

Ágoston Haraszthy: “Father of California Viticulture”? Debates in the Mirror of Recent Revisionist Literature

Csaba Lévai

Ágoston Haraszthy (1812-1869) is a well-known figure of the history of Hungarian-American relations. He authored the second travelogue written by a Hungarian author about the United States, which was published under the title *Utazás Éjszak-Amerikában* [Travels in North America] in 1844 in Pest.¹ In this paper it is not my aim to analyze Haraszthy's book or to compare it to the famous 1834 work of Sándor Bölöni Farkas (1795-1842), *Journey in North America*, as this has already been done by other scholars.² Instead, I propose to focus on the role he played in the founding of California viticulture.

It is not easy to reconstruct Haraszthy's activities in California, since the story of his career is surrounded by myths: some of these were self-created others were invented by people who wrote about him. The main aim of this paper is to examine these myths in the light of the “revisionist” Haraszthy literature of the last two decades produced by American scholars. I will concentrate on three works. Haraszthy is not in the main focus of two of them, since they examine the history of wine culture in California from a wider perspective.

Two decades ago Thomas Pinney published a two-volume history of wine-making in the United States in which he devoted a whole chapter to Haraszthy's California activities. In 2003 Charles Lewis Sullivan, who is a well-known expert of the history of wine-making in California, published a book about the origins of the famous California grape, the Zinfandel. In this work he, like Pinney, outlined in detail Haraszthy's role. The author of the third book under my scrutiny is Brian McGinty, the great-grand-child of

Haraszthy, who produced a biography of him with the title *Strong Wine: The Life and Legend of Agoston Haraszthy*.³ The results of this revisionist literature are practically unknown to Hungarian scholars. For this reason it should be useful to contrast the image created of Haraszthy by these authors with that produced by earlier commentators.

While the main focus of this paper will be Haraszthy's wine-growing and wine-making activities in California, I will also deal with some other aspects of his life regarding which the American literature of the last two decades also made new discoveries. One of these is the question of where Haraszthy was born. On the basis of a statement that Árpád Haraszthy, Ágoston Haraszthy's son, made in California in 1866, all the major biographical accounts of Ágoston Haraszthy published in Hungary claimed that he was born in Futak in the county of Bács-Bodrog in August, 1812.⁴ (In our days Futak is called Futag, located in the outskirts of Újvidék [Novi Sad] in Serbia.) But Brian McGinty found the documentation of his birth and baptism in the archives of the Roman Catholic Church of Terézváros in Budapest. According to these, Haraszthy was born in Pest (today's Budapest) on August 30, 1812.⁵

Ágoston Haraszthy was the only son of nobleman Károly Haraszthy and his wife Anna Halász. The family could trace its roots back to the 15th century. On the basis of a statement Haraszthy made once in America, another recurring theme of the Hungarian biographies of him is that in 1828, at the age of sixteen, he had joined the Royal Hungarian Bodyguard. Even such noted authors as Péter Szente and Béla S. Várdy had accepted this assertion. Again, Brian McGinty did extensive research in Hungary in this regard but could not find any proof supporting Haraszthy's claim.⁶

On the basis of his alleged service in the Royal Hungarian Bodyguard, while living in California and towards the end of his life in Nicaragua Haraszthy claimed to have been a colonel. We have to note however that if Haraszthy had really served in the Royal Bodyguard he couldn't have reached the rank of colonel in just a few years. He also told an attorney in San Diego at the end of 1849 that at the age of nineteen he had organized a company of 120 men and joined the Polish troops fighting against the invading Russian forces during the Polish insurrection of 1830-31. According to this statement, he took part in the fighting and was wounded. He also informed this same attorney that as the captain of a regular hussar company of the Habsburg Imperial Army he took part in a campaign in Northern Italy. Historians never found any evidence that supported these allegations.⁷

Haraszthy was a clever person who at a very early age recognized the importance of self-promotion and image building. He wanted his American

neighbours to accept and respect him, and he also wanted to substantiate his new life in America. Haraszthy exaggerated some elements of his career and he also simply invented some new “facts” in order to create a good impression of himself in his American environment. He was probably well-aware of the sympathy the American public felt towards the participants of the Polish insurrection since they thought that the Poles continued the struggle the Americans initiated during their own revolution against Britain. Haraszthy presumably also knew the widespread custom in America that country gentlemen of good standing were usually addressed by their neighbors as “colonels” — whether they had really served in the army or not.⁸

It was also probably also a part of such tactics that while he was residing in Wisconsin he started to call himself a “count” (Wisconsin was the site of Haraszthy’s first residence in the United States). In all likelihood, he also recognized the romantic and mystical affinity of republican Americans to European titles of nobility the real meaning of which they did not really know. According to Brian McGinty, in the eyes of contemporary Americans Hungary appeared as “an exotic kingdom fragrant with the mingled odors of Eastern potentates and Asiatic warriors, a country that was in Europe, but not really of Europe.”⁹ As historians Zoltán Sztáray and Béla Várdu pointed out it was quite common among Hungarian immigrants in the 19th century to use imaginary titles. Haraszthy probably hoped that as a Hungarian aristocrat he would be able to attract more of his countrymen as settlers to the small settlement he had founded in Wisconsin.¹⁰

