

An Inquiry into the Everyday Life of Townspeople of Košice in the 16th Century

Bernadeta Fabová

vol. 1, 2012, 1-2, pp. 26-33

Košice represents an atypical European town in the 16th century. Unfortunately, due to numerous destructive events, relatively small number of documents has been preserved from this period. The testaments, which originated in particular period, were selected as the source for the reconstruction of everyday life. The primary aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the existing research on the townspeople of Košice in the 16th century. Secondly, the possible difficulties that might arise during the research of the topic are being listed. The final part of the paper contains specific examples of the life experience of the selected inhabitants of the town.

Key words: Košice. Early modern period. Testaments. Property. Everyday life. Burghers.

Košice in the 16th century

In the 16th century, Košice represented an atypical European town. Even though it was relatively most in size, its prominence in the country and general significance reflected the state of national affairs highly. Unfortunately, due to eventful history, only a relatively small number of archival sources have been preserved from that period.

For this reason the reconstruction of the demography, layout, social and economic conditions and also life of its citizens is difficult. It also explains a relatively low number of published studies and monographs. Probably the most comprehensive monograph that includes selected period is Ondrej R. Halaga's book: *Legal, Territorial and Population Development of Košice*.¹ Another author who has dealt with the selected period is Miloslava Bodnárová. She wrote several works dedicated to the description of demography and property structure,² handicraft³ and the beginning of reformation⁴ in Košice in the 16th century. She based her research on the tax registers⁵ and to a limited extent also town's chronicle. This type of sources was preserved fragmentally; there is a need for adding further information from another kind of source to create a more comprehensive view of the city. The property structure and social layering of the eastern Slovak towns is the subject of Marie Marečková's publication.⁶ In her paper she also put emphasis on the town of Košice. Here, the description of the property and social condition of burgesses of Košice was only marginal.

Existing knowledge suggests that the town undergone changes of its status and economical circumstances during the early modern period. The economy and mainly trade were affected by the shift of trade routes from east to west; to the Atlantic coast and to the New World. The fact that new routes were far away from Košice reduced its trade and shrank the related income. Economical decline was amplified by the expansion of the Ottoman Empire.

1 HALAGA, O. R. *Právny, územný a populačný vývoj mesta Košíc*. Košice 1967, 134.

2 BODNÁROVÁ, M. Majetková štruktúra obyvateľstva Košíc v 16. storočí. In *Historica Carpatica* (18) 1987, 179-205.

3 BODNÁROVÁ, M. Remeselná výroba v Košiciach v 16. storočí. In *Historica Carpatica* (17) 1986, 99-119.

4 BODNÁROVÁ, M. Počiatky reformácie v Košiciach. In *Acta facultatis philosophicae Universitatis Šafarikanae*. Košice 1994, 38-49.

5 Which are located in Municipal archives of Košice (AMK). (AMK, *Taxa Media in civitate per iudicemet iuratos cives imposita*, Ladula 1. 1476 – 1694, taxa 28, 29, 30).

6 MAREČKOVÁ, M. Majetková štruktúra a sociální rozvrstvení obyvatel východoslovenských svobodných královských měst v raném novověku. In *Historický časopis* (42) 1994, 3, 425-445.

After the Ottoman victory in the famous battle at Mohacs in 1526 the southern part of Kingdom of Hungary was integrated within the Empire for a long time. This affected Košice's status as well. The former trading town was transformed into a defensive fortress against new Ottoman expansion.

Other recorded and obscure events also led to the reduction of the town's population and the deterioration of its quality of life. In spite of these changes, Košice retained the status it held as the centre of craft and trade in the eastern part of the upper Hungary. Ondrej R. Halaga recognized it in his book⁷ in which he listed 230 crafts, which were performed in Košice in the beginning of the 16th century. This fact referred to a high level of craft differentiation that was typical of the developed towns in the early modern period. Despite this fact the period records attest to a population drop.

