

Chief Judges and Urban Elite of Miskolc in the Turkish Era (1550 – 1700)

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Market town Miskolc has gone into the possession of pledge holders in the Turkish Era who preserved its medieval character and were elected by the serf-burgers. The serf-burgers continued to elect the town's self-administration i. e. the council and the chief judge, which started to keep permanent protocols (Town's Book) from 1565. Chief judges emerged from among the serf citizens of the town, no nobleman could hold this position, but from mid 17th century, only noblemen, what is more, landowners filled this function. In the 16th century, the urban elite consisted of rich serf-burgers, craftsmen and a small number of merchants, but there was also a small 'outsider' noble elite attached to the castle and dominium of Diósgyőr. In the 17th century, there were significant changes in the town's society and elite. An increasingly larger numbers of the citizens applied for nobility, and due to the Turkish wars, a lot of noble families also moved into the town from the countryside starting to form a new noble strong group in Miskolc.

Key words: Chief judge. Council. Town's book. Mown elite. Turkish Era. Nobility.

In the history of the Hungarian Kingdom, the period lasting from the mid 16th to the late 17th century is a separate era, also called Early Modern Age or Turkish Era. It is a special period in the history of Miskolc, too, as the market town of the medieval Diósgyőr royal dominium went into the possession of pledge holder aristocrat families, who leased the estates belonging to the Diósgyőr castle from the king or the Chamber as the economic institution representing the monarch for one and a half centuries. The monarch put royal dominions in pledge because during the Turkish wars, it was difficult for the Chamber to manage them while the amount of pledge received for the dominions could be used to pay and maintain the army and border castles. Miskolc got new landlords and also paid taxes to the Turks from the 1540s as the town became part of the Habsburg-Turkish rule, belonging to a double taxation area on the perimeter of the territory under Turkish rule. Town inhabitants paid state taxes to the monarch of Hungary, church tithes (to the bishop) for their production of wine and crop, gave the same together with other services set forth in their serf deeds to their landlord, the owners of Diósgyőr castle and paid tax to the Turks in a lump sum, including both services owed to the landlord and state tax as Miskolc was a has or hasza estate, that is, it belonged to the sultan's private property. The fact that Miskolc became the dominion of the Turkish sultan and was not divided up to reward soldiers and especially officers prove the economic importance of the town. Miskolc's economy strengthened in the 15th century, and its development continued in the second half of the 16th century despite the Turkish taxation.¹

However, the self-administration of the town preserved its medieval character, and similarly to free royal cities, the inhabitants of the market town regarded the members of their community to be citizens although they had the legal status of serfs. Approximately 4,000 – 5,000 inhabitants of the town were free to elect the town council and the chief judge as the head of it. It was a new phenomenon, however, that while in the Middle Ages, the town kept no permanent records although it used seals, and both the chief judge and the council

1 GYULAI, É. Gazdálkodás, termelés és árucsera a kora újkori Miskolcon. In *Miskolc története Vol. II. 1526 – 1702*. Ed. Szakály, F. Miskolc 1998, 175-357.

issued deeds with their own seals, in 1565, they started to enter the most important issues affecting the town and its inhabitants into the Book of Town (Town's Protocols), which was kept from this time on without interruptions up to mid 19th century.²

The chief judge and the 12 members of the town council, the consuls or senators were elected by the citizens of Miskolc around St George's Day (24 April), at the beginning of spring. The senators were, however, often appointed by the chief judge himself. Due to the Turkish wars, the general existential insecurity, and the large number and variety of grave problems, the position of the chief judge was not at all as popular as one would think. In the second half of the 17th century, it was rejected by several people but the town set forth in a legal statute that whoever rejected the position should pay a fine. This, however, did not deter those who did not wish to accept the appointment. Because of this, at late 17th century, those who did not want to undertake to lead the town were threatened with a loss of property. However, town administration required permanent officials. It already had a notary public as early as in the Middle Ages. In the 16th and 17th centuries, economic officials like the treasurer and the 'town governor' (*hospes oppidi*), the top controller of the economic management of the town gained an increasingly greater importance. In the 17th century, the latter had its own office with professional accounting and the recording of returns and expenditures. Another new position was that of the interpreter as at the beginning of the Early Modern Age, there was a great demand for language knowledge when the town had negotiations with different legal authorities (Turkish officials in Erlau (Hungarian: Eger), the often foreign commanders of the border castles in Szendrő or Ónod in Borsod county, German commanders and officials in the Chamber and in the military headquarters in Kaschau (Kassa/Košice).

