

PÁZMÁNY PÉTER CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

HAJNALKA SEBESTYÉN

THE HISTORY OF THE GUARD

in the mid-17th century

DOCTORAL (PhD) THESIS

Pázmány Péter Catholic University
Doctoral School of History, supervisor: Dr. Sándor Óze DSc
Workshop on Social and Lifestyle History, led by Prof. Dr. József Ö. Kovács

Supervisor:
Dr. Zsuzsanna J. Újváry PhD, associate professor

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I. Background, sources and problem statement

As a student of the Social and Lifestyle History Workshop at the Doctoral School of History at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Pázmány Péter Catholic University, I began to study the history of Órség on the recommendation of my teachers, Dr. Vera Zimányi and Dr. Zsuzsanna J. Zsuzsanna Újváry, I began to study the history of Órség based on two censuses from the mid-17th century found in the Batthyány family archives. Since the time of the Hungarian conquest, the Órség region has been home to peoples with a special status, enjoying a certain degree of independence and freedom, who guarded and defended the borders of the Hungarian state. However, their guarding role gradually became symbolic with the development of royal border protection, and in 1391, King Sigismund of Luxembourg donated their lands, largely reducing them to serfdom. In 1524, they came into the possession of the Batthyány family and remained with this noble family until the emancipation of the serfs in 1848. The two Hungarian-language censuses were compiled in 1648 and 1651 during the Turkish occupation and the associated double taxation by¹, the then landowner of the area, Ádám Batthyány I, who, as captain-general of Transdanubia, re-employed them as soldiers and retained or restored their privileges in whole or in part. Several excellent studies have been written on the history, population, and economy of Órség, but no comprehensive work has yet been written using all the data from the censuses. That is why I undertook to prepare a social, economic, and microhistorical analysis of 17th-century Órség.

The aim of the research was therefore to present the life of the people of Órség in the 17th century in two time periods, which I also compared with an economic census of Transdanubia 50 years later². The sources are supplemented, enriched and brought to life by the petitions written to Ádám Batthyány I,³ missives,⁴ documents relating to the Turks,⁵ contemporary military registers,⁶ and the tax records of hajduks and soldiers, which I also used.⁷

¹Hungarian National Archives, hereinafter referred to as MNL OL Batthyány family archives, Urbáriumok P1322,

²In 1696, Leopold I ordered a census to be taken in the counties of Transdanubia in connection with the planned tax reform, which resulted in the 1697 census of Órség. Kálmán BENDA (ed.), *Historical Chronology of Hungary*, Volume II, 1526-1848. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1982. 519; HU MNL OL E 156-a. Fas.039 - No. 058. March 31, 1697. Prepared by Paul Wibmer.

³MNL OL Batthyány family archives, P 1322, Central Körmen Administration Archives, Supplicationum merita 1642, 1645,1646,1648,1649.

⁴MNL OL Batthyány family archives, Missives, P 1314

⁵MNL OL Batthyány family archives, Documents related to Turkey II. P 1313.

⁶BATTHYÁNY-STRATTMAN László Museum, Körmen, Historical Documentation Collection, http://muzeumkormend.hu/sites/default/files/csatolt-fajl/palyazat/2016-12-29/nka_rest_2013.pdf 2022.

⁷MNL OL, Batthyány family archives, P 1322/35. Sept. 7, 1640. Volume 42, p. 346.

In my work, I sought answers to three questions.

The first question is how the soldier-peasants of Órség experienced the war conditions caused by the occupation, how they were classified in terms of serf status, whether they were soldiers, guards, serfs, or free men, and what their duties and obligations were. What was their social, economic, and financial background like? Were they poorer or richer than the serfs living with them in the Órség? Furthermore, how did their situation differ, if at all, from that of the inhabitants of hajdú settlements in other parts of the country?

In the second set of questions, I sought to answer whether the social and economic situation of all the inhabitants of the 18 villages in the Órség region, whether they were serfs, stewards, majors, hajdú, soldiers, tenant farmers with houses, (Inquilinus) or tenant farmers without houses (Subinquilinus), carpenters, etc., and if so, how did it differ from the situation of the inhabitants of other areas of Hungary threatened or conquered by the Turks at that time.

The third question concerned the comparison of the two main sources; what changes had taken place in the three years between the two censuses. In this work, I have endeavored to examine and present the smallest units of society, namely families and their living conditions, in the greatest detail.