Haraszthy had made even more outrageous statements regarding his Hungarian past. At one point he claimed that, following his service in the Royal Bodyguard, he became private secretary to Archduke Joseph (1776-1847), the Habsburg Palatine (Governor) of Hungary. Neither Péter Szente nor Zoltán Sztáray — and not even Brian McGinty — found any proof of this claim.¹¹

Unfortunately we do not know much about the real life of Ágoston Haraszthy in Hungary. The Haraszthy family hailed from the village of Mokcsa in the County of Ung in the northeastern part of the kingdom; however Antal Haraszthy, Ágoston’s grandfather, left Ung County for Szeged in southern Hungary in the middle of the 18th century. Ágoston’s father Károly was born there in 1789. By the early part of the 19th century Károly lived in Pest where he married in 1811 and, as has been mentioned, Ágoston was born a year later. Some time between 1825 and 1833 the family moved to the south again, this time to Bács-Bodrog County where they came into possession of an estate near the villages of Szenttamás and Pacsér (nowadays a wine-producing region in Serbia). In 1833, at the age of twenty-one, Ágoston Haraszthy

married Eleonóra Dedinszky. The marriage took place in the town of Futak. The record of this marriage is the first written proof of the presence of the Haraszthy family in Bács-Bodrog. Eleonóra Dedinszky was the daughter of Ferenc Dedinszky, the manager of the neighboring estate of a member of the aristocratic Brunszvik family. Within two years the newlyweds had had two sons, Géza and Attila. Soon Ágoston Haraszthy became an appreciated member of the local community of noblemen and he was elected the vice-notary of Bács-Bodrog County.

On March 27, 1840, Haraszthy left Hungary for the United States in the company of his nephew Károly Halász. We do not really know much about Haraszthy's motivation. Why did a well-to-do landlord decide to travel to North America? In the book he published about his first trip to the United States in Hungary in 1844, he stated that he had wanted to see life in North America. Péter Szente also called attention to the fact that Haraszthy declared in the very same book that he did not want to emigrate from Hungary. He repeated this statement after his return from his first trip to North America — after he had purchased an estate in Wisconsin. A few years later in California Haraszthy claimed that, even before his first trip, he had been persecuted by the Austrian authorities due to his liberal views and his support of Lajos Kossuth (1802-1894) the leader of the Hungarian liberal opposition, and that this was the main reason behind his emigration from Hungary. Haraszthy also proclaimed in California in 1849 that he was not only the friend of Kossuth but he had also taken part in the work of the Hungarian Diet. Since he left Hungary for the first time on March 27, 1840, the only session of the Diet he could have taken part in was the session of 1832-1836. It can be taken for granted that Haraszthy, hardly out of his teens, was not a member of the Diet; he might have been one of the young men visiting the sessions of the Diet and cheering for the liberal opposition. It is also conceivable that he met Lajos Kossuth, who was not yet a prominent figure of Hungarian politics, at that time. But, again, historians could not find any proof of all this. Regarding his alleged persecution by the Austrian authorities, it is true that there was an investigation against him in 1837, but it was conducted by the authorities of his county and he was not prosecuted for his political views or activities. Haraszthy was the honorary vice-notary of Bács-Bodrog County at the time and he was accused of having used the pair of horses provided for him by the county for private purposes.¹²

I wish to point out that when in 1849 Haraszthy was talking about his connection to Kossuth and his alleged persecution by the Habsburgs he must have been aware of the sympathy of the American public towards the parti-

participants of the defeated Hungarian War for Independence, Kossuth being the symbol of the Hungarian cause. His claim about his support of the Hungarian liberals and about his alleged connection to Kossuth is likely to have been part of a self-promotion exercise.¹³

After the conclusion of his first stay in the United States, in early 1842 Haraszthy returned to Hungary. He had traveled extensively and, as already mentioned, purchased an estate in Wisconsin. This latter act can surely be considered a proof of his intention to return and settle permanently in North America. The most important result of his first trip to the United States was the publication of his travelogue. Haraszthy and his family returned to the United States in the fall of 1842: they wanted to settle on the estate Haraszthy had purchased in Wisconsin. Back in Hungary his book was published only two years later, in 1844. The book covers not only the events of his first trip but also the experience of his first years in Wisconsin.

