

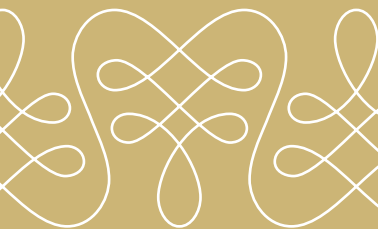


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*Stepfamilies across Ethnicities*

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## *Stepfamilies across Ethnicities*

Gabriella Erdélyi  
Special Editor of the Thematic Issue

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# Noble Lineage as Stepfamily Network: An Eighteenth-Century Noble Autobiography from the Principality of Transylvania<sup>1</sup>

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In this essay, I examine how an eighteenth-century Transylvanian nobleman constructed the meanings of kinship and family relations. The investigation primarily draws on the autobiographical work of László Székely (1716–1772), an educated and sensitive Transylvanian nobleman, who recorded the brief history of his family and himself. Being orphaned at a young age the author made his way out in life without the help of his biological parents, with the advice and support of his extended family: guardians, blood relatives, brothers-in-law; and other personal connections, such as servants, former colleagues, and friends. Due to the detailed description of his lineage and his constant preoccupation to record the major family events the present article offers an exhaustive study of the emotional bonds and kinship ties between some of the most important noble families from Transylvania.

Keywords: kinship networks, stepfamily, orphanhood, egodocuments, eighteenth-century Transylvania

## *Introduction: Egodocuments and Family History*

The present inquiry is based on a recently edited Transylvanian autobiography written by Count László Székely (1716–1772).<sup>2</sup> Initially his autobiography raised the interest of some historians, but due to the little importance this Count played in the political history of Transylvania, and due to the lack of political information from his narratives, the full edition of his egodocuments was delayed. Some parts, considered probably of greater interest, such as his journey

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1 This paper was supported by the MTA BTK Lendület Családtörténeti Kutatócsoport [Lendület Integrating Families Research Group] and is a revised version of the introduction of *Gróf Székely László Önéletírása*. Fehér, “Család és élettörténetek.”

2 *Gróf Székely László Önéletírása*. The complete title of the manuscript: “Description of his life, origins, birth, upbringing, youth, and the vicissitudes he faced during this time.” The author began to copy his personal narratives into a book in 1763 and continued this work until his death in 1772. Therefore some parts were written earlier than the 60’, as the integrated diary from his journey to Vienna (1743–44) and his autobiographical poem written between 1745–54.

to Vienna, or his autobiographical poem were previously published.<sup>3</sup> The new, recent edition contains all the narratives included in the initial manuscript, not just all Székely's personal retrospective writings but also the continuation of his autobiography by his second wife, Zsuzsánna Toroczkaï (1730–1788),<sup>4</sup> and then a last narrative written by a family-servant, Zsigmond Kis,<sup>5</sup> the administrator of Toroczkaï.<sup>6</sup>

László Székely began to arrange his personal narratives at the age of 47, without a living heir, almost convinced that with him, since his brother Ádám (1724–1789) did not want to marry, the Székely family will disappear. The family's countship, which his father Ádám Székely (1679–1730) had acquired a few years before he was born, and in particular the disdain of Transylvanian society for the “*homines novi*,” as his grandfather László Székely the Elder (1644–1692) was considered, exerted a decisive influence on him. His autobiography aims to justify not only one, but three life-stories: that of his grandfather and father too, contributing in this way to the construction of the family memory as well.<sup>7</sup> Székely was constantly frustrated by the socially low descent of his lineage, therefore a great part of the autobiography is concerned with his ancestors, and family alliances, since the kinships gained through marriage were very important for the author. The present inquiry suggests that these relationships were complicated, and there is no place for generalizations. Families belonging to the same cultural and social group exhibit signs of different emotional behavior from case to case, blood bonds being frequently overwritten by friendships based on sympathy. Family and kinship ties were determining factors, but it seems that in the Székely family, beyond the network of biological or step relatives the alliances of friendship were just as important.<sup>8</sup>

Orphaned at a very fragile age, Székely was trying to find his place in society with the help of his blood-relatives, distant kin and friends. Therefore

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3 *Bécsi utazásomról; Bécsi utazások*, 105–200; *Székely László verses önéletírása*.

4 *Toroczkaï Zsuzsánna feljegyzései*, 441–50.

5 *Kis Zsigmond feljegyzései*, 452–72.

6 Personal narratives in the eighteenth century were barely intimate, wives continue sometimes the narratives of their late husbands, and occasionally some of the family records were ended and preserved by members from the household. Probably the most interesting case is that of Péter Bod and her patron Katalin Bethlen, since the autobiography of Bethlen was published, organized in chapters by Bod. András Markos, “Bod Péter és Árva Bethlen Kata,” 341–5. One might even talk in this particular situation about a “shared authorship.” Erdélyi, “Confessional identity,” 478.

7 Erdélyi, “Stepfamily relationships,” 161.

8 Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, 93.

the autobiography offers an exceptional and detailed insight into 18<sup>th</sup> century family-life, into the construction of kinship-networks and family-relationships. From these one could easily examine the supportive networks which stood at the disposal of a noble orphan.

*“Complaints about the Bad Fate of the Origin” – The Paternal Lineage*

Since a mandatory structural part of modern personal narratives is the one concerning lineage, it is not difficult to reconstruct the kinship network of this family that had only survived for three generations in Transylvania. Székely touches with unmatched detail upon the kinship acquired both on the mother’s and the father’s side.

The history of a family begins with marriage. Transylvanian narrative sources keep emphasizing the importance of harmonious coexistence between partners, and it seems that the authors themselves sought successful marriages. While reading the memoir literature of the time, one may even get the feeling that with the exception of some memoir writers, everyone lived in a happy marriage, and married according to their individual wishes, for by this time love had already been interlocked with marriage for a while.<sup>9</sup> The reality is, of course, far more nuanced. These memoirs report on tragedies, divorces, and, in the language of the time, on so-called forced marriages arranged by relatives. It is true, memoir writers mostly disapproved of these unions considered favorable by parents and relatives.<sup>10</sup>

The marriages within the Székely family are amongst those that are a result of individual choice rather than of family decision or coercion.<sup>11</sup> The best example for this is the marriage of László Székely the Elder, who managed to obtain the hand of Sára Bulcsesdi (b.1656–1708), raised in a very influential family – a pursuit where suitors belonging to more well-to-do families with more important lineages had failed.

László Székely, the Elder, due to his role played in the history of the principality, is an active, –and not a particularly beloved– character of Transylvanian memoirs. Miklós Bethlen (1642–1716) had written the following about him: “László Székely was a poor, two-horse nobleman from Jenő, and was such a favorite of the Prince [Mihály Apaffi, 1632–1690] in the role of Postmaster

9 Fehér, *Sensibilitate și identitate*, 165–66.

10 Fehér, *Sensibilitate și identitate*, 165–72; Péter, *Házasság a régi Magyarországon*, 123–38.

11 Fehér, “From Courtship till the Morning After,” 787–90.

that his wife and all his relations and counsellors did not do as much in his view as László Székely,”<sup>12</sup> and this is somewhat completed by György Rettegi (1718–1786): “together with Mihály Teleki (1634–1690) they have sold the country and emerged at the same time.”<sup>13</sup> The quotations point rather to the low origin and unscrupulous character than the actual lineage. The present autobiography does not reveal much more about the “great” László Székely either: all we find out is that he was the son of János Székely; the author does not record anything of importance about the sisters of his grandfather who remained in Hungary—it seems that their fate was not being monitored attentively. But the modest origins of his grandfather bothered the autobiographer, since he constantly feels the need to justify the actions of his ancestor.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike in the case of the grandfather, quite a lot is known about the grandmother, Sára Bulcesdi.<sup>15</sup> Luckily for him, László Székely, was not familiar with the contents of Romanian chronicles, because otherwise he would have had to justify this lineage as well. The reason is that Sára’s grandfather, Diicu Buicescu (ca.1610–1659), just like László Székely –according to public opinion– exhibited serious shortcomings in his character, defects that could not be erased from the chronicles, not even through him founding numerous monasteries. The careerist nephew of Matei Basarab (1588–1654), ruler of Wallachia, was also infamous for his intrigues, as well as his negative influence on the ruler.<sup>16</sup> Diicu’s son, Preda (†1656), became a victim of the family’s pursuit for titles and wealth, being sacrificed on the altar of politics and forced to marry Anna Szalánczi.<sup>17</sup> Death, however, had ended the marriage quite early on, but not before the birth of the common child, Sára, who inherited many Wallachian properties through her father.

