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**The Question of Loyalty:
Habsburg Subjects in the Service of George I Rákóczi**

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Abstract

In my article I would like to offer another perspective on the relationship between the Principality of Transylvania and the eastern-north-eastern part of the Habsburg Monarchy, which was called Upper-Hungary. This region was a unique part of the Monarchy, with respect to its religion and society. Upper-Hungary was part of the Habsburg Monarchy but because of the subjects who lived there had a strong connection to the Principality of Transylvania.

In my article I will focus on the Rákóczi family, especially George I Rákóczi (Prince of Transylvania from 1630 to 1648). He was the second member of the Rákóczi family who was elected to be the Prince of Transylvania. But he also had huge properties in Upper-Hungary, which meant he was a subject of the Habsburg rulers while also being the Prince of Transylvania at the same time.

I would like to show how George I Rákóczi influenced the political decisions of the Habsburg Monarchy in this region as a Prince of Transylvania and a local aristocrat. This influence depended on those people who served Rákóczi as a soldier, officer, or governor of his estates. I will focus on those subjects who came from Upper-Hungary and were loyal to the Prince of Transylvania.

Keywords: Habsburg Monarchy, Principality of Transylvania, Upper-Hungary, protestant, aristocrats, nobility, George I Rákóczi

Introduction

Researching the history of the Habsburg Monarchy is always a challenge for historians and this is especially true if we would like to focus on this particular area of the Monarchy. During my research I first noticed a circle around certain prominent members of the famous Rákóczi family. My doctoral thesis deals with the economic history of a Protestant family from Upper-Hungary called the Fáy family. While working on the history of the Fáys, I became aware of the life of Stephen IV Fáy (†around 1640) whose relationship with the Rákóczi family led to his own advancement. It is an interesting question, whether there are others who were similar to Fáy? Perhaps they were also the part of the circle around Rákóczi? And if so, how and why?¹

¹ Horváth, Mónika "Egy Rákóczi-familiáris, Fáy (IV.) István levelezése 1633–1639 között" [The Correspondence

Through the family connections, the mention of Thomas Debreczeni (1570–1650) and Paul Szemere (†around 1649) can be found in several letters and some other sources, we can conjecture that they also belonged to this circle. But how did they serve the Rákóczi family? What did the three of them have in common? What are the differences?²

In this study, I would like to present my research that I have conducted over the past three years. The results are waiting for additions in the future, so this study is a description of the knowledge that I have gathered from archival and current sources.

Our brief historical overview starts with the Battle of Mohács in 1526 which was one of the most significant dates of this area and for these families as well.³ At Mohács (present day *Mohács* in Hungary), the Hungarian army was decisively defeated by the Ottomans. This defeat was a calamity for Hungary that had many detrimental consequences. During the two decades after Mohács, the country was weakened because of the subsequent civil war between the supporters of Ferdinand (King of Hungary from 1526 to 1564) and those of John Zápolya's (King of Hungary from 1526 to 1540) infant son, resulting in the capture of Buda Castle (present day *Budapest* in Hungary) by the Ottoman sultan Suleiman (Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520 to 1566) the Magnificent in 1541. After the capture of Buda, Hungary was divided into three parts. The central area of the country was occupied by the Ottomans, and this part is called Ottoman Hungary. The second territory was Transylvania, and after the Treaty of Speyer in 1570 it was called the Principality of Transylvania. The western part of Hungary, stretching from the Adriatic to Transylvania, was ruled by the Habsburg family, called the Kingdom of Hungary. This region served as a shield for Vienna against any

of One of George Rákóczi's Servitors called Stephen IV Fáy, from 1633 to 1639] *Lymbus* (2020), 181–183; Horváth, Mónika "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz. Fáy IV. István levelezése (1633–1639)" [Details to the Duties of a Servitor of George I Rákóczi. The Correspondence of Stephen IV Fáy (1633–1639)] *Aetas*, 36, no 2 (2021), 154–155; Horváth, Mónika "Fáy László gazdasági feljegyzései a 17. század második feléből" [The economic conscriptions of Ladislaus Fáy from the second half of the 17th century] on https://disszertacio.uni-eszterhazy.hu/156/1/Horv%C3%A1th%20M%C3%B3nika_disszert%C3%A1ci%C3%B3.pdf (November 28 2024)

² Horváth, "Egy Rákóczi-familiáris levelezése, 184–185.

³ About the Battle of Mohács: Perjés, Géza, *Mohács* [Mohács] (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1969); Szakály, *A mohácsi csata* [The Battle of Mohács] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977); *Mohács. Tanulmányok a mohácsi csata 450. évfordulójára alkalmából* [Studies about Mohács for the 450th Anniversary of the Battle], ed. Rúzsás, Lajos – Szakály, Ferenc (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986); and recently: B. Szabó, János: *Mohács* [Mohács] (Budapest: Osiris, 2006).