II. Other sources and methods of research

As a first step, I processed the data from the two main censuses in an Excel spreadsheet by village, family, animals, plot size, number of children, and their ages. Then I looked for the families and children recorded in 1648 in the 1651 census. Ideally, I found both the family and the children without exception, and even the number of children born during the three years enriched the research with new data. Often, however, I found no trace of a child or family in 1651. I also presented the changes in the two data sets in tables and graphs. I then collected all the books, studies, other censuses, letters, petitions, and registers I could find about Órség, which helped to paint a picture of the economic and social background typical of the mid-17th century. The various sources provided a unique and deeper insight into the lives of the people and families of Órség, which may also fill a gap in terms of personal and family sources on peasant society.

I was able to draw relatively accurate conclusions about the size of the population from the details, as I counted one spouse for each man listed, unless he was noted as a widower, and added the number of children to the number of adults thus obtained. After processing the population data, I also examined the changes in the number of animals for the three years. If

only these data series had been available to me, this alone would have drawn attention to a sad, declining process that took place between 1648 and 1651.

I then systematized the number and size of the plots and the differences between the two censuses. I found the smallest changes in these data sets. The data was enriched by a purely economic census in German from 1697. Although this census was compiled for completely different purposes and from different perspectives than the previous two, I was able to use it effectively in terms of the size of cultivated and uncultivated plots, the identity of family names, and the number and change in population. I tried to examine these changes from several perspectives. This census contained less data on family status, only the names of the serfs, the size of their plots, and the number of their children by gender, but without their ages. However, in addition to the number of large livestock, oxen, cows, calves, and horses, it also includes smaller animals not included in previous censuses, such as pigs, goats, sheep, beehives, as well as grain varieties such as wheat, rye, barley, oats, the amount of hay per cart, vineyards, and finally the number of tenant farmers living in other houses. I have included the number of smaller animals only as a matter of interest, because although we can assume that the same types of animals were bred fifty years earlier, in the same way and probably in similar proportions, they are not included in earlier censuses, so it was only possible to calculate their ratio to the population and make comparisons for large animals.

However, I tried to examine hay production in 1697 in more detail, because data on this was also included in earlier censuses, although it was not recorded in the same way. In 1648 and 1651, the hayfields belonging to the plots were recorded at the end of the villages; *"Here, three carts of hay are produced for an entire place. The land is worth 12 cubic meters."*⁸ In 1697, however, it was written down for each registered taxpayer serf how many carts of hay he personally had.

In Őrség, the writing of the history of the period under review was aided and supplemented by Turkish letters in Hungarian concerning the area, found in the Batthyány Archives and transcribed by former students of the PPKE BTK Doctoral School⁹ and, last but not least, by the petitions (supplications) addressed to Ádám Batthyány between 1642 and 1651. Ádám between 1642 and 1651.¹⁰ From these letters and petitions, we can learn not only how the wars, epidemics, Turkish demands, and raids of the period affected the lives of the area's

⁸ MNL OL, Batthyány family archives, Urb., Census of the village of Ispánk, p. 434. (1648)

⁹ MNL OL Batthyány family archives, Documents related to Turkey II. P 1313 ; P1315 Missiles.

¹⁰ MNL OL, P 1322, 1642. 1645. 1646. 1648. 1649.

inhabitants, but also how they lived, argued, fought, litigated, and complained. I found a wealth of data in the large collections of the Batthyány Archives, in the *Acta Antiqua*, in the documents of the Földesúri family, and in the military records. My work was greatly aided by my visits to Órség, especially the materials at the Edit Szikszay Museum in Óriszentpéter, as well as my telephone conversations with Gyula Benczik, a former colleague and researcher at the Vas County Archives, from which I learned a great deal. I would like to thank all of them for this.

