

THEMATA OF A PhD TREATISE

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Careers, conflicts, everyday.

The life of a family from Great-Cumania (1745—1867)

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## I. The aim of the treatise and the definition of the theme

The fruit of the more than 200 year-old Jazygian historiography has reached a library-scaled extent recently. Besides the syntheses of different topics numerous source- and conference-publications, studies, monographies deal with the history of certain persons, settlements and times. But the so fancied genealogy in Hungary was unkindly dealt with by ethnographers and historians who were interested in the Jazygian-Cumans. There is only a dozen scholarly studies which demonstrate the history of several generations regarding the 18–19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Authors of the studies published in the last four decades mostly could not rest on considerable family documents neither from the feudal nor from the civil era. Despite of the not so fortunate basis we get valuable snapshots of the Jazygian-Cuman jurisdiction, dietary and dressing customs besides the genealogy, demographical, financial condition, productive activities and labour structure of the studied non-noble families.

In spite of the above mentioned facts I tried to describe the history of a noble family from Túrkeve of modern times. The document remains of the Felsővályi Vincze family proved to be a good starting point for the scientific research, which became the part of the collection of the Public Archives of County Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok at the end of the 1990s. I could also rest on with certainty the monography dealing with the history of Túrkeve. The authors of that historical synthesis of the settlement did not know this valuable source base, but frequently mentioned the family in the passages on the history of 18<sup>th</sup> century. It comes to light from their readable examination that the male members of the noble family played an important role in controlling the life of the settlement on the banks of Berettyó as early as before the redemption (*redemptio*) in 1745 and after that as church-masters, councillors, chief constables. Beyond their public role they granted credit several times and offered charitable gifts for the propertied class. Besides the success the author did not forget to report on a family conflict caused by a woman with her norm-breaking testament. With this knowledge it was strange that in the chapters of that synthesis dealing with the 19<sup>th</sup> century we could not read a word about the family. It seemed from that monography as if Vinczes moved off from Túrkeve.

However among the fortunately survived documents several private letters, sales contracts can be found which prove that the family did not become extinct, did not sale their properties but two prominent male members lived in Túrkeve even in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the family documents judicial decisions, solicitor's petitions could be found which cast light upon a family property case which is written in the monography. It is not evident from that documents that the retreat from the public role could be brought into connection with that property case lasted for decades or other reasons e.g. economical, demographical factors. Basically this was the issue which aroused my interest in this noble family and inspired me to trace their modern times history.

The thesis deals with the life of four generations of Vinczes from Túrkeve between 1745 and 1867, but the outlined introduction of the family roots and of the fifth generation reaches six generations and almost two centuries. The dates in the subtitle must be explained. The life of the first married couple representing the first generation had begun before the redemption but the year of 1745 is a constitutional and social-historical turning point which changed not only the legal and property relations, but the people's self-consciousness too. The other date in the subtitle, 1867 does not designate the compromise but marks the death of the householder of the fourth generation.

We think that not only the men's but the women's way of life are important within each generation not only for the woman who commenced the property case. Several studies investigated the decreasing number of the nobles and their rate or their general situation in the

Jazygian-Cumanian District in the past few decades, but no one has ever examined that at family level. This work provides a good opportunity to reveal the husbandry, mentality, way of life, social relations, geographical movement and inner conflicts of a noble family. The results of the examined fields could not be interpreted in themselves, only in relation of the local 'redemptus' society.

The 18–19<sup>th</sup> century private letters, debentures, sales contracts, letters of appointment, property registers survived in the family archives helped me to present each generation, but the elaboration could not be happened without the sources of Túrkeve market-town, Győr and Debrecen free royal cities, the Jazygian-Cuman District, Heves and Outer-Szolnok, Bihar and Győr comitats and the archives of the Protestant College of Debrecen. We could rest on the memories of the family member who presented the family documents to the public archives beside the primary sources. The direct line descendant mainly emphasized the ancestors' noble origin, the glory of the military and guardsman's service, the public role of the family in Túrkeve and the effect of the forfeiture of property in the dualistic era. All of these informations completed, varied the facts written in sources in several cases.