Haraszthy was a real entrepreneur who pursued several different activities in Wisconsin. He and his family remained in the state for six years but at the end of 1848, probably inspired by the news of the California gold rush, decided to re-locate to that part of the country. One of the most important elements of the Haraszthy legend is that he introduced wine-growing and wine-making in his newest homeland, mainly by the help of the importation of Hungarian grape varieties. Two well-known pioneers of the history of American-Hungarian relations accepted this idea. Jenő Pivány in his path-breaking study *Magyar-amerikai történelmi kapcsolatok* (Historical Contacts between the United States of America and Hungary) declared in 1926 that “Haraszthy was the founder of vine growing in California, and he imported many grape varieties from Europe and Hungary, including the California Tokay, which became well-known all over the country.” Another Hungarian historian, Ödön Vasváry, was of similar opinion. According to him, “Haraszthy was the founder of vine growing in California.”¹⁴

The legend of Haraszthy as the “founder of viticulture in California” remained popular in Hungary even after World War II. We can find several incorrect statements regarding his life in the widely-used *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon* (Encyclopedia of Hungarian Biography), for example. Although the author of the entry on Haraszthy stated correctly that he had “played significant role in the establishment of viticulture” in California, he declared wrongly that he had “toured America in the 1830s.” As it is well-known, Haraszthy visited North America for the first time in 1840. The entry also mentions that Haraszthy founded a settlement called “Saul City” in Wisconsin, while the township founded by him was called “Sauk City” later on. Mihály Sárkány,

the author of a short biographical note of Haraszthy published in the volume entitled *Messzi népek magyar kutatói* (Hungarian Explorers of Nations Far Away), stated that, due to his wine-growing activities, Haraszthy was called “the father of viticulture in California.” More recently, Béla S. Várdy declared in his book published in 2000 that Haraszthy was not simply the founder of Californian but the “founder of American viticulture” and that he published “the first American handbook on viticulture.” As it is clear from such works as Thomas Pinney’s *A History of Wine in America*, several studies had been published about wine-growing and wine-making in North America well before the publication of Haraszthy’s treatise of 1862.¹⁵

Even today there are several websites still endorsing elements of the old Haraszthy legend. Regarding his activities in California the Hungarian version of Wikipedia declares that the “creation of wine culture in California” was the achievement of Haraszthy, and that he played major role in the introduction of the Zinfandel grape. The author of this article also took over almost all of the other mistakes mentioned above concerning the Haraszthy’s career, from his service in the Royal Hungarian Bodyguard, through his participation at the Hungarian Diet, and the friendship of Kossuth. The entry cites a wrong version of the title of Haraszthy’s travelogue (*Észak-amerikai utazások*), and contains such false statements that he emigrated to the United States for good in 1840, and that he also went to Hungary during his visit of Europe in 1861. Regarding his wine-making activities, the author declares that the “creation of wine culture in California” was the achievement of Haraszthy and that he “gained long-lasting distinction in the improvement of the Zinfandel grape and wine.”¹⁶ These mistakes are repeated by several other Hungarian websites, which is a clear sign of the fact that their authors are not aware of the results of the latest American researches. According to one of these websites, Haraszthy “created viticulture in California by the help of grape cuttings imported from Tokaj-Hegyalja.”¹⁷ This mistake is quite surprising taking into account the fact that the English version of Wikipedia contains correct information about Haraszthy’s activities in California, mainly based on the book of Brian McGinty.¹⁸

The legend of Haraszthy proved to be even more popular in the United States. The main founder of it was Árpád, one of Ágoston Haraszthy’s sons. As we will see later on, Jenő Pivány, Ödön Vasváry and some other Hungarian-American authors also contributed to it significantly. Due to the writings of these authors, Ágoston Haraszthy became the official “father of viticulture in California” in the eyes of the American public, especially among Hungarian-Americans. You can find his plaque on the main square of Sonoma

and also in front of the House of Hungary in San Diego. Commemorating the 100th anniversary of his death, California Governor Edmund Brown planted a vine-cutting in the park next to the building of the state legislature of California in Sacramento. You can read in the *Dictionary of American Biography* published in 1960 that Haraszthy imported from Europe “the first vines which were... Tokay and Zinfandel, sent to him by friends in Hungary.”¹⁹

It was the principal aim of the “revisionist” historians of the last two-and-a-half-decades to rectify these myths and to construct a realistic picture of Haraszthy’s the wine-growing activities in California. The question arises in what ways and to what extent the revisionist authors had modified the traditional evaluation of Haraszthy’s activities in that state. As Brian McGinty pointed out, researchers had to answer two fundamental questions regarding this problem: Does Ágoston Haraszthy deserve the title “the father of California viticulture” and was he the person who imported to California the Zinfandel grape?

The answer to the first question depends fundamentally on our understanding of the term “father or founder of viticulture in California.” If it is used — as many of the above-mentioned authors and websites — in the sense that Haraszthy was the first person who started to grow vine and make wine in California, he was obviously not the “father of California viticulture.” According to Thomas Pinney, by 1849, when Haraszthy arrived in California, “there had been a history of nearly three-quarters of a century of practical winegrowing, and a strong effort towards improving the selection of grape varieties had already been well under way.” Pinney also added that it was not Haraszthy who imported European grape varieties into California for the first time.²⁰ But if this is true, could Haraszthy still be called the “father of Californian viticulture”? In order to answer this question we need to outline briefly his wine-growing and wine-making activities in California.

