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Thesis Booklet of the Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**„THE NATION OF GÚTA”
SOCIETY OF THE MARKET TOWN OF GÚTA,
1768–1870**

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Introduction

This work is the result of several decades of monographic research on Gúta (Kolárovo, Slovakia), my hometown, which I had worked on since the early eighties of the last century. At that time, as a “volunteer ethnographic collector”, I was doing research in my spare time, submitting entries to the Hungarian Ethnographic Museum's competitions, and participating, among other things, in an ethnographic research project on the Little Alföld organised by Hungarian museum workers in Slovakia. I started regular and exhaustive archival research on Gúta after 2010. Over the past decade or more, I have photographed, photocopied, and organised thousands of pages of archival documents. I have also started to work on and publish some sub-areas and themes. In the meantime, I obtained my master's degree in ethnography, thus acquiring a systematic knowledge in the field of social sciences. I wrote and defended my thesis entitled “*The people of market town Gúta in the last third of the 18th century*” in 2018. My present dissertation submitted as a doctoral thesis of the University of Szeged (Faculty of Arts, Doctoral School of History, Modern Age Programme – Ethnography Subprogramme), increases the time frame of my former work several times, covers new subfields and significantly increases the source base on which I draw.

Research Topic and Aim

The main motivation for choosing the topic of my dissertation was to answer the question of the origin of the peculiarities of the social development of Gúta in the 19th and 20th centuries, the characteristics of its political life that were different from those of its surroundings. One of the most striking phenomena is that the population of Gúta is portrayed in the works published so far as eternal rebels from the early 19th century and as adherents of left-wing communist ideas in the first half of the 20th century. The answer must be sought in the development of the municipality in the 18th and 19th centuries, in its economic and social processes, which require a comprehensive exploration and analysis of the archival sources of the period in question relating to Gúta.

The timeframe for my work was primarily determined by the resources available. I started with a series of extensive registers produced in 1768 in the course of enforcement of the *Urbarial*

Patent issued by Maria Theresa, and then I researched the uniform quality documentary material produced during the period of enlightened absolutism, which increasingly became Hungarian-language from the end of the century.

These sources provide a continuous insight into social and economic changes of the time. From the first half of the 19th century, there are abundant Hungarian-language archival sources available, including newer ones such as the minutes of the council of the market town and the pleadings on the urbarial regulations, which are accompanied by only fragmentary archival material from the period of absolutism. I have chosen 1870 as the final date range, as the survey records of the first official Hungarian census collected in Gúta at the end of the previous year, have survived in their entirety, providing a valuable cross-section of the society entering the age of capitalist development.

The more than one hundred years thus selected and presented span several periods that have been accepted in works on social and economic history of Hungary as watershed moments. The period from the middle of the 16th century to 1848 is referred to in the literature as the era of late feudalism, and the period from 1849 onwards as the era of capitalism. The period from 1825 to the revolution of 1848 is considered by Hungarian historiography to be the period of reform(s). The latter period is marked by the development of national culture and the officialisation of the Hungarian language. Politically, it is characterized by the parliamentary struggles for the adoption of programmes and laws marking the beginning of the bourgeois transformation, and the laws passed in April 1848, including the enactment of the serf emancipation law, which brought the era of feudalism to a close in Hungary. The period of absolutism that followed after the defeat of the War of Independence in 1849 was characterised by the suppression of Hungarian national aspirations and further attempts to Germanise the administration. At the same time, the dismantling of the feudal system, the practical implementation of the abolition of serfdom and the painful, long-lasting process of the urbarial regulation, following the imperial letter patents, really began in these years. This is when the new tax system, payment of public dues and the free engagement in trade (crafts) are enacted into law. The period of absolutism was ended by the Austro–Hungarian Compromise of

1867, which marked the beginning of the dualist era, followed by the industrial revolution and half a century of rapid urbanisation until the First World War.

