

# Comrade Baron

## A journey through the vanishing world of the Transylvanian aristocracy

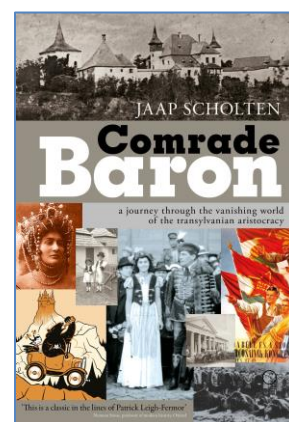
Winner of the Libris History Prize 2011 and shortlisted for the Bob den Uyl  
Prize for best travel book 2011. Now available for the first time in English

By Jaap Scholten

5<sup>th</sup> May 2016

*Comrade Baron* will be launched at an event, hosted by BBC presenter, Petroc  
Trelawny, at the Hungarian Cultural Centre, London, on 4<sup>th</sup> May. Jaap Scholten will be  
in the UK, w/b 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

A best-seller in The Netherlands with more than 30,000 copies sold, *Comrade Baron* has  
been translated into French, Hungarian and Romanian.

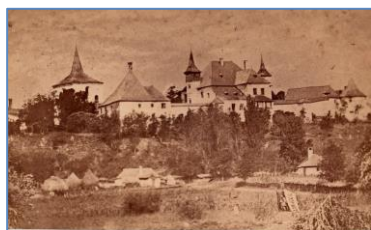


An extraordinary, passionate and important work, *Comrade Baron* is “in part, an oral history of a group we know  
little about, in part the account of a journey through one of the most beautiful and mysterious regions of Europe  
and in part a record of a Dutchman’s impressions on finding himself in an extraordinary  
milieu in the company of some exceptional families.”



In the darkness of the early morning of 3 March 1949, practically  
all of the Transylvanian aristocracy were arrested in their beds  
and loaded onto trucks. That same day the Romanian Workers’  
Party was pleased to announce the successful deportation and

dispossession of all large landowners. Communism demanded the destruction of these  
ultimate class enemies. Taken away with just the clothes they stood up in, what happened to these once mighty  
families? Their stories, as told first-hand in this fascinating and enlightening book, are ones of hardship and fear  
but also of determination, solidarity, family tradition, resilience and indomitable spirit...



Jaap Scholten lives in Budapest, which is where, in 2006, he first heard about the  
nocturnal mass deportation of the Transylvanian nobility. Fascinated by their  
plight, he determined to track down as many of the older members of the  
former aristocracy as he could, recording their stories before they were lost

forever. His journey took him the length and breadth of Transylvania (a magical land that comes to vivid life through descriptions in the book), to apartment blocks, slums and ruined castles, and brought him face-to-face with a group of rare and fascinating families with an extraordinary tale to tell.

Supported by a selection of black and white photographs and told through poignant and illuminating first-hand conversations, **Comrade Baron** is their story - from the days that preceded communism to after the communists came to power and through to the modern day.

Grand houses were exchanged for homes in cellars, attics, laundry rooms and sculleries and pleasure-seeking lifestyles for work in quarries, steelworks or domestic service. Interrogation was a daily occurrence and many were sent to hard labour in the Romanian gulags. Yet despite living under terrifying conditions, inflicted upon them firstly by Gheorghiu-Dej and later Ceauşescu, the aristocrats were leading a double life. Secretly gathering at night, they maintained the rituals of an older world – *“they carried on kissing hands and using other formal gestures, their conversations were governed by long established rules... They met in cellars to play bridge, rummy and canasta. They read poetry aloud and made music. The older aristocrats taught the children foreign languages and gave them music lessons.”* In contrast, as Jaap travels through Romania and observes the behaviour of the new Romanian elite –extravagant behaviour at parties and restaurants, driving their Mercedes and SUV’s – he recognizes what has been lost and consider how best to rebuild a country in a moral vacuum.

**Jaap Scholten** studied Industrial Design at the Technical University in Delft, Graphic Design at the Willem de Kooning Academy of Arts in Rotterdam (BA), and Social Anthropology at the Central European University in Budapest (MA). He is the award winning author of seven books, novels and short story collections. *Comrade Baron* is his first non-fiction book. Jaap has lived in Budapest since 2003. His Hungarian wife is of noble descent and distantly related to some of the families in the book.

**To arrange an interview with Jaap Scholten or for a review copy of *Comrade Baron*, contact**

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Comrade Baron

Jaap Scholten

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*“I have enjoyed this book so much - such a great tale, with brilliant original research and source material, and so many stories, tragic, humiliating, painful, yet all engrossing and highly readable”*

**Petroc Trelawny, BBC presenter and journalist**

*‘This is a classic in the lines of Patrick Leigh-Fermor and it should be on the shelves of anyone interested in Mitteleuropa.’* **Norman Stone, Professor of Modern History, Oxford**