About the history of the Habsburg Monarchy, see, Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550–1700. An Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 235–266; Pálffy, *Hungary between two Empires 1526–1711* (Indiana University Press, 2021), 7–80; Martyn Rady, *The Habsburgs. To rule the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 75–83.

Ottoman attack.⁴ Upper-Hungary was the north-eastern part of the Hungarian Kingdom and therefore it was part of the Habsburg Monarchy. The fact that Upper-Hungary was the furthest part of the Habsburg Monarchy, it was far from Vienna but near to the Principality of Transylvania, made its situation even more difficult.

The Rákóczi family was one of the most famous princely families in Transylvania. Many researchers from Hungary are familiar with George I Rákóczi (Prince of Transylvania from 1630 to 1648), George II Rákóczi (Prince of Transylvania from 1648 to 1660) and Francis II Rákóczi (Prince of Transylvania from 1704 to 1711) because of the War of Independence that he led. The Rákóczis were one of the aristocrat families who had huge properties not just in Upper-Hungary, but also in Transylvania and Poland. They were one of the richest families in the Kingdom and in the Principality of Transylvania. In addition, they had influential family connections and political contacts and had a pleasant activity in the patronage of cultural life in Transylvania and in Upper-Hungary.⁵

The influence of George I Rákóczi in the economic level: the Rákóczi's masons

In the early modern period, owning property meant having a reputation for being wealthy and distinguished in social rank. One of the most significant people of the period was George I Rákóczi who tried to acquire as many estates as possible to increase his power in the area. On the one hand, he bought or rented these properties, on the other hand, he was not afraid of illegal acquisition of estates (extortion, threat and so on).⁶

This was the reason why it was an important question about who could manage the several part of the family estates? One of them, Thomas Debreczeni, was one of the most loyal subjects of George Rákóczi until his death.⁷ The most significant source about the life of Thomas Debreczeni is his own last will from 1645 which contains the date of his

⁴ *Erdély rövid története* [The Brief History of Transylvania], ed. Köpeczi, Béla (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989), 228; Pálffy, *A tizenhatodik század története* [History of the Sixteenth Century] (Pannonica Kiadó, 2000), 32, 59–64, 90–96, 35–44, 104.

⁵ About George I Rákóczi and his son, George II Rákóczi for example: *I. Rákóczi György birtokainak gazdasági iratai (1631–1648)* [The Economic Documents of the Properties of George I Rákóczi], ed. Makkai, László (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1954); *Erdély története. 2. kötet. 1606-tól 1830-ig* [The History of Transylvania from 1606 to 1830. Volume 2.], ed. Makkai, László – Szász, Zoltán (Budapest, 1986), and so on.

About Francis II Rákóczi for example: Dobrossy, *A Rákóczi-szabadságharc dokumentumai. Abaúj-Torna, Borsod, Gömör-Kishont és Zemplén megyékből 1703–1704* [The Sources of the War of Independence from Abaúj-Torna, Borsod, Gömör-Kishont and Zemplén Counties in 1703–1704] (Miskolc, 2004) and so on.

⁶ *I. Rákóczi György birtokainak gazdasági iratai*, 21–25.

⁷ *I. Rákóczi György birtokainak gazdasági iratai*, 486.

birth and the list of his properties. We know that the family were considered to be part of the nobility in 1609 through the activity of Thomas Debreczeni.⁸

Thomas Debreczeni began his career as a soldier during the uprising of Stephen Bocskai from 1604 to 1606. But after this event his life changed significantly. From 1608 to 1610 he became the economic manager of Szatmár Castle (present day *Satu Mare* in Romania) which means that he managed the mason around the castle and made decisions about the economics of Szatmár. This castle was important for the Habsburg Monarchy because, at this time, it was the eastern center of the Hungarian defense system. As we can see, in the beginning of his career, Thomas Debreczeni worked in the service of the Habsburg ruler called Matthias II (King of Hungary from 1608 to 1619).⁹ From 1611 to 1623 Thomas Debreczeni started to work as an economical manager on the estates of George Thurzó (1567–1616, Palatine of Hungary from 1609 to 1616) and later his son, Imre Thurzó (1598–1621) in Tokaj (present day *Tokaj* in Hungary) in the Habsburg Monarchy which was located near to Szatmár Castle.¹⁰

