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Dissertation abstracts

The Szeri Pósaft family
The History of a Wealthy Noble Family in the 14th– 15th centuries

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I.

Originally, the history of Szer (the eponymous estate of the examined family) made me become interested in the history of the Szeri Pósa family. To my surprise, the latest discussion about the medieval owners of the village was written by János Karácsonyi who dedicated a chapter on the history of the Pósa's in his academic dissertation published in 1897. So as I spent more time by examining the family history at completeness, it became clearer that the research would provide a wider range of knowledge about the Pósa's that goes beyond local history results which I initially intended to cover.

The significance of the Szeri Pósa family lies not particularly in their ownership of Szer, but in the fact that they used to play a significant role during the middle ages and that they used to be one of the most influential families of the South-Alföld region. Due to the excellence of the family founder, Szeri Pósa and his descendants, the Pósa's managed to rise from the stratum of medium landowners. Their wealth and prestige made it possible for them to gain a foothold amongst the castle-owning nobles, a social group in medieval Hungary that used to be a relatively prominent stratum between the prestigious barons and wealthy medium landowners. The status and role of the families who belonged to this group were special since they often had the chance to have a share in power, though to lesser extent, but at least further political and social rise was attainable for them.

In my dissertation I have examined the history and political role – interrelated to the social background – of the Pósa family as an example of the castle-owning nobles from their first recorded mentioning (1306) until the male line died out (1471). I intended to identify and investigate how much certain historical events and circumstances, together with the way how the family responded to them, influenced and contributed to the developing status of the family.

II.

The research method I used in the course of making the dissertation was data acquisition aiming at completeness. In addition to the special literature about them, I have examined primarily the Pósa archives that preserved almost 300 charters. On the other hand, I acquired data from the records of authoritative local and ecclesiastical bodies along with family archives near their estates in Southern Hungary. Discussing the family history, instead of applying the traditional approach, that is, dealing with possessory actions (often lasting for many years) in details I concentrated on the history and political role of the family members

in both local and general events which examination was interrelated to their social background. The source base I finally gained, which became much broader than the one used in the former publications, enabled me to sort out the relatively abundant data from primary sources in accordance with the principle above. The aim required the use and combination of various research methods and approaches as well as the grouping and selection of the data of legal cases recorded in the documents in terms of genealogy, archontology and prosopography. Furthermore, sometimes the data could be used to find and locate the sojourn of family members as well. These means helped the identification of the leading family members and the compilation of their biography (their offices and duties, their roles as retainers, family relations) through which the family history was to be introduced. Although, I intended to highlight these aspects of their history, the dissertation does not exclude the examination of their possessions. The original location of the Pósaft's wealth was in Csongrád county but as time passed by they managed to enlarge their assets in the southern counties as well (Arad, Krassó and Temes) which highly determined their social status besides providing them with power and prestige. The paper, therefore, includes a data store on their estates and concerning affairs which summarises their possessions one by one county wise.

It has to be emphasised that this dissertation intends to reach further aims, namely, to serve as a reference for socio-historical works elaborated in the future. With the study of the Pósaft family I am aiming at the organic processing of medieval families and kinships that originates back to János Karácsonyi's monumental work published in the early 20th century. In line with this, the dissertation tries to provide material for comparative historiography so as to enable the composition of a comprehensive socio-historical work about the medieval social stratum, the castle-owning nobles. As far as recent family history or socio-history studies are concerned (not a complete list: Erik, Fügedi: *Az Elefánthyak*; Pál, Engel: *A nemesi társadalom a középkori Ung megyében*; Tibor, Neumann: *A Korlátköviek*), they focused rather on the noble families of Northern, North-Eastern regions of historical Hungary. While in this respect, the examination of the Pósaft's may bring a new aspect of approach, as the reader can have an insight into the relations of a relatively poorly documented region of medieval Hungary, the Temesköz.

III.

