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Thesis of doctoral dissertation

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**Economy and Society of the Privileged Market-town of
Szombathely in the 17. Century
(1605/1606–1685)**

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1. Significance of the topic

The towns of the Kingdom of Hungary had suffered serious losses as a result of the Ottoman conquest in the 16th Century. The town network and town hierarchy of the late middle ages had changed as a result of military-economical-social changes leading to the increase of the town functions – e.g. garrison-, fortified- and border fortress towns had appeared. The change of the town network was closely connected to a town development manifestation that was characterizing at that time. The range of the duties of the market-towns (oppidum) caring for differentiated functions was expanded; the role of the settlements became more valuable. The more developed market-towns have temporarily or as part of a longer process integrated into the town network of a given region based on the political and military events having been in an interactive relation with their respective areas while caring for the extended educational-cultural, economical, commercial and management duties. The settlement hierarchy of the given region could be modified with such integration.

In the 1990s the national historical research of the market-towns of the early modern times was renewed being closely built on the previous results. Besides the researches focusing on the indication of the state of development such as guild and handicraft industry the researches focusing on the commercial, cultural, confessional aspects and the military roles have become of ever increased importance. On the basis of the case studies the above town development tendency appears in a more characteristic way compared to the earlier results; a group of the most developed market-towns that had increased functioning systems and central roles have successfully integrated into the network of towns modifying the regional settlement hierarchy.

This thesis is intended to present the economy, society and the operation of the former market-town, Szombathely in the 17th Century, in the period from 1605/1606 to 1685. The starting date goes back to the destruction of the town by the Transdanubian campaign of István Bocskai's Haiduk captain Gergely Németh (1605) and the start of the reorganization of the destroyed town afterwards (1606). This is a forced starting date since the archives of the town had been relocated to Némethújvár in order to escape the military action, where the records were eaten up by a conflagration. For this reason the official records of the town are available for research only from this date onwards. The closing date (1685) is the end of the landownership of the Archbishop of Kalocsa, the administrator of the Episcopate of Győr, György Széchényi. The examined period almost covers the whole century until the special period of the reoccupation wars.

2. Resources of the research, methods of processing

On the basis of the study of the local and regional resources we can confidently state that the 17. Century Szombathely was one of the most developed market-towns of the time with the most differentiated official writings. Following the fragment of 1604/1605 the council meeting and judicial records, minutes form a continuous series of documents from 1606, while the minutes of the hillside master are available from 1609. Besides the town books the various liquidation documents of the various officials of the town are also available for researching the operation and economy of the town. (E.g. accounts information of guild masters between 1606-1618, wine masters from 1610, mayors from 1621 and of mill masters from 1671.) Compared to the other market-towns of the region an abundance of documents of individual and collective legal matters have been preserved (e.g. collection

of last wills). For the favor of the research the available information about the official functioning of the town can be added with the documents found in the credit place (*locus credibilis*) of the town about monastic orders (Franciscan and Dominicans), guilds (e.g. button-maker). Unfortunately only the fragmentally preserved archives of the authority of Vas County the Hungarian Chamber and the Bishop of Győr played an important role in the expansion of the basis of the research besides the other available data, however control data collections have taken place in the noble archives (Batthyány Family) as well as other archives of the region (Sopron).

In case of the continuously developing market-town the examination of the local economy and society could not mechanically be started with the end of the fifteen year long war. There was a need to look back to the 16th Century. I was trying to provide a complex picture as regards the various examination methods so besides the typical history of property and politics or the customary resource- and instrument systems of the settlement research of the early modern times I have tried to present the town leading elite by using the prosopography method besides others. I paid an equal importance to the town as *communitas*, and to the people living in it, managing it.

3. Results of the thesis

The privileged market-town of the Bishop of Győr, Szombathely has integrated to the town network of the region as part of a long development process within the system of complex economical, social processes by means of the continuous expansion of the central functions. The legal framework of the development of the settlement including its privileged position granting very significant administrative, economic and judicial autonomy was laid down by Bishop

János Héderváry in 1407. By the beginning of the 16th Century the town had acquired economical privileges by holding five national fairs. By means of its more complex function system Szombathely became more developed than the centre of the county Vasvár by the end of the middle ages. Since the Győr Bishop Balázs Paksi has lost his life and the majority of the lives of his mounted escort in the battle of Mohács (1526) Szombathely belonged to the interest sphere of Ferdinand I. during the decades after the battle in the period of the civil war of the two legitimate kings. The ruler has not only strengthened the position of the town by reregistering the old privileges, but has added new customs duty privileges (1534). The town possessing a fortified castle provided security for the population of the surrounding area fleeing from the Ottomans (1532) or to its citizens fearing from war. The seized market-town, castle and landed property were given back to the members of the new Hungarian aristocracy (Bakiths, Révays) loyal to the Habsburgs in 1554 by the Bishop of Győr Pál Gregorianczi.

On the basis of the data of the next half century the little town had been developing – not always with undeterred social development – as regards its economy, and influence in the region with differentiated handicrafts and ever increasing range of central functions. The determining traditional bishop centered range of activities was significantly expanded. With the relocation of the chapter of Vasvár because of the Ottoman danger (1578:XX. tc.) Szombathely became the regional center of the use of written records as regards private legal and official matters. Without a doubt this relocation played a part in the fact that by the end of the 16th Century Szombathely was the center of Vas County. After this the town meant a possibility for a new life not only for the Croatian-Slavonian, Zala-Somogy refugees but also for the nobles of the county. The

significance of the castle besides the bishop's residence inside the diocese was highlighted at the Council of Trent in 1579.