The reconstruction of demography is difficult due to the lack of relevant sources and the fragmented conservation of the tax registers. The population has been estimated at 4500⁸ persons in the 16th century as the town tax registers suggest. The only complete register, for all quarters and suburbs is undated; its origin has been dated by estimation to the period between 1522 and 1524.⁹

Due to the scarcity of sources, it is difficult to stratify the population according to their social status and property ownership. All mentioned authors prefer to follow the classical model of the three classes: the richest, the middle class and the urban poor. The exact determination of a particular class is hard, due to the opposing nature of available information. One could assume that the social diversification and property division did not always go hand in hand. A burgher could have been a member of the middle class based on the social status, yet by property standards he may have belonged to the high society.

Based on the existing knowledge, the richest class represented the town elite which lived in the inner town, mainly near the town centre and market. Hungarian author Erik Fügedi uses the German term „Ringbürger“ to describe this category of population in the 15th century. Members of this class were mainly traders and merchants who focused on international trade; and also precious metals refiners and mine operators.¹⁰ They were also entitled to higher privileges; they were chosen to serve as members of the town council and as sworn officials. The reeves also belonged to this class.

The middle class included the townspeople living mainly in the inner city who worked as internal traders and craftsmen. They were not as rich and influential as the members of the upper class. They worked mainly with metal as blacksmiths, goldsmiths and locksmiths. The second most numerous groups of craftsmen made a living in working with wood, such as coopers, wheelwrights and carpenters. Leather processing by tanners, belt makers and saddlers, was also popular.¹¹ The members of this class could also become sworn officials, but there is a need for detailed research on this issue.

Finally there was a third class, which was much poorer than the previous ones. Members of this class lived in the suburbs and did not a dwelling. They were tenants working as craftsmen of low-valued specializations, day labourers, maids and servants; a large portion of them

7 HALAGA, O. R. *Počiatky Košíc a zrod metropoly*. Košice 1992, 54-55.

8 The number of citizens may be estimated from approximately 2807 to 4411 people. (HALAGA, O. R. *Počiatky Košíc...*, 54-55.)

9 See more: BODNÁROVÁ, M. *Majetková štruktúra...*, 179-205.

10 FÜGEDI, E. Kaschau, eine osteuropäische Handelstadt am Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts. In *Studia slavica Academiae scientiarum hungaricae* (3) 1957, 2, 185-213.

11 BODNÁROVÁ, M. *Remeselná výroba...*, 99-119.

had no job; they were beggars, criminals and immigrants without funds.¹² This class, the urban poor reflected the progress and regress of town by changing the size of suburbs. The reconstruction of the reduced circumstances they lived in is difficult; due to the lack of preserved relevant sources.

Despite the fact, that the town population consisted of all three classes; this research does not focus on the property status of the town's poor. The emphasis has been placed on reconstructing various aspect of everyday life of burghers; on their property, dress code, housing, and living.

The sources of research

The solid base of relevant information for this research is provided by the aforementioned town's chronicles, but also the testaments, inventories and „divisionales bonorum“(property division). The manuscripts of last wills and inventories are deposited in the Municipal archives of Košice. They have not merged into one fund; instead they are spread around the different archive funds.¹³

Before the beginning of the research it was necessary to create the list of testaments and inventories based on the Schwartzentachs inventories; mainly the first two volumes. The time range was limited, by the legal Act no. 395/2002 on Archives and Registries, to include documents after 1526. The base of this research represents 205 testaments and 54 inventories written mainly in German, Hungarian and to a lesser degree in the Latin language. Because of the lack of standardized form it has not been possible to use all of the documents; a certain part of them do not meet the adequate information potential.¹⁴

Last wills and mainly inventories contain relevant information about individual burghers of Košice. The main significance of these sources is to provide an overview of the owned estates, the personal property, and their heirs. Names of the deceased relatives were also recorded; this is important for genealogy research. The determination of the heir also demonstrates the applicable succession law. The aforementioned information makes testaments suitable to serve as a base for the reconstruction of everyday life of bourgeoisie.