First of all, it needs to be clarified what kind of wine-growing skills Haraszthy had when he arrived in California? Although he never mentioned it in his writings, he had presumably been growing vine in Hungary according to Brian McGinty. The Haraszthy family was originally from Mokcsa (today the village is in Slovakia. It is known to Hungarians as Mokcsamogyorós, and to Slovaks as Krišovská Liesková) in Ung County, which is located relatively close to the famous wine region of Tokaj-Hegyalja, and some references suggest that Ágoston Haraszthy’s father was growing vine there. Sometimes between 1825 and 1833 the family moved to the southern part of Hungary, to Bács-Bodrog County, which at the time was not one of the well-known wine regions of the country but was close to others that were. It is also true that when Haraszthy became acquainted with noted viticulturists in California none

of them questioned his wine-growing skills, and we also know that he had experimented with wine-growing in Wisconsin in the second half of the 1840s. It means that in all likelihood Haraszthy had experience in wine-growing before he came to California.²¹

Haraszthy established his first vineyard in California near San Diego in 1850, and, according to his son Árpád, he imported some grape varieties from Europe the following year. Unfortunately, we have no proof of this. He became the first sheriff of San Diego County in 1851, and he was elected by his fellow citizens to the state legislature one year later — which is another proof of Haraszthy's ability to endear himself to his neighbours. The seat of the state legislature was in Sacramento and this fact prompted him to move north where he purchased an estate south of San Francisco. He called it Los Flores and he started to grow vine. This site, however, soon proved to be unfavourable from the point of view of wine-producing, consequently, Haraszthy decided to sell one part of it and purchased another estate near San Mateo in 1854. Unfortunately, the location of this estate was also unfavourable, so he bought still another vineyard in the Sonoma Valley one year later, where he established his famous estate called Buena Vista. Haraszthy liked the local wine and decided to concentrate on wine-growing. We have to add that it was not Haraszthy who started to grow vine in the Sonoma valley. Among others his neighbour and future father-in-law of his sons General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo (1807-1890) had started to grow vine almost a generation earlier. It is also true on the other hand that it was the Hungarian who initiated the real wine-making boom in the region. As Charles Sullivan pointed out: "Everyone agreed that Sonoma was having a boom and that Haraszthy, more than anyone else, was its author."²²

Haraszthy won first prize with one of his wines at the state agricultural fair in 1859 and the California State Agricultural Society asked him to write a pamphlet about the state of affairs of wine-growing and wine-making in California. The result was Haraszthy's *Report on Grapes and Wine in California*, which was not the first such work published in the United States. Nevertheless, according to Thomas Pinney, "it was the first such treatise really written by a Californian." But Pinney also added that there is nothing "notable or original" in this essay, except perhaps Haraszthy's instructions for making Tokay wine.²³ Haraszthy claimed that he owned more than 150 grape varieties, which according to Charles Sullivan "was pure puffery. The Hungarian was employing the great American entrepreneurial tradition of substituting his hope for facts in public statements about his enterprise."²⁴

Haraszthy’s prominent position in California’s wine-producing community probably played a role in his appointment in 1861 as one of the state’s three commissioners who were charged with the task of exploring the possibilities of improving viticulture in the state. The establishment of this commission was initiated by the California State Agricultural Society, and the state legislature voted for it unanimously. The task of the first commissioner was to report about the state of viticulture in California, while the two others were to make field trips to South America and Europe respectively. Haraszthy was tasked with traveling to Europe to study the latest wine-growing and wine-making practices. As Thomas Pinney pointed out: “The purpose of his trip, according to the terms of his commission, was simply to make observations upon European practices in viticulture and winemaking and to report on these.... But in his own mind Haraszthy seems to have had the collection of grape varieties as his first and most important business.”²⁵

Haraszthy left California on June 11, 1861 and arrived in New York on July 4, where he received letters of recommendation from secretary of state William Henry Seward (1801-1872) to the ambassadors of the United States in Europe. He also made a contract with the publishing house Harper and Brothers concerning the publication of his report. Haraszthy left North America for Europe on July 13. First he visited various wine-producing regions of France, from where he went to Germany and Switzerland. Then he continued his trip to Italy and then, via the southern regions of France, he went to Spain. He intended to visit Greece and Egypt also, but eventually he decided to go back to Paris, from where he returned to North America. I would like to stress that, contrary to the information provided by some authors and websites, Haraszthy did not visit Hungary during his European trip and did not bring back any Hungarian grape varieties to California. He arrived in California on December 5, 1861. On his tour he had purchased some one hundred thousand vine cuttings of some three-hundred varieties in Europe.²⁶

Haraszthy submitted his report to the state legislature about his European activities in January 1862. In this he pointed out that climatic conditions of California were very favorable for wine-growing. He also made recommendations for the establishment of a state agricultural experimental station and state support for the development of new grape varieties. He also urged the appointment of a state agency to regulate commerce in wine in order to eliminate fraud. Next Haraszthy published a book about his experience entitled *Grape Culture, Wines and Wine-Making with Notes upon Agriculture and Horticulture*. As he had signed a contract with Harper and Brothers publishers even before his departure for Europe, it is clear that he hoped to make some money from his trip.

