

Time in Villages: Timekeeping and Modernization in Rural Communities in the Long Nineteenth Century in Hungary

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The study explores the changing perception of time through the records of a multi-generational peasant family. By comparing several rural manuscripts from different times and places, the study traces the refinement of the way time is thought, its new meanings, and its emergence in farming and family life. The appearance of the clock plays an important role in the analysis. The clock, first as a prestige object in the household, gradually becomes a tool for the modern use of time. The replacement of calendars by newspapers in the first decades of the 20th century is also a decisive factor in the perception of time. The world expands and information about more and more distant lands is brought into peasant households. The study places important emphasis on the idea that rural households are the last base for the spread of globalization phenomena. What is already occurring at this level within each country is where the spread of the phenomenon has come to an end.

Keywords: rural history, globalization, family history, use of time, peasant traditions

Background and Proposition

Concepts and understandings of time are a research problem on which spans generations of historians have touched. This is hardly surprising, since the passage of time itself sets the coordinates, to use a metaphor, of a historian's propositions. As a straining dual system of cognition, the narrowness or vastness of space and time determine our everyday lives, just as they did for those living in times past. This is one of the reasons why the endeavor to arrive at a grasp of time has become a fundamental human undertaking. Of the relevant examples, it is worth highlighting the abstraction already indicated in the subtitle: the arrangement of time in a framework defined by centuries. A century is not in itself an abstract period of time developed organically from the use of calendars.¹ It is, rather, a solution that stems from the need of the human mind to organize and

1 Osterhammel and Camiller, *Transformation*, 45–49.

structure. It is a clue which has provided a more precise demarcation and nuance to an earlier approach, which was based on massive blocks of epochs in the professionalization of historiography.² And this is precisely why its use should not be regarded merely as a factor of “convenience,”³ but rather as a logical necessity, much like historians’ narrative constructions and deconstructions over the past half century or so are also logical necessities. The difficulty lies in further abstracting the century as a clue, since the adaptation of the century (for instance, stretching it to cover a set of allegedly epoch-making events and thus reducing the time and, by implication, significance of other centuries) is a practice that partly forms the coherence of an epoch, and it generates problems.⁴ The use of Koselleck’s *Sattelzeit* or the *fin de siècle* is scale-specific and thus is at best a point of reference for the time concept of a micro-level study rather than a framework for interpretation. The concept of the “prolonged turn of the century,” as proposed by German historians and dated to the period between 1880 and 1930, may be a wiser choice. For Central and Eastern Europe, however, this is true only because this was also a major period of demographic change, which is interpreted as an important indicator of economic and cultural changes. Indeed, the last third of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth were times of demographic transition, even if it is clear that the people living at these times were not aware of this. Attempts to grasp traditional life-worlds and document the transition have given rise to several methodological approaches, of which microhistory, born out of disillusionment in the wake of the quantitative revolution, serves only as an illustration of the one extreme. However, even with its exceptionally normal objective, microhistory has led to a kind of loss of hope, to which first postmodern historiography and then, more recently, globalization history have been trying to provide an adequate answer. The increasingly greater availability of sources as historians find themselves closer in time to the periods they are studying increases the number of problem-oriented questions. So the continuous return to the individual and her everyday life and experience provides inexhaustible opportunities. Pushing the peasant into the spotlight thus also implies the masses (or the statistical majority), and we

2 Gyáni, *Az elveszített múlt*; Gyáni, “A történet ideje,” 10.

3 Roberts, *Twentieth Century*, 3.

4 Osterhammel and Camiller, *Transformation*, 45–49; Nolte, “Einheit”; Hobsbawm, *Europäische Revolutionen*; Hobsbawm, *Blütezeit*; Hobsbawm, *Zeitalter*.

can boldly hope to grasp this peasant as an individual while also getting a broader picture of the general population and the world in which this population lives.⁵

The foregoing justifies an attempt to outline the conceptual journey of the peasant approaching the regime of time from the perspective of everyday life, using a multi-generational chronicle, or the so-called Gyüker Chronicle. For this chronicle provides a tangible point in the source material where the variability of individual and social perceptions of time are clearly expressed in contrast to the constancy of physical or natural time.⁶ According to the entry made by József Gyüker (1862–1932),

they started in [19]28 to fly over the sea from Europe to America or from one country to another, and travel under water and powered cars and powered ploughs that had no horses in front of them were not new by then, and bicycle riders were also abundant; and the wireless telegraphs, they talked from one country to another as if they were sitting in front of each other.⁷