III. Main results of the research

The research provides the following information about the guards and soldiers mentioned in the first question: among the military settlement customs typical of the era, the guards stand out as unique because the armed guards were allowed to remain in their places even after they had ceased to serve as soldiers. An examination of the family and economic status of the armed people of Órség showed that they lived not only in the two military settlements of Szentpéter and Szalafő, but in all the villages. The ratio of armed guards to the total population was 2.7% in 1648 and 2.5% in 1651. A military register from 1640 lists 71 guards and hajduks, of whom only ten were still alive in 1651. Among the 1,462 examined petitions written to Ádám Batthyány in 1642-43, I found 156 guard petitions and 181 petitioners, including 69 soldiers () – a total of 140 people between 1640 and 1651 – of whom I found 15 in 1648 and 1651, 14 soldiers only had their families, presumably their children or family names, and the rest did not even have their family names. Either they were not residents of the border region, or they were no longer alive. Various sources report that the Turks treated the captured soldiers and hajduks with particular cruelty, kidnapping their children first and foremost, and that the captured soldiers were rarely released for ransom, but were mostly tortured and killed. The loss of soldiers' children was 51, which was proportionally much higher than that of serfs' children. The writings also reveal that almost all of the 140 soldiers owned land (an average of 1/3 of a plot), for which they had previously paid taxes together. However, during the reign of Ádám I Batthyány, they were registered together with the other inhabitants of the guard district and generally enjoyed tax exemption for only one quarter of a plot, while they had to pay tax on the rest, if they had any. But they did not have to do forced labor; they received clothing and provisions from Ádám I Batthyány as long as they served as soldiers. The proportion of horsemen from Szentpéter was 3.3%–5% of the entire cavalry, while the proportion of foot soldiers was 19%, meaning that practically every fifth soldier in Ádám Batthyány I's army was from the Órség region. The lists the names of 60 armed men in two

censuses, of whom 19 were soldiers and 19 were hajduks, meaning that there were 38 men in the ranks in both years .

In the second set of questions, I compared the conditions in the Órség with the results of research conducted in one area in Transdanubia (Rohonc-Szalónak) and two areas in northern Hungary (Diósgyőr Castle and its surroundings, and Magyaróvár). These areas were chosen because all three had economic and/or social conditions similar to those of Órség at the time. The research revealed that the plowed fields in Magyaróvár were of better quality than the clayey, hilly fields in Órség, and the number of farms there increased by 11% during that period, while the number in Órség decreased. Diósgyőr Castle is also located on the edge of the occupied territory, and condominium, or double taxation, was also implemented there. Both places have serfs, but while in Órség the term refers to the settlement structure, in Miskolc it refers to the role of the serfs. The number of households was similar to that in Órség, at 5.18 persons per household. I compared certain data from the Rohonc-szalónaki estate owned by the Batthyány family with data from Órség, where, similarly, but with one bushel of grain more, they paid more tax per plot than in Órség. The average population of villages in Hungary and the occupied territories was 140, while in Órség it was only 130 and 125, respectively.

In the third section, I compared the population and wealth of the Órség region in 1648 with those of three years later. The number of inhabitants decreased from 2,208 in 1648 to 2,129 in 1651. In 1648, there were 1,087 children in Órség, and 267 children were born before the next census, so there should have been 1,354 children, but instead, only 1,035 children were recorded in 1651; 319 had moved away, died, or been kidnapped. In some villages, we encounter tragic numbers. In Kotormánszeg, for example, there were 37 boys in 1648, but only 23 in 1651. In Szalafő, the number of boys fell from 98 to 74, and the number of girls from 59 to only 27. The most likely explanation for this large difference is the aforementioned Turkish child abductions, given that the missing children were generally between the ages of 8 and 12, who were perhaps not yet seriously affected by child mortality and had not yet reached marriageable age. As the letters reveal, child abduction was a favorite "custom" of the Turks and a means of coercion to "emphasize" their various demands. The documents reveal that 56 children were taken from Szentpéter in 1650, and the 1651 census shows the consequences of this tragedy. This is the third major child abduction we know of since 1615.

Of the 458 families in the guard, I found 71 stepchildren in 49 places where the head of the family lived and had probably remarried. Sources also indicate that 48 girls, 64 young men, and 49 widowed men remarried between 1648 and 1651, many of them probably to each other.

During those three years, 64 men, 49 women, and the aforementioned 319 children died or disappeared, a total of 432 people, or 20% of the population, which is tragic data in any case. The proportion of serfs also decreased from 3.73% to 3.05%.

In the 1697 economic census, only 549 people were recorded, which means 32 people per village. The main reason for this was the destruction caused by the wars to repel the Turks.

The lives of the people living in the 18 villages of Órség were also affected by countless other factors besides those mentioned above. In addition to their border defense duties, the land was not of very good quality, and they also had to contend with the terrain and the difficulties of animal husbandry.