## **II. Applied methods**

It comes to light from the synthesis dealing with the modern social-history of Jazygian-Cumans how the number of inhabitants in the Jazygian-Cuman District changed between 1745 and 1848 as well as the extend of land-properties, the ratio of landowners to persons with no property, and the extend of share in political rights. The authors of the Túrkeve monography – according to the somehow reduced scaled examination – show these facts in the level of a Great-Cumanian market-town. Revealing the complex world of social movement of individuals, families, smaller communities and their relations could only be possible when we reduce the scale of the observation. The history of Vinczes from Túrkeve is treated in biographical form, the course of biographies is interrupted only by the analysis of the property case lasting for fifty years. By the means of the applied micro-historical method or the reduced scaled examination, the microscopical analysis and the intense exploration of sources the family members' attitudes, interpersonal relations and own strategies came to light. We can get acquainted with those problems, decisions sometimes not free from powerlessness and doubtfulness had to be faced day-by-day by the Vinczes and accompanied persons. It may rise to view what possibilities existed at a certain decision, or contrary what were the pressuring circumstances which encroached upon the liberties of their acts.

The examined persons – apart from the two men who married to Győr and Bihar comitats – lived their daily life in the Jazygian-Cuman District. The micro-level analysis of the family members' life – following the method of the few Jazygian-Cuman genealogy – is combined with the presentation of the 18-19<sup>th</sup> century Jazygian-Cuman peasant social environment. The family ways of life can not be understood through their difference and peculiarities, so we must trace back the dissimilarities of the lives to the norms which made them possible to exist.

Our thesis is treated with the life of Felsővályi Vinczes from Túrkeve and of the Jazygian-Cuman regulating system. We are interested in in the case of a certain family member how the relation to the Jazygian-Cuman customary and common law had an effect on the exploitation of the economical, social and cultural resources and how these things had an effect on descending. It is possible that some certain cases, attitudes can point out to general phenomena, but we can not want to sacrifice them on the altar of generalization. It is irrelevant for us whether events happened with the Vinczes could happen in other families too. We are on the opinion that these cases can point at the contradictions of the rules

infiltrated the life of the 18-19<sup>th</sup> century Jazygian-Cumans, and throwing light on them it reveals what the social actors can do and what can not. Techniques used to get round and manipulate the customary law and the written rules, and the answers given to these techniques inform us not only about the persons' behaviour, but about the working mechanism of social relations.

To understand the – mysterious at first sight – retreat of Felsővályi Vinczes in Túrkeve in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century we must go back to the commencement in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the first phase of our research we were interested in why the householder, who can be regarded as the direct root of the Vinczes from Túrkeve, moved from his supposed place of origin to the socially different Jazygian-Cuman District in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Examining his way of life we applied double standpoint. First his quality necessary to conduct the community, on the other hand we focused on the forms which made possible the accumulation, or his enrich. There is no source regarding his early years, but we have written information from archives for his life only in the Jazygian-Cuman District, or Túrkeve.

The generation change in the Vincze family nearly coincided with the redemption of Jazygian-Cuman District. Throwing light on the two events we focus on that social actions and personal abilities which helped the householder representing the first generation to successfully hand down the material heritage obtained by his father-in-law as well as the non-material heritage.

From the period after the 1745 change numerous land, account and property records can be found which help to understand how the members of the first and second generations of Vinczes from Túrkeve differentiated their economical activities. After the 'redemptio' the council-records became more informative, and the survived economical agreements inform us about the family members' success and failure of the techniques to reduce risk. Besides the economical activities of the first two generations – resting on the ample source base of the Jazygian-Cuman District and the private letters and petitions from the family archive – the Great-Cuman men's public role, official and military career also take shape. We get to know indirectly from the documents how much the family assigned from their economical resources to institutional education, their learning, all of these can be interpreted as cultural capital during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is also revealed how they exploited their relations, which was their social resource to vindicate their interests, one of the junctions of these relations was the Illésy family from Kisújszállás which provided the Great-Cuman captains.

The obtained positions and the considerable wealth even in Great-Cumania by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century could not make forgotten the sharp conflicts in the Vincze family. Two class records and a norm-breaking testament indicated for the outside world in the 1770-80s that a striking difference of opinions took shape between the women and the men regarding the inheritance of the ancient land property. During the examination of that conflict we were not content with describing the first generation widow's irregular action, but we reveal the nature of the normative environment which encompassed and effected her actions. During the presentation of the irregular cases and examination of the normtexts and decades-long property case we are looking for answers for how the laws were coherent and stable which dealt with succession and the widows' legal status collectively and severally applied. On the other hand we examined how the parties on the opposing sides of the regulating system, those who keep the rules and those who make the others to keep the rules, maintain a relation to the accidental contradictions of the customary and written law. After the examination of the first act of the property case it became evident that the first verdict caused an important change in the family at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century but did not effect the careers of the men.