The dissertation has eight chapters. The first includes the introduction, the objectives, the summary of the special literature about the family, the outline of the acquired sources and a brief description of the research methods. The second chapter deals with the origin of the

family. The Pósa family descended from the Szeri lineage of the time-honored Bár-Kalán kindred, their closest relatives were the members of the Ellősi family. They possessed jointly their lands that lay along the banks of River Tisza from Tiszaalpár to Szeged (including Szer, where the monastery of the kindred stood – hence their name) until the autumn of 1329 when they divided their estates.

All together there were six families that descended from the Bár-Kalán kindred, but it was the Pósa family who managed to rise from the wealthy medium landowners. The third chapter examines the background of that through the biography of Szeri Pósa (1306 †1352). In the early 14th century, similar to the majority of the impoverished descendants of genteel kindreds, Pósa might have started his career as a retainer of an oligarch. In his case, it might have been Kán László who he served. As his lord had yielded to Charles I in 1310, Pósa took the side of the monarch, who appointed him as the head (*ispán* - bailiff) of Krassó county as a honor in 1325, although, what Pósa had done to deserve it is not known. He held this office first together with the captainship of subordinated castles until 1346, while his second bailiffship lasted from 1350 to 1352. Szeri Pósa held a kind of “position of trust” since the honor of Krassó used to be one of the most lucrative honors of medieval Hungary, furthermore, it played a significant role in the defense of the country and served as a fine base for the offensive campaigns as well. Therefore, the position required utmost loyalty and military experience from the bearer. As a bailiff his duties ranged from judicial issues to the (re)population of desolate territories while his military activity was also outstanding. He participated in the campaign against Austria in 1328 and he was probably there at the unsuccessful attempt against Wallachia in 1330. Pósa commanded his banderial units against Serbia in 1339 and he was also siding Lajos I when he deployed troops in Transylvania in 1344. His participation in the first war against Naples (1347-48), though, not anymore as a bailiff, can be considered to be his greatest military activity, and from where he returned in 1350. In exchange for his services – besides the income he earned from the honor – he was donated well with estates which made him able to establish manorial centers (in Arad and in Krassó counties) that his descendants developed further during the years. All the factors mentioned above contributed to his personal rise, and consequently to the rise and growth in the prestige of his family. He was always addressed as *magister*. His office was significant enough to enable him to get access to the royal court and, therefore, to become the member of the second line of the political elite. For instance, he was one of the members of the lay jury who sentenced Felicián Záh in 1330 after he had tried to assassinate the king, and probably he had been present at the attempt in Visegrád as well. Moreover, his marriage policy also

reflects his social status and his ties with the court. Such families became related to the Pósa's due to Margit, the daughter of Pósa, like the honor-keeper Szántai Pető family, and later the Lackfi's, one of the most influential families of the Angevin-era.

The fourth chapter focuses on the biographies of the five sons of Pósa. Their father had already paved the way for them, therefore, they already had access to the royal court during Charles I. All of them were addressed *magister* from the beginning, what is more, the highest title within the court attendants' hierarchy, knight (*aule miles*), soon appeared next to their names, which shows that the sons of Pósa had good reputation in the court of Lajos. János (1326 †1350) became the second office holder of the family. The king appointed him the head of Krassó (1349-1350), and the same position was given to two of his brothers, László (1326 †1363) and István (1338 †1382) from 1351 and 1353. Meanwhile, Balázs (1338 †1368) served prince István, the brother of king Lajos, and became the bailiff of Arad (1351). Seemingly, it was only the youngest of the siblings, Miklós (1338 †1372) who never held any office. Up to this point, the brothers' career not only resembled much to their father's career in this respect, but also in their military ability and activity. For instance, János participated in the second campaign against Naples (1350), and during which Lajos granted new estates to him.