Haraszthy's work was not the first treatise on wine-making in the United States and was not a very original publication. As Thomas Pinney pointed out, the first part of the work contained a description of his travels in Europe and in the second part he reproduced European and American writings about wine-growing. Haraszthy also re-published some sections of his former treatise in this book and only rarely mentioned Californian or European wine making methods at all. To sum up the opinion of Thomas Pinney, the merit of the book is that this was "the first discussion in book form of California as a winegrowing region" written by a Californian viticulturist that became known nationwide.²⁷

Haraszthy thought that the state of California would take upon itself the distribution of his cuttings and hoped that it would reimburse him for his expenses amounting to \$12,000, but in April of 1862 the state legislature refused his request. Zoltán Sztáray argued that Haraszthy became the victim of political intrigues, since he was a Democrat and by the time of his return to California there was Republican majority in the state legislature. We should keep in mind that in April, 1862, the American Civil War was well under way and California supported the Northern cause. Haraszthy had been elected to the state legislature on a Democratic ticket, and many in the Democratic Party had supported the South during the debates before the war's outbreak.²⁸ According to the representatives of the "revisionist" literature, politics had nothing to do with the refusal by the state legislature of the payment of Haraszthy's expenses. As Thomas Pinney and Charles Sullivan pointed it out, there were two fundamental reasons for the refusal of Haraszthy's request. First, as I have mentioned earlier, according to the terms of Haraszthy's commission the official purpose of his trip had been "to make observations upon European practices in viticulture and winemaking and to report on these to the state," and not to purchase grape cuttings. Second, it was clearly stated in the official instructions of the commissioners that they could not ask for any compensation from the state for their expenses in connection with their commission. This means that the legal situation was absolutely clear and in all likelihood Haraszthy was fully aware of this.²⁹

But, if this was the situation, why did Haraszthy decide to purchase thousands of wine cuttings contrary to his instructions? I think that there could be only one rational answer to this question: he wanted to make money. As Thomas Pinney found out, Haraszthy had started to collect subscribers for the cuttings even before his departure for Europe.³⁰ This means that the Hungarian was not an innocent victim of political intrigues, but was a skillful speculator

who acted contrary to his instructions in the hope of making a big sum of money.

According to the Haraszthy legend his importation of thousands of grape cuttings had a decisive impact on the development of large-scale wine industry in California. But the representatives of the “revisionist school” see this differently. As Charles Sullivan summed it up:

There was nothing special about the importation of good European vines. It has been going on since 1852. What made the Haraszthy importation unique and potentially valuable was that it could have been distributed to vineyardists, had an agency for such an operation existed. But there was none. The claim that the Haraszthy vines were distributed throughout the state became part of the legend constructed by Árpád (i.e. Haraszthy’s son) years later. There is nothing to support such a claim.

Thomas Pinney even added that there were hardly any varieties in Haraszthy’s shipment which play important role in California’s wine industry nowadays.³¹

It is clear that the most special vine of California, the Zinfandel, was not among the varieties Haraszthy imported in 1862. Zinfandel is a red vine that played a crucial role in the early days of the Californian wine industry, and it is still quite popular. Thirteen per cent of table wine produced in California in 2007, for example, was made from Zinfandel grape.³² It is also true that Haraszthy never mentioned Zinfandel among the grape varieties he owned. Why then did it become an integral part of the Haraszthy legend that he imported the trademark of its wine industry into California? According to Charles Sullivan who devoted a book to the history of the Zinfandel grape, this legend was invented by Haraszthy’s son Árpád.

Árpád Haraszthy also played an important role in the history of California’s wine industry, since he was the person who “produced what eventually would be California’s first, commercially successful bottle-fermented sparkling wine.”³³ By the end of the 1870s Árpád Haraszthy became an influential member of the Californian wine-making community as a result of which he was elected the president of the California State Viticultural Society in 1878. It was at that time that he started to spread the idea that the Zinfandel grape had been imported by his father from Europe in 1862. This idea had been included in the official reports of the Board of State Viticultural Commissioners, so it was confirmed officially. But some wine-growers in the state called the attention to the fact that the Zinfandel had been grown even before 1862 in California. As a result of this claim, Árpád Haraszthy changed his

mind and started to argue that his father imported European grape varieties into California for the first time at the beginning of the 1850s, and the Zinfandel was the part of this earlier shipment. In regard to this claim Charles Sullivan calls our attention to a few very important facts. First of all, aside from the statement by Árpád, there is no other proof of the importation of any European grapes before 1862 by Ágoston Haraszthy. Sullivan also added that at the beginning of the 1850s Árpád Haraszthy was about ten years old and he had not been present in California since he had been sent by his father to the east coast to pursue his studies there. Consequently, he could not be the eyewitness to the importation of European grapes by his father at that time. Maybe his father informed his son about the importation of European grapes later, but Ágoston Haraszthy never mentioned this in any of his writings. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1880s the Árpád Haraszthy version of the story became the accepted view about the origins of the Zinfandel grape in California. This myth was endorsed even by the influential nationwide newspaper the *New York Tribune* which in a long article about the Haraszthy family included Árpád's story about the origins of the Zinfandel in California.³⁴