The passive public role of the family did not related to the property case but to some renitent family members' transgression. All their activities were to contend with the local

councillors and the office-bearers of the Jazygian-Cuman District in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as happened differently before. Why the third generation family members were opposed to the local leading class while generations which established the family's wealth and social prestige had been co-operated in harmony with them. The correspondence between the Vinczes and the different administrative levels make clear that the family members' actions not free from personal remarks basically directed not against the élite of Túrkeve and Great-Cumania, but against the articles of the Jazygian-Cuman laws dealing with the paying taxes. Some prominent members of the family – apart from their sex – refused to pay taxes referring to their noble origin and sabotaged the obligation of transportation and quartering. Their law-breaking acts – contrary to the infringement of the norms of private law – did not remained effectless among the landowners in Túrkeve. The loss of the family's social prestige and the men's almost total supplantation from the local and Great-Cumanian public life were the result of the heavy infractions of social regulations which followed on each others heels.

The analysis of the history of the third generation is quite long – thanks to the great number of sources. We follow in the track of three men's life from the same generation beside the examination of each branch of the family which split after the property case. It becomes evident at the analysis of the careers started in the same family and run parallel with each other and rarely crossing each other that behaving as a nobleman was different in the Jazygian-Cuman District than in the comitats. All of these were justified in the case of a person representing the fourth generation who took root in the Great-Cumanian market-town, but obliterating his father's negative memory was a harder task than to regain the lost material goods.

### **III. Results**

We put a landowner noble family at the centre of our examination in our genealogical thesis – contrary to the published scholarly genealogies, and at first in the Jazygian-Cuman historiography. A family came to the front which define themselves as 'redemptus' up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but noble in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The latter was not tolerated at all by the Jazygian-Cuman social environment, so the Vinczes were socially isolated in Túrkeve as well as in the Great-Cuman District. The inevitable isolation from the local and district public life came hard on them because there were no ties of blood to the families of Túrkeve. In spite of the fact that several noble 'redemptus' families lived in the Great-Cuman market-town and in wider sense in the Jazygian-Cuman District, the Vinczes rather formed marriage bonds with noble – mainly landowner – families from the comitat.

The refusal of the peasant social environment as their noble attitude can be traced not only in their feudal endogamy but in their way of life too. It is clearly evident from the partial or entire 'inventariums' remained at the archives material that the Vinczes found the norms in the noble scale of values regarding the clothing and furnishings. The Vinczes' refusal of the peasant scale of values was strengthened by a request to be changed the church seating in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and by disdain the physical work. This appeared openly at the breaking the tax laws when the family refused to pay taxes. In our opinion the greatest social-historical result of this thesis is that it grabs and interprets the noble attitudes and gestures which at first conformed to the majority of the 'redemptus' society and then isolated from them.

Besides the other noteworthy result is the reveal of the family's inner conflict, and the description of the women's possibilities. Analysing the intermittently six decades long property case we can cast a glance into a family's life. Valuable nowhere else could be found informations became public from the later statements of the servants and domestics of the Vinczes, neighbours and the local élite not only about the origin of the material goods, the

family members' successful treasuring up, their failures, the organization of the daily life, but about the relation of the first generation married couple, their children's feelings towards them, their interests and last but not least about the position of the family in the community.

The chapters of the records of the lawsuit consist of several hundred pages and two greater parts separated at the archives and the women's class-records and testaments can be regarded as the narratives of lives, and they proved that the women's education and law-consciousness did not depend on each other. Several outstanding studies have been published since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the two Jazygian-Cuman statutum which regulated the women's right to obtain land, but in the case of the Vinczes the opposite verdicts warn us that the revealing of primary sources is indispensable for the more accurate definition of the women's right and possibilities in the Jazygian-Cuman District.

#### IV. Publications

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2, Falak között. Egy redemptus família három generációjának társadalmi helyzete a 18. századi Túrkevéen. In *Szabolcs-Szatmár-Beregi Levéltári Évkönyv*, XVII. Galambos Sándor – Kujbusné Mecsei Éva (szerk.), 359–370. Nyíregyháza, 2006.

3, Lelkészlaktól az albérleti szobáig. Marjai József karriertörténete. In *Jászok és kunok a magyarok között. Ünnepi kötet Bánkiné Molnár Erzsébet tiszteletére*. Bathó Edit – Ujváry Zoltán (szerk.), 197–205. Jászberény, 2006.

4, Egy borkereskedő nemes. Vincze Pál hivatali és üzleti karrierje. *Debreceni Szemle*, XIII. Új folyam. 2007/3. 319–330.

5, Egy borkereskedő nemes. II. Vincze Pál magánélete és anyagi világa. *Debreceni Szemle*, XIV. Új folyam. 2008/4. Megjelenés alatt.

6, Nők felülkerekedése? Nemek harca egy családi konfliktusban. In *Nők a Jászkunság történetében. Jászkunság kutatása 2007*. Bathó Edit (szerk.). Megjelenés alatt.

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