The economic-historical perspective describes and divides the hundred years I have cut out into periods as cycles of booms and busts. Pre-industrial European societies were hit repeatedly by years of poor harvests, low productivity and supply disruptions caused by poor transport. Famine broke out several times and epidemics often decimated the population. These 'old-style crises' gradually became less frequent with the development of agricultural modernisation in the 18th century and transport in the 19th century. In the second half of the 18th century, the economic boom and the growing demand for agricultural products, especially cereals, also had an impact in Hungary. The number and importance of large estates producing goods increased, while extensive livestock farming declined. Both large landed estates (of landlords) and peasant farms participated in the boom. As early as 1767, the state took the serfs, who paid the state tax, and the plots of lands of the peasantry under its protection against the landlords. At the end of the 18th century, live animals, mainly cattle on foot due to poor road conditions, were still the main export article; from the beginning of the 19th century, wool and cereal crops took over the leading role. During the French wars, the needs of the armies in particular stimulated the expansion of cereal production. The Napoleonic boom was accompanied by financial crisis and bad harvest years (1815–1817), which were followed by a national shortage. During the crisis years, population growth slowed down compared to the previous period. The rise in the price of cereals began in 1827 and continued, with small falls, until the end of the period under review. Population growth was stunted by cholera in 1831, another disastrously poor harvest in 1846 and another cholera epidemic in 1849.

In relation to the period under study, ethnography emphasizes that folk culture, the research of which began at the end of the 18th century, contributed to the renewal of national culture and the formation of the modern Hungarian nation during the reform era. The detailed history of Hungarian folk culture is still unwritten, but an attempt has been made to divide it into phases in time and space. Focusing primarily on folk art and music, Tamás Hofer identifies three phases: the old serf-peasant phase typical of the 18th century;

the new, flourishing peasant phase, which developed from the beginning of the 19th century as a result of commodity production, gradual material growth and the changing peasant way of life; and the disillusioned, neutral, more civilized phase, which replaced it from the end of the 19th century, indicating the antagonistic nature of the peasant way of life.

László Kósa considers peasant embourgeoisement to be the most important issue of the 19th century. The roots of the change in the peasantry go back to the last third of the 18th century, when the urbarial patents of Maria Theresa and the protective regulations of Joseph II laid the foundations for the emancipation of serfs and their elevation to the nation. The liberated peasantry was slow to abandon serf behaviour and attitudes and to adapt to the emerging capitalist society after the legal precedents of the reform era and the emancipation of the serfs.

From the point of view of historical demographic research, the period under discussion represents a single period. The demographic examination, comparison, and analysis of the various archival sources in Hungary, due to the lack of the necessary sources, begins with the end of the 17th century, with the research of the period after the Turks were driven out of the country, as from the 1770s onwards, new types of sources appear which are suitable for a comprehensive analysis of the historical population. Tamás Faragó places the final time limit of the first phase of the development of the Hungarian population and of historical demographic research in the 1870s, the decade that marked the acceleration of the disintegration of the traditional population system and the beginning of the demographic transition.

Sources and Collection of Material

The primary source base of my work was the exhaustive exploration and analysis of archival sources on the society of Gúta in the period under review. The most important archival sources used were the archives of the erstwhile landlord, the Archdiocese of Esztergom. The archives of the Primate of Esztergom are divided into two large units, the ecclesiastical (*Archivum ecclesiasticum*) and the secular (*Archivum saeculare*) archives. Of the latter, the materials of the Archives of Legal Administration and Economic Affairs (*Archivum juridico-oeconomicum et directoriale*) in

particular have served as a source for my work. The tax censuses, *urbaria*, manorial administrative records and litigation documents preserved here were indispensable sources for my dissertation. Other frequently cited archival sources are located in the State Archives of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic in Nitra (Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky, Štátny archív v Nitre). The most important archival holdings of the Nitra Archives for my topic are the collection of church registers (*Zbierka cirkevných matrik*) and the surviving records of the Komárom County (*Komárňanská župa I*). The latter contains the complete records of the 1869 census of Gúta. These are supplemented by documents found in the archives of the Gúta administration, the parish, and the town office. In the archives of the Gúta Parish Office, among other things, a census from 1853, compiled by the local parish priest, was an important source for my work. Of the files in the archives of the Gúta Town Hall, the most important are the council minutes from the first half of the 19th century.