In the 16th century, chief judges emerged from among the serf citizens of the town. No nobleman could hold this position, which means that similarly to the Middle Ages, the population of Miskolc basically consisted of market town serfs, whose legal status was determined by the taxable inner tenement (*intravillanum*) and exteriorities related to farming (*extravillanum*). Stephen Pap was chief judge of Miskolc from 1576 to 1580, that is, he was annually re-elected for 4 years. In 1582, however, he became a nobleman, whose grant of arms was, in fact, also preserved, but as a nobleman, he was no longer elected to be chief judge.³

Stephen Pap was ennobled and was given a coat of arms in 1582. The figure of the beneficiary of the donation himself can be seen in the emblem of the letter patent of nobility preserved in the historical archives of Borsod county of in the Archives of Borsod–Abaúj–Zemplén County (BAZML): the depicted person is bald, he is wearing a black overcoat according to the Spanish fashion of the Viennese court, and what is more important, he is holding a curved Hungarian saber in his right hand and probably a human head in his left hand. The crest of the helmet displays a straight sword with a human head pulled on it. The miniature made of Stephen Pap chief judge of Miskolc was painted at the Pressburg (Hungarian: Pozsony, today: Bratislava, Slovakia) chancery of Holy Emperor and King Rudolph II (I) of Habsburg but in all probability, according to the supplicant's instructions, which means that the freshly ennobled chief judge regarded fighting as his most important and characteristic activity. Perhaps he himself had actually killed one of the Turkish enemies. It should not be forgotten that the beneficiary of the coat of arms and nobility was chief judge in a town that was regarded as their own property by the Turks from the mid 1540s and paid tax to them but was also

2 Miskolc város tanácsülési jegyzőkönyvei I. (1569 – 1600). In *Miskolc város történetének dokumentumai I.* Eds. Tóth, P. – Csorba, C. Miskolc 1990.

3 TÓTH, P. A város igazgatása. In *Miskolc története Vol. II. 1526 – 1702.* Ed. Szakály, F. Miskolc 1998, 377-404.

regarded a subject of the Habsburg monarch. This duality was typical all through the one-and-a-half-century long Turkish era.⁴

The shift in religion of the town inhabitants also contributed to the strengthening of self-government. From the 1560s, Miskolc citizens were followers of the Reformation as the whole population was converted, with the medieval Gothic church becoming the place and centre of the Calvinist worship. In this era, it was common that the elected leadership of local Protestant denominations was interconnected with the town council in power relations, jurisdiction and personally, too, thus further increasing the power of the town leadership.

In the second half of the 16th century, Reformation spread very quickly in North Eastern Hungary. In the 1570s, the population of market towns was mainly Protestant but the new religion could not set up such a hierarchy or episcopacy as the Catholic Church did in the Middle Ages. Local Protestant churches were in many respects independent and therefore they had greater sovereignty, enhancing their power over their congregations. In feudal society, administrative and judicial authority was not separated. As the Hungarian name of the chief judge (*főbíró*) indicated he also had to pass judgments in different issues, assisted by jurors, that is, by sworn elected judges. Similarly, church leadership also had jurisdiction over the congregation. The Reformed (Calvinist) cleric or pastor of Miskolc judged church issues together with the members of the consistory. The guilty person often had to do penance in the black chair set up in the converted medieval Gothic church, named *Avas*. Urban and church authorities of town Miskolc were often interwoven in jurisdiction, too.

No Turks lived in the town during the Turkish Era, They were only present in Turkish centres as Erlau (Eger). However, they had their own judge in town. In spite of this, the integrity of town leadership remained strong, in many cases verging on the practice of free royal boroughs. It is true, however, that free royal boroughs were only subject to the king while Miskolc as a market town, the property of a landlord, was dependent on the legal authority of the landlord. This legal status was adopted by the Turks, who also treated the inhabitants of Miskolc as serfs.⁵

In the Turkish era, the council and the judge had an enhanced role as war conditions became permanent in the Hungarian Kingdom. In 1596, the Turkish army occupied the castle of Erlau/Eger, which was located near both *Diósgyőr* and Miskolc, and then became the military and economic centre of the Ottomans in the region, the centre of the vilayet of Eger or *Eğri Eyalet* (Ottoman Turkish: *Eyâlet-i Egir*). From this time on, the delegation of Miskolc inhabitants took the annual tax due to the Turks which amounted to several thousand Hungarian florins to Eger (Erlau). After the occupation of Eger, the Turks also occupied two smaller castles situated near the castle of *Diósgyőr* and Miskolc but *Diósgyőr* remained part of the Hungarian Kingdom. It is true that it was by no means such an important military fortress as the other royal border castles of the region, controlled from the military headquarters in *Kaschau* (Kassa or Košice), *Szendrő*, *Ónod* (Borsod county), *Tokaj* (Zemplén county), *Putnok* (Gömör/Gemer county), and the more remote fortress of *Szatmár* (Satu Mare, Romania). Although Turks were 'natural enemies' of Christians, the inhabitants of Miskolc and the other settlements of the region were not only threatened by the Turks but also by the soldiers of the border castles, not to mention the dangers of the feudal strife in the 17th century. This was because Hungarian noblemen opposing the Habsburgs maintained their own armies and these irregular troops known as '*kuruc*' often demanded food and money from the Hungarian population.