In terms of livestock, in 1648 there were 296 horses, 959 cows, 610 calves, and 657 oxen, which amounted to 0.7 horses, 2.2 cows, 1.4 calves, and 1.5 oxen per farm, for a total average of 5.84 animals. These animal numbers had fallen dramatically by 1651, with 95 fewer horses, 161 fewer cows, 222 fewer calves, and 198 fewer oxen, which threatened plowing and harvesting, further weakening the quality of life of the inhabitants.

Serf services in the Órség region are already mentioned in the 1576 urbarium, according to which, for an entire plot of land, on St. George's and St. Michael's Day, 40-40 denarii of census, two bushels of wheat, one bushel each of rye and oats, 12 hens, 20 eggs, one meszely of butter, and one meszely of cottage cheese. Together, they paid 24 forints in ox money, 22 forints in servant money, and 12 forints in farmhand money. These items did not change significantly for 100 years.

From an agricultural point of view, Órség was one of the poorest regions in Hungary. The three-field crop rotation system, which was considered modern at the time, was not practiced here. Clearing culture continued to dominate the landscape because the clay located close to the surface, the high rainfall, and the high degree of lime deficiency in the soil only created poor farming opportunities. The hayfields were exhausted within 10-20 years, then burned out and overgrown with scrub, which even animals avoided. Here, as in other parts of the country, it was not whole fields but small plots that were typical. In 1648, 478 smallholdings shared 184 whole plots, of which 21.6 whole plots were classified as wasteland, with 39 smallholdings. In 1651, there were 498 smallholdings out of 198 whole plots, of which 20.5 whole plots remained wasteland, with 35 smallholdings. It is interesting to note that the 1651 census included 15 more whole plots. The main reason for this was Pankasz, which was not included in the 1648 census because it had a different landlord, but by 1651 the situation had changed, with 15 working plots and 6 uncultivated plots covering a total area of 11.25 whole

plots. From the two censuses, it appears that the serfs farmed on smaller plots, mainly half and third plots, as the larger plots required more work. The actual size of a plot in today's terms could be estimated based on the 1697 census, when plots and wastelands were also given in acres. 45.75 The entire working area covered 710 acres, which means 15.5 acres per plot, and in reality, these 172 plots were shared, which means 4.13 acres per household. The 15.5 acres in Órség was only half, at most three-quarters, of the average plot size at the time, which was typically 20-30 acres throughout the country. Of the 17 villages listed in Órség, eight had mills, six on the Kerka River and two on the "Kis" stream. Although milling was a landowner's right, the people of Órség were in a special position in this respect, because peasant mills were used for grinding and were not subject to tax, and they successfully defended this right even against the Turks.

Their trade, which was controlled by the Hungarians throughout the country and tolerated by the two great powers even during wartime, and in which mainly the people of Hodos and Kapornak were involved, was hampered by the destruction caused by bands of robbers and the closures caused by epidemics. They had to pay taxes to their landlords and to the Turks who forced them into submission. Neither they nor their children were safe from Turkish raids, taxes, and slavery, and their ranks were decimated by the dreaded Black Death, the plague, just like the populations of other regions of the country. In addition to all this, they also fought for their Reformed faith, which they managed to preserve despite the increasingly powerful spread of recatholization. Yet despite all these difficulties, the people of Órség retained some of their centuries-old freedoms, provided soldiers, stood guard and fought against the enemy of the time, the Turks, reported troop movements and defended their homeland as best they could.

IV. Publications on the subject

SEBESTYÉN Hajnalka, *The History of the Plague, with Special Reference to Epidemics in Hungary*, Janus Pannonius University, Faculty of Humanities, Pécs, 1997. Thesis

SEBESTYÉN Hajnalka, *The soldier-peasants of the guard during the reign of Ádám Batthyány I*, In: J. ÚJVÁRY Zsuzsanna (ed.), *Ádám Batthyány and his circle*, PPKE BTK, Piliscsaba, 2013. 37–44.

SEBESTYÉN Hajnalka, *A brief overview and comparison of the supplications received by Ádám Batthyány I in 1642 and 1643*, In: J. ÚJVÁRY Zsuzsanna (ed.), *Everyday Life in the Shadow of the Turks*, PPKE BTK, Pázmány Historical Workshop, Doctoral School of History, Khronosz, Piliscsaba, 2008. 143–154.

SEBESTYÉN Hajnalka, *The everyday life of soldier and hajdú families in the Órség region in the mid-17th century*, Conference presentation, 2019.

SEBESTYÉN Hajnalka, *The economic history of the Órség estate in the mid-17th century*, Conference presentation, 2020.