Following the death of her husband, Anna Szalánczi married “old” István Jósika, from whom she gave birth to four children: Imre, István, Dániel and Mária. Sára Bulcesdi had thus four half siblings, one of them, the bachelor Dániel later taking under his guardianship the orphaned memoir writer, László Székely, and his brothers, Ádám and József (1726–1736). It seems that Dániel

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12 Bethlen, *The Autobiography*, 257.

13 Rettegi, *Emlékezetre méltó dolgok*, 269.

14 The introduction of the autobiography deals constantly with the worries of the author regarding his origins. He even argues on the pages of his life-narrative with other Transylvanian memoir-writers, whose texts he previously read and who discredited his grandfather. Fehér, “Székely László Önéletírása,” 68–69.

15 Tüdős, “O doamnă pentru vremuri noi,” 241–68.

16 *Ibid.*, 243–44.

17 Jakó, “A Szalánczyak,” 209.

Jósika was closest to his elder half-sister Sára, because in his youth, according to the autobiography, he was raised in her court, and spent a lot of time in the company of the young married couple. Otherwise it was not unusual for sisters to take care of their bachelor brothers, not to mention that the time spent together influenced also the emotional relations between siblings. It is presumed that the bond between siblings was always stronger for those who lived a long time together or near each other.<sup>18</sup>

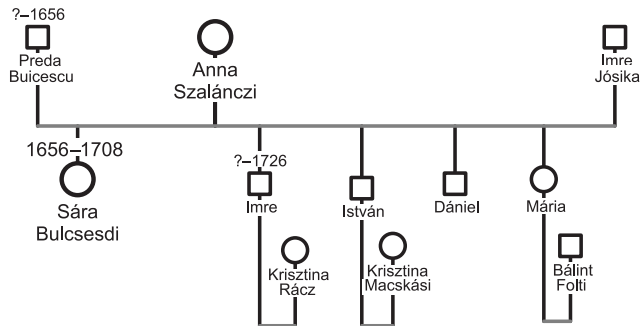


Table 1. The siblings and half-siblings of Sára Bulcsesdi

### *The Transylvanian Early-Modern Marriage Market: The Székely–Bulcsesdi Marriage*

Luckily, many interesting antecedents of the Székely–Bulcsesdi marriage are known to us, which sheds light on the fact that the early modern marriage market did not always develop according to the expectations, and that the calculations of relatives could often be overwritten by the young girl’s feelings. Namely, Sára Bulcsesdi had several suitors who were all above her later husband in terms of lineage.<sup>19</sup> Her first suitor and fiancée was a member of the Bethlen family. The family’s marital intentions were conveyed by the memoir writer Miklós Bethlen, who proposed to Sára on behalf of his brother Pál (1648–1686). But the engagement was broken off to the consternation of Transylvanian society due to the objections of Klára Fekete, stepmother of the Bethlen brothers. According to Bethlen’s autobiography, Klára Fekete had a great influence on her husband and interfered “too often” in the private life of her same-aged stepchildren, especially when she hindered the engagement of Pál Bethlen. The stepmother managed

18 O’Day, *The Family and Family Relationships*, 74, 89.

19 Fehér, “From Courtship till the Morning After,” 787–88.



to ruin the emotional balance of the family, turning the father against his sons, and probably as a result of these tensions the engagement was eventually broken. Following the “unsuccessful engagement” of his brother, Miklós Bethlen visited Sára Bulcsesdi once again with similar intents, this time on behalf of his friend Boldizsár Macskási (ca. 1650–ca. 1700). His argumentation conveys the views of traditionalist Transylvanian nobility: “I found the opportunity of saying, among other things, to István Jósika, her stepfather that I would rather give my daughter to a true-blue nobleman of ancient lineage than to a postmaster.” To what extent could Jósika influence his stepdaughter is unknown, but Bethlen’s quote suggests that whatever the stepfather personal opinion was, Sára preferred “the beardless and somewhat younger man of her choice rather than the widowed beard,”<sup>20</sup> thus the suitor did not succeed. We may also suppose that a promising political career, and a fortune acquired in short time have overwritten social rigidity and seclusion,<sup>21</sup> even though Transylvanian society tended to be still suspicious of *homo novus*-es.

The betrothal and the celebration confirming it were looked at with repulsion by contemporaries; the grandchild, however, proudly mentions that his grandfather “managed to marry in such a way that even today is rare to find, not only back in the days; in short: he married into a rich family.”<sup>22</sup>

The marriage was rich not only in financial terms, but also considering the number of offspring. The pair gave birth to eight common children, only two of them reaching adulthood: the father of the memoir writer, Ádám, and his younger brother Mózes (1685–1712), who died a brutal death in 1712, i.e. before the birth of the author. Sára Bulcsesdi gave birth to eight children in ten years, at the time of her husband’s death in 1692 the youngest of them being only four, the eldest fourteen years old. She decided to remarry after five years of widowhood.

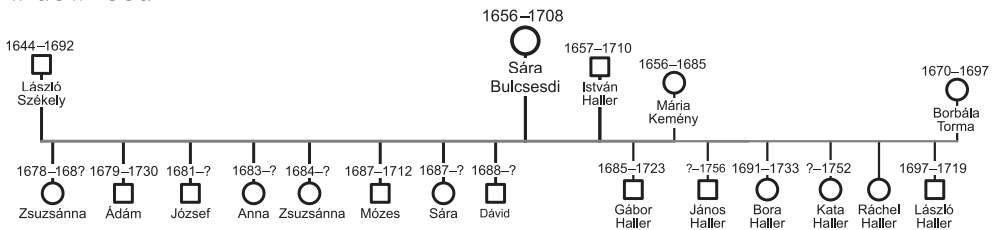


Table 2. The biological children and stepchildren of Sára Bulcsesdi

20 Bethlen, *The Autobiography*, 283–84.

21 Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French Nobility*, 123–25.

22 *Gróf Székely László önéletírása*, 66.

## *Between Biological Kin and Step-family Relations: The Bulcsesdi–Haller Marriage*

In his memoir, Székely relates the second marriage of his grandmother as well, although it did not bring about blood bonds, not to mention that he does not consider this marriage of Sára Bulcsesdi a successful one. The author's objections were on one hand of religious nature, since the up until then zealously charitable woman of the Reformed Church married a Catholic lord to the contemporaries' great surprise, on the other hand by economic reasons: "There is no doubt, that my grandmother's second marriage differed a lot from her first one, which can be easily tracked down in the testament she left behind, and which I have read. I don't say anything about the family, since that is a fine old noble one, but taking others in consideration, and I am not going to discuss it further. What good it is for me to mention how much we lost? It was God's will, so had to be."<sup>23</sup>

What motivated Sára Bulcsesdi to marry the twice widowed István Haller (ca.1657–1710) would be hard to explain in the absence of her personal narratives. At the time, she was not in need of a man's support, her children were not endangered, her husband's family could not claim them or their inheritance since their existence was unknown to them. Usually women in Transylvania remarried, including not only those of the lower nobility but also the aristocracy,<sup>24</sup> even more often than in Hungary,<sup>25</sup> especially if they had small children.<sup>26</sup> But this was not Sára's case. Her reasons were presumably financial, or power-related, because it was easier for a woman to face everyday problems with the support of a man.<sup>27</sup> Not to mention that she had still two young males in her household,

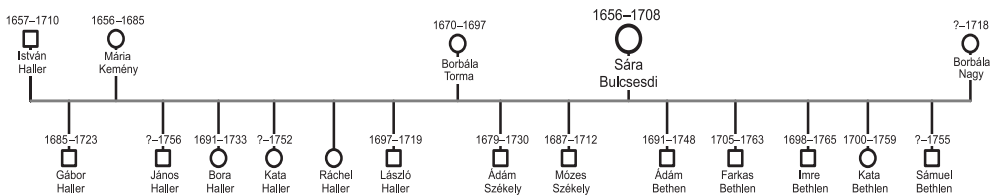


Table 3. The blended family of István Haller

23 *Gróf Székely László önéletírása*, 68–69.