In my view, this is the point where the chronicler becomes aware that his own time is no longer the same time as his father, grandfather, and earlier ancestors had lived it (presentism), so this is where he begins to reflect consciously on the fact that his life is different from the lives of his predecessors.⁸ The quote, taken out of context, is the result of a longer process of inquiry, a continuous opening to the events of the world. It also implies thinking in a global perspective. It is a summary in which production conditions, weather, and trade also play important roles textually, but the mentions of world events become increasingly frequent and detailed. The significance of the passage lies in its concentration on emblematic events.⁹ The documentation of change seems relevant from multiple angles. As a basis for the comparison, in order to formulate the question, it seems appropriate to include another quote, this time from the grandfather, József Gyüker the Elder (1799–1874): “István Kovács the Elder was the first to buy a clock. He did so in Bőcs around 1840. Nobody had had one before. I bought mine around 1850.” By 1860, after a year of a bountiful harvest, he continued, it had become common to own a clock in the village. In Gyüker’s writing, the clock first appeared as an object of prestige.

5 See Hareven, “Family Time.”

6 Gellériné, “Előszó,” 7–14.

7 “Gyüker család feljegyzései,” 110.

8 Koselleck, *Elmúlt jövő*.

9 Osterhammel and Camiller, *Transformation*, 45–49.

By comparing the entries written by the grandfather with those written by the grandson and also with other entries written by other villages, one can examine the impact of modernization across generations. But how can we grasp the changes in the prevailing understanding of time in a peasant family? How does acceleration appear? To what extent did technological progress and in particular the spread of the clock as a device play a role in the transformation of the understanding and structuring of time in a peasant world? In the chain of influence, the strong natural determination of the agricultural world, marked by the seasons, and the important feast days of Christian culture are present at the same time. Alignment with these appears regularly from generation to generation in the chronicle, dating back to the end of the eighteenth century and lasting until the mid-twentieth century. In addition, however, to the cyclical nature of seasons, feasts, agricultural tasks, and rites, as well as life events,¹⁰ new points of time were slowly appearing too. József Gyüker the Younger records three different times when recording the birth of his daughter: “Zsófi Gyüker was born on the third day of August 1890, at 2 o’clock in the afternoon, under the sign of the Pisces.”¹¹ When specifying the time of birth, Gyüker makes no mention of Christian feast days. Rather, he refers very specifically to the moment of time as specified by the calendar and the clock. In 1887, Gyüker the Younger also recorded a moment in time with reference to a clock when there was a fire in the village. References to the signs of the zodiac also became recurrent elements in the chronicle as a means of indicating the date of a birth. Taking these references to new methods of specifying and structuring time as my point of departure, I seek an answer to the following questions: what role did different aspects of the understanding of time have, and how did this vary across generations? And on the basis of this, what can we say about prevailing perceptions of time among peasants in light of the Gyüker Chronicle?

Source, Data, Method

To begin venturing answers to the questions raised above, it is worth considering the understanding of time and methods of managing time from a bottom-up perspective. Historical time is considered personal time when the individual interprets the age in which he lives in light of her own circumstances. Changing

10 Fónagy, “Ember és idő,” 78.

11 “Gyüker család feljegyzései,” 43–44.

concepts of time in peasant communities are the last stage in the spread of modernity.¹² Given the scarcity of intermediary channels, it is in these communities that we can hope to find the endpoint. This approach is more exciting when analysis is possible across generations. From the viewpoint of the availability of sources, however, we must consider ourselves lucky to have even a single source on which to rely. So far, only one such source is known in Hungary.¹³ A peasant chronicle, written by multiple generations, has survived from the village of Böcs, more specifically a part of this village called Külsőböcs, near Miskolc in northern Hungary. József Gyüker is thought to have begun recording his memories and what he had been told of the decade or so preceding his birth in 1863. In the late 1880s, his grandson, also named József Gyüker, wrote his notes in chronological order as a convenient means of linear narration.¹⁴ His son and grandson later wrote a few entries of their own. In the absence of a comparable source spanning multiple generations and a century and a half, I find it worthwhile to compare this chronicle with records that cover the same period and the roughly same territory of the country and relate to rural, specifically village communities. The selection was based on two data banks. In addition to the database of more than 600 items compiled by György Kövér, Zsuzsanna Kiss, and Anikó Lukács, I browsed the nearly 250 annotated first-person accounts written by peasants and published by the *Lendület* Ten Generations Research Group at the Research Centre for the Humanities.¹⁵ In the selection process, territorial representativeness and the connection to the periods were important criteria. The main parameters of the selected sources are summarized in Table 1.