4 Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltár (BAZML) Miskolc, XV.3.50.

5 SZENDREI, J. Miskolcz város története 1000 – 1800. Vol. III. In *Miskolcz város története és egyetemes helyirata I – V*. Miskolc; Budapest 1904, 1886 – 1911.

It was a new task of town leadership to ensure the safety of the town. Therefore, in 1556, a separate bell tower was built at the town's expense next to the church to replace the collapsed Gothic tower of the Old Town's medieval parish church Avas, burnt down by the Turks. It was more like a fortress than a thin bell tower and it has been the symbol of town integrity ever since. From this time on, citizens kept their valuables here. The town had to be protected from Turkish and Hungarian marauders. Therefore, in the 17th century, at the expense of the inhabitants, the council arranged for the inhabited part of the town to be surrounded with a board-fence, that is, a wall consisting of stamped earth and a wicker-woven fence with the purpose to enhance safety. Naturally, the fence surrounding the town could not perform the function of the strong walls of free royal boroughs and was not even similar to them although it also had gates in it where the highways reached the town. The parts of the town leading to the inner city of Miskolc are still called 'gates', preserving the memory of the special market town defense zone, set up in the Turkish era.

In the Middle Ages, there was no town hall in Miskolc. The council had its meetings in the chief judge's residence, where the chest containing the seal, letters patent and other valuables of the town were also kept. It reveals the enhanced importance of self-administration and the chief judge's office that in 1550, the monarch donated a plot of land to the town, having suffered a lot from the devastation of the Turks in 1544. Gradually, this plot of land, located in the old town, became the administrative centre. In the 17th century, a simple town hall was built on it, and this way, the chief judge and town administration got their permanent seat in Miskolc, too. There has been a town hall on this plot ever since. In the town hall, the chief judge and town leadership held their meetings but during the 16th and 17th centuries, the institution of a special type of 'rally' (contemporary Hungarian expression: a város állatása) was also known in Miskolc. In important issues and in emergency cases, the chief judge called the inhabitants of the town together, usually around the medieval Gothic church. In these meetings, the chief judge, the leadership of the town and the inhabitants discussed important issues directly, eye-to-eye.⁶

In the second half of the 16th century, in the first decades of the Turkish era, the elite of the market town of Miskolc had a special character. On the one hand, it consisted of serf citizens that were from rich serf-burgher owning tenements; craftsmen and a small number of merchants. On the other hand, there was also an 'outsider' noble group in the town, attached to the castle and dominium of Diósgyőr. Miskolc serfs could primarily become rich and start climbing up the social ladder due to their wine, produced on the town's 15 hills planted with vines as wine was the best sellable commodity in the era. Although vineyards were also subject to tithes which had to be paid to both the church and the landlord for the vintage, Miskolc inhabitants eagerly offered the remainder for sale either themselves or by selling it to wine merchants. Rich people in Miskolc often had several vineyards as vineyards were independent from the villeinage, their ownership being more like bourgeois property as they could be sold and bought freely. The buying and selling of vineyards was conducted before the town council. The transactions were entered in town records (Town's Book), which further enhanced the power of urban leadership. As early as the second half of the 16th century, the serf-citizen town elite took the first steps in the social rise as rich Miskolc wine-producing citizens, craftsmen, merchants as well as the servants (servitores) of the lords of Diósgyőr

6 GYULAI, É. Miskolc topográfija a XVI – XVII. században. In *Miskolc története Vol. II. 1526 – 1702*. Ed. Szakály, F. Miskolc 1998, 89-174.

castle applied to the monarch for the coat-of-armed nobility.⁷ Laurentius Jakus-Kis, who was a citizen of Kaschau (Kassa/Košice) and Miskolc at the same time, possessed a house and vineyards in Miskolc, and also got involved in the flourishing cattle trade of the era, which was the reason why he requested an ox-head in his coat-of-arms from the monarch.⁸