The use of testaments and inventories as base documents which drive the research also has a couple of disadvantages. The main drawback is the low number of preserved documents. It enables us to reconstruct an overview of the life of but a small portion of burghers of Košice; the years of origin cover mainly the last quarter of the 16th century.

Another problem is caused by the format of the documents, which lack the information about citizen origin and status. For this reason it is hard to differentiate between for example a burgher and an aristocrat, which moved into the city. Even though both of these groups enjoyed the privileges of bourgeoisie, they cannot be merged to one class.

Besides the testaments and inventories or manuscripts there are also other last will records, mainly in the town books or the testament books which originated at the end of the 16th century; this kind of documents is not included in our research because of the low degree of conducted research.

The estates owned by the burghers of Košice

The burgher property consisted of two main groups. The first one was the estates. In this group belonged mainly the house that represented the elemental estate owned by the

12 FÜGEDI, E. *Kaschau, eine osteuropäische...*, 185-213.

13 AMK, Magistrate of Košice (MMK), Schwartzentachiana, 1604 – 4815; AMK, MMK, Archivum secretum (AS), U – NN.

14 Some last wills represent the statement about delegation of the owned property to the selected heirs; without specifying inherited items.

burgess of Košice. Ownership of a residence was the first condition of bourgeoisie; the rest was the performance of a craft and a certain property status. Most burgesses owned only one house; however the possession of two or more houses was not rare even in the middle class. The fact that the number of houses does not reflected the social class points to a discrepancy between social and property groups in the town of the selected period. Some members of the highest class owned only one residence; on the other hand several members of middle class owned more than one.¹⁵

The possession of a particular building was rarely specified in the last will of the owners. The most frequent way to specify the possession of a property was to track the names of the closest neighbours¹⁶ or locate it in the inner town or suburbs. Ownership of one house in the inner town and another one in the suburbs was not unique. The specific name of the street in which the building stood was rarely recorded.¹⁷

Adjacent to the houses there were yards of various sizes. It was a dedicated space for performing crafts and storing domestic animals or carriages. „Maierhoff“¹⁸ was a special kind of court which was frequently situated in the suburbs. It was used mainly for economic purposes.

Gardens were another kind of estates. They were situated frequently near the house or in the suburbs.¹⁹ They were modest in size. They probably provided space for domestic animals, carriages, crafts performance or trade. They could also have offered room for relaxing and fostering social contact to their owners.

Vineyards were typical estates in Košice. The hills that surround the town were used mainly for growing grapes. It is very difficult to specify the position of the individual vineyards based on testaments. Not unlike houses, last wills here too determined only the names of owners of the neighbouring vineyards or lands.²⁰ Despite this confusing naming, it is likely that the most of the burgesses' vineyards were located in the areas surrounding the town. If they were located somewhere else, this fact was recorded. The second favourite location for cultivation of vine for citizens of Košice is Tokay.²¹ It was case probably because of the above-average conditions of this region for growing grapes. Vine produced in Košice and Tokay was popular and in demand in domestic and international trade. Interestingly, the citizens of selected towns did not pay tax on the size of their vineyards, but from the volume of produced vine.²²

Meadows and fields were other kinds of local estates; their ownership was however rarely mentioned in the studied sources. Based on this fact, it is possible to conclude that this kind of estates represents a minority of lands owned by the townspeople. Food supplies for the

15 This fact is also the conclusion of Erik Fügedi. See more: FÜGEDI, E. *Kaschau, eine osteuropäische...*, 185-213.

16 „...das haus ist gelogen zwischen herrn Casper Land Schneiders und Hansen Plattners...“ (Testament of Joannis Budai; AMK, AS, CC, Budai, 1); „...zwischen des Jacob Fleischers und Albrecht Glesershaisern gelegen...“ (AMK, AS, AA, Holtmaier, 2).