Starting with the 1970s scientists began to investigate the origins of the Zinfandel grape with the help of modern genetics. Historians also managed to find new evidence. Thomas Pinney pointed out that a grape called Zinfandel had been mentioned in the catalogue of the exhibition of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in 1834, and it was also included in the book entitled *Fruits and Fruit Trees of America* published in 1845. The first evidence about the Zinfandel in California is from 1858 when it was exhibited by the viticulturist A.P. Smith. This means that in all likelihood the Zinfandel arrived to California from the east coast sometimes around 1855.³⁵

But from where did the Zinfandel arrive to North America? Árpád Haraszthy asserted that his father had imported the Zinfandel to California from Hungary and Brian McGinty called the attention to the fact that there was a grape in Hungary called *cirfandli*, and it is still the most characteristic variety of the Mecsek region in southern Transdanubia. McGinty also added that the Mecsek region was relatively close to Bács-Bodrog County where the estate of the Haraszthy family was located. This means that Ágoston Haraszthy could have been familiar with the *cirfandli* grape. The name *cirfandli* is probably the Hungarianized version of the German term *Zierfandler*. The latter, in all likelihood, comes from the Latin name *sylvaner*, which refers to the fact that this grape originally was a wild wine. Brian McGinty maintains the opinion that the Zinfandel could have originated from Hungary and that

Ágoston Haraszthy could have played some role in its importation to California.³⁶ On the other hand Thomas Pinney and Charles Sullivan squarely reject this possibility. They can reject it on the basis of the findings of genetic research, since genetic scientists had found out that the Zinfandel originated from Dalmatia, and not from Hungary. There is grape called *crljenak kaštelski* in Dalmatia (in present-day Croatia) and it is genetically identical to the Zinfandel.³⁷

American researchers also found that an American viticulturist in Long Island, George Gibbs, had imported grape cuttings from the Imperial Nursery of Vienna several times between 1820 and 1829. Since Dalmatia was part of the Habsburg Empire at the time it is highly probable that the ancestor of the American Zinfandel arrived to North America as part of one of Gibb’s shipments.³⁸ We should also keep in mind that the American Zinfandel is a red vine preferring the hot climate of California, while the Hungarian *cirfandli* is a white vine preferring cooler climate and humid soil. On the basis of the above-mentioned evidence, Thomas Pinney and Charles Sullivan dismiss the idea that the Zinfandel grape was imported into California by Ágoston Haraszthy from Hungary, whereas Brian McGinty tries to maintain this idea, but he can rely only on assumptions and not on concrete evidence.

By the time of his return from Europe, Haraszthy’s estate became the largest vineyard in California. Haraszthy even argued that he owned the largest vineyard on Earth. Obviously, he declared this without investigating the subject. With eight businessmen from San Francisco he established the Buena Vista Vinicultural Society which, however, did not prove profitable. Soon, the debt-ridden Haraszthy decided to move to Nicaragua, where he disappeared on July 6, 1869.

How then we can evaluate Ágoston Haraszthy’s contribution to the development Californian wine industry? Was he really the “father of California viticulture”? I share Thomas Pinney’s opinion that “Father after all, is not a very useful metaphor: a literal father must have an exclusive claim, but a man who pioneers in a decisive way may share credit with a good many predecessors.”³⁹ I believe that Haraszthy belongs to the second category. He was one of the ardent supporters of the development of viticulture in California, but he was definitely not the exclusive creator of wine industry in the state. He was not as unique and independent actor as he is often portrayed by Hungarian historians, but he was the part of a longer process of the development of large-scale wine-making in California. He was clearly not the first person who started to grow vine and make wine in California and he was not even the first man to import European grape varieties into the state. I think that

we should pose the question differently. Instead of asking if he was the first person who grew vine and made wine in California, we should ask the question to what extent and how he contributed to the development of wine industry in California that had already existed in the state when Haraszthy arrived there? The answer to this question is that in this sense he played a significant role. The representatives of the revisionist school agree on this, but their judgment is not unqualified.