24 According to recent studies women from middle classes remarried more often than aristocrats or the poor. Warner, "Introduction," 13–14.

25 Horn, "Orphans of Noble Birth," 138–40.

26 Hanawalt, "Remarriage as an Option," 141–44, 150–51.

27 This seemed to be the general opinion regarding this matter: Lundh, "Remarriages in Sweden," 428.

who had to be married at some point, therefore a strong alliance with one of the most influential families of the time was desirable.

Moreover, István Haller did not come into this marriage on his own, bringing six small children with him. His son Gábor (1685–1723), born from his first wife, Mária Kemény (ca.1656–1685), had not even turned one when he became an orphan. Finding a caring woman for the infant was an urgent matter, thus came into the family as second wife Borbála Torma (1670–1697), who later gave birth to three girls and two boys. But they, too, lost their mother soon: László (1697–1719), the youngest one, was just a baby when his mother died thus leaving István Haller to a second widowhood. This is when the third wife, the 41-year-old Sára Bulcsesdi arrived into the family. Her adolescent sons probably did not play a lot with the Haller children, from which the oldest was 12 and the youngest one-year-old. We don't know how much time Ádám and Mózes Székely (18 and nine years old) spent in the company of their stepfather and stepsiblings, but since the Haller-Bulcsesdi marriage lasted ten years, there was enough time to develop emotional attachments. During these years Ádám got twice married, and we know that Haller actively promoted the making of an advantageous second marriage for his stepson.<sup>28</sup>

The relationship between Sára Bulcsesdi's sons and their stepfather was interrupted however by the mother's death. Tensions arose when Haller refused to give Sára Bulcsesdi's corpse over to her sons and to take her beside her first husband to the church on Farkas Street in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca); not to mention that Haller refused to pay for the funeral services. The conflict is recounted in detail by Ádám Székely's former brother-in-law, the diarist István Wesselényi (1673–1734).<sup>29</sup> Wesselényi does not only write about the tensions, but about the funeral ceremony of Sára Bulcsesdi as well. Fulfilling the role of the main ceremony master (*főgazda*), he recorded every detail regarding organization, from expenses to listing the persons with functions during the funeral. Through him we find out that Sára Bulcsesdi was eventually buried in Szeben (Sibiu), the funeral masters (*temetési gazdák*) and wailers being members of the extended family; amongst mourners were, beside Ádám and Mózes Székely, her stepchildren from Haller's first two marriages.<sup>30</sup>

István Haller after his third wife's death took a wealthy widow as his fourth wife, but death separated them after one year. István Haller did not

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28 Wesselényi, *Sanyarú világ*, vol. 2, 229.

29 Ibid., 551–52.

30 Ibid., 557–60.

enrich the list of stereotypically evil stepparents, although he could have that chance since he managed to marry more than most of his contemporaries, moreover he managed to live in all the possible blended family-formations.<sup>31</sup> His first marriage followed a somewhat normal path, both parties being single; for the second one the widowed man chose a maiden for the upbringing of his orphaned child;<sup>32</sup> and in the third and fourth marriages it was two widows who tied together their own and their orphans' fates. Thus, Haller had raised his children in a complex blended family: beside his offsprings from the first two marriages he had presumably raised the children of his third—and most definitely also of his fourth—wives, too; a “sad result” of this coexistence would be the marriage between Kata Bethlen (1700–1758) and her stepbrother, László Haller.<sup>33</sup> In her memoir, Kata Bethlen never speaks negatively of her stepfather, although she had only spent one year in his household, during which time she would experience his unmatched tolerance.

It is clear from the enumeration of the parents' genealogy that, as we shall see further on, the great sympathies were directed towards the relatives on the maternal side, since László Székely, did not manage to establish life-long friendships with anyone on the father's side. The grandmother's, Sára Bulcsesdi's half-siblings are only occasionally mentioned by the author, excepting one, the guardian, Dániel Jósika, who is a constant figure in the first part of the autobiography, but the relation the author and his great-uncle had was not based on mutual sympathy. We know barely anything about the family of the grandfather, László Székely, the Elder, since he did not keep in touch with his relatives from Hungary. Only two of the Bulcsesdi-Székely children reached adulthood, and only the memoir writer's father had started a family, therefore there were not many relatives to be inherited. Two persons are prominent in the enumeration of collateral relatives, and curiously both belonged to the Haller family: László (ca.1717–1751), the son of his father's stepbrother, Gábor Haller (1685–1723); and Farkas Bethlen (1705–1763), Kata Bethlen's brother, “my adopted and dearly beloved Bruder,” whose short characterization we encounter for the first time during the enumeration of the Haller relatives.

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31 Perrier, “The Blended Family,” 462.

32 Warner, “Introduction,” 12.

33 On the marriage of the stepsiblings see also Erdélyi, “Confessional identity,” 473–96.

*Supportive Kinship Ties Across Generations: Aunts and Cousins on the Maternal Side*

The reason why László Székely presents in such detail the marriages of his maternal grandmother and of her sibling is that, as we shall see, the most reliable family members for him were on this side of the kinship. As recent studies have demonstrated the fate of orphans was dependent on kinship-networks.<sup>34</sup> This is perhaps the most important part in the description of his lineage, where the presentation of the maternal side—the less problematic one—takes place.

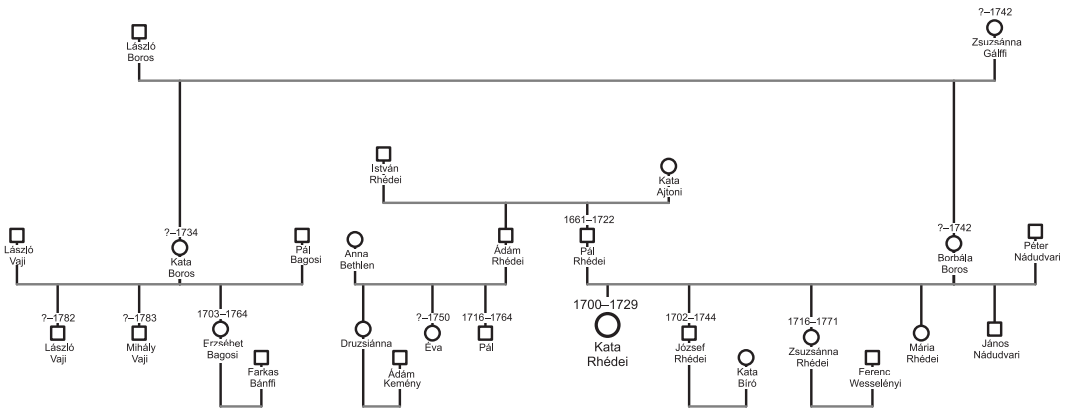


Table 4. The extended family of Kata and Borbála Boros. Siblings and half siblings.