17 For example in the testament of Ursula Hopper the wife of Andrae Meltzer from the 4th September 1554, where is written: „...als velich lygende oder beveglyche gutter czu ersthen nein haus auf der Faulgassen czu mander...“ (AMK, AS, X - Melczer, 13).

18 „...der meyerhoff in der firstatt auff Sanct Lenaharts gasse...“ (The inventory of Sebastian Holtmaier; AMK, AS, GG, Holtmaier, 2).

19 „...mehr in flekenn oder gartenn, gelegenn in der vorstad bey den neuen gäffell...“ (Testament of Martin Grünberg; AMK, AS, II - Grünberger, 1).

20 „...zwischen des Tarczy Pals und Pap Ferencz Weingarten gelegen...“ (The inventory of Sebastian Holtmaier; AMK, AS, GG, Holtmaier, 2).

21 „...Zum funfen das stuckle weingarten so gegen Uyfaluligt...“ (Testament of Margarete the widow of Erasmus Kirschner; AMK, AS, II - Kirschner, 1).

22 BODNÁROVÁ, M. *Majetková štruktúra...*, 179-205.

bourgeoisie were bought from villagers of the surrounding villages at a regular weekly market. Similar to the mention estates the last wills contains not the certain location, but the list of neighbour's names.²³

The majority of selected sources do not provide any information about the size of the estates; the value of the buildings is also hardly ever recorded. In the case of houses, their value, which could have indicated their size, was rarely specified. As far as meadows or fields were concerned, the amount of production which indicated their size was sometimes established.²⁴

The personal property of burghesses of Košice

Personal property of burghers of Košice came in several groups. The most expensive group represents the luxury goods. This class included the objects decorated with gold, silver, gems, or pearls. The majority of these items consisted jewellery. Rings with gems were the most popular jewellery. The gold as a metal always dominated. Emerald, ruby and sapphire were the most well-liked gems; the diamond and turquoise were uncommon. Seal ring was another predominant ring type. Memorial rings, protections ring and rings with an image were under-represented. Besides rings there were other sorts of popular jewellery such as chains made from gold decorated with coins, gems or without any decoration. Non-set gems represent specific types of expensive goods; their utilization was not written.²⁵

In a group of expensive good it is possible to involve casual products made from expensive material. Different types of cup, such as goblet, beaker, tumbler and glass were the most frequent products from this class. The other products were bowls, spoons and candlesticks. They were made from silver or unspecified metal and they were additionally gold-plated and decorated. There was also demand for buttons; they could be made from silver and gold-plated or from crystal. The usage of different decorations mainly for women hairdo was typical; such as headbands decorated with pearls and made from gold or silver. It was also possible to involve certain garnished kinds of weapons, such as velvet belts with a pair of knives and a chain to this group.

Weapons were the second most expensive kind of products.²⁶ This involved hand rifles with matchlock and wheellock and guns of different sizes. Gunpowder flasks were attached to firearms. The property of citizens also involved different type of swords and daggers. „Cavalry saber“ was the most frequent that could be decorated with silver or silver chain; then there was „cavalry sword“, cord, hunting knife, axe and knife. Protective clothing was absent in the inventory of the townspeople. This category consisted of armour for different body parts, mainly arms and hands.

Clothing was the largest group of personal property. The description of clothing was not very detailed in the selected kind of sources. It contained the colour, material, status of conservation and decoration; the inscription of design or pattern was absent. The most popular colours in the 16th century in Košice were black, white and red; fewer brown, nude and

23 „...sindt 5 seel ackerlandt der ein nachsbar ist Greger Czipser...“ (The inventory of the LadeislavSzabó's widow; AMK, AS, Z – Szabo, 7).

24 „Uber den flus Hernad ist anderhalb seel ackerlandt...“ (The last will of Peter Nitsch; AMK, AS, HH – Nitsch, 2).

25 The amount and value of owned jewellery is variable due to the economical status of its owner. It could also reflect the social status or the membership in the town council; mainly the ownership of a seal ring, which was used as the guarantee of validity of the documents, it was owned by the sworn.