After that, Debreczeni got a breakthrough in his life and from 1623 to 1629 he became the manager of estates of the then current Prince of Transylvania, Gabriel Bethlen.¹¹ Based on several sources we can clearly see that he was strict and liked following the rules. Thanks to his work, Debreczeni received many of his estates from the Prince of Transylvania as a reward.¹² Gabriel Bethlen trusted him because he was proven as a good subject. Perhaps this was the reason why Debreczeni was the writer of the last will of Bethlen.¹³

Three years after the death of Gabriel Bethlen in 1632, as an economic manager who already had many previous experience, Thomas Debreczeni started to work in the

⁸The publication of the last will of Thomas Debreczeni: Dienes, “Debreczeni Tamás végrendelete” [The Testament of Thomas Debreczeni] The whole text here:

https://epa.oszk.hu/03300/03307/00003/egyhzstorteneti_szemle_2001_01_143-156.htm (July 11 2023)

Debreczeni–Droppán, Béla, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból: Debreczeni Tamás élete és működése” [An Economic Specialist from the 17th Century: The Life and the Activity of Thomas Debreczeni] *Fons*, 11, no 3 (2004), 456.

⁹Debreczeni–Droppán, Béla, “Nagy fejedelmek főembere. 450 éve született királydaróci Debreczeni Tamás” [The Employee of Great Princes. Thomas Debreczeni of Királydaróc was born 450 years ago] *Partium*, 24 (2020), 30.

¹⁰Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 457–461.

¹¹I. Rákóczi György birtokainak gazdasági iratai, 668; Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 460–461.

¹²In 1625, the Prince of Transylvania gave to Thomas Debreczeni as a reward the estate of Radnót (present day *Iernut* in Romania) and the villages of Ombod (present day *Ambud* in Romania) and Amac (present day *Amăți* in Romania) in Sáros County. After that, in 1626, Debreczeni became the owner of Pálfalva (present day *Păulești* in Romania), Remete (present day *Rămeț* in Romania) and Vasvári (present day *Oșvarău* in Romania). Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 460–463.

¹³Debreczeni–Droppán, “Nagy fejedelmek főembere”, 32.

service of the new Prince of Transylvania, George I Rákóczi. He became the economic manager of the properties of Rákóczi in Upper-Hungary and in the Castle of Sárospatak (in German: *Potok am Bodroch*) which was one of the centers of the Rákóczi family.¹⁴ In a short time, Debreczeni acted as a governor for George Rákóczi and was able to make decisions not only in economic but also in political issues.¹⁵

The question is, how can we describe Debreczeni's relationship to George Rákóczi? First, Thomas Debreczeni played an important role in the selection of new supplies to the several economic positions. There were many young people around Debreczeni that he worked with and besides him they had the opportunity to learn about the managing of estates. After that, a couple of years later, they were selected for manager positions and were sent to manage other estates of Rákóczi by Debreczeni. It is important to emphasize that he participated not only in the selection but also in making proposals to Rákóczi. This was an important decision and influenced the future of the properties and the people.¹⁶

It was important to find the right person like Debreczeni because those who managed a smaller estate received instructions in letters, directly from the governor. Thomas Debreczeni regularly received replies to his instructions, therefore a communication developed between the governor and managers of different estates. This was also important because Debreczeni regularly reported to Rákóczi about his properties and there were many times that the Prince of Transylvania answered these letters. This may have led to a long correspondence between Rákóczi and Debreczeni and sometimes not only about economic questions.¹⁷

In addition, it was one of the duties of Debreczeni to check the postal network: all letters which were written by the Prince of Transylvania or sent by others to him. It means that he had the right to open and read the contents of letters which also included the personal correspondence of George Rákóczi.¹⁸

The activity of Thomas Debreczeni was important for the Prince of Transylvania from economic, financial, and communicational points of view.¹⁹ He was an ambitious man

¹⁴ Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 472–473.

¹⁵ Debreczeni–Droppán, “Nagy fejedelmek főembere”, 34.

¹⁶ Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 480–486.

Thomas Debreczeni regularly made proposal to George Rákóczi about the position called *comes curialis*. The *comes curialis* worked in the several centers of the estates and looked over the work of the other workers like the herdsman, the forester, the horse-herders, the miller and so on. Kállay, István, *A magyarországi nagybirtok kormányzata, 1711–1848* [The Administration of the Manors in Hungary in 1711–1848] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980), 11.

¹⁷ Debreczeni–Droppán, “Nagy fejedelmek főembere”, 35.

¹⁸ Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 486.