Thomas Pinney is the most critical towards Haraszthy's activities. According to him all the fundamental claims in the Haraszthy legend have been proven false. "He was not the 'father' of California winegrowing. He was not the man who first brought superior varieties of grapes to California. He was not the man who introduced the Zinfandel. He was not a martyr to public ingratitude whose financial sacrifices for the good of the state went uncompensated." On the other hand, even Pinney acknowledges the Hungarian's merits. As he pointed out, Haraszthy authored California's first treatise on grapes and wine. Through his pamphlets and articles he published in the American press throughout the 1860s he promoted California's wine industry on the East Coast. The success of Haraszthy's Buena Vista winery was a "notable exhibition of entrepreneurial skill." To summarize the opinion of Thomas Pinney, Haraszthy "certainly was an energetic flamboyant promoter, combining the idealist and the self-regarding opportunist in proportions that we can only guess at. He will remain an interesting a highly dubious figure, of the kind that always attracts historians; but we should no longer take seriously the legend that has grown up about him."⁴⁰

Charles Sullivan is somewhat more sympathetic towards the Hungarian. He unambiguously rejected the idea that Haraszthy imported the Zinfandel grape into California — as he noted "It is laughable to assert that he was the 'father' of the industry, but I don't believe that anyone contributed more to its growth and development. He was a great publicist. He was the young industry's public conscience, promoting better wine through the use of better grapes and rational cellar practices. He advocated vineyard and cellar techniques in the 1860s that were considered prescient in the 1880s."⁴¹

Among the three authors under my scrutiny Brian McGinty proved to be the most sympathetic to Haraszthy. McGinty's main ambition was to reformulate and modernize the legend of his great-grandfather, Ágoston Haraszthy. Not unlike Thomas Pinney, he also argued that "the early writers who chose to call Haraszthy the 'father of California viticulture' chose their word inexpertly, for the word 'father' does connote a kind of primacy in time, and there is no doubt that there were winemakers before Haraszthy [in Califor-

nia].” But if the term father “means a man who came on a winemaking community that in the early 1850s was so tiny as to be barely recognizable as an industry and, in the course of a dozen years, built it by force of his example and preachments into one of the most important agricultural industries in California — indeed, in the whole United States — he was surely the ‘father’.” Nevertheless, McGinty recommended that “another term might have described him more appropriately. He might have been called ‘The First Important Commercial Winemaker in California’ or ‘The First Pioneer of California Viticulture’ or ‘The Great Name in California Wine Industry’.” Regarding the problem of the importation of the Zinfandel grape into California by Haraszthy, McGinty tried to separate it from question of the general role of the Hungarian in the promotion of viticulture in the Golden State, and his opinion also proved to be more sympathetic in this respect. According to him “my research has uncovered no direct evidence either proving or disproving that Ágoston Haraszthy was the first man to bring the Zinfandel into California, [but] I have found some new and intriguing evidence that he could well have been that man.”⁴² As mentioned before, Thomas Pinney and Charles Sullivan unequivocally rejected this idea.

On the basis of the works of the revisionist school we can clearly dismiss the notion that it was Ágoston Haraszthy who started to grow vine and make wine in California, or who first imported European grape varieties into the Golden State. It is also highly probable that he was not the man who introduced the Zinfandel grape into California. But it is also my impression that it was not the intent of these authors to diminish Haraszthy’s stature completely. They simply wanted to offer a more realistic picture of Haraszthy’s activities in California. All three of them acknowledge the important role he played in the promotion of wine-making on the West Coast of the United States. And for us Hungarians this flamboyant and interesting character means much more. He remains the author of the second travelogue about the United States that had ever been published in Hungary, and a man who played an important role in the early history of Hungarian-American interactions. I have no doubt that we remain faithful to his memory even if we strive to formulate a more realistic picture of his activities in California and elsewhere.

NOTES

¹ Mokcsai Haraszthy Ágoston, *Utazás Éjszakamerikában I-II.* (Pest, 1844). On the impact of Haraszthy’s book in contemporary Hungary see: Géza Závodszy,

American Effects on Hungarian Imagination and Political Thought 1558-1848. (Highland Lakes, New Jersey: Atlantic Research and Publications, Inc. 1996), 186-187.

² Závodszy, *American Effects*, pp. 233-237. Farkas's book was published originally with the title *Útazás Észak Amerikában* [Journey in North America] (Kolozsvár: János Tilsch Jr., 1834). One English translation of it is by Theodore and Helen Benedek Schoenman (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1977).

³ Thomas Pinney, *A History of Wine in America. Volume I. From the Beginnings to Prohibition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Charles Lewis Sullivan, *Zinfandel: a History of Grape and its Wine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Brian McGinty, *Strong Wine. The Life and Legend of Agoston Haraszthy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁴ Péter Sente, "Egy elfelejtett Amerikás magyar — Haraszthy Ágoston," *Századok*, CXII (1978), 112. *Magyar Nagylexikon*. Vol. 9 (Budapest: Magyar Nagylexikon kiadó, 1999), 215. *Amerikától Óceániáig. XIX. századi magyar utazók*, ed. Mária Dornbach (Budapest: Park kiadó, 2006), 41.

⁵ McGinty, *Strong Wine*, p. 4.

⁶ Sente, "Egy elfelejtett," p. 112. Béla S. Várdy, *Magyarok az Újvilágban. Az Észak-Amerikai magyarság rendhagyó története* (Budapest: Magyar Nyelv és Kultúra Nemzetközi Társasága, 2000), 39. McGinty, *Strong Wine*, pp. 24-25.