Reliable records produced by members of the peasantry and suitable for deeper analysis began to be kept in greater quantities in the mid-twentieth century. The stratum-specific nature of literacy means that there are relatively few sources available from earlier periods. In any case, the diversity of village life justifies the need to focus not only on serfs and peasants, but also on the local intellectuals, clergymen, and schoolmasters, who were also an integral part of this life.

12 Mitterauer and Sieder, *Vom Patriarchat*, 72–99.

13 Forrai, “Tájékoztató,” 5; Romsics, “Gazdagparasztság,” 128; Küllős, “Parasztkrónika,” 186; Kovács, *Kalendáriumtörténet*, 333; Varga, “Öreg Gyüker,” 453–54; Gyenis, “Emlékirat,” 157–58.

14 Danto, *Analytical*.

15 Kövér, *Biográfia*, 100–1; “Tíz nemzedék és ami utána következik... Vidéki társadalom az úrbérendezéstől a vidék elnéptelenedéséig, 1767–2017. Paraszti egodokumentumok. <https://10generacio.hu/hu/eredmenyek/paraszti-egodokumentumok>

Title	Author	Occupation	Date of origin	Covered period	Location
Vajszló Chronicle	Dániel Kis Tóth	peasant	1830	1700–1830	Vajszló (Baranya County)
Gábor Kátai's chronicle	Gábor Kátai	peasant	1838	1700–1838	Karcag (Jász-Nagykun- Szolnok County)
The records of the Gyüker family	József Gyüker the Elder; József Gyüker the Younger	peasant; peasant	1863–1866; 1889–1933; 1940–1944	1787–1944	Bócs (Borsod-Ababúj- Zemplén County)
János Helle's memoirs	János Helle	pastor	1821–1870	1821–1870	Alsónyék (Tolna County)
Lajos Arató's memoirs	Lajos Arató	school- master	1928–1934	1863–1934	Szeghalom (Békés County)

Table 1. The source material providing the basis for the analysis

Source: Mándoki, *Ormánság népeletéből*; S. Püski, “Kátai”; “Gyüker család feljegyzései”; MMgMK IV. 456. Helle János feljegyzései; Szeghalmi Könyvtár és Közérdekű Muzeális Gyűjtemény T.86.84.1. id. Arató Lajos visszaemlékezése.

In terms of geography, the sources are from the northern region of Hungary, the Great Plain, and the southern parts of Transdanubia. In terms of farming opportunities, arable farming and animal husbandry predominate, especially as, in addition to Karcag and Szeghalom, which belong to the Great Hungarian Plain, Alsónyék and Vajszló, although Transdanubian villages, belong to the same lowland landscape structure (the former as part of the microregion known as Sárköz, the latter as part of the microregion known as Ormánság). Their economic profiles included trade, which is emphasized in all the sources except Arató's recollections, and also trade to distant commercial posts, such as market towns in Hungary and abroad. A further direction for research could include discussion of sources from northern Transdanubia.

Findings

The multi-generational Gyüker Chronicle of the peasant family that forms the backbone of the analysis here starts with an entry which is relevant to the life in the village and the local church and which touches on events which predated the birth of the author by more than a decade and thus were clearly descriptions offered by him based on second-hand information, presumably

accounts given by his older family or community members.¹⁶ Among the comparable nineteenth-century chronicles, the *Vajszló Chronicle* by Dániel Kis Tóth, which was written in 1830, and the chronicle by Gábor Kátai of Karcag, which was written in 1860, precisely define 1700 as the starting point of the narratives they offer. For these narratives, this year is presumably a reference point, namely a year which, in the perception of the authors, had been a very specific watershed moment for their own age. If interpreted in a flexible way, 1700 in Hungary means the post-Turkish period, which meant the reorganization of economic and social life. In the areas depopulated during the period of Turkish occupation, such as Karcag in the Great Plain, this was also a difficult period of resettlement. Kátai starts with this:

In the year 1700, Karcag was captured by the Tatars; those who escaped went to Rakamaz and lived there for nine years, and the town was burned and destroyed by the Tatars; in the year 1710, those who were in Rakamaz came home [...]. And the Church was finished in 1797, it was consecrated on All Saints' Day in the same year.¹⁷

For Dániel Kis Tóth, who lived in Vajszló in southern Transdanubia, where the Turkish occupation affected the lives of the locals but did force the continuity to flee, this year was notable in other ways: “I begin to count the origin and history of this clan from 1700; it was then when our forefather István Kis Tóth was born; his two sons were György and János.” The Tatar armies devastated Karcag a few years earlier, in 1697,¹⁸ while the exact date of the birth of Dániel Kis Tóth's forefather cannot be determined due to the lack of birth records, although it can be assumed that it dates back somewhat earlier.¹⁹ Their concept of time is thus strongly based on the memories (if second-hand in some cases) of the life and history of the settlement or the family, but the fact that the local residence was also decisive for Dániel Kis Tóth is indicated by his remark about the place of his ancestor's birth. He notes that István Kis Tóth was born in Haraszti, which was already part of Vajszló when he was writing his narrative in 1830. An important difference between the two is that Dániel Kis Tóth wrote

16 Gyöker József the Elder's diary. 1787–1866. Original manuscript. This peasant chronicle from Bócs was donated by József Gyöker, a peasant from Külsőbócs, to Dr. Géza Hegyaljai Kiss, who gave it to the College of Sárospatak. Sárospataki Református Kollégium Tudományos Gyűjteményei, Kt. 3635. The source is a diary in name only. It is in fact a memoir.

17 S. Püski, “Kátai,” 541.

18 *Ibid.*

19 No age was given at the time of death on March 1, 1753, but the fact that he was listed as an independent taxpayer in 1715 suggests that he was slightly older than 15.

a family chronicle, the basic organizational principle of which is the succession of generations, while Kátai followed a chronological order in his chronicle. The generational narrative is only present in Kis Tóth's writing. Reflections on the lives of ancestors is at most a minor element in the other narratives. József Gyüker the Elder, like Kátai, starts his chronicle with an event relevant to the settlement:

The writing of *Stories Worthy of Memory*; the order of priests and schoolmasters was established in 1787 by the venerable Ecclesiastical See; in 1788, the reign of Emperor Francis I of Austria began, the first French war started with his reign, lasting four and a half years [...], 1793 was the great lean year, which some of the old may remember, it is said, that 1794 was also such a year, until the harvest came.

The events mentioned by Gyüker can be interpreted in several ways. The determination of the order of priests and schoolteachers meant the determination of salaries, presumably due to the lack of extra-parish minutes, especially the presbyter's minutes. The income of Calvinist priests and schoolteachers depended to a considerable extent on the number and financial situation of the members of the church community. However, this was before his birth, so his source must build either on the accounts of members of the community in which he lived or the local historical sources already mentioned. The latter seems more likely. Gyüker relies, presumably, on inherited oral accounts to date the "Great Tribulation," a difficult period that left a deep imprint on the memories of older people. However, the definition of the pastoral and teaching order would not have been a similarly traumatic event and thus was unlikely to have survived as part of the recollections of members of the older generations. Gyüker was presumably drawing on information found in a written source, which may have been a late eighteenth-century record. As the village's magistrate as of 1836 and therefore a lay magistrate, he would have had the opportunity to consult this kind of source, since he had access to the village's official records. Either then or later, but knowing the source, he learned of the event which had taken place in 1787. We can assume that his source may have been a contemporary record since, in the case of a village history or similar compilation, medieval or early modern references would presumably not have been missed. In connection with Bócs, there are no surviving accounts of tragic events resembling the accounts of events that had taken place in Karcag. There are no indications that the inhabitants were driven away or that those who remained at home were deported at the end of the seventeenth century. In Kátai's writing, this is a traumatic point,

which was of great importance and also stood out in the chronological narrative, since the account of the period of resettlement is followed by a mention of 1772 as the year in which the three-field system was established, followed by the consecration of the church in 1797. From this point of view, there is no significant interval in the historical time as seen by Káta and Gyüker the Elder, which undoubtedly focused on important events in the life of the settlement and reflected the division of time into periods in the accounts handed down from one generation to another in oral narratives.²⁰