The author describes in detail the course of Borbála's (†a.1734) and Kata's (†a.1742) life, the daughters of his great-grandparents, László Boros and Zsuzsánna Gálffi (†1742). Both Borbála Boros and Kata Boros married twice. László Székely knew nothing more of his maternal grandmother Borbála's first marriage than the husband's last name; he also only mentions in passing the boy János born from Péter Náduvvari, without stating his first name. It seems he would not play any part in the family's life later on. Much more thorough is the presentation of the second marriage of Borbála to Pál Rhédei (1661–1720), especially because the Rhédei family served as cure to the already mentioned frustrations regarding ancestry,<sup>35</sup> since the Rhédeis had obtained acknowledgement of their nobility in Hungary as well. From Borbála Boros's marriage to Pál Rhédei were born

34 Sabeau, *Kinship in Neckarhausen*.

35 We may even talk about an obsession with the family name, and origins, since the extension of the genealogical tree influenced the social or political possibilities of the individual. O'Day, *The Family and Family Relationships*, 68–70.

the mother of the autobiographer, Kata (1700–1729), and her siblings, József (ca.1702–1744), Zsuzsánna (1716–1771) and Mária. The author himself mentions it as an interesting fact that his mother and his grandmother were pregnant at the same time, and that his aunt Zsuzsánna was a few months younger than him: “It is quite remarkable that my mother, Kata Rhédei was already married to my father, and when my mother was half-time with me, my grandmother became pregnant with her daughter, Zsuzsánna, wife of Ferenc Wesselényi, and therefore I was born a half year before my mother’s sister Zsuzsánna.”<sup>36</sup>

From his maternal uncles, József played an important role in Székely’s life, being referred to as “rather a father, than uncle to me.” József was present, together with his wife Kata Bíró (†a.1764), at several important events of Székely’s life, for example at his wedding as ceremony masters,<sup>37</sup> and when he left for Vienna for half a year, they took care of his daughter from his first marriage, the then only six-months-old Zsuzsánna (1743–1744). Nothing proves better Székely’s deep sympathy for his uncle than the emphasis on József Rhédei’s death in both of his autobiographical works, the one written in prose and the one in verse. At the level of narration, the part relating Rhédei’s death is certainly the most dramatically constructed one among the passages dealing with the loss of male relatives, especially because the death of the uncle was preceded by the loss of the author’s first wife: “They did not dare to tell me about the death of József Rhédei [...] after understanding that my poor uncle has passed I was terribly saddened, I was so confused, that when I started reading the Bible I could not see the letters from my tears.”<sup>38</sup>

Although the half-siblings born from Borbála Boros’s two marriages did not get along very well with each other, the Rhédei children coexisted really well with their cousins. The children of Ádám (1674–1704), brother of Pál Rhédei, were raised together with the latter’s children after the loss of their mother, and based on László Székely’s account, it seems that the relationship between cousins and uncles was very harmonious: “[Ádám Rhédei was] an uncle whom my mother and her siblings loved tenderly.”<sup>39</sup> Being raised together must have strengthened this alliance, which had perpetuated itself: Druziánna Rhédei (†a.1764) “an undeniable kind kin” as the author mentions, but especially Éva (†1750) and

36 *Gróf Székely László Önéletírása*, 55. However that was not at all that remarkable, since we found several similar cases in the Transylvanian ego-documents. Fehér, *Sensibilitate și identitate*, 243.

37 Fehér, “From Courtship till the Morning After,” 796.

38 *Gróf Székely László Önéletírása*, 237, 300.

39 *Ibid.*, 378.

Pál (1716–1764), also due to a certain generational shift, maintained a strong friendship with László Székely. Pál played a role in the forming of the first family nucleus, too, accompanying the author to Bonchida (Bonțida) during courting, and László would have been the ceremony master at Éva's wedding. But Éva had suddenly died under tragic circumstances, thus Székely had to take on the role of funeral master. Éva's death had deeply affected the author, since the emotional bond between them was very strong: "many should indeed possess such love and honesty as this poor soul had toward her siblings and other relatives too, and especially to me."<sup>40</sup> The narrative techniques used in the account of the funeral ceremony and of the grief being similar to the ones used in József Rhédei's case. The affectional bond could be easily traced through this life-cycle-related duties kindred perform in one another's life, or in this case death. It is not a coincidence, that most of our Transylvanian ego-documents, however laconic, always enumerate the occasions when authors performed roles at baptisms, weddings or funerals.

Székely László relates with this same thoroughness the marriages of his grandmother's siblings: the first marriage of Kata Boros to Pál Bagosi, and also the life journey of their daughter Erzsébet (ca. 1703–1764), who married into the Bánffy family; then the fate of Kata Boros's sons born from her second marriage to László Vaji. There is more to this thorough account than the author's drive to present the divergence of family networks. The interest in horizontal kinship ties was based on individual sympathies. Székely mentions Erzsébet Bagosi as a deeply beloved aunt, who had been, together with her husband Farkas Bánffy (1701–1761), a great promoter of Székely's first marriage. Farkas Bánffy was the one to urge the girl's family for an answer, brought engagement gifts back and forth, and served as master of ceremony during the wedding together with his wife.<sup>41</sup> The author describes Farkas Bánffy as "rather father than uncle to me" as well, like József Rhédei. Furthermore, László (†1782) and Mihály Vaji (†1783), although they were cousins of Székely's mother, belonged to the author's generation, and are quite frequently mentioned in the memoir as childhood friends. What is more, Mihály also accompanied the author on his journey to Vienna. In contrast to the children of the Nádudvari and the Rhédei family, the half-siblings born from the Bagosi and the Vaji marriages, lived together in a beautiful friendship according to the memoir.

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40 *Gróf Székely László Önéletírása*, 344–48.

41 Fehér, "From Courtship till the Morning After," 798.



The author's great grandmother, Zsuzsánna Gálffi, who lived almost 100 years, got to see seven adult grandchildren from her two daughters, and 30 great-grandchildren, and only one year had separated her from meeting the grandchild of her grandchild. Her daughters had raised their children and often their nephews and nieces in extended families. The generational shifts, the great age gaps between siblings, half siblings and cousins resulted in very interesting kinship networks, uncles and aunts being in certain cases younger than their nephews or nieces.

### *László Székely's Childhood as an Orphan*

As studies of Early Modern marriage markets reveal, first generation marriages were the most important ones, since these laid the foundations for the future of family members without grants of nobility by opening the way for better and better marriages.<sup>42</sup> In the Székely family this was particularly true in the autobiographer's father, Ádám's case, who managed to enter into even more advantageous marriages than his father, the "great" László Székely.<sup>43</sup> On the first occasion, Ádám Székely, with his freshly acquired countship (1700), announced his marriage intents to one of the most influential Transylvanian families. His marriage to the governor György Bánffy's (1660–1708) daughter, Anna (1686–1704), was cut very short by death, leaving no chance for providing a successor. As mentioned earlier, Ádám Székely maintained a very good network of family relations, friendships and links that paid off after several years, too. At his second wedding his former brothers- and sisters-in-law performed some very important duties: István Wesselényi was groomsman, and his wife lady of honor; Dénes Bánffy (1688–1709) was bridesman, and his sister maid of honor.<sup>44</sup> This second marriage to Sára Naláczi (1692–1760) however, was also cut short, this time by divorce. His third marriage in 1715 must have been strongly motivated by the wish to produce an heir.<sup>45</sup> From his third wife, Katalin Rhédei, was born the autobiographer himself, on September 4, 1716.

The birth of László Székely, was not devoid of agitation, the 17-year-old mother almost losing her life during labour. Otherwise during his infant- and

42 Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French nobility*, 122.

43 Fehér, "From Courtship till the Morning After," 788.

44 Wesselényi, *Sanyarú világ*, vol. 2, 645.

45 As it was for the great majority of widowers. Lundh, "Remarriages in Sweeden," 431, 446; Warner, "Stepfamilies in Early Modern Europe," 480–81.



early childhood, the author himself was also continually in a state between life and death: “from the very beginning, from my birth until I was almost 14 years old, I struggled continuously with different diseases, so I grew up wearing clothes made for my funeral.”<sup>46</sup> In a feverish state, he often listened to old women preparing for his funeral, among them especially his mother’s old servant spoke openly in front of the child about his death, as though she wished to hasten it. This was because the old servant, Mrs. Galgóczi did not like the boy, what is more, she rejoiced in tormenting and frightening him. László’s childish imagination was invaded by the image of the evil witch, master of life and death, and not even time could alter this impression of her; he did not even dare to eat her cooking: “This pour old woman never loved me, and I was rather scared off her too, after my parent’s death I avoided eating what she cooked.”<sup>47</sup> But by that time his parents’ love provided some healing for all his childhood pain and fear: “But all my sorrow and pain was sweetened by the gracious providence and diligence of my sweet parents.”

