár Nikowitz; the sophisticated cover design is the work of Móni Kaszta.

By presenting the history of the Jankovich family of Pribérd, Dénes Jankovich-Bésán followed closely the history of a family that for several hundred years played a prominent role in medieval and modern Hungary and Croatia. He painstakingly researched the scattered data, and with the data compiled he managed to immortalize the family.

In doing so, not only does the descendant remember his immediate ancestors, but also explores and processes the activities of an ancient family that exerted a major influence on Hungarian and Croatian history in Bosnia, Dalmatia, Croatia, and Hungary. Due to the description of significant estates and diverse family connections, the book offers abundant information for local history research. We hope that it will also provide a model for future family history monographs. Former and current members of the family may be proud of the author, who is also a family member, and the wide Hungarian and Croatian readership may be proud of the Jankoviches' name and achievements. Due to the common past, it is rightly hoped and strongly desired that this extremely informative book be published in a Croatian edition in Zagreb as soon as possible, which in turn might facilitate the emergence of previously hidden Croatian sources. I wish it to be so.