In Gyüker's entry, however, the monarch is also named. In this respect, of course, his memory is not flawless. In 1788, Joseph II was still on the throne, but even Leopold II, who reigned for two years, was no longer remembered. Although Francis was the first emperor of Austria, he began his reign as Holy Roman Emperor, numbered Francis II. And the French War which Gyüker called the first, began not in 1788 but in 1792. But for Gyüker, who was 64 years old in 1863, the beginning of his personal time was marked by Emperor Francis (emphatically not named as king of Hungary) and the war with the French, which meant that Gyüker placed himself in both local and, in his conception, global history. The latter, that is, a concept of time that goes beyond the local as global, should not be mistaken for a sign of the global impact of the French War, even if one can argue from the perspective of later events that this war did have a significant impact, but rather is better understood as an indication of the size of the world conceivable by Gyüker. The period during which Emperor Francis sat on the throne, who was also King of Hungary between 1792 and 1835, may have been an early time for him because of the length of Francis' reign. The memory of Francis as a ruler was also deeply imprinted in public consciousness visually because of his portrait on coins, where for much of this time the following inscription was running around his head: FRANCISCUS I D G AUST IMPERATOR. In Gyüker's entry, therefore, only the "by the grace of God" part was omitted with regard to the monarch. In Helle's case, the beginning is *in medias res*:

In 1821, towards the end of August, the water, which had already prevailed, flooded so much that, as travelers from Pest said, the whole Pest market, the part towards Pest, Óbuda, the lower part of Buda, the "water city" was completely submerged; consequently, it also took the embankment of Nyék, and entered Déllő and the courtyard of the school house. The cattle have also been displaced from the inner

20 Tóth, "Harangkongás," 51.

pasture, from the forest. According to residents, the last time the water was this high was eight years ago.²¹

Helle's opening does not create a historical context. He was the village pastor, and he had come to this village from far away (his birthplace, Nagyharsány, is half a day's walk from Alsónyék). He may have made these notes not only because the events described seemed worth remembering to him but also perhaps as a way of identifying a possible explanation for any shortfall in the benefits he was given by the congregation. Compared to the first passages of Helle's notes, Arató's recollections tell of experiences. He was associated with several municipalities, and these associations indicate the places where he served in addition to his place of birth. For him, too, regional and personal time takes on a different reading, as in Helle's case.²² Arató spent most of his time in Szeghalom, but his municipal history cannot be compared to that of Gyüker or Kátai. He presented the years and events in which he personally played a part or had a particularly formative role (such as the improvement of the May Day celebrations or the unveiling of the statue of Kossuth). The temporal structure of his narrative is therefore peculiar compared to the temporal structures of the previous ones, because he focuses on turning points, on the "outliers" of memory. Kis Tóth saw his life as a parallel to that of the biblical Job:

It is true (says Solomon the Wise) that the light is sweet, and it is delightful for the eyes to see the Sun; but I can write for myself what Job the patriarch says in Job 3:11. Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb; you will find in this Book all the great details of my life, my condition, my sufferings, and my complaints; each epistle is numbered and can be found on the index table; (though it is too late for the remnant, that if God hath pleased me to be).

Arató's stories, however, seem more to follow the Solomonic approach, as the motto introducing the manuscript makes clear: "Joyful years and happy days. Oh, when I think of you! You have drifted away like the waves of spring!" In contrast, the two Gyükers (especially the elder) and Kátai do not discuss the events of each year from an emotional perspective. Rather, they focus on the circumstances that provide the framework for peasant and everyday life.

21 MMgM IV. 456.

22 Osterhammel and Camiller, *Transformation*, 45–49.

In the entries composed by Gyüker the Elder, the interplay of family, local, national, and sometimes European events are sometimes captured, even when these events all took place in a single year:

In 1809, my elder sister married András Bényei, who was with us until Saint Michael's Day, when he was drafted as a soldier and served for a year and a half. As a child, I was so shy, and we managed to make do with the help of others. In the same year, in anticipation of the fourth French war, the emperor ordered military mobilization for the nobles, which they did, and they assembled in camp near Komárom; France broke through the greater part of Hungary at Győr, and here the armies and nobles engaged them, but fortune favored the French; and then having made peace, the German emperor suffered a great loss; the nobility dispersed in the same year, each to his own place.