It was the death of Szeri Pósa which brought a shift in the family history. None of the sons of Pósa were appointed to any positions for almost 30 years, except for István who once became the captain of Miháld in 1362. Nevertheless, their participation in the wars launched against the Balkan states in the 1360s and 1370s (1359: Serbia, 1365: Bulgaria, 1368 and 1375: Wallachia) resulted in donations (1360: Gyelid, 1364: Gyroltháza, in the 1360s: Szentpál, all three in Arad county) so finally, they were able to maintain the prestige and social status of the family. Occasionally, as a proof for their esteem, they were credited with executing certain commissions from the court, while the presence of László's son, János (1364 †1374) as an assessor at a general meeting held by the palatine for Krassó in 1370 exemplifies their high reputation amongst the local nobility, not to mention the latter's willingness to serve the Pósa's as *familiars*. As far as their estates are concerned, the brothers never carried out a division on the family's extending possessions, but they administered them as if they had agreed on the scope of each family member. László and Balázs oversaw the possessions in Krassó, István was responsible for the ones in Arad, while Miklós ran the estates in Csongrád.

The fifth chapter follows the eventful biography of Szeri Pósa's grand- and great-grandsons. The status of the Pósa family was heavily determined by the fact that no matter

how much wealth the family had around the 1380s, without higher offices and castles their chances to get closer to the circles of the political elite, the barons, were limited. Nevertheless, by supporting queen Maria from 1382, the two sons of István, Miklós (1374 †1385) and István (1374 †1391/92) managed to hold two offices for a while: they were the bailiffs of Nyitra and Sztrecsény in Trencsén county (1384). After the coronation of Sigismund of Luxemburg, István was appointed as the head of Csongrád (1391), while his brother, Péter (1382 †1423) was often present in the attendance of the king between the period of 1387 and 1403, which evidently show that Sigismund had trust in the family members. Moreover, the donation of Ménesi (Arad county) to them in 1398 can also be considered a sign for their fortunate status. Despite their efforts to become barons, their wealth and their ties with the court enabled the Pósafti's to manage to remain members of the second line of the political elite.

During the coup against Sigismund in 1403, Péter stood on the side of the king, while his nephew, György (junior), the son of István, (1394 †1431) supported the pretender, László of Naples. For this reason, György was granted with Szeged castle and the possessions pertinent to it, although, the realisation of the donation never happened. However, the family got Hódos with its enormous possessions in Temes county around 1405 which made their status amongst castle-owning nobles firm. To some extent it was strange since the title *egregius*, which appeared before their names in the recorded documents around this time, clearly justifies their place in that group even if Hódos was a *castellum* (a fortified mansion) instead of a castle. It looks as if their role as retainer at the most significant lords of the period determined their social status. First they served Pipo Ozorai (from 1404 to 1412), then the despot of Serbia, István Lazarevics (from 1412 to 1427) and finally the Tallóci family (from 1428 to 1439). The dissertation analyses in details the status of the family members interrelated to their political and military role in the second half of the Luxemburg-era. The contemporary head of the family, Péter and his brother, György (senior) (1385 †1423/24) both played an active role in the fights against Bosnia and against the threatening Ottomans in the 15th century (1407, 1409, 1413, 1423) since it was their *domini* who were responsible for this task. However, the two appeared in the campaigns led to crush the Hussites in Bohemia as well (1420-21, 1422). In addition to these, Péter was amongst the ones who sealed the Polish-Hungarian peace treaty at Lubló in 1412 and he was also one of the tax-collectors in the south-eastern counties who had been nominated to collect the tax levied in order to pay the ransom for Maróti János and three other barons in 1416. The biography of Miklós's son, Gábor (1389 †1440), who was also a nephew of Péter and György, starts in this chapter, too.

First, he appeared as bailiff of Torontál county (1420-21), then he became the head of the family in the mid 1420s after the death of his uncles. Around 1428 Gábor chose to serve the Tallóci family, by which he could get in contact with families like the Hunyadi, the Szilágyi, the Gúti Ország and the Gersei Pető who later played a significant role in the history of Hungary from the second half of the 15th century. The relationship with the latter families got stronger as they became relatives since Gábor's daughters (Erzsébet, Katalin és Ágota) got married to a member from each families but the Hunyadi. After the death of king Albert, Gábor took the side of Ulászló (he visited the diet which elected Ulászló king of Hungary in 1440), but he unfortunately died in the armed conflict that developed soon after the coronation of the new monarch.