¹⁹ Horváth, “Egy Rákóczi-familáris levelezése”, 181–214; Horváth, “Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz. Fáy IV. István levelezése (1633–1639)”, 152–166.

who was living in the Upper-Hungarian region, first in Szatmár Castle, then in Tokaj and Sárospatak and tried to be part of contemporary society. Besides this, Debreczeni tried to establish connections through marriage or god-parenting to the nobility from Upper-Hungary, for example with the Pathay, Reöthy, and Fáy families.²⁰

His letters to his relatives contained not only information about family affairs but also other news which was more important to the area where they lived. The reason why the people, including his family members, wrote to Thomas Debreczeni was because they knew he had a special relationship to the Prince of Transylvania. He was the man who was able to deliver their messages directly to Rákóczi as fast as possible which was, especially in the beginning, important to stabilize his power.²¹

It is interesting that from an economic manager's perspective, Rákóczi was more of a landlord than a prince in terms of his personal estates. He was a landlord who entrusted his estates to his reliable employee. The reason why Debreczeni's position was extraordinary is that he was one of the Upper-Hungarian nobles around Rákóczi with an important duty. It is also interesting that we do not have any other information about who was the supervisor before and after him, so we can see he was a special member of Rákóczi's group.²²

The influence of George Rákóczi in the basic level: the county

Before I speak about George Rákóczi's local influence, I have to explain at first briefly the function of the counties (in Latin *comitatus*). From the Middle Ages, these were the smaller administrative units within a country which were led by the *supremus comes* (in German *Obergespan*) who was usually the member of a rich and well-connected family. Each *supremus comes* had the opportunity to lead two or three counties at the same time. It was a fact that since the *supremus comes* was a rich aristocrat, he spent most of his life in the Habsburg Court or all around the country. Because of this, the role of sub-prefect (Latin *vicecomes*, German *Vizegespan*) was more important, practically he was the leader of the county and usually he was in the service of the *supremus comes*, for example they managed the castle or the estates of the comes.²³ It is also a fact that the members of nobility who were living in

²⁰ Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 455–457.

²¹ In 1636, Stephen Fáy wrote about the rebellion against George Rákóczi directly to Thomas Debreczeni because Fáy knew, Debreczeni has more opportunity to meet the Prince of Transylvania in person. Horváth, “Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz”, 163.

²² Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 462.

²³ Ember, Győző, *Az újkori magyar közigazgatás története Mohácstól a török kiűzéséig* [The History of the Hungarian Public Administration in the Early Modern Period from the Battle of Mohács (1526) to the Expulsion of

the same region knew each other well and had many experiences of working together in the leadership of the counties. Sometimes they were in the service of the same aristocrats.²⁴

Usually, the county ensured the administration of justice, the gathering of taxes, the promulgation of laws and the military protection of the people who lived in the county.²⁵ In the centers of the counties, the noble families would hold meetings that were called assemblies of the county. These meetings were especially important for the nobles who lived there because they could reach decisions about the future of their villages and therefore their own life. During this period, for the Hungarian nobility, the assembly was a place where they could meet, talk and share information with each other which meant an opportunity to reach their own goals.²⁶

The life of Stephen Fáy shows how an ambitious Hungarian noble man can step higher from the lower level of the social rank through his networks. The Fáy's were one of the Hungarian Protestant families during this period with origins in the Middle Ages. The estates belonging to the Fáy family were scattered across Upper-Hungary in several counties, sometimes threatened by Ottoman attack and abutted on those of the Rákóczi family.²⁷

In this article I will focus just on the life of Stephen IV Fáy in the 17th century. We know that his father – also called Stephen Fáy (†around 1618) – gave him a lot of support. The young Stephen was commended to the service of one of the famous members of the Rákóczi family. This was a typical way of learning; young nobles would often learn the ways of service in the court of a local aristocrat. After that, until the 1630's we do not have any other information about his life.²⁸

His name appears in the service of George Rákóczi for the first time in 1632. In this year he was the member of a diplomatic mission to the Crimea. From Rákóczi's contract book,

the Ottomans (1686)] (Budapest, 1946), 40–42.

²⁴ Dominkovits, Péter, “Főúri udvar – uradalom – vármegye – katolikus egyház. Adatok és szempontok a 17. századi nyugat-dunántúli megyei nemesség mozgásterének kutatásához” [The Aristocrat Court – Manor – County – Catholic Church. Details and Aspects to the Research of the Hungarian Nobility's Opportunity in the Western Part of the Transdanubian Region] *Turul*, 80, no 2 (2008), 38–39.

²⁵ Ember, *Az újkori magyar közigazgatás története*, 42–43.

²⁶ About to sharing information in the assemblies of the county: Horváth, “Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz”, 162.

²⁷ Horváth, Mónika, “Házassági stratégiák egy felső-magyarországi köznemesi családban. A Fáyak és rokonaik a 17. században” [Marriage Policy of a Noble Family in Upper-Hungary. The Fáy Family and their Relatives in the 17th Century] in *Doktorandusz hallgatók IX. konferenciájának tanulmányai*, ed. Szuromi, Rita (Eger: Liceum Kiadó, 2020), 107, 109.

