



July 22, 1970

Dear Archiduc Rodolphe,

It has been too long since I have had the pleasure of hearing from you. I do hope that you and your children are in good health.

A friend of mine from Hungary, George E. Lang who is presently Vice President of one of the largest food chains in the United States, has counseled with me as to how he should submit to His Serene Highness Archiduc Otto some material pertaining to the last coronation luncheon which took place on December 30, 1916, at the Royal Palace of Buda when your late father, His Majesty King Karoly IV and Her Majesty Queen Zita were crowned. I would be most grateful for your kind advice in this respect.

I am taking the liberty of enclosing a copy of Lang's letter as well as material he enclosed in his letter to me.

August 31st, 11970

Dear Mr. Lang :

Through Mr. Baan and my brother Rudolph I received the description of the Coronation Luncheon, which you plan to enclose into your History of the Hungarian Cuisine. I am of course in favor that you do so, since the Coronation dinner represents a historical ceremony, strongly rooted in the centuries-old Hungarian tradition. You can quote me on this, if you wish.

Before you publish it, however, I would like to draw your attention - as you ask me to - on some points, where there are errors in small but certainly significant details :

- page 1 : the "blinding white tablecloth" was not made of silk, but was an artistically woven linnen-damask.
- page 1 : "Hercegprimás" should not be translated as "First Prince" but as "Primate".
- page 2 : "Slovakian royalty" did not exist; what is meant here is the high nobility from Slovakia.
- page 2 : the Master of the Door was, at my father's Coronation, Prince Pálffy, who at the time was still relatively young and certainly not "white haired".
- page 3 : the food bearers were not "appointed", but representatives of the Parliament.
- page 3 : "the bearers placed the plate on the table and left": this is an error. The bearers presented the food, then, without placing it on the table, immediately took it away and handed it back to the representative of the "vármegye" or "Komitat" which had given it for the Coronation dinner. Each plate indeed was presented as hommage to the King by another vármegye, but returned to the latter, without being touched.
- page 5 : "marvelling at the untouched food" is not quite right, since at that moment all the plates had already been returned to representatives of the vármegyék. Only the confectionary remained on the table, where it had been placed already before the luncheon. It was taken by the onlookers as souvenirs.

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page 5 : "since about an hour before the ceremonial banquet, in a neighboring Palace hall everyone was served an even more elaborate luncheon .. " This was not the case for the King and the Queen, who had to attend further ~~ceremonies~~ ceremonies during that time. Since they had had no breakfast in the morning - the ruling of the Church in the past not allowing to take food before Holy Communion - they had actually not eaten anything that day. It was only after the show-meal, that they were given a small, hasty luncheon, as the receptions of delegations from the whole country had to follow immediately.

With my warmest wishes for the full success of your book on whose value I can conclude after having read the one chapter you sent me and with best regards,

very sincerely yours,

OTTO VON HABSBURG

July 14, 1970

Mr. George Baan
Handy Associates, Inc.
405 Park Avenue
New York, N. Y.

RECEIVED

JUL 16 1970

HANDY ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL, INC.

Dear George:

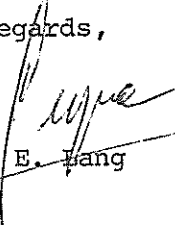
I just finished a quite unique volume, the History of Hungarian Cuisine from the Vth Century to present times. As you see from the enclosed Index, it is a detailed and serious treatment of this fascinating subject even though Atheneum, who will publish it, hopes for a fairly large circulation.

During my fifteen plus years of research I found an interesting vignette about the last coronation luncheon which was written by a nameless journalist who obviously was somewhere on the balcony watching the proceedings. I am including it in the book as a fascinating and significant ritual marking the end of an era.

I would be most grateful to you if you could get it through the proper protocol to H.H. Otto. I am most interested in his opinion on the accuracy of the description and perhaps he also would give me kind permission to quote him in the book.

I am most grateful for your help in this matter.

Best regards,


George E. Lang

VF

enclosure

THE LAST CORONATION LUNCHEON

Reading the accounts of the sublimely ridiculous event is not only entertaining but shows us what the ^{disciples} of József Marchal could produce, given the occasion. Let us now focus our magica lanterna on the year 1916 and observe the strange ritual banquet which is an ancient part of every Hungarian coronation ceremony. The last of these took place December 30, 1916, in the Royal Palace of Buda, when Karoly IV and Queen Zita were crowned.

It was already two o'clock in the afternoon when the guests and officials entered the ballroom and its enormous connecting rooms in the Palace. The vast ballroom was lit with eight huge chandeliers, and under a baldachin on a three-level platform a table was set for six people. (Blinding white silk tablecloth and six gold plates with gold chalices and pitchers, two low gold vases with flowers,) The table was surrounded by six red silk armchairs; for the King and Queen higher throne-like chairs with gold crowns atop the back. At the head of the table, on the King's left sat the Queen, on his right the Cardinal (called Hercegprímás -- or First Prince), next to him sat the Archbishop of Kalocsa, on the Queen's left sat the Papal Nuncio, and next to him Count Tisza who was elected by the national congresses to crown the monarch.