Applied Methods

One of the most difficult issues in writing my thesis was the huge amount of mixed source material and the complicated, a hundred-year, fragmented historical period to be examined, the scale of the approach to the topic, and the choice of the method of analysis. My choice of methods and approach was aided by my acquaintance with the works of Gyula Benda. The author prepared his dissertation on the society of Kestrel (Hungary) primarily by adopting the conceptual and methodological apparatus of the French *Annales* school, using a multiscopic approach. In the course of my work, I have looked into several areas that are closely related to each other, but can also be considered complete in their own right. I have used both quantitative and qualitative sources and have tried to present them in a macro-historical and micro-historical approach. I have used the quantitative method, for example, in the compilation of historical demographic data, so I have also quantified the available data on households according to Peter Laslett's typology, which is accepted in the literature, in order to compare them with data from other periods and regions. An example of qualitative resource management is the chapter on serfdom (*copyhold*) and inheritance, or the chapter on the municipality (local government) of

the market town. A macro-historical approach, e.g. presenting the results of historical demographic calculations, averages, and summaries for the whole population of Gúta. Micro-history also appears alongside them, when I attempted to present individual life paths and family histories by comparing the data from the sources used for the macro approaches: tax assessments, urbaria, censuses and registers. I have analysed the phenomena by considering complete time series rather than samples.

My work is basically historical ethnography, historical anthropological research, in which a micro-historical vision is present. This thematic and historical approach is best suited to presenting contemporary peasant life, its actors, their material world, their relationships and ultimately their society. It is the choice of subject itself that has determined, above all, the methods and vision, which differ from the practice of historiography, which had previously sought to describe only the elite of the time, the events and institutions that determined the political life of the states.

The reconstruction of life paths was made possible by the data of the population registers of the previous centuries, which recorded all demographic events (births, marriages, deaths, emigration) affecting a given household. Previous Hungarian family history research was concerned with the presentation of the *haut monde*, the noble or wealthy families, while the life and relationships of lower status families and classes were hardly ever studied.

In the field of ethnographic research on popular culture and society, the role and importance of the individual has been noticed earlier. As early as the 1930s, ethnographers took for granted that the data they collected would be linked to 'data providers', to specific individuals. By the end of the 1980s, research into life paths and life stories was gaining ground in Hungarian ethnographic research as a whole.

Introduction to the Society of the Market Town of Gúta

To date, no comprehensive monographic work of a scholarly type has been written on Gúta. The one-sided picture of its written history that survives today is the result of descriptive-statistical and summary national descriptions published in the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century. However, these were mostly not backed up by scientific exploration and their data

are often not supported by written archival sources. Some of the unsubstantiated data were taken over by the authors of later summaries or local history works without source criticism, and they still appear frequently in both Hungarian and Slovak publications. Systematic research and study of the history of the settlement from the age of the Árpáds has only recently begun.

The main reason for the incomplete and in many points distorted historical picture is that basic research, scientific archival research has been carried out only to a small extent, and only a few data and dates have been selected in publications. The first refreshing exception to this practice was Sándor Takáts, who, during his archival research in Vienna, took great care to research his native town of Komárom and Komárom County. Some of his studies were based on data collected in the Viennese archives. We should also mention Dénes Edelényi-Szabó's collection of data on the population and property relations of Komárom County and his study on the county's ethnic and religious composition.

There has been no regular, in-depth ethnographic research in Gúta and its wider surroundings, and its folk culture is largely unexplored. Ethnographic research in the municipality began in the early twentieth century. Zsigmond Bátky collected objects for the Ethnographic Department of the Hungarian National Museum and made a valuable series of photographs of the village. Another collection is that of Edit Fél conducted in 1942, but her research results have survived only in the form of a considerable number of labels. This rich material has not been published, unlike her research carried out in Martos (Martovce), near Gúta, which resulted in valuable publications.

From the eighties, the archival and field collections, and publications of Magda Fehérváry, born in Gúta and qualified as an ethnographer, should be mentioned. The book of studies on the traditional farming of Gúta in the first half of the 20th century, written by a research group led by her and consisting of mostly Hungarian experts mentioned in the introduction, was a pioneering work in the history of Hungarian ethnography in Slovakia. The summary work of the author of this dissertation on the network of farmsteads (*tanya*) in the vicinity of Gúta was published only after the turn of the millennium.