The close temporal connection also suggests causal links, which may well have been one of the principal aims of the author. András Bényei, who had recently married into the family, demonstrates the labor organization in extended families, and the war primarily represented damage and loss (as was later the case for his grandson with the outbreak of World War I), as was evident in the corruption of the family labor organization. In addition to the indirect mention of Napoleon as a historical figure of global significance, the reference to the Battle of Győr also reveals the violation of the foundations of the feudal order and a gradual awareness of this. After half a century, the disgraceful flight of the nobility at Győr, who were doing military service instead of paying taxes, remained an integral part of memory even after the dismantling of the legal framework of the feudal order. Of course, the comparatively small town of Bőcs found itself on the stage of global history not only because of the French wars but also because of the arrival of the potato, which originated in South America. This was also a significant event that transformed the culture of consumption.

Festivals and saints' feast days are regularly mentioned by the authors of the sources under study. In fact, mentions of these occasions can be seen as indications of moments of normality, whereas everything else that happened was a representation of the extraordinary. It is not my aim to describe the festivals and the rites associated with them, which have been thoroughly studied by scholars of ethnography,²³ but only to give a brief overview of the significant days that the authors whose recollections I am using as sources chose

23 See Tátrai, "Jeles napok," 102–264.

as recurring points. The chronological order is not linked to the start and end dates of the agricultural year (traditionally the feast days of Saint George in April and Saint Michael in September), which is why the year-start entries in the Gyüker Chronicle were linked less frequently to the Epiphany or to the feast days of Saint Vincent and Saint Paul (if not to a specific day). The two feast days are mentioned only in Gyüker the Younger's entries, while the Epiphany or Russian Christmas was used by his grandfather. Saint Vincent's Day (January 22) is recorded as being consistently foggy, while Saint Paul's Day (January 25) was sunny. The saints' feast days at the end of January were followed by the feast of Candlemas (February 2) and the feast of Saint Gregory (March 12), which marked the beginning of plowing for both the older and the younger generation. On Saint Joseph's Day (March 19), still in keeping with tradition, sowing began so that it would be finished by Saint George's Day.²⁴ In the records composed by János Helle, Saint Joseph's Day is mentioned as a recurring event because of the fairs in Pest. The Easter holidays were mentioned less frequently, not appearing at all in the case of Gyüker the Elder, but mentions of Saint George's Day (April 24) were all the more prominent, for the reasons indicated and not merely because of its role in the agricultural order. According to the recollections of József Gyüker the Elder, in 1814, his brother was taken away as a soldier under orders. The importance of the feast day is underlined by the fact that it still had its gravitational force from the Middle Ages:²⁵ the events before and after it were related to this day. For example, in 1863, "[a]fter good weather in March, April came with cold winds, which didn't grow but rather spoiled everything, the vines were worked in the weeks before Saint George's Day, in cold winds." Saint John's Day (June 24) was also, if not to the same extent, an important part of the task-oriented annual rhythm.²⁶ In 1831, it was the spread of cholera that made this feast day memorable for the Gyüker the Elder:

On Saint John's Day, we started to hoe on Batka, but already then cholera had appeared in many places; it started in Lucs sooner than in Bócs, it was impossible to go straight to the fields, there were guards, but one had to go a roundabout way to the wild waters; it appeared in our village too after a short time, and in two months, 65 people died, not children, but men and women; one was not allowed to go from one village to another, there were guards everywhere.