²⁸ Varga J., János, *Szervitorok katonai szolgálata a XVI–XVII. századi dunántúli nagybirtokon* [The Military Service of Servitors in the 16–17th Centuries on the Transdanubian Properties] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1981), 14; Horváth, “Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz”, 156.

which is similar to a modern contract, we know that he worked as Rákóczi's servitor from 1635 to 1639 because during this time he was regularly paid by Rákóczi on a permanent basis.²⁹

Besides that, Stephen Fáy worked as one of the leaders of Abaúj County from 1630 to 1631 and from 1634 to 1639. Fáy's relationship to George Rákóczi on the one hand was based on his connections to the nobility and on the other hand, to the Protestant religion. Stephen Fáy strengthened his position around George Rákóczi and his circle because of his marriage. In 1625, he married Catherine Reöthy, who was the daughter of one of Rákóczi's important soldiers from this region called Urban Reöthy (†1647).³⁰ Considering the position of his father-in-law, it was an advantageous marriage for Stephen Fáy: he found a patron who could support him in entering into Rákóczi's service. It is important to emphasize that the properties of the Reöthy family abutted on those of the Fáy family. We do not know much about Fáy's feelings or those of his wife, but we do know that marriages in the early modern period were made for the purpose of property; a circumstance which could be advantageous not only for the husbands but also for the wives.³¹

Since Stephen Fáy worked in the service of George Rákóczi and in the county in the 1630's, we can ask what was his role in Rákóczi's gaining of power? From his correspondence,³² we can see that Fáy played a significant role in the Upper-Hungarian region: he recruited soldiers for Rákóczi's army. Many of his letters shows us the success of these recruitment efforts. He sent information to Rákóczi about the enemy's military preparations and the moving of their troops. He probably fought against the enemies of the Prince of Transylvania.³³

Stephen Fáy was one of the nobles in the county of Abaúj who regularly participated in the meetings of the county. On 27th July 1636, the nobles of Upper-Hungary already knew that Rákóczi's enemies would rebel against him again. Fáy took part in the assembly of the county, asking for the help of the nobles who lived there to support George Rákóczi to fight.³⁴

²⁹ Horváth, "Egy Rákóczi-familiáris levelezése", 182.

³⁰ Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 156–157.

³¹ Urban Reöthy worked as the manager of the Sárospatak Castle, from 1634 to 1644 he became the captain of Kővár Castle (present day the part of *Berbeșzoaia* in Romania) and after that, until his death in 1647, Reöthy was the captain of Kassa Castle (present day *Košice* in Slovakia). Stephen Fáy married to his daughter, Catherine on February 4th 1624 in Fülek (present day *Filakovo* in Slovakia). Horváth, "Házassági stratégiák egy felső-magyarországi köznemesi családban", 112.

³² The original correspondence of Stephen IV Fáy can be found in the National Archives of Hungary in Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [*Hungarian National Archives National Archives*] P1729 Archivum familiae Fáy [*Family Archive of the Fáy family, Section P*].

The published version of the correspondence: Horváth, "Egy Rákóczi-familiáris levelezése", 181–214; Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 152–166.

³³ Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 160, 162–163.

³⁴ Horváth, "Egy Rákóczi-familiáris levelezése", 197–200.

Fáy worked a lot not only for his county but for his country. In 1632, he had worked as a representative of Rákóczi when he visited the Crimea. We do not have any other information about this mission, but Rákóczi probably wanted to keep in touch with the Khan in Crimea. It was important to be at peace with the Crimean Tartars because the Principality was not strong enough to fight two or more enemies at the same time.³⁵ It is an interesting fact that other members of the Fáy family were also taking part in diplomatic missions. But they were less successful. For example, one of Stephen Fáy's relatives, Peter Fáy (†1620) had been executed in Constantinople many years before while he tried to complete his mission.³⁶

We must speak about Fáy's espionage activity, which means in this case delivering information. Correspondence was the quickest and securest way to deliver information between two people. Fáy always thought it was important to send letters about his region to Rákóczi himself or one of his servitors. But what sort of topics did he send to the Prince of Transylvania? He wrote about military readiness in general, the number of troops, and the military actions of Rákóczi's enemies or the Ottoman forces in his county.³⁷ Then he conveyed the news about the people who he worked and lived with. He talked about various topics with them and knew which people were only pretending and did not in fact support Rákóczi's policy. Fáy wrote about his experiences to Rákóczi and from this Prince of Transylvania was able to make decisions about their careers.³⁸

The difference between Thomas Debreczeni and Stephen Fáy was that Fáy did not have any experience in economic activity, he did not work as an administrator on Rákóczi's properties. I think on the one hand, the prince had his own appointees and on the other hand, perhaps it was impossible to work as an estate manager and as a representative at the same time.³⁹

Finally, with some further information, we can conjecture the date of Fáy's death which probably took place in 1640. We can find his name in the contract book of George

³⁵ Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 156.