On the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the first written mention of the settlement, I summarized and arranged in a volume, based on my archival research, primarily the previously unexplored Gúta documents, censuses, and church visitation records, as well as ethnographic and economic data. I also collected the most important charters and records, and included them in Hungarian translation together with a significant part of the other documents discovered in the anniversary publication. At the beginning of the book, I gave a brief historical overview of the newly discovered sources and summarised the history of Gúta, trying to make the old, fixed schematic picture more colourful and nuanced, and to draw attention to the erroneous data in earlier works.

Until 1848, the abolition of serfdom, Gúta was a market town of the Archbishop of Esztergom. The population of the town in the period under study was almost homogeneously of Hungarian ethnicity, Roman Catholic, with a small gypsy population. Jewish settlement was forbidden for a long time, and only after the laws of the 1840s, which extended the rights of the Jews, were they allowed to settle in the town. From the point of view of the estates of the realm, the population was almost exclusively made up of serfs, not of nobles. The nobility made up only a few percent of the town's population, some of whom were immigrant intellectuals, clergymen, and craftsmen. The serf population of the town, which was under the jurisdiction of the landlord, made use of the ecological conditions of its extensive marshy fields (*határ*) and supported themselves mainly by livestock farming, meadow farming, fishing and fruit growing. Cereal crops were grown largely on the surrounding grassland (*puszta*). Some elements of traditional floodplain farming survived, despite the fact that considerable flood control work had already been carried out during the period under study.

Besides historical demographic and economic phenomena, the archival sources that I have explored and researched also provide an opportunity to gain insight into the peasant world of the time, into the everyday life of the market town of the Esztergom archdiocese, into the world of the families, farms, and households of Gúta.

In my dissertation, I have worked on several areas that are closely related to each other, but can also be considered complete in their own right. For example, the historical spatial location of Gúta, the natural, economic, and transport-geographical situation of the

municipality; historical demographic phenomena; social fragmentation; the economic management role of the market town's municipality; or the presentation of the material world of peasant households and farms, and the estate inventories of inheritance. When analysing the phenomena, I considered complete time series rather than samples.

In addition to the macro studies, I also carried out micro studies of equal importance. Family reconstruction analyses – including genealogical research on my own family – and the presentation of individual life paths occupy a significant place in my work and have contributed to a better understanding of local social phenomena and contexts.

Results, Theses

1. Ethnographic Classification of the Population of Gúta

Hungarian ethnography classifies the population of Gúta in terms of territorial division into three categories based on the administrative-geographic units they belonged to: the Little Alföld, the Komárom County, and the Csallóköz (Žitný ostrov) region. On the basis of ethno-cultural characteristics, due to the military events and migratory movements that took place in the peripheral territory of the Ottoman Empire (occupied by the Turks), it fits into the complex, fragmented ethnographic and dialectal picture of the Little Alföld. It shares the most similarities mainly with some settlements along the Vág (Váh) river and with the villages between the Vág and the Garam (Hron), from where part of its population came from. With its extensive fields (*határ*) and a population of several thousand inhabitants, it is strikingly different from the network of small villages in the Főtáj of the Csallóköz region. A recent computer cluster analysis based on data from the Hungarian Ethnographic Atlas has also shown cultural differences between the populations of the two neighbouring areas. According to the analysis, Gúta and its surroundings have features similar to those of the settlements in Mátusföld (Matúšova zem). In the opinion of Edit Fél and according to my own research, cultural affinities with the settlements along the Vág river, especially with Negyed (Neded) and Szimő (Zemné), can be established. From the 16th century onwards, the privileged status of the market town that it held gave rise to a community with a strong sense of belonging, with a population that

separated itself from its surroundings as the 'nation of Gúta'. Its separateness and cohesion were only enhanced by the centuries-long struggle against the landlord, the Archdiocese of Esztergom, to retain its privileges and to acquire the surrounding *határ*.

