

BARON VIKTOR DE DIRSZTAY – INFORMATION FROM NATIONAL LIBRARY OF HUNGARY

Administrator: Barbara Berecz

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Dear Julian Land,

Thank you for your enquiry. We found the following details about Baron Viktor Dirsztay and his family.

Baron Viktor Dirsztay (born in 1884 in Budapest, died in 1935 in Vienna) was a Hungarian writer, patron of the arts and social figure of Jewish origin. He is best known for his connections to the cultural elite of early 20th-century Vienna and Budapest, as well as for his psychoanalytic case studies.

The Dirsztay family (originally Fischl) was a wealthy Hungarian Jewish family that had attained noble and baronial titles, whose members played important roles in the economic and diplomatic life of the era.

Viktor's life in Budapest was deeply influenced by the family's immense wealth. His father, László Dirsztay (born László Fischl), and his uncle, Béla Dirsztay, were among the most influential wholesalers and bankers in Budapest of the era. The family owned apartment buildings in various parts of the capital and held significant interests in the grain trade and banking sector in Pest. Viktor was born into this upper-class Pest milieu, and his early years were shaped by prestigious social events, balls, and the elite clubs of Pest.

In accordance with the expectations of the time, Viktor completed his studies in Budapest. He attended the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences at the Royal Hungarian University of Budapest (today's ELTE). Although he graduated with a law degree, he was far more interested in the humanities, psychology, and literature than in dry legal paragraphs or his family's banking legacy. During his university years, he was a frequent visitor to Pest's progressive intellectual communities, where he was introduced to the modern artistic and scientific movements of the turn of the century.

After he married Irén Leto (Ilona de Lousada), Budapest became their shared family home. The family lived in an apartment within one of the grand buildings funded by the Dirsztay fortune. By this time, Viktor's life in Budapest was characterized by a sense of duality: while Irén managed the household in Pest and raised the children, Viktor became increasingly estranged from the traditional role of a family patriarch.

It was an open secret in Pest's social circles that the young baron behaved strangely: he suffered from severe hypochondria (he was terrified of infections and illnesses) and was

notorious for his sudden outbursts of anger and fits of rage. After a while, Budapest became a source of tension and family expectations for him, from which he compulsively sought escape. Therefore, he spent less time in Pest and more time in Vienna—on Sigmund Freud’s couch—or in various luxury sanatoriums across Europe.

Although Viktor wrote and published his works primarily in German (in Austria and Germany), he also tried to make a name for himself in Budapest as a patron and literary figure. During the peak of Pest’s café culture and the rise of the Nyugat generation, he provided financial support to artists, but in Budapest he was never able to break free from the role of the “wealthy but eccentric dilettante.” Critics and society in Pest focused more on his fortune and quirks than on his literary talent. His life in Budapest finally came to an end in the early 1920s, following his divorce from Irén Leto, when he relocated permanently to Vienna.

Ilona:

According to official genealogical records and the Petőfi Literary Museum (PIM Name Database), Irén Leto is in fact Viktor Dirsztay’s first wife—the Ilona mentioned previously.

Year of birth: 1881. The exact date of her death has not been preserved in the available genealogical records.

At the time of her marriage, her name was Ilona de Losada (full name: Ilona Maria Francisca Josefa de Lousada / de Leto-Losada), and she was one of the twin daughters from the princely branch of the Lousada family. Official Hungarian and international certificates refer to her alternately as Irén Leto, Ilona de Lousada, or by her full name.

Origin of the name Leto: The wife’s family, the de Letos, was an extensive aristocratic house with Southern Italian (Neapolitan/Sicilian) roots that had intermarried with the Anglo-Portuguese, princely branch of the Lousada family. For this reason, official Hungarian sources often simplified her name to “Irén Leto” in civil registers. On her father’s side, she belonged to the de Leto marquises of Sicilian descent, and on her mother’s side, to the Portuguese-British house of Lousada, which held princely rank.