26 Ownership of firearms was not a frequent phenomenon. Andreas Illenfeld owned the biggest number of this kind weapon, the cannon manufacturer; it was probably linked with his profession.(AMK, AS, DD – Illenfeld, 3).

green. From used materials dominated velvet, damask, samlot, silk, taffeta, cotton, drapery, linen and leather.

Clothing was divided into the two main groups; female and male garments. Some kinds of clothes were used by both. Trousers, coat, vests, sarks, and pantyhose dominated the male wardrobe; collars were a common accessory of a man's wardrobe. The clothes of men were less decorated. Female wardrobe consisted of dresses, skirts, corsages, chemisette, pantyhose and jackets. Bonnets or veils were typical female hat covers; males used different kinds of hats.

Fur insulation was the most frequent modification of cloths. Fur from marten, fox and beaver was both popular and probably also affordable. Decorations of gold, silver or silk and velvet dominated the clothes' edging. Pearl decoration was also frequent as well as knitting of garments. Leather gloves, neckwear, scarves, sleeves and aprons made from aforementioned materials dominated the accessories.

The subcategory of clothes which represented the underwear was called „weise kleider“. This group involved not only lingerie, but also sleepwear. Lingerie was represented by tunics used by males and females. Shoes made from leather completed the set of general clothing. Specification of shoes type in analysed sources was absent. The conclusion that could be drawn is that the clothes represented a wide range of prices and could be considered as a reflection of social and property status of its wearer.

The description of the house equipment is not so detailed. Mainly the information about the furniture was absent. This could reflect on the fact why less facility in households was common; also the range of furniture types was not so wide. It was possible to take bed as primary furniture during the whole 16th century. Its design was not described in used sources, only their size. Besides the usual bed there could be also found the special kind – „himmelbett“ (the canopy bed) with hangings. Only chests or caskets of different size were used for storage of clothing and other smaller equipment. There is a large quantity of these items in every household.

The type of the furniture depended on the usage of certain room. In a common household of a burgher of Košice there were mainly the kitchen united with dining room, chamber for storage of supplies and hall. The bedrooms were only in the residence of the richest burgess. Number of rooms could indicate the size of building as well as its value. The inventory of Andreas Illenfeld the existence of „scriptorium“ was also mentioned.²⁷ It was equipped with a table with chairs, hangings, boilers and chest; the utilization of this room was not stated.

The typical furniture of kitchen was the table supplemented with a bench that was used for eating and cookware. In a bedroom there was a bed, small tables, chairs and also some chests. The rooms could be decorated with different tapestry, hangings or paintings; candles in candlesticks were used for lightning.

This category of property also involved bed equipment that represented the majority of household tools. Term bed equipment involved the canvas, blankets and pillows; due to fact that their material is not mentioned, it is predictable they were made of linen. Their colour and possible decoration was also not described.

In the household of burgers there were also practical textiles, such as tablecloths, cloths, aprons or towel; made probably from linen. They were necessary for personal hygiene and maintenance of cleanliness of the residence. They were washed in front of the house, in the yard, as well as burgher's dresses; for this purpose they used troughs or containers.

Hangings and the carpets were used as thermal insulation of building. Their material and design were also absent.

27 „...in der hindern schreibstuben...“ (AMK, AS, DD – Illenfeld, 3).

Kitchen and court accessories included also home equipment. Baking was the most popular way of food preparation in the time of the 16th century. Different types of pans, boilers, pots, grills, mortars, strainers, scoops and bowls were used in food preparation; the more valuable cookware was made from cooper, the cheaper variants were made from tin, clay or wood. Individual eating was conducted with spoons, knives, plates, bowls and cups; made mainly from wood and clay. The foodstuffs were stored in the cellar, mainly in barrels and chests. The food with the short shelf time was not conserved; it was bought daily on the market.