24 Paládi-Kovács, *A vetés idejének*, 359.

25 Tóth, "Harangkongás," 57.

26 See Thompson, "Az idő, a munkafegyelem," 60–116.

The prominence of the feast day as a marker of the passage of time is evident in several entries, not only in the case of Gyüker the Elder but also in the case of Gyüker the Younger, for instance in one entry writes, “starting on the day of Saint John, it was very hot for three days.” The fact that József Gyüker the Elder’s records may have been based on almanacs or other earlier records is, however, suggested by the passages in which the days before or after the feast day are not necessarily mentioned in the context of the feast but as independent days.²⁷ Saint Martin’s Day, in contrast to Saint Michael’s Day (which brought the agricultural year to a close), seems to be more significant for the chronicle and was observed by both generations in their lives. After Saint Martin’s Day, only Christmas appears, with Saint Andrew’s Day (November 30) going essentially unmentioned (except in 1928). The special days of the agricultural year were major events in the lives of members of both the older and the younger generations, or at least these days are frequently mentioned in the source. Particular feast days remained points of reference even for the grandson, even though by the time he was writing the use of the month and the day was a more widespread method of indicating a date. A noticeable change, however, took place in the naming of the feasts. References to Saint Martin’s feast in the entries composed by Gyüker the Elder always included the word “saint,” while this word is found in this context in entries by his grandson only until 1889, and from 1910 to 1927 he simply called it Martin’s Day (in 1927, he again referred to it as Saint Martin’s Day). Saint Andrew’s Day, only mentioned in 1903, is also given without the word “saint.” Mentions of Saint George’s Day and Saint John’s Day consistently include the word “saint,” while Saint Paul’s Day is called by various names, but again only by Gyüker the Younger. Obviously, this might suggest a slight degree of laicization, but given the frequent expressions of gratitude to “God Almighty” and assurance of trust in God, this seems unlikely.

The accounts of individuals’ lives included mention of major events, namely marriage, birth, and death. Women and girls were mostly mentioned in these contexts and less often in connection with a vacancy in the family labor organization. There is a marked difference in the recording of births between Gyüker the Elder and Gyüker the Younger. József Gyüker the Elder considered it important to record his and his wife’s birth dates (although he never referred to his wife, Erzsébet Makláry, by name), and so did his grandson (but he referred to his wife, Julianna Almási, by name). Gyüker the Elder did not record the

27 Kovács, *Kalendáriumtörténet*, 11–25; Tóth, “Harangkongás,” 59.

dates of the births of any of his children, while Gyüker the Younger wrote them down one by one: József in 1885, Julcsa in 1888, Zsófi in 1890, and Julianna in 1894. Death in the family played a more important role for Gyüker the Elder. He noted that his father died in 1802, his paternal uncle, the bell founder János Gyüker, in 1831, his brother, István, in 1849, and his son, Samu, in 1850. Apparently, József Gyüker the Elder's attention was essentially directed towards the older members of the family, and his son was an exception only due to his tragically premature death. In the case of his grandson, József Gyüker the Younger, the deaths of his parents, his wife, and his younger brother are listed, as well as the deaths of his daughters Julcsa in 1889 and Zsófi in 1893. In his case, even the children were given more attention. Their births and deaths were milestones in his understanding of personal time. This tendency to devote greater attention to the fates of his offspring may be reflected in the practice (also only observed by József Gyüker the Younger) of indicating the astrological sign of his children at birth. When it came to this, however, his references were inaccurate. He thought that his son József, who was born on November 8, was a Sagittarius, his daughter Julcsa (born on February 8) a Capricorn, Zsófi (born on August 3) a Pisces, and Julianna (born on December 29) an Aquarius. Not only was he consistently wrong, his blunders were sometimes quite notable (for instance, the notion that someone born in August is a Pisces), so it is different to imagine that he drew on the almanacs. Regardless of this, however, his interest in the signs of the Zodiac as a means of structuring time offers some indication of his interest in the eventual fates of his offspring, since he presumably hoped to learn something of his children's futures from these signs, for instance, whether they were born under a so-called lucky star.²⁸

Although astrology emerged as a new marker in the concept of time among peasants, the spread of the clock brought about a more significant change. According to an entry by József Gyüker the Elder, the clock first appeared in Bócs around 1840, he himself bought one around 1850, and then, "in 1860, as there was a very abundant harvest, everyone could afford anything, so others bought them too, as the price was not much. One could be bought for five or six silver coins, whatever kind the poor farmer needed; thus began the clock in Bócs." What could he have meant by the phrase "whatever kind the poor farmer needed?" In his 1864 entries, he repeatedly describes events to the nearest hour. For instance, he notes that on March 13, at 4 p.m., there was a strong, cold