³⁶ Horváth, "Házassági stratégiák egy felső-magyarországi köznemesi családban", 110.

³⁷ Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 160, 162–163.

³⁸ In 1633 Stephen Fáy wrote a letter to his father-in-law about the activity of Catherine of Brandenburg. Fáy was disappointed to the widow of Gabriel Bethlen and supported her to leave Transylvania as quick as possible. Besides that, Fáy helped Rákóczi to gain the title of Prince of Transylvania, he heard disappointing rumors about Catherine of Brandenburg. According to this information, the widow of Bethlen already started to keep in touch to the Habsburg ruler, Ferdinand II. The people also talked about her conversion to the Catholic religion. Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 159.

³⁹ The contract of Stephen IV Fáy: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [*Hungarian National Archives National Archives*] E190 Archivum familiae Rákóczi [*Family Archive of the Rákóczi family, Section E*], 3. tétel, Nr. 12. (40.) fol. 95–96.

I Rákóczi for last time in 1639, and I found a letter where his wife is mentioned as a widow in 1640. We do not know anything certain about his death. We do not have his last will which means he probably died in an unexpected accident or a battle or maybe this source was destroyed in a fire during the Second World War or at the time of the anti-communist uprising in 1956.⁴⁰

Fáy was one of Rákóczi's enthusiastic supporters in several counties of Upper-Hungary. The Prince of Transylvania found a loyal person who was in contact with the noble families whose properties were located next to the Rákóczi's estates. In addition, Fáy was one of the Calvinist nobles who had relatively large estates, money and political influence to cover those nobles with his power who were against the Prince of Transylvania.

The influence of George I Rákóczi in the higher level: the diet

Before showing Rákóczi's territorial influence, I should first explain briefly the function of the Hungarian diet.⁴¹ The diet was the legislative institution of Hungary whose function – unlike its structure for example the numbers of the chambers or the location of the diet – did not change at all, up until these days. The meetings of the diet were located in Pressburg (present day *Bratislava* in Slovakia) and the participants were summoned by the Habsburg ruler. During this period, the Hungarian diet was bicameral which means it had two parts, the Upper – and the Lower Chamber (*tabula superior et inferior*).⁴²

The prelates and aristocrats served as the members of the Upper Chamber, they had the right to vote at the diet in person. In addition, it was a privilege of the aristocrats that if they did not want to participate at the diet in person, they could then send in place of himself a Hungarian nobleman who could afterwards share his knowledge about the diet's proceedings.⁴³ The members of the Lower Chamber were representatives of the cities, the Catholic church and the counties, who also had the right to vote at the diet. The Lower Chamber included the representatives of the Prince or the Princess of

⁴⁰ Horváth, "Egy Rákóczi-familiáris levelezése", 181, 183.

About the short history of the Archivum familiae Fáy [*Family Archive of the Fáy family*]: Kosáry, Domokos, *Bevezetés Magyarország történetének forrásaiba és irodalmába, I. kötet* [Introduction to the Sources and Literature of the Hungarian History, Volume One] (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1970), 666.

⁴¹ About the history and the function of the Hungarian diet: Benda, Kálmán – Péter, Katalin, *Az országgyűlések a kora újkorai magyar történelemben* [The Diets in the History of Hungary during the Early Modern Period] (Budapest, 1987) and so on.

⁴² Szijártó M., István, *A diéta. A magyar rendek és az országgyűlés, 1708–1792* [The Diet. The Hungarian Nobility and the Diets, 1708–1792] (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005), 43–45, 56, 58, 104.

⁴³ Szijártó, *A diéta. A magyar rendek és az országgyűlés*, 46–48.