2. Sources, Source Analysis, Source Criticism

In my work I have tried to draw on as rich a source base as possible. I have tried to be complete in my search for documents of different provenance and categories. By analysing the data series for the whole period under study and by comparing the various sources, I have tried to provide a multifaceted picture of the society of Gúta. The source-centrism had to go hand in hand with source criticism based on an analytical examination of the history of the sources, their data collection, and a broad and thorough knowledge of the literature. Instead of highlighting individual data or time sections, I have sought a multi-perspective approach, at different levels, rather than a single analytical method. The studies have shown how conclusions drawn from a single source using a single method of analysis can be arbitrary and often misleading. Sorting and multifaceted analysis of all the sources available leads to much more reliable results. Some quantitative sources have proved to be unreliable and inaccurate because of the circumstances in which they were produced, e.g. the 1828 national tax census or the population data in church schematisms. On the other hand, the censuses of archdiocesan estates at the time of the see vacations are much more detailed and accurate. In the case of the property inventories, the history of their creation and the date of their compilation had a major influence on their incompleteness and accuracy. For example, an inventory for a property auction is generally more detailed and accurate than an inventory of the estate of a deceased serf.

3. Historical Demographic Analysis of the Population

The demographic indicators of the population hardly changed during the period under review. The fluctuations in the slow population growth did not affect the main trends. Birth control was unknown in the society of the market town, and population growth was disturbed only by recurrent epidemics and famines. Only the cholera epidemics of 1831 and 1849 caused a major disruption in natural reproduction. The population was characterised by the Eastern European household settlement pattern, early marriage, and almost compulsory being married. This resulted in frequent

remarriages of widows. The analysis of the birth records shows that Gúta cannot be considered a strictly endogamous settlement, with one in fourteen of the married of both sexes in the over 100 years studied being non-Gútan inhabitant. The mortality rate of more than 50 per cent among children under 10 years of age was offset by a very high birth rate of around 48 per thousand throughout the examined period. The population figures estimated from the barely variable birth rate and the number of births is very reliable. They are more accurate than those estimated from other archival sources or from contemporary publications. The age profile of the population was characterised by a pyramidal shape and a young average age. Those aged 0–19 years accounted for half of the population, and those aged 20–59 years for 45%. During the period under study, the population increased from an estimated 3 000 in 1768 to 5 824 in 1869.

4. The Pauperisation Process During the Period Under Review

Until the emancipation of serfs, the period under study was characterised by the hardening of serfdom, despite the existing privileges of the market town, and a stricter, more bound system of villeinage, which limited peasant development. The grasslands (*puszta*) previously leased by the town were gradually taken over by the landlord, and farmsteads were established on them. The differentiation of society accelerated, and a process of intensive growth of the villeinage and plot fragmentation took place. In 1768, when the urbarial regulation took place, the average plot size in Gúta was 0,40, less than the national average of around half a plot. Of the 283 serf heads of family paying taxes, only 66 had more than half a plot. In 1847, at the end of feudalism, the average plot size in Gúta was only 0,25. In parallel with the dwindling agricultural *raison d'être* of the peasantry, there was a steady population growth, which also contributed to impoverishment. In addition to the shrinking lands of the peasants and the rapid population growth, the system of male inheritance also contributed to the growth of the villeinage (the number of cottars) and the fragmentation of serf plots. After the abolition of serfdom, Gúta's taxpayers became owners only of the land they had earlier cultivated as serfs. Any additional land beyond this was not enfranchised, but remained in the possession of the

archdiocese or continued to be used as a community by the former serfs.

5. Structure of the Gúta Society

The local society was not structured by the legal classification of estates (of the realm), nor was divided by occupation, as the population of the market town was mainly a non-noble community living from agriculture. The narrow, armalistic nobility was not sharply separated from the society of the town. Nor were the marriage customs of the nobles strictly endogamous.

The local craftsmen were not sharply separated from the peasant population living from agriculture; before the abolition of serfdom, many of them also owned serf land or tried to rent or distrain it. Some of them were engaged in a trade only as a supplementary occupation or as an unqualified craftsman without a guild membership. Some of them were taxed as craftsmen for only part of their lives. In respect of the estates, and also according to ethnicity, craftsmen were the most diverse social group. There were noblemen, serfs, and cotters among them alike. Many of them came from abroad and spoke a foreign language.

The society of Gúta was increasingly divided into groups according to wealth. The boundary between the wealthier farmers and the poorer ones was drawn between the wealthier who could keep oxen and the more modest owners of fragmented plots, the cotters, who could only afford keeping horses.