Naturally, in time the family was expanded with new members. László was followed by Ádám I (b-d. 1719), Mária (1722–1728), Ádám II (1724), and József (1726–1736). Ádám I died as an infant, Mária at the age of eight. Soon the children had to face the death of their parents. László Székely was 14, Ádám six, and József four years old when they lost first their mother, and then, their father. József also died at the age of ten, therefore only two children from the third marriage reached adulthood, László and Ádám, who were rather separated than brought closer by their orphanhood. The brothers did not even have time to deepen their relationship, because Ádám was only one-year old when László was sent to college, and except a short period when the Székely boys were spending time together in Szeben (Sibiu) in order to learn German, they had never lived under the same roof. Due to the customs of child circulation, siblings, not only orphans, often spent their childhood years separately, in the company of other children such as their cousins.<sup>48</sup>

The author, being of legal age, was in the position to name a guardian for the three of them since his parents did not leave behind a will. He decided upon Dániel Jósika, the bachelor half-brother of his paternal grandmother: “After

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46 *Gróf Székely László Önéletírása*, 71.

47 *Ibid.*, 85. The Transylvanian ego-documents contain several mentions regarding the mistreatment if young nobles by their servants or nurses. Fehér, *Sensibilitate și identitate*, 241–42.

48 Perrier, “Coresidence of Siblings,” 300–4; O’Day, *The Family and Family Relationships*, 86–93; Collins, “British Stepfamily Relationships,” 332.

my parents died, I remained orphan at the age of 14. When, because my poor parents did not make any testaments known to me, being the first born of my father, in 1730, I made my poor great-uncle Dániel Jósika to be guardian for me and my brothers, therefore for seven years, until the spring of 1737, I truly lived on orphan bread.”<sup>49</sup>

The author’s choice had a background, too: the unmarried Jósika had promised Ádám Székely the Elder that he would leave his fortune to the latter’s children. Probably this had also played a part in the fact that the relatives did not object to the autobiographer’s choice. The ego-document later reveals that the author ended up utterly regretting his decision. Dániel Jósika’s educational methods were considered outrageous even in those times. The guardian verbally and physically abused the elder boy left to his care, what is more, during his time spent at home, Székely often slept in the company of servants or on the dusty floor next to greyhounds, for he was not allowed to sleep in a bed. His clothing also resembled rather that of the servants. This may remind us of other barefoot and badly dressed little noblemen, who spent the nights on the cold floor; but just like István Apor (1638–1704) or Mihály Cserei (1667–1756),<sup>50</sup> László Székely also considered that it was due to this harsh upbringing that he became a responsible man: “In a word, he kept me in an extremely miserable state. It is true that if a young man is left alone, and he is not tempered, hardly would become a good man out of a thousand, and even if all things would have gone in the world as I wished [...] nothing good would come out of me.” As Székely argues, corporal punishment as a tool to solicit respect and obedience towards fathers was applied more by Protestants, since Catholics were much more indulgent with their children, which he attributes to the influence of Jesuits.<sup>51</sup>

The sorrow of orphanhood, it seems, was felt not only in the lack of (parental) love, but first of all also in the change in financial circumstances.<sup>52</sup> László Székely would have wished somehow to suffer rather from the reduction of his wardrobe or harsh treatment, but not through the lack of side expenses necessary for the establishment of relation networks, which would develop during dinners or wine consumption. This also hurt his vanity, his college mates and fellows often mocking their “ragged” Count colleague. But orphanhood

49 *Gróf Székely László önéletrása*, 73.

50 Apor, *Lusus mundi*, 21–25. Cserei Mihály *Históriája*, 91–92.

51 *Gróf Székely László önéletrása*, 74.

52 A common concern among orphans Perrier, “The Blended Family,” 469.

also put an end to the Székely boys' prospects for further studies. While László simply thought of it with regret, Ádám, made great financial sacrifices in his adulthood in order to attend Western academies.

By his authority as a guardian, Jósika was tied to the children left to his care through different interests. These were, first of all, financial interests, and although theoretically it was his Christian obligation to compensate for the absence of parental love, it is obvious that more rational reasons had guided him.<sup>53</sup> Jósika did not treat the Székely boys the same way: he did not behave badly towards Ádám, and he even liked the youngest one, József, which was certainly also due to the fact that József's youth made him more impressionable than his brothers.<sup>54</sup> László Székely was unable to do anything against the abuses. Normally it was the family's duty to protect the child from the abuse of guardians, since the family network had to counterbalance the authority of a guardian in major conflicts.<sup>55</sup> But since the author himself made this otherwise logical choice (Jósika was his closest male relative on the father's side) no kindred interfered in the dispute between the two.

The severity of the guardian had to be suffered only occasionally. Székely spent most of his childhood at college, and he often suggests in his autobiography that he could not have been in a better place in Transylvania then because 50 fellow students coming from noble families were there simultaneously.<sup>56</sup> College years were followed by three years of apprenticeship spent in the service of the prothonotary (*ítélőmester*) András Szentkereszti (†1736), the one-time prefect of his grandfather at the chancellery. The Szentkereszti family did not take care of the author only with regards to the "great" László Székely, but also due to the insistence on relatives. Székely's aunt on the maternal side, Zsuzsánna, younger than him with a few months, had recently married Ferenc Wesselényi, who intervened with the solitarily living Szentkereszti to take in László Székely. This is how Székely entered into the friendly environment of the Szentkereszti family for a while, which somewhat eased the pain of emotional wounds caused by his guardian. He later formed life-long friendships at the prothonotar's table,

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53 Collins, "Reason, nature and order," 314.

54 Horn, "Orphans of Noble Birth," 101.

55 Perrier, "The Blended Family," 460–61.

56 The importance of these friendships could be as well traced in the life-story of some of the author's colleagues. Székely played an important role in the marriage of two of his school comrades, Sámuel Szentkereszti and István Radák, both marrying Székely's sister-in-law. We will later analyze the part played by another former college colleague, András Barabás in the second marriage of the author. The most significant example is however that of Pál Balázs, who lived his whole life in Székely's household.

and would roam the dusty roads of Transylvania together with Szentkereszti's grandson, Sámuel (1721–1772), in search of a marriage partner. This friendship was eventually strengthened by marriage too, the two becoming brothers-in-law.<sup>57</sup>

Székely, freed from under his guardian with the help of András Szentkereszti, did not know how to manage his freedom and fortune at first, wasting it, making mistake after mistake.

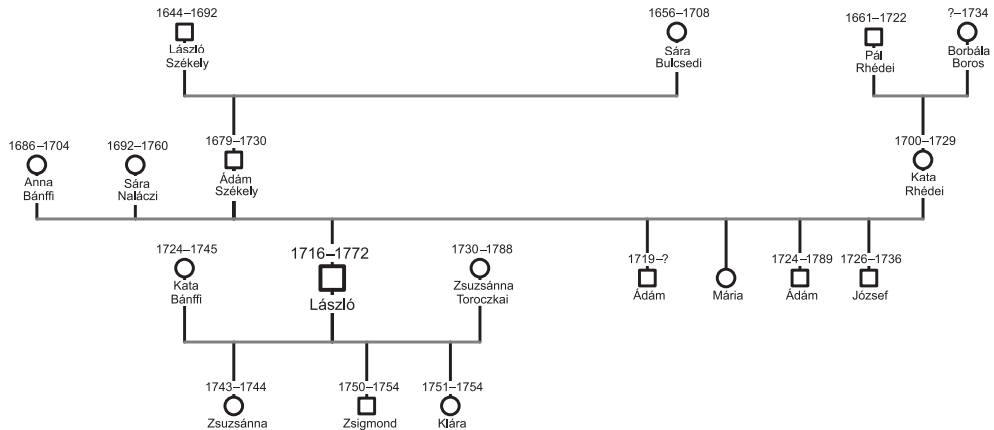


Table 5. The lineage and marriages of László Székely

### *The Autobiographer's First Marriage*

As a result of his grandfather's property acquisitions László Székely came by a considerable financial capital, as well as a noteworthy social capital through his father's marriages. Thus with his own marriage he did not really need to achieve anything, and since as an orphan at the age of marriage he could make an individual decision with the assistance of distant kin and close friends. By that time his guardian Jósika was no longer present in the life of the author, since a few years earlier, when he reached the legal age, Székely terminated the guardianship. In the absence of parents and guardians the support of distant kin and friends was extremely important, since in early modern times the majority of youth were

<sup>57</sup> The widow of András Szentkereszti, Mária Korda asked Székely to propose for his son, since he already had great connection with the guardians of Klára Bánffi. In her request Mária Korda makes several references to the time Székely lived in her household, and ask him to remember the favors András Szentkereszti made him. So his involvement in the marriage could be also interpreted as a return for the favors he once received from them. *Gróf Székely László önéletrása*, 322–26.

orphans or half-orphans when making their marriages.<sup>58</sup> Following the custom of repeated marriages, he also consciously tried to strengthen an existing alliance with the same family:<sup>59</sup> his first wife was a member of the Bánffy family, the also orphaned Kata Bánffy (1724–1745), niece of his father's first wife.