28 Hoppál, "Horoszkóp," 579.

wind and sleet, and on June 11, around 5 or 6 o'clock, there was a strong wind with little rain. On October 24, 1866, at 11 p.m., there was an earthquake. It is unlikely that it was some need to record these kinds of events that made the clock important to the farmers. Beyond the fact that it was obviously a prestige object, the clock may have had a more practical use as well. Gyüker the Elder began his account of the events of 1859 with the construction of the railway, which played an important role in the life of the village in the development of both trade and employment. And keeping up with the train now required the precise measurement of time to the minute.²⁹ In the case of József Gyüker the Younger, documentation up to the hour is, understandably, much more frequent. In addition to the weather events, he also recorded family events mostly to the hour. For example, his daughter Zsófi is known to have been born on August 3, 1890, at 2 p.m. and to have died on March 19, 1893, at 10 p.m., and his mother, Zsuzsanna Nagy, died at 10 p.m. on June 7, 1913. Consequently, the emergence of the clock had not only an economic role, either as a prestige object or as a means of keeping up with the train schedule. It was also a means of experiencing certain events, especially family events, in a deeper way. In 1830, the clock is mentioned in the Vajszló Chronicle more as a hoarded prestige object,³⁰ while in the case of Arató's narrative, the exact or approximate time of certain important events was kept rather as part of the flashbulb memory. In Helle's records, an indication of the time of an event that was precise to the hour was exceptional, but in these cases, one can assume that Helle used the time signals of the church. Gábor Kátai gives the first exact time when recording the earthquake of July 1, 1829 (8 p.m.). He writes, "at the town hall the bell rang and the sheep bells on the nail rang." It can be assumed that here, as in the case of the fire at noon on May 23, 1831, the tolling of the bells drew attention to the clock tower, if there was one (further research is needed to determine this).³¹ The clock was also a sign of modernity in contemporary society. The clock represented both the figurative and the concrete sense of the passage of time in the home. More abstract units of time than the hour itself, such as the minute and the second, become part of life in rural homes. They were given form and sound by their

29 On the role of modern society in the education for time, see: Fónagy, "Ember és idő," 87–88; Frisnyák, "Időzavarban," 123–32.

30 "Now where is my Father, he was even a juror for two or three months, he had two pocket watches, but the wall clock is now broken, [now] the estate is in decay, his passing glory is about to be lost."

31 On the spread of clock towers in Hungary, see Takács, "Toronyórák," 352–56; Csukovits, "Órahasználat," 21–50; Tóth, "Harangkongás," 68.

structural carrier, or in other words, modernity itself became a tangible, rapidly running, ticking experience for rural society.

Conclusions

József Gyüker the Younger learned of the events described in the proposition, such as the possibility of flying in 1928, the spread of the bicycle and the powered plough, and many other pieces of information from the newspaper rather than from the almanacs.³² He had access to more information and apparently thought it important to write down more things than his grandfather had. Price statistics appear in his entries more and more frequently, which must have become increasingly important for him because of purchasing and especially selling. The question is whether this greater amount of information, which took more time to absorb and process, was worth the time spent. I believe that Gyüker the Younger's aim by following price movements was to make more money by selling and to get a higher return on the time invested. This was probably facilitated by local rail transport, but it required keeping up with rail transport. Exposure to the natural environment continued to play a significant role in the perception of time for members of Gyüker the Younger's generation, but more efficient management also required more efficient time management. The spread of the clock and the way it became an integral part of the main areas of life definitely furthered this. Regardless of this, however, the regular use of references to exact years, months, and days and the occasional use of the clock as ways of marking the time of an event indicates a modern concept of time in the case of József Gyüker the Elder. Not only is this practice refined in his case of his grandson, who notably indicated the very hour of an important event, but there are also more frequent moments, in his narrative, of retrospection. While József Gyüker the Elder looks back on the events of the past by writing the chronicle itself, his grandson repeatedly reflects on earlier events even within the very text. Indeed, this becomes quite common in entries written after World War I. We do not know why József Gyüker (1836–1897) (the son of Gyüker Elder and the father of Gyüker the Younger) did not continue his father's chronicle, but we do have information about why the youngest József Gyüker (1909–?) abandoned it: “he has no time to write.” In other words, for Gyüker the Elder, the time he spent writing was understood as leisure time, not work time, while

32 In 1929, for example, he wrote, “The paper reported 45 degrees below zero in Poland.”

for his grandson, Gyüker the Younger, this time was work time, as it facilitated work and productivity. From this point of view, this time lost its purely leisure-time character. Instead, the importance of time as a means of keeping accounts became more and more important. In time, Gyüker the Younger devoted even this time spent on writing to work, which is one more indication of the disappearance of traditional peasant life.³³

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