6. Property of Serfs and Inheritance

Generations of serfs were linked by inheritance customs in terms of land ownership. Customary inheritance law had a significant influence on the composition of households, the development of individual peasant life path and the status of the individual. Among the Hungarians and in Gúta, too, the most widespread form of inheritance in the 18th and 19th centuries was the male heirship, whereby immovable property was inherited by the male heirs, the female heirs being paid in movables or money. In the 1840 Diet of Hungary, a reform law on the inheritance of serfs was passed for the first time, under which, irrespective of the sex of the descendants, the son and daughter were to share equally in the property. Thus, from the 1840s onwards, the law sought to make class inheritance general, as opposed to the traditional male line heirship. However, the principle of equal inheritance was difficult to

enforce in the face of the centuries-old tradition of male line inheritance. In peasant communities, male line heirship was accepted and considered fair. Thus, the principle remained in practice for decades after the principle of equal inheritance was enacted into law.

In addition to the traditional elements of serf property, such as a plot of land within the territory of the settlement or in its outer area, meadows and reedbeds, as well as orchards, played a prominent role in Gúta. The vast majority of meadows and reedbeds were owned by the community or the municipality and were distributed annually among the inhabitants, and were of great importance for their ecological qualities and their significance with a view to animal husbandry. The orchards did not belong closely to the serfs' plots and could be freely traded between farmers. The orchard was the only real estate property from which, traditionally, the daughter heirs shared equally with the son heirs.

An essential part of some of the serfs' plots in Gúta was the winter housing for cattle in the fields around the town. Extensive livestock farming by serfs with a larger livestock population required the creation of winter shelters (pens, sheep-folds) for the animals.

In connection with lands held in villeinage, we should also mention the institution of the pledge, which is a little researched area and hardly mentioned in the literature, although it played an extremely important role in farming at the time. It is clear from archival records that, in the first half of the 19th century, if a Gúta serf got into financial difficulties or tax arrears and needed cash, he would most often pledge part of his land, thus obtaining access to the money. The sources provide ample information on such transactions, which is surprising since several landlord decrees of the time prohibited the pledging of lands held in villeinage. According to a census from 1818, 20–25 percent of the arable land and meadows belonging to the plots on the outer area of Gúta were pledged. The issue requires further research, as these data partly redraw the picture of the property situation of individual farmers as revealed by the tax censuses. In some cases, a serf who appeared to be an independent farmer on the basis of the tax register had his land largely pledged. However, the opposite is also the case, where the official census shows the person as landless or having a fragmented plot, but at the same time he owned and farmed substantial property in pledge. Farmers with more adult male labour force and draught animals

undertook to cultivate more land in addition to their own. The craftsman having cash at his disposal could invest his wealth in pawned land and sought to acquire land for himself and his heirs. Beneath the surface was the accumulation of wealth by a narrow group, about which archival sources reveal little.

7. Composition and Functioning of the Municipality

The municipality of the archiepiscopal market town, which not only regulated the internal order of coexistence, but also had a significant economic management role, also performed judicial functions and state functions mediated by the county. The landlord of the manor regarded the municipality as an organisational unit that facilitated the management and administration of the manor. He therefore sought to control the election of the town's leadership and to place in positions those who would further his aims. In the town's administration, the wealthier farmers were primarily in charge, and a narrow stratum with family and kinship ties held the reins. These circumstances often allowed a despotic spirit and corruption to take hold in local government. The estate and county economic auditors also pointed out numerous cases of economic abuse and waste in management, but the situation did not improve for decades, and those responsible were not punished either financially or morally, and usually retained their positions. The poorer majority of the town's population was in almost constant conflict with the town's leaders, with a constant stream of letters of complaint to the landlord and the county, and later to the Viennese court, accusing the magistrates of abuses. However, the leaders of the archiepiscopal estate mostly sided with the accused persons they put in their positions, covered up the cases or delayed the real prosecution for years or decades. On a few occasions, the noisy majority, taking advantage of the internal political situation, briefly took over the leadership of the municipality. In each case the rebellion ended in defeat and the old order, the previous municipality, was restored. In the country that embarked on the path of bourgeois development after the Compromise, in the course of the administrative restructuring, Gúta failed to strengthen its municipal government and the town was reclassified as a large village after the abolition of its market town framework, and failed to achieve the status of a town with a regular council.