Kata Bánffy lost her mother, Ágnes Toroczkai (1703–1733), when she was nine years old, then after two years, in 1735, her father, György Bánffy (1688–1735). Kata's upbringing was taken on by her paternal aunt, Klára Bánffy (1693–1767), whose husband, Ádám Bethlen (1691–1748) was named guardian of the orphans by testament. Kata also had a brother, Dénes (1723–1780), and four sisters, Klára (†1750), Ágnes (1731–1754), Anna (†1740) and Zsuzsánna. The Bánffy orphans thus grew up together with their guardians' children, Ádám (1719–1772) and Gábor Bethlen (1712–1768),<sup>60</sup> who loved their cousins as siblings, proof of this being the role they played in marrying them off.<sup>61</sup> But it was not only the guardians' immediate family that took care of the Bánffy orphans; the other Bethlen and Bánffy relatives had also spent time in Bonchida. Székely's autobiography emphasized several times how supportively the kinship ties within the Bethlen family operated. The siblings: Kata Bethlen (the wife of József Teleki (†1732) by this time), Imre (1698–1765) (with his wife Klára Gyulai (†1757) and Ádám spent not only holidays, but also the everyday together. The author's courtship was thus observed with attention by many interested people who most certainly voiced their opinion on it, too: “The wives of József Teleki and Imre Bethlen [the aunts of the bride, sisters of Ádám Bethlen] often said that they have never seen such a shy suitor as I was, although they constantly observed me, to see if I stare at my future bride, but they couldn't catch me.”<sup>62</sup> The autobiography enumerates the aunts for several times, therefore we can be sure that every gesture of the young couple was carefully measured, and not just in order to be sure that nothing inappropriate happen, but to analyze the character of the suitor as well. The whole family acted as mediators, taking a great interest in the future of their relatives, fulfilling in this way their Cristian obligation toward them.<sup>63</sup>

58 Dülmen, *Kultur und Alltag*, 136; Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, 244.

59 Erdélyi, “Stepfamily relationships,” 161.

60 The autobiography doesn't mention the third boy, Miklós, but his wife Kata Csáky is constantly present in the narrative, especially in the Diary, and in Zsuzsánna Toroczkai's memoir. She was a good friend to Székely's wives, to both of them, even if her controversial character, not to mention that she was a zealous Catholic, was tolerated by the author very hard. *Székely László önéletrása*, 188–89.

61 Fehér, “From Courtship till the Morning After,” 790–91.

62 *Székely László önéletrása*, 98–100.

63 O'Day, *The Family and Family Relationships*, 74, 84.

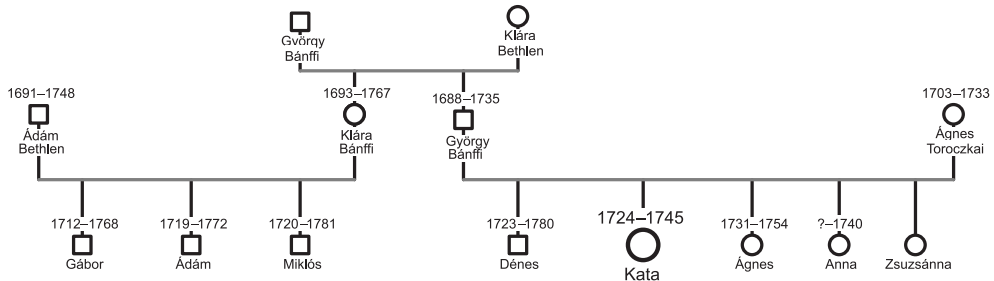


Table 6. Ádám Bethlen and Klára Bánffi's household with their biological and foster children

We meet the foster family for the first time in the description provided on the occasion of the official bride-visit. Every serious marriage plan began by visiting the home of the chosen girl. It seems that this did not happen in such an official manner, with such accompaniment and grandeur as we may read in Péter Apor's (1676–1752) *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae*,<sup>64</sup> through diligent workings of parents and guardians, but mostly with the help of young bachelors and friends,<sup>65</sup> as earlier Transylvanian memoirs seem to confirm.<sup>66</sup> The first encounter between László Székely and his first wife was organized with the help of Kata's cousins, especially that of Gábor, who helped the loving couple from the beginning.

The otherwise disliked guardian, Dániel Jósika entered the scene only after these steps, when Székely, putting aside his childhood wounds, requested it from him to ask Kata Bánffi's hand on his behalf. The custom was to ask the family's most influential member to carry out the proposal.<sup>67</sup> But the answer was delayed by four months. Eventually it was Farkas Bánffi, husband of Erzsébet Bagosi, Székely's aunt, who urged things forward at the girl's house. Theoretically the proposal of the young bachelor was being considered first by the head of the family or the most influential men, but as the autobiography clearly suggests, the opinions of the family's female members were also taken into account. The final decision, with few exceptions was left to the young ones.<sup>68</sup>

During courtship and the bride-visit it was friends who had a greater role; during the proposal and the exchange of engagement gifts – the relatives. At the wedding ceremony the two kinship networks met: the bearers of good tidings

64 Apor, *Metamorphosis Transylvaniae*, 55.

65 O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, 30–31.

66 Sárdi, "Leánykérés, házasság, szerelem," 51.

67 Radvánszky, "Lakodalmak a XVI–XVII. században," 223–42.

68 Sárdi, "Leánykérés, házasság, szerelem," 54; Béla Mihalik's study adds further valuable data to the problem. Mihalik, "...nemcsak anya, hanem atyai gondjukat is viselvén."

(*örömmondók* – Székely’s college mate and dear friend Sámuel Szentkereszti; his mother’s cousin, Pál Rhédei), the wreath runners (*koszorúfuttatók* – Mihály Vaji, his mother’s cousin, who played a great role in winning the wreath), the bridesman (*vőfély* – his younger brother Ádám), the groomsman (*násznagy* – Ferenc Wesselényi, husband of Székely’s aunt), the lady of honor (*nyoszolyóasszony* – the wife of Ferenc Wesselényi Zsuzsánna Rhédei, Székely’s aunt), the maid of honor (*nyoszolyóleány* – Krisztina Bánffi (b.1726), daughter of his mother’s cousin, Erzsébet Bagosi). At mealtime, helpers were Székely’s friend Farkas Kun and the several masters of ceremony: Zsigmond Bánffi and his wife, Erzsébet Bagosi, Farkas Bánffi, József Rhédei and his wife, Kata Bíró.

Székely served the family of his first wife in his quality of brother-in-law, too, because he helped a lot during Dénes Bánffi’s courtship and in acquiring a positive answer from the Barcsai family, and it was also him asking for the hand of Klára, his wife’s younger sister, on behalf of Sámuel Szentkereszti, his college friend. Kata’s brother, Dénes would become a constant figure in the young married couple’s life. Among the siblings it seems that it was these two who were closest to each other. They lived also near, and when they were not at their estates, they ran a common household (in Szeben and Vienna).<sup>69</sup>

Just like his father’s first marriage, the author’s first marriage did not last long either, due to Kata’s sever lung-illness. As he notes numerous times, “the Székely family has no luck with the Bánffi girls.” Kata Bánffi spent the last weeks of her life with her foster family, at Dénes Bánffi’s mansion in Csanád (Cenade), where the rest of the relatives were also dwelling. Klára Bánffi insisted to be by her foster daughter’s side during her last moments. The Bánffi family did not leave László Székely by his own in his widowhood either; both his brother-in-law and the foster parents of his wife would be by his side in the following years of his life.