Social status: Because her vast European connections allowed her to move comfortably within English, Italian, and Austrian aristocratic circles, her marriage into the Dirsztay family—a newly ennobled Hungarian family of Jewish descent that had acquired a baronial title—was considered a significant social achievement.

Year of marriage: 1912. Although the children’s birth years (Zoltán in 1902, Anna in 1905) suggest they had been living together earlier, their official marriage—both legally and ecclesiastically registered—took place in 1912. The marriage lasted slightly more than ten years.

Year of divorce: around 1923. The couple divorced permanently around 1923, as Viktor Dirsztay married his second wife, Klara Unreichet, in Vienna in 1924.

Reasons for the divorce:

1. Mental health issues and psychological instability: The divorce was primarily caused by Viktor Dirsztay's severe mental health issues and emotional turmoil, which made family life completely untenable. We know from Freud's notes and his correspondence with Sándor Ferenczi that Viktor was an unstable, hypochondriacal, and deeply anxious individual who suffered from fits of rage and obsessions.

2. Compulsive travel and estrangement: Viktor traveled compulsively throughout Europe to escape his illness and inner restlessness. He frequently left his wife and children behind while moving from one sanatorium to another.

3. Artistic bohemianism and impoverishment: Viktor spent most of the family fortune on supporting Viennese avant-garde artists (such as Oskar Kokoschka) and on his own, misunderstood literary ambitions. Irén Leto ultimately could not endure the constant existential and psychological uncertainty and, to protect the children, decided to separate and eventually divorce. Following the divorce, Irén Leto withdrew completely from the Dirsztay family's life.

During their marriage and in their daily lives, Irén Leto and Viktor Dirsztay divided their time between Budapest and Vienna, but their family home—where they raised their children—was in Budapest. Their children (Zoltán and Anna) also grew up there.

After the separation, Irén Leto stayed in Hungary with the children and traveled throughout Europe thanks to her international family connections.

Viktor and Ilona Dirsztay had two children:

Zoltán Viktor Dirsztay: Born in Debrecen in 1902. (He is also listed in official nobility registers as Zoltan Victor de Dirsztay de Leto-Losada.)

Far fewer public sources and literary records have survived about his life than about his father's.

While his sister, Anna Dirsztay (Anna Bórai), was deported in 1944 and murdered in Auschwitz, Zoltán—presumably with the help of Lousada relatives living abroad who held British citizenship or had ties to Britain through his mother's side—managed to escape the territory of the Third Reich and Hungary, thus surviving the Holocaust.

He died in 1981 at the age of 79. Domestic sources do not specify the exact location of his death, but international genealogical research records it as having occurred while he was in exile abroad (in Anglo-Saxon or Western European countries).

Zoltán's life story represents one of the rare branches of the Dirsztay family that survived the 20th-century destruction in Central Europe.

Anna Dirsztay (Anna Bórai): Born in 1905. She was murdered in 1944 at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. (This tragic fate befell the entire family: in addition to Anna Dirsztay, other relatives also perished in the camps; for example, her cousin from Vienna, Andreas Dirsztay, also died in Auschwitz.)

In the first half of the 20th century, under the influence of growing anti-Semitism and social assimilation, some members of the family, including Anna, opted for Hungarian-sounding surnames. Anna adopted and used the surname Bórai (sometimes spelled Bóray) in her daily life and social circles to obscure the Dirsztay name, which was widely known to have Jewish roots despite being a baronial title.

Sincerely,

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Tárgy: Baron Victor de Dirsztay

Hi

Are you able to help me with this man? He is listed with the Dirsztays in Bela Kempelen's 'Hungarian Jewish Families'. His life in Vienna is well-known, including his second wife Klara Unreich.

But his life in Budapest is less well-known. For example his first marriage (to Ilona?, date of marriage, and divorce 1912?), and his children Zoltan? and Anna? (their dates of birth).

Many thanks

Julian Land