Transylvania. In this article, I would like to focus on the representatives of the counties and partly the Prince of Transylvania.⁴⁴

The diet played a significant role in the whole of Hungarian history. After the Hungarian Kingdom had an elected king from the Habsburg family, the bigger part of the nobility did not participate in the policy directly which means that they could not, or did not want to, gain the significant positions in the Habsburg Court or in the administration. Instead of this, they tried to represent their own and territorial interests at the diet. To achieve their goals, on the one hand, the Habsburg ruler had to convene the diet as often as possible and on the other hand, the Hungarian nobility had to be unified. It is already an interesting fact that the Habsburg Court and the nobility acted as competitors at the diet, and both the ruler and the Hungarians represented their own interests in a persistent way. Most of the time, the Habsburg ruler was able to strengthen his position in the Kingdom of Hungary but he knew it would be impossible without the permission of the Hungarian nobility.⁴⁵

Now I would like to focus on a Hungarian Protestant nobleman, Paul Szemere, who also had smaller properties in the Upper-Hungarian region. He was a well-known nobleman in his county who regularly participated in the assemblies of his county and had good connections to the nobility. According to current research, we know the most significant details of his life like his activity as a representative of the counties and the Prince of Transylvania.⁴⁶

Paul Szemere was the member of a noble family with origins in the Middle Ages but they became famous because of his activity during this period. Their estates were also scattered across Upper-Hungary in Abaúj and Borsod Counties.⁴⁷

Paul Szemere worked as the notary of two Upper-Hungarian counties from 1635 to 1640, during this period he was the sub-prefect of Abaúj County.⁴⁸ From the 1620's

⁴⁴ Szijártó, *A diéta. A magyar rendek és az országgyűlés*, 51–52; Guszarova, Tatjana, “Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján a 17. században” [The Representatives of the Counties in the Lower Chamber of the Diet in the 17th Century] in *Rendiség és parlamentarizmus Magyarországon. A kezdetektől 1918-ig*, ed. Dobszay, Tamás (Budapest: Országgyűlés Hivatala, 2013), 137.

It is important to emphasize that a representative itself was able to represent the interest of more than one aristocrat and counties and/or the interest of more than one county and the Prince of Transylvania at the same time. Guszarova, “Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján”, 137.

⁴⁵ Ember, *Az újkori magyar közigazgatás története*, 230.

⁴⁶ Nagy, *Magyarország családai. Czimerekkel és nemzékrendi táblákkal, 10. kötet* [The Families of Hungary. With Coats of Arms and Family Trees, Volume 10] (Budapest, 1863), 595.

⁴⁷ Nagy, *Magyarország családai, 10.*, 595, 601–602; Borovszky, Samu, *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai, Abaúj-Torna vármegye és Kassa* [The Counties and Cities of Hungary, Abaúj-Torna County and Košice] (Budapest, 1896), 548.

⁴⁸ Paul Szemere had a very diverse activity in Abaúj County. From 1625 to 1628 he worked as one of the judges, from 1630 to 1632 and from 1634 to 1643 he was the notary of the county. Besides that, in 1635 and from 1638 to 1641 he worked in the same position of another county called Sáros. Korponay, János, *Abaújvármegye*

to the end of the 1640's, Szemere regularly participated in the assemblies of the diets as representative. He was the representative of Borsod County in 1625 and after that, in 1630, the representative of Sáros County; from 1634 to 1635, from 1637 to 1638 and from 1646 to 1647, in 1642 and in 1649 he was the representative of Abaúj County at the diet. Apart from this activity, he regularly participated in delegations and committees before the summoning of the diet.⁴⁹ We can find his name in the contract book of George I Rákóczi in 1635, this year he was paid by Rákóczi on a permanent basis.⁵⁰ In 1646, Szemere worked as the representative of the Prince of Transylvania at the diet. It is an interesting fact that he wrote a diary about his experiences and his activity at the diet but the publishing of this source is still one of the tasks for the future.⁵¹

The marriage policy of Paul Szemere was similar to other contemporary noblemen. He married Clara Putnoky who was the member of a noble family whose properties were located also in Upper-Hungary. Although the Putnoky family was not one of the richest families during this period through this marriage he was able to increase his political power in the Upper-Hungarian region.⁵²

The question is, what does it mean if somebody worked as the representative of a county from Upper-Hungary or the Prince of Transylvania during this period? First of all, we know that the leaders and the representatives of the counties had similar family backgrounds, work experience and they had similar opportunities to represent their own interests. In the assemblies these people were able to meet and support each other. Since the estates of a nobleman were scattered across more counties and he would have good connections to other nobles from the counties, it was possible to become the representative of two or three counties at the same time. Besides that, the counties of Upper-Hungary usually had the same proposals and opinions about the questions at the diet. As I mentioned

monographiája, 2. kötet [The Monography of Abaúj County, Volume 2] (Kassa, 1878) 138, 153, 197, 202, 227, 253, 292, 315, 328, 337, 356, 365, 368, 370, 423, 425, 444.

⁴⁹ Borovszky, *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai, Abaúj-Torna*, 548; Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 136.

⁵⁰ The contract of Paul Szemere in the contract book of George Rákóczi: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL) [Hungarian National Archives National Archives] E190 Archivum familiae Rákóczi [Family Archive of the Rákóczi family, Section E], 3. tétel, Nr. 12. (40.) fol. 15–16.