Craft tools were another group of equipment, which could be found in the early modern period house. Specific type of tools and its location in the house depended on the kind of craft performed by the house owner. They would be stored in a chamber or in the courtyard. Its description is not the subject of this research.

Service tools represent an important group of tools. It involved different hammers, chains, knives, nails or axes. They were used for building repairs or maintenance of property.

The inventory of an early modern period burgher did not lack riding gear, such as saddle, bridle or rope; but also horseshoes and nails. Ownership of carriages and wagons was not rare in the 16th century; they were necessary for transporting straw, wood, resources, goods, or food supplies. Possession of bigger number of wagons could indicate the trade as the profession of the burgher.

In unique cases the inventory or testament contains the collection of books.²⁸ The list of owned books contains the title, its author and rarely price of this item. The majority of titles are dedicated to history, philosophy or theology. It also reflected the demand for certain genres. Book collection was typical for the members of highest class. John Galen who was a bookseller was an exception.²⁹ He owned large collection of books, even though he does not belong to the higher class. Ownership of books was associated with his trade.

Food supplies, resources, and domestic animals made the last part of burgher's property. There are occasional references about them in the analysed inventories or last wills. The most frequent was the ownership of wine barrels; their origin was recorded, mainly in the case of the wine from the surroundings of Košice and from Tokay. It also represented the most valuable stored food supply. The storage of resources was associated with the performance of crafts. Possession of domestic animals could be considered a common phenomenon; even though it was not recorded. Horses always dominated the house yard. Domestic animals were frequently stored in the estates located in the suburb or the town's surroundings.

There were also some uncategorized items, such as patents of arms, privileges, debts registers, purchase and sale contracts or donations in the inventory of the burghers.

Conclusions

Based on listed estates and personal property it is possible to assume the existence of a few really rich burghers in the town in the 16th century. The list of jewellery and clothing reflected the preferred items of domestic and international trade as well as the purchasing power of bourgeoisie. Absence of luxury cloths, such as gold lily or atlas, indicated lower economical condition of citizens in common. Also the lower amount of jewellery and its small scale as well as the general property size indicated the lower purchasing power of the townspeople of Košice in the 16th century.

28 For example, the inventory of Andreas Illenfeld lists the collection of 37 books which cover topics from history, science and theology. (AMK, AS, DD – Illenfeld, 3).

29 See more: FABOVÁ, B. Ján Galen a jeho knižná zbierka. In *Z dejín knižnej kultúry východného Slovenska II*. Prešov 2011, 166-171.

Information contained in the last wills and inventories does not exhaust all available information. Other relevant dates in towns chronicles and mainly in the property division were not included in this research. Further examination of the issues involving different aspects of everyday life of townspeople in Košice is in progress.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BODNÁROVÁ, M. Majetková štruktúra obyvateľstva Košíc v 16. storočí. In *Historica Carpatica* (18) 1987, 179-205.
- BODNÁROVÁ, M. Počiatky reformácie v Košiciach. In *Acta Facultatis philosophicae Universitatis Šafarikanae*. Košice 1994, 38-49.
- BODNÁROVÁ, M. Remeselná výroba v Košiciach v 16. storočí. In *Historica Carpatica* (17) 1986, 99-119.
- FABOVÁ, B. Ján Galen a jeho knižná zbierka. In *Z dejín knižnej kultúry východného Slovenska II*. Prešov 2011, 166-171.
- FÜGEDI, E. Kaschau, eine osteuropäische Handelstadt am Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts. In *Studia slavica Academiae scientiarum hungaricae* (3) 1957, 2, 185-213.
- HALAGA, O. R. *Počiatky Košíc a zrod metropoly*. Košice 1992.
- HALAGA, O. R. *Právny, územný a populačný vývoj mesta Košíc*. Košice 1967.
- MAREČKOVÁ, M. Majetková štruktúra a sociálny rozvrstvení obyvateľ východoslovenských svobodných kráľovských miest v ranom novoveku. In *Historický časopis* (42) 1994, 3, 425-445.