⁷ Sente, "Egy elfelejtett", p.112; Várdy, *Magyarok az Újvilágban*, p. 39; McGinty, *Strong Wine*, pp. 24-25.

⁸ On the sympathy of contemporary American public towards the Polish insurrection see Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Volume I* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963.), 302-303. On the Haraszthy's custom of styling himself "colonel" see Várdy, *Magyarok az Újvilágban*, pp. 39, 110. McGinty, *Strong Wine*, 26-27.

⁹ McGinty, *Strong Wine*, p. 3.

¹⁰ Zoltán Sztáray, *Haraszthy Ágoston, a kaliforniai szőlőkultúra atyja* (San Bernardino: Kossuth Foundation, 1964), 8. Béla Várdy devoted a whole chapter in his book to the topic of Hungarian pseudo-aristocrats in America. Várdy, *Magyarok az Újvilágban*, pp. 108-121.

¹¹ The opinion of Sztáray is quoted by Sente, "Egy elfelejtett," p. 113; McGinty, *Strong Wine*, p. 26.

¹² On the details of the investigation against Haraszthy see Sente "Egy elfelejtett," pp. 113-114.

¹³ On the impact of the European and Hungarian revolutions of 1848-49 in the United States see: Csaba Lévai, "Charles Loring Brace és Magyarország képe az Amerikai Egyesült Államokban, 1848-1852," in Charles Loring Brace, *Magyarország 1851-ben* (Gödöllő: Attraktor, 2005), 293-327. Timothy M. Roberts – Daniel W. Howe, "The United States and the Revolutions of 1848," in *The Revolutions in*

Europe 1848-1849. From Reform to Reaction, ed. R.J.W. Evans and H.P. Strandman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 157-179.

¹⁴ Jenő Pivány, *Magyar-amerikai történelmi kapcsolatok a Columbus előtti időktől az amerikai polgárháború befejezéséig* (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1926) p. 30. Ödön Vasváry, *Magyar Amerika* (Szeged: 1988), 187.

¹⁵ *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon Volume I*, (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1967), p. 675. Mihály Sárkány, ‘Haraszthy Ágoston’, in *Messzi népek magyar kutatói*, ed. Tibor Bodrogi (Budapest: Gondolat, 1978), 151. Várdy, *Magyarok az Újvilágban*, pp. 39-40, 89. Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, p. 140., pp. 277-278. On page 140 Pinney mentions that an American viticulturalist named John Adlum had published several treatises on wine-making in the 1820s well before the publication of Haraszthy’s work. On pages 277-278 Pinney analyzes Haraszthy’s work and he mentions that it was not the first in America. It was only the first such treatise written by a Californian.

¹⁶ <http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/haraszthy>

¹⁷ <http://metapedia.org/wiki/haraszthy>

¹⁸ Even the English language Wikipedia site contains one mistake. In contrast to it Haraszthy was not the first Hungarian who settled in the United States permanently. Sándor Bölöni Farkas who visited the country in 1831 met several Hungarians living in the United States permanently. See: Sándor Bölöni Farkas, *Journey in North America, 1831* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-Clio, 1978), 158-159, 206.

¹⁹ *Dictionary of American Biography. Volume IV*, A. Johnson and D. Malone eds. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960), p. 236.

²⁰ Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, p. 269.

²¹ McGinty, *Strong Wine*, pp. 41-44.

²² Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, pp. 272-273. Sullivan, *Zinfandel*, p. 55.

²³ Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, pp. 272 and 275.

²⁴ Agoston Haraszthy, *Report on Grapes and Wine in California*, (Sacramento: 1859); Sullivan, *Zinfandel*, pp. 55-56.

²⁵ Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, p. 276.

²⁶ On Haraszthy’s European trip see Sullivan, p. 56; Pinney, pp. 275-277.

²⁷ Agoston Haraszthy, *Grape Culture, Wines and Wine-Making, with Notes upon Agriculture and Horticulture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1862); Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, p. 277.

²⁸ Sztáray is quoted by Sente, “Egy elfelejtett,” p. 122.

²⁹ Haraszthy’s instructions are quoted by Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, p. 279; see also Sullivan, *Zinfandel*, p. 57.

³⁰ Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, pp. 279-280.

³¹ Sullivan, *Zinfandel*, p. 57; Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, p. 280.

³² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/zinfandel>

-
- ³³ Sullivan, *Zinfandel*, p. 57.
- ³⁴ Sullivan, *Zinfandel*, pp. 63-71; Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, pp. 280-281.
- ³⁵ Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, p. 281.
- ³⁶ McGinty, *Strong Wine*, pp. 45-46.
- ³⁷ On the genetic identification of the Zinfandel and the *crljenak kaštelanski* grape see <http://www.zinfandel.org>; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/zinfandel>
- ³⁸ <http://www.zinfandel.org>
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ Pinney, *A History of Wine in America*, p. 284.
- ⁴¹ Sullivan, *Zinfandel*, p. 58.
- ⁴² McGinty, *Strong Wine*, pp. 7-9.