⁵¹ Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 136.

István Hajnal (1892–1956) already published several important details of the diary of Szemere: Hajnal, István, *Az 1642. évi meghiúsult országgyűlés időszaka* [The Period of the Failed Diet in 1642] (Budapest, 1930), 75, 78–85.

⁵² Borovszky, Samu, *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai, Szabolcs vármegye* [The Counties and Cities of Hungary, Szabolcs County] (Budapest, 1900), 530; Borovszky, Samu, *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai, Gömör-Kisbont vármegye* [The Counties and Cities of Hungary, Gömör-Kishont County] (Budapest, 1903), 654; Horváth, "Házassági stratégiák egy felső-magyarországi köznemesi családban", 116.

earlier, from the middle of the 1620's to the end of the 1640's, Paul Szemere also regularly worked as the representative of two or three administrative units.⁵³

It is important to emphasize that since the leaders, the administrators and often the representatives of the counties also were in the service of a Hungarian aristocrat like the Rákóczi family, the aristocrats believed that the leadership of the counties and therefore the decisions of diet could be influenced by them.⁵⁴

Besides that, due to the large number of Protestant nobility in Upper-Hungary, these counties represented a different opinion towards the Catholic Habsburg Court. This was one of the reasons why these representatives had a good connection to the Protestant Prince of Transylvania. Paul Szemere participated at the diet as the representative of the Prince and several Upper-Hungarian counties where the estates of Rákóczi were located. Therefore, through Szemere's activity as a representative, Rákóczi had the opportunity to represent his own interest not only in the counties but also at the diet.⁵⁵ His presence at the diet as a Protestant representative meant that there was someone who represented the interests of the Protestant nobility.⁵⁶

Although the history of his life and the importance of his work must be supplemented with the information from his diary or other sources of the assemblies of the counties, it is already obvious that the activity of Paul Szemere was important not only for the Hungarian Protestant nobility but also for the Upper-Hungarian region. Besides that, he worked in the

⁵³ Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 123, 127.

⁵⁴ Dominkovits, "Familiárisi szolgálat – vármegyei hivatalviselés. Egy 17. századi Sopron vármegyei alispán, gálósházi Récsy (Rechey) Bálint" [The Service of a Servitor – The Employment of the County. The Life of Balint Récsy (Rechey) from Gálósháza who was the Sub-Prefect (Vizegespan) in the County of Sopron (Ódenburg) in the 17th Century] *Korall*, 9 (2002), 33; Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 128.

From 1615 to 1630, George I Rákóczi was the *supremus comes* of Borsod County which meant a good opportunity for him to build connections, increase his power and look over this region. The researchers who work with the Rákóczi era need time to find and show every members of the circle around George Rákóczi. Until now, we know only a few members of the Rákóczi group from Upper-Hungary. Fallenbüchl, Zoltán, *Magyarország főispánjai 1526–1848* [The List of the Supremus Comes of Hungary from 1526 to 1848] (Budapest: Argumentum, 1994), 72.

The servitors of George I Rákóczi in Transylvania: Jeney-Tóth, Annamária, "Adalékok az udvari familiárisi karrierhez I. Rákóczi György udvarában" in *Műveltség és társadalmi szerepek: arisztokraták Magyarországon és Európában*, ed. Bárány, Attila – Orosz, István – Papp, Klára (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi Intézete, 2014), 319–333.

⁵⁵ Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 130, 137, 139.

The activity of Paul Szemere, for example speech at the diet or following the instructions of the counties can be supplemented with other information from his diary or the protocol books and notifications of the counties. Since the main part of these sources are unpublished yet, it needs more time to work with these documents and based on the amount of the data, it deserves to write a completely different and independent article about the topic.

⁵⁶ Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 139.

service of George Rákóczi and was a loyal supporter of the Prince of Transylvania and, as one of his representatives, Szemere also had the opportunity to present his interests and those of Transylvania at the diet.⁵⁷

Summary

In my article I have tried to show how George Rákóczi maintained or increased his power in the region and how he was able to influence the people in the Kingdom of Hungary.

We have looked at Rákóczi's influence on three levels. The first was at the economic level, dealing with the life of an economic manager who worked on Rákóczi's estates. The second was the local influence through the life of a Hungarian nobleman who worked in his county. The third one was Rákóczi's territorial influence through his activity as a representative at the diet.

It is important to emphasize that in my article I have shown the activity of one person at each level but we have to imagine that on every level there were many more people who worked in the service of Rákóczi. Because of these people, Rákóczi could make a stand for his own interests, and become one of the most powerful princes of Transylvania.

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⁵⁷ Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 124, 140.

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