The sixth chapter deals with the life of Gábor's son, János (1414 †1448) and especially with the life of György Jr.'s son, István (1428 †1471), who were the last male members of the Pósaí family. They both participated in the consolidation of Ulászló I's power. János's life is less documented, but his death might be linked to the battle of Rigómező (Kosovopolje). István, however, joined the retinue of Újlaki Miklós, the *vajda* of Transylvania during the confused period of the mid 15th century and he became one of the leading *familiars* of Újlaki. The offices he held clearly shows this: he was the vice of Arad from 1444 to 1445, the vice of Csongrád and the captain of Szeged in 1445 and last but not least, he was once the captain of Nándorfehérvár in 1454. Due to the resolution of his lord, Pósaí István supported László V in the 1450s, therefore, he (once again as the head of Csongrád) got involved in the fights against the Hunyadi-party like in 1457 as documents such as the amnesty letter of Mátyás (1458) mention it. When Mátyás came to the throne, he finally pledged loyalty to him. István was given amnesty and he could keep his possessions, but in the future he never participated in national politics. However, he remained active in his local neighbourhood where he husbanded his possessions, got involved in legal cases, and furthermore, he appeared as Jan Giskra's vice of Arad county in 1464. With his death in 1471 the male line of the family died out. There is a separate sub-chapter demonstrating the struggle of the female line, especially the Gúti Ország and the Gersei Pető families, for the family estates.

The seventh chapter covers the cultural aspect of the investigation as the plan of the seal used by the family, which shows a lion rising from a crescent moon or crown turning to the right hand-side, could be reconstructed. Due to the result, the number of the known medieval family seals increased since we could support the former description of Csoma József about the seal of the Pósaí's with clear evidence. Moreover, the reconstruction enabled

us to make cautious supportive justifications on the views about the lion coat of arms used by the Bár-Kalán kindred present in the special literature. The last chapter is a data store showing the changes in the family property by counties and settlements. The dissertation ends with an appendix consisting of two chapters, which contain the pictures of those eight seals that helped the reconstruction of the plan of the family seal as well as a family tree of the male line of the Pósaí's.

IV.

1. Könyvrecenzió a *Documenta ad historiam familiae Bathori de Ecsed spectantia I. Diplomata 1393-1540.* (A nyíregyházi Jósza András Múzeum Kiadványai 67.) szerk.: C. Tóth Norbert. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Önkormányzat Múzeumok Igazgatósága. Nyíregyháza. 2011. című családi oklevéltár publikációról [A book review on *Documenta ad historiam familiae Bathori de Ecsed spectantia I. Diplomata 1393-1540.*] Turul 84 (2011) 105–107.

2. Adalékok Krassó megye történetéhez. Krassó megye archontológiája (1319–1439). [Some Data To Improve the Historical Knowledge about Krassó County. The Archontology of Krassó County (1319–1439)] Turul 86 (2013) 60–65.

3. A Szeri Pósaíak címerhasználata. Megjegyzések a Bár-Kalán nemzetség címeréről. (sajtó alatt – Turul 86 (2013) 4. szám) [The Plan of the Seal of the Szeri Pósaí Family. Notes on the Coat of Arms of the Bár-Kalán Kindred. Under publication.]

Conference presentations:

- April 26, 2012 a presentation held at the session of the Hungarian Heraldry and Genealogy Association with the title: The Szeri Pósaí Family – The History and Political Role of a Wealthy Noble Family in the 14th–15th Centuries
- June 30, 2012 a presentation held at Ópusztaszer during the 6th Meeting of the Archers – Shower of Arrows 2012 event with the title: The Szeri Pósaí Family – The Possessors of Ópusztaszer in the 14th–15th Centuries