8. Responses to the Impoverishment Process

The society of Gúta has tried to respond to the negative trends towards impoverishment in various ways. One possible response was a change in household structure. During the period under review, there was a trend towards more complex households, with a high proportion of multi-family households. In a national comparison, at the time of the census under Emperor Joseph II, the municipality was in the category of predominantly single-family households. At the end of the period under study, in 1869, the proportion of multi-family households was only 14% nationally, accounting for 22.8% of the population. In Gúta, however, these proportions were more than double the Hungarian average, 30.77% and 45.92% respectively. The complex household structure was mainly characteristic of families with land, in which the co-farming and co-housing of related families was observed. This was done in order to preserve the status of family members and to prevent them from falling into deeper poverty (from becoming cotters) or emigrating. The variety of marriage strategies also worked against impoverishment. The large number of intermarriages between relatives or stepsiblings, levirates and sororates also served to avoid the fragmentation of the landed estate and to keep wealth and family labour together. The forces and relationships that held family communities together were counteracted after emancipation of serfs. By the end of the 19th century, the expansion of suburban settlements had intensified, with farms being established on the site of former animal wintering shelters and orchards to provide a livelihood and the opportunity for young couples displaced from overpopulated villages to set up their own farms.

The collective response of the inhabitants of the market town to the unfavourable developments was a lawsuit against the archdiocese for the possession of the *puszta*, for the perceived and real privileges. The bitter struggle for land, which often ended in violence, open rebellions, and land seizures, gained new momentum after the abolition of serfdom. At that time, the question was what kind of and how much land each serf family would own after the emancipation of serfs, how much pasture and forest they would receive in addition to their acquired plot of land. The 'nation of Gúta', however, was doomed to lose both in the maze of law and in the field of open violence. The archdiocese retained the ownership of

the *puszta*, and the right to fish and keep taverns could not be won by forceful seizures or by invoking old customary law. The defeat was mainly due to the ungenerous legislation enacted under absolutism to dismantle the complicated, century-long system of serfdom. The archdiocese was also adamant that only the most narrowly defined serf land should be given to the peasantry. The society of the market town was also deeply divided on the issue, which is perhaps surprising at first glance within a homogeneous Hungarian Roman Catholic peasant community. The narrow wealthier stratum of the town, which was over-represented in the leadership of the municipality, was not prepared to fight the landlord and risk losing their wealth. A large part of the town's population was forced to enter the world of free peasantry and capitalism as landless cotters, day labourers. It was the extremely fierce and persistent resistance of the inhabitants of my hometown to the former landlord that created the image of a community in contemporary literature and public discourse as a constantly rebellious and litigious one. In the struggle for land, it developed a high degree of self-organisation and political advocacy (petitions, popular assemblies, delegations, letters of complaint, petitions, etc.).

The emancipation of the serfs brought freedom of movement to the peasantry, giving them economic independence, but left them vulnerable in the free market economy. Social emancipation was not accompanied by effective economic reforms, and there was no large-scale land reform. It had to bear the bitter consequences of the unfolding capitalist competition. In this free struggle, the landless masses in particular, the servants and cotters, entered at a huge disadvantage, and their growing numbers exacerbated social tensions. In the case of Gúta, whose people could not take advantage of birth control until the mid-20th century, rapid reproduction only increased their misery. It was this growing social tension that gave rise to the agrarian proletarian and communist movements of the twentieth century in the municipality.

9. The Role of Education in the Life of the Market Town

The municipality also managed the organisation of local education, which was only present at the elementary level in the town. The role of the school was mainly emphasised in terms of religious and moral education, and it did not contribute to social mobility. The children of Gúta families were rarely able to break out

of serfdom through education. I could only identify two individuals in the period under study who had risen to the priesthood, in which education played a decisive role.

10. Presentation of Individual Life Paths

The family histories and life paths presented in my work contribute to a better understanding of the social processes that took place during the period under study. The picture emerges of a narrow stratum of a few families growing wealthy who held the leadership of the town in their hands for generations. Alongside them existed a majority that fought with almost religious fanaticism for its perceived or real privileges and for the land, the basis of the population's subsistence. The process of pauperisation that characterised Gúta's society can also be observed in the family life paths. The micro-historical parts of my work bring us closer to, and give us a better understanding of, the people of Gúta in the 18th and 19th centuries.

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