There were about 500 "earthly gods" who were present. Without exception the dazzling, sparkling ceremonial garments (there is a special word for this -- disz-ruha) were heavily decorated and encrusted

with fabulously valuable jewels; some sewn on, some worn separately.

On the balconies were the Hungarian journalists and reporters from all over the world, some of the greatest artists of the time busily sketching and many of the famous artists and writers from all over were hypnotized by this fantastic spectacle, as though they knew it would never happen again.

In the Imperial box, heads of state including Ferdinand, King of Bulgaria, dressed in a red Hungarian general's uniform, Slovakian royalty, Croatian lords and nobility and the child, Otto, between two ladies of the Court.

When everyone had filed into his appointed place, The Court Master of Ceremony gave the report to the Royal Couple that they might enter. Three sonorous knocks reverberated through the hall, and the two enormous doors swung open slowly, and everyone waited in dead silence. First in with gold-buttoned white scepter, the white-haired ancient Master of the Door, and then came the various nobles representing the important factions of the country -- religion, House of Lords, etc. After these came Karoly IV, the sacred crown on his head, and on his shoulder the Mantle of Saint Stephen, with the Head Chamberlain, and Head of the Royal Guard. When the King's figure was visible, an enormous cry of "Long Live the King!" burst from thousands of throats. Then came Queen Zita, on her head the diamond crown and wearing the most extraordinary dress also used in past coronations. She was led by Count Esterházy and various nobles held her train. When they arrived at the table, there was a ceremonial hand-washing from a huge gold ewer, the Cardinal offered a towel and they smilingly accepted it.

The six stood at the table while the Cardinal pronounced the blessing, and then everyone sat down. At this moment, the Chamberlain and one of the Crown Guards together took off the crown from the King's head and placed it on a tiny gold stand next to the King. And now the symbolic Luncheon began.

First Count Szechenyi, the Head Cup Bearer, poured wine from a gold ewer to the gold chalice in front of the King and Queen, and for the other four seated guests. At the same time the appointed noble food-bearers began to bring the food around in gold plates. The first went to the King with a plate in his hand, bowed and offered the food but the King did not touch it. He bowed again and went to the Queen who with a gracious smile refused it. Then the food-bearer offered it to the other four diners who did not touch it either. When everyone had been offered the food, the bearers placed the plate on the table and left. Then came the second, third, etc. each enacting the same ritual as the first. Each food offering lasted about ^{one} minute and each of the nine persons came two or three times.

But do not think that these were also only symbolical foods! These were the creations of one of the most extraordinary royal-kitchen, and it's a fair guess whether one should be more sorry for the guests who could not eat, or the cooks whose masterpieces were only seen but not eaten. According to several sources the care which was taken with the flavoring of the Symbolical Luncheon was equal to that of the exquisite gastronomical feast. We in the restaurant industry have great difficulty convincing the cooks of the importance of every single dish, although they know that it will all be consumed and judged. If there ever was a true "l'art pour l'art" this was it!

And now the menu:

.

Pheasant en Chemise

Frozen Chicken Souffle à la Reine

Pate of Goose Liver with Mushrooms

Poultry Salad

Cream of Game with Truffles

Coronation Ham

Filet of Venison, Stuffed

Pork Cutlet, as in Hortobagy

Spit-Roasted Duck

Turkey à l'Ancienne

Royal Capon

Rock Trout from Tatra

Fruit Sorbet as in Tokaj

Petits Fours

Fancy Confections

A Variety of Fruit

Basket à la Heir Apparent

Again, according to some sources there were endless arguments as to how to abbreviate the menu to only eighteen items, since usually on such occasions there were at least twice as many. Everything is relative so when our next dinner is given by one of the gourmet societies and there will be an argument about whether there should be five or seven courses I shall remember this Coronation Banquet and will refrain from smiling.

At the end of the procession of dishes the King rose with the wine chalice in his hand and in a loud voice proclaimed, "Long Live the Country!" Immediately after this, the Queen rose and they both touched the wine with their lips. The Cardinal stood up and raising high his wine chalice cried, "Long Live the King!" To this a frenetic mass scream, unending, echoed through the hall, reverberating in the walls of the Royal Palace. A few words of quiet blessing were spoken by the Cardinal, again a hand-washing ceremony and the Crown of St. Stephen was again placed on the King's head, and in the same order in which they had entered the procession filed out, to roars of acclamation.

After the departure of the King's party, the high nobility surrounded the table, marvelling at the untouched food, and within minutes picked up the dry cakes and confectionery as mementos.

Since the Coronation ceremony for these people lasted from early morning one could admire their self-control and ability to muster all the enthusiasm they apparently did. Please don't waste your sympathy on them since about an hour before the ceremonial banquet, in a neighboring palace hall everyone was served an even more elaborate luncheon, which certainly had enough energy-giving ingredients to last a couple of days.

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