### *Székely’s Remarriage and Second Family*

The thought of remarrying was alien to László Székely for a while, who believed that “second marriages were rarely lucky.”<sup>70</sup> It seemed extremely complicated to fill the void left by the ideal wife who had died young. But because his younger brother, Ádám Székely wished not to marry, the 32-year-old author had to ensure the family’s survival by producing offsprings.

69 As we mentioned it was not unusual for sisters to take care of their bachelor brothers. O’Day, *The Family and Family Relationships*, 74, 89.

70 *Székely László önéletrása*, 328.



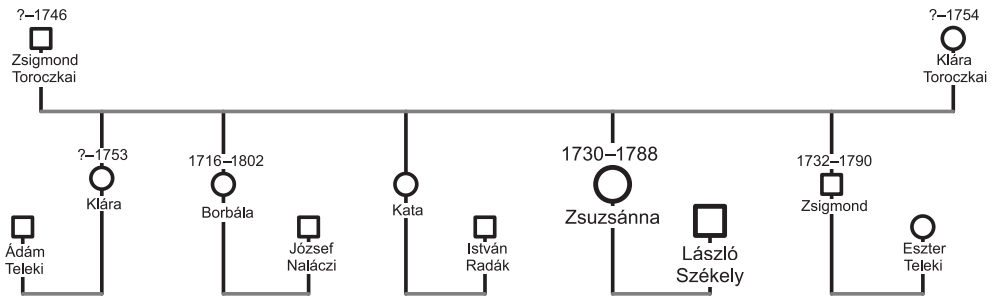


Table 7. The second wife Zsuzsánna Toroczkai's family

Székely started to think about remarrying under pressure of friends, who recommended the Toroczkai girls and praised especially the beauty of the younger one, Zsuzsánna Toroczkai. Even though Zsuzsánna had an elder maiden sister, and Székely was warned that there was little probability for “the younger one being married off before the elder one,”<sup>71</sup> he chose Zsuzsánna, which probably induced the older sister’s later resentment towards his brother-in-law. The bride-visit was organized by his brother-in-law in his first marriage, Dénes Bánffi, with whom the author had also discussed his views on the Toroczkai girl: “After dinner I went to sleep over the Count’s apartments, when only the two of us remained, the Count asked me if I liked the person, to which I replied, that I really liked her, and if they would give her to me, I would gladly marry her. To which Master Dénes replied, if I trust him, he would ask her for me.”<sup>72</sup>

However, the second marriage faced trials already in its incipient stages. Dénes Bánffi, charged with the proposal, was preparing for widowhood (since his wife was suffering in child-bed), and in the meantime he ended up taking a liking to the younger Toroczkai girl himself, thus he did not rush to initiate a discussion on Székely’s marriage intentions with the girl’s parents.<sup>73</sup> Eventually László Székely received unexpected help from a former college mate, András Barabás, who at the time was in the service of the Toroczkai family, and would be the one bearing the good news to Székely.<sup>74</sup> The exchange of engagement gifts, as with the first marriage, happened without the pair meeting, the Toroczkais being represented in this matter by the prospective bride’s sister, Klára Toroczkai (†1753). The narration of marriage rituals is succinct; one could say it conforms completely to our expectations regarding Transylvanian memoirs, since it narrows

71 *Székely László önéletrása*, 329.

72 *Ibid.*, 330; Fehér, “From Courtship till the Morning After,” 791.

73 *Székely László önéletrása*, 330–32.

74 *Ibid.*, 335.



down to the short description of the guests list, relatives and friends with more important functions in the wedding ceremony. We meet Farkas Bánffi again, this time as groomsman, next to him the wife of Ádám Kemény Druziánna Rhédei as lady of honor, and her sister Éva as maid of honor. Therefore, the most important roles are again played by the maternal lineage. Farkas Bánffi the husband of Erzsébet Bagosi, Druziánna and Éva, cousins of Kata Rhédei, the author's mother. Ádám Székely not only did not take on the role of bridesman, but we do not find him amongst the guests either, the brothers' relationship having completely deteriorated by this time. The author was actually very concerned regarding this matter, since he tried in his testament to protect his second wife from any future unpleasantness coming from Ádám Székely, by that time very influent and powerful: "And since the Lord has not given me any successors so far, and foreseeing that if my brother mocked a lot even with me, his older brother, he would be all the more unpleasant with my widow."<sup>75</sup>

The relationship with the in-laws, however, began to form. The author's second marriage differed in more regards from the first one. The prospective bride was a maiden, who had not experienced the sorrows of a long orphanhood since she had lost her father only one year before her wedding. Thus Székely had to obtain the approval of the mother and gain the sympathies of the biological siblings. The autobiography – and the two memoir fragments, that of the author's wife and of the administrator Zsigmond Kis – suggests that in contrast to the Rhédei, Bethlen and Bánffi families mentioned in the previous subchapters, sibling relations in the Toroczkai family tended to be more often tense than loving. Just like with László and Ádám Székely, there were insurmountable disagreements between the Toroczkai siblings, too, which would only periodically ease up. The pressures did, of course, only intensify with time, and the clueless Székely approached his future wife's family with great trust during his courtship.

The second marriage is barely present at the narrative level, which could be of course explained structurally. While the recounting of the first marriage can be said to follow the scheme of typical framed narratives where the subsequent biographical episodes bear their own chapter titles, the second marriage unfolds day by day as an ongoing experience.<sup>76</sup> This is where the narration about the children born in the second marriage finds its place, children whom the memoir mentions more rarely than we would expect from an author "living an unusually

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75 *Székely László önéletírása*, 371.

76 Fehér, "Székely László önéletírása," 73.

deep emotional life.” We would like to avoid the usual trap of searching for excuses and explanations for why the descriptions of hunts and sledding adventures were allotted more narrative space than the children. It is a fact though that the author’s daughter from his first marriage was only six months old when the parents parted with her for half a year; the children from the second marriage were also divided between parents and grandparents, uncles and aunts.<sup>77</sup> The Transylvanian ego-documents suggest that the upbringing of children was not only the responsibility of the nuclear family, but of the extended family, adult siblings cooperating and sharing in the task that secured the future of the noble families. Klára (1751–1754) spent the three years of her life at her maternal grandmother, Klára Toroczkai (†1754), unlike Zsigmond (1750–1754), who was raised by his parents, and only spent shorter periods at his grandmother’s court.

Zsigmond Kis’s accounts tell us also of the presence of other children, too.<sup>78</sup> László Székely does not mention the eight Katonai–Barcsai orphans whom he had raised, educated and then properly married off. We don’t know the lineage-connection between the author and the Barcsai family, we only know that they were distant kin. The children are therefore missing, although a flitting entry at the end of the autobiography does mention Klári Katonai’s (“my dear little daughter”) illness,<sup>79</sup> we do not find out anything more about the child or her siblings. Székely expressed his emotions often, sometimes even in an artistic way, such is the case with his autobiographical poem, and he enjoyed recalling the emotional bounds he nourished with his family and friends. The reason for the absence of the Katonai–Barcsai orphans, from the Székely family chronicle, could be explained with the fact that they do not fit in the narrative of the family lineages. Székely recalls not just his life-events, but transformed his autobiography at a certain extent into a family chronicle as well. In this chronicle these children played no roles, they did not inherit, did not carry the name further, thus they are part of another family-saga, not the Székely.