It seems that until the end of the first third of the 17th Century the town had a balanced, good relationship with the bishops of Győr that were at a determining level of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church often caring for high level state offices (e.g. court chancellors) at the same time. The heads of the church had supported the efforts of the people of Szombathely besides the minor conflicts. (E.g. assisted in the renovation of their privileges.) This relation between the landowner and the town has radically changed with the bishopric of György Draskovich (II.) from 1635/1636. In order to serve the Catholic renewal he placed the increase of the income from his possessions above anything else. He treated the citizens of the privileged market-town as inferior bondsmen. A new era has started in the relation between the town and its landlord; the conflicted relation had continued with a little bit less intensity during the landlordship of György Széchényi. The town had acquired significant connections while battling with its landlord in order to protect its interests and privileges. (The elite of the county, lawyers from this circle, aristocrats won to fight for the interest of the town, e.g. Ferenc Nádasdy.) The feature of these conflicts: the citizens fought their landlord with unbelievable self-respect reaching compromises. The controversial relation between Draskovich and Széchényi with their town to create values and submission should be examined from a point of view wider than the history of a town. Such an examination should include the general property and economical policies of the landlords taking into consideration the fact that from the middle of the 17th Century – in Germany after the Westfalia Peace – the ruling absolutism and the struggle of towns become common.

The town was operated by a local government of significant autonomy including civil and punitive rights with the following determining individual and gremial bodies: the judge, and the 12 member internal council assisting him, 4-8 officials elected for various specialized administrative departments. The 24 member (often 17-21 member) outer council replacing the inner council of control and legitimate role was developed from the street representation system. The town was characterized by differentiated type official record keeping, which was based on the activity of mostly civilian notaries. Szombathely has created a lot higher number of statutes than the other market-towns of the region. This administration (e.g. limitation of prices-salaries) indicates a higher level of regulatory system compared to other towns. At the same time the general assemblies creating the regulations indicate the necessity for an ever wider local legitimacy and the demand of the citizens for control and expression of their opinion. Among the judges of the 16-17th Centuries only two families were able to pass this office on to the next generation (Szele, Hetésy). The judges have changed office terms at rotations of 2-3 years rather than longer – annually renewed – rotations of 4-6 years. At the same time the inner council made the closed nature of elite of the little town possible, members could only get in here from the outer council. These leading elite tried to establish the practical grounds for the autonomy of the town, create budget balance and promote accumulation.

The Szombathely of the 17th Century was basically an agricultural little town the ownership of land was an important factor for all groups of the society. Its main financial group in the beginning of the century (1619/1620) was the group of those paying taxes on the basis of $\frac{1}{2}$ land (42%) the second largest group was the group of $\frac{1}{4}$ lands (34.4%). The increase in the financial differentiation starts to become

apparent from the middle of the 16th Century, though the pauperization of taxpaying was insignificant at that time. Above the “middle class” of ½ lands the differently sectioned little town elite is apparent; at that time the biggest tax paid was based on the 12/4. In other words, the society of the little town included very little number of families of marginal position the vast majority was modestly wealthy. The same tendency is apparent in the middle of the century (1648). Beginning in the middle of the century the caretaking of the poor ones starts to be apparent in the final wills and this tendency appears with more character in the years of 1660-1680.

Though 20-25% of the citizens were legally determined as nobles (officials, nobles of the county that moved in, county officials, the majority is market-town citizen that became nobles) the market-town cannot be called free noble oppidum. The privileged noble citizens of the town did not make up a unified society. Its elite group consisted of leading county officials (e.g. Ambrus Káldy, Ferenc Szántóházy), aristocratic familiars of important positions (e.g. Pál Festetics), or manorial officials (Mihály Skublics). The majority of the citizens consisted of citizens that became nobles or nobles that became citizens (e.g. the industrialist Ányoses). They typically lived the life of the market-town citizens besides the decisive line of legal privileges.

On the basis of the 16th Century the first half of the 17th Century was characterized by intensive guild formation (8 guilds from 1604 to 1642), the very uncertain nominal examination between 1636 and 1656 indicates 24 trades and 81-91 industrialist heads of families. These trades principally included textile and metal processing industries. This latter is important because the last wills of the smiths took mention about the resupplying of the end houses of Keszthely and Kiskomárom. This implies that Szombathely did not only take part in one of the determining tasks of the period that is

to provide supplies to the border fortresses protecting the country as a *communitas* but the local craftsmen also contributed to it with their everyday activities. The traders, craftsmen of Szombathely had intensive connections to 58 settlements in Vas county, 12 in Zala county and 7 in Sopron county inside the circle of Keszthely-Zalaegerszeg-Rohonc-Kőszeg-Csepreg (market) towns – Kőszeg is a free royal town from 1648-től – as it turned out from the money matters regulated in their last wills. This without a doubt indicates an active role of the citizens in the matters of the region, and the fact that the citizens of the above mentioned settlements were frequent guests at the Szombathely market also indicates the elevated economic role of the town.

In line with the above expansion of the central functions the town played a significant economic role in the region. Following Kőszeg, Szombathely was the second strongest settlement in Vas County as regards taxpaying power, number of industrialists, and the differentiation of guilds. The new administrative, legal functions further strengthened the tendencies determining its regional role and connection system. We can have further insight to the everyday life, financial culture, inheriting customs of the 17th Century town by means of further micro researches. The primary way to get to know the cultural picture of the town is by the examination of the local church. The further clarification of the settlement hierarchy role Szombathely played within the county and the region could be done with new settlement researches primarily focusing on the exploration of the connection system and regional role of Kőszeg that is very rich in archive material.

4. Independent publications used for the thesis

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