### *The Emotional Barometer: Grief, Support and Consolation*

The Székely–Toroczkai couple had lost both their children in a short time. Contrary to what one would expect, they did not receive any emotional support from their relatives. Székely emphasized it multiple times, that after the loss

77 O’Day, *The Family and Family Relationships*, 84; Warner, “Stepfamilies in Early Modern Europe,” 485.

78 *Kis Zsigmond feljegyzései*, 462–63.

79 *Székely László önéletírása*, 438.

of their children, neither his own brother nor his brothers-in-law stood by his side during the mourning period, and that he and his wife only received spiritual support and consolation from friends and acquaintances. Moreover, the Toroczkai siblings, after the death of both of their parents, wanted to exclude Zsuzsánna from the inheritance saying that she did not need her part since she had no living children: “[Klára and Borbála Toroczkai (1716–1802)] were very upset about the way things turned out for them, but it was too late and they could not change the draw. Both asked for our arrow [i.e. the states they inherited by draw] arguing in such a nice, brotherly compassionate way, that we did not have any children [i.e. do not need the inheritance].”<sup>80</sup> It seems that the brother Zsigmond Toroczkai (1732–1790) was the only one who could somewhat gain Zsuzsánna’s confidence by leaving his son to his widowed sister’s care multiple times, hoping that thus he could acquire a larger part of the fortune as well.

In Székely’s memoir, the description of mourning and its rituals has a central role. The detailed account of the funeral ceremonies, the description of the participants and their roles are important not only from the viewpoint of representation, but served also as a sort of emotional barometer. All the three texts (the autobiography of Székely, and the two memoirs of Toroczkai and Kis which follow and continue it) highlight the behaviour and the number of participants at the funeral ceremony, which was, it seems, followed with lively interest by many in those times. The expression of feelings on such occasions was of great significance. Transylvanian ego-documents contain a great amount of information regarding the preparations for funerals from both sides, from the one of the moribund and from the family as well. While for the first one it was extremely important to behave like a true Christian, and not to fear death, for the later it was required to expose as many emotions as possible, since their tears and sorrows reflected their feelings towards their kin. The society was very vigilant and keen in observing the intensity of these emotions. In Székely’s autobiography the dying persons played exceptionally their parts, preying or singing psalms on their last hours.<sup>81</sup> But we know from Wesselényi’s diary that the grandmother of László Székely, Sára Bulcsesdi wasn’t at all content with her situation, she had a difficult passage, and was bothered by the “curiosity” of her visitors, asking at one point if it is really necessary for a dying person to be so exposed to public

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80 Ibid., 365.

81 We must be aware of the major impact funeral orations had on these personal narratives. Since almost all Transylvanian ego-documents describe death in a similar way, we must talk about a fashion, influenced by the edited orations. Fazakas, “tetszett az Úristennek,” 270–75.

eyes.<sup>82</sup> It seems that it was, since the majority of our personal narratives reflect on this topic, describing the last moments and dialogues between the dying and its family, interpreting the lack of emotions as a bad sign. The loosening of bonds between siblings from the Toroczkai and Székely families, detailed above, or estranged relations are best noticed in the case of grief and funeral ceremonies. Zsuzsánna Toroczkai mentions that many had visited László Székely on his death bed, but neither his brother Ádám Székely nor the Toroczkai sisters-in-law or brothers-in-law honored him with their presence.<sup>83</sup> Zsigmond Kis records similar things about Zsuzsánna Toroczkai's death struggle.<sup>84</sup> Neither the sisters nor the brother-in-law went to Alamor [Alamor], but following the news of his death they immediately sealed up the doors of Toroczkai's house in Szeben. There were veritable fights for the inheritance which not only the blood relatives wanted to acquire: "The administrator [Zsigmond Kis] and the doctor as well reported this last and deadly affection of hers [Zsuzsánna Toroczkai] to Baroness Naláci [Borbála Toroczkai], but she did not bother to come [...] she was rather thinking how could she seal all the good and houses [of her sister] from Szeben. Just as she did it, right away, in the day the Countess died, very sudden, since the Countess died between four and five in the morning [...] and by six all her things were sealed in such a hurry, that the late Countess body was not even in the Church when all her goods were already locked."<sup>85</sup>

The reading of the accounts of Toroczkai and Kis suggests that the kindred was not so much preoccupied with mourning but rather with securing the fortune. Every eligible family member delegated guards to the deceased person's houses, properties, and waited tensely for the division of the inheritance. And even if it has been suggested that the weaker the blood relationship was, the greater was the greed, the autobiographical narrative suggests that close blood relatives caused the biggest tensions. Zsigmond Kis describes the lack of fraternal love in both houses without any emotional attachment, as an outsider, and he also points at scrounging as the reason for all estrangement. Neither Ádám Székely

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82 Wesselényi, *Sanyarú világ*, vol. II, 433. Otherwise we know a few cases recorded in the memoir-literature about frightened and angry moribund. (Rettegi, *Emlékezetre méltó dolgok*, 259–60) We learn from Rettegi that even Ádám Székely, the autobiographer's brother was one of them, since he never attended funerals and was afraid of death. (Rettegi, *Emlékezetre méltó dolgok*, 270.) We consider that these cases are recorded because they were perceived as unusual, and because they deviate from the normal, socially accepted behavior, that of silent and honorable death.

83 *Toroczkai Zsuzsánna feljegyzései*, 442.

84 *Kis Zsigmond feljegyzései*, 458.

85 *Kis Zsigmond feljegyzései*, 458–59.

nor the Toroczkai sisters are painted in a favorable light in Kis's recollections. In fraternal bonds within the Székelys and Toroczkais, feelings were overwritten by personal interests.

### *Conclusion*

The autobiography of László Székely familiarize the reader with the complicated network of Transylvanian noble families. In the first part of the article I focused on marriages, and the way these alliances shaped the kinship networks of the author. While describing his lineage, László Székely touched upon these complex family models, and based on his detailed accounts, the kinship with the paternal (Székely, Szalánczi, Jósika) and that of the maternal (Boros, Vaji, Rhédei) side can be easily traced. The autobiography lingers more on the maternal lineage, in contrast to other Transylvanian egodocuments written by nobles, which usually underline the importance of the paternal side. This shift could be on one hand explained by the fact that the Székely family belonged to the new-nobles of the principality, therefore they were not totally accepted by the old Transylvanian families, thus the importance of the well-known and “pure” lineage of the maternal side. On the other hand, the autobiography suggests that the supportive kinship network the author relied on after he faced orphanhood came also from this side of the family. Moreover, this supportive network was formed not only by biological kin, but by several distant relatives coming from a step-lineage, since each four grandparents of the author in different life stages, either as children or adults, experienced living in families including stepparents, half-siblings and stepsiblings. The autobiography suggests that small children lived as orphans for only a limited period of time before gaining a stepparent, until their parents seek a new partner, as did the great-great grandmother (Anna Szalánczi) and the grandmother of the author (Borbála Boros). If both of the parents died other solutions were found, such as the foster parenthood, as was in the case of the author's first wife, Kata Bánffy, which was also a common kinship tie that reintegrated orphans into families, or the guardianship, as was the case of the author. These new alliances and family-formations were not always successful, since the author himself faced great difficulties living under the guardianship of his grandmother, Sára Bulcsesdi's half-brother, Dániel Jósika. Székely's life changed once he entered into college, since his circle of interest expanded beyond his kindred. The friendships he made during these years with his fellow noble students were of utmost importance, some of them

got integrated into the extended family through marriages, as brothers-in-law, and others coming from the lower nobility became integrated into his household fulfilling services for life.

After Székely founded his own families family life became more flexible, due to the overlapping of the biological family and the new one. Once important relations became now less significant, since new family members and several new family relations appeared. These new family alliances sometimes outlast the original bond. After the death of the partners the “inherited kin” did not disappear, but supports for several years their former sons and daughters-in-law, or brothers and sisters-in-law. In Székely’s life these new families played a very important role, even if sometimes not in a positive way. The autobiography tells us not only about the presence, but also about the absence of emotional ties between the Székely and Toroczkaí siblings. The ego-documents suggest that in the adulthood of the author, and especially after losing his biological children, alliances outside the nuclear family, the fictive kinship network and the inherited step-family relations proved to be more determining.

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