In the second half of the 16th century, the elite did not exclusively mean noblemen in the market town of Miskolc but all those who managed to get into the leading bodies of the town and the Protestant church. A great majority of these people were rich serf citizens, who knew that in feudal society, they could only achieve real social rise with privileges they would gain by getting into the class of noblemen. In the 16th century, hardly any noblemen in the town lived there. In the 1563 survey, 17 units of land held by noblemen were recorded in the Old and 4 in the New Town, whose owners were mostly officials of the Diósgyőr dominium. One of them, Ambrosius Miskolci was a land steward and a castellan (castellanus), who had his wife and little son buried in the Avas church. Their tombstone can still be seen there today. The father of the famous poet Bálint Balassi, chief mining commissioner Johannes Balassa, belonging to the military and political elite of the country, also owned a house in the town. In fact, as he fell into disgrace with the Habsburg court for some time, he fled to his estates in Poland, and lived in the castle of Kamieniec (Odrzykoń, Poland) with his family for years. Between 1540 and 1559, his brother, Sigismund Balassa was a pledge holder owner of both the castle and the dominium.⁹

The officials and officers of Diósgyőr castle as well as the relatives of the owners of the castle and dominium often acquired real estates in the town in order to be able to produce wine and sell it in the pub set up in their mansion, that is, in their house possessing the privileges of noblemen although their places of residence were elsewhere. Thus, they were not an integral part of urban society, either, as their intravillum generally possessed the privileges of noblemen and therefore, it was tax-free so they sneaked out of bearing the burdens of the town. Town leadership and the thin noble elite mainly had conflicts concerning the issue of wine sales because noblemen often sold their wines as pursuant to the contract between the dominium and the market town in which this right was exercisable only by the town inhabitants.

The 15-years war, which started in 1593, was the most devastating period of the Turkish wars. The contemporaries called it a 'long war', dividing the Turkish era into two parts both in the history of the Hungarian Kingdom and the market town of Miskolc. In the 17th century, there were significant changes in the town's society and elite. The pledge holder families of the castle and the dominium were eager to exempt their Miskolc serfs from services. Such liberalisations were not made without consideration, of course. This way, Miskolc citizens were becoming increasingly free to manage their pieces of plough-land and especially their vineyards, their legal status also getting farther and farther from that of serfs. More and more of them applied for nobility, and due to the Turkish wars, a lot of noble families also moved into the town from the countryside. Gradually, Miskolc acquired a nobility of 'its own', including families rising into the aristocracy in the 18th century like the families Dőry and Szepessy. The Aszalays were also typical representatives of ambitious noble families in Miskolc. At the beginning of the 17th century, the family had its residence in Szendrő, a settlement having one of the most important border castles in Upper Hungary with soldiers of the emperor.

7 GYULAI, É. Nemesek és városi közösség Miskolcon a 16. Században. In *Archivum. A Heves Megyei Levéltár Évkönyve* (15) 1998, 5-26.

8 8 KIRST, J. – DOBROSSY, I. Košice – Miskolc : common centuries in a region / Kaschau – Miskolc : gemeinsame Jahrhunderte in einer Region. Košice; Miskolc 2001.

9 GYULAI, É. A miskolci Avasi templom 16. századi sírkövei. In *A Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve* (XXXII) 1994, 185-206.

However, in the middle of the century, the family already lived in Miskolc, and in the 1680s, Andreas Aszalay was a sub-prefect (vice-comes) of the Borsod county who married a lady from the prestigious Dőry family. The economic basis of these freshly ennobled families was provided by their agricultural estates, wine production, trade of agrarian products and military service in border castles.

An important scene of the representation of the noble elite, possessing a house in the market or the main street of the town and dominions in several settlements of the region, was the Protestant church of medieval origin. The best seats in the church were given to elite families by church consistory, which donated these seats as a favor and reward, and the families handed them down to their descendants.

In the non-noble elite of the town, the number of craftsmen increased in the 17th century. Several new guilds were established in Miskolc, including the guild of locksmiths and gunmakers. In Miskolc, the first guilds, the associations of tailors and butchers only appeared at the end of the Middle Ages but with regard to the fact that there was no significant handicraft industry anywhere else in the region, the market town became the centre of guild industry in the Borsod county in the 16th and 17th centuries. The practice of a trade often enhanced the social status of masters. Kelemen Mészáros (= Butcher) served as chief judge of Miskolc for several terms at the end of the 16th century. As serf citizens, tradesmen often had a plot of land in the town, to which extravillanum also belonged. What is more, they also had vineyards. The guild was a privileged association with its own regulations, enforcing its rights with the effective help of town leadership. Especially, practicing a trade outside a guild was prosecuted. At the request of guilds, the chief judge or his agent could enter the residence of the tradesman practising his trade outside a guild to confiscate his products and tools. Several guild masters were ennobled, for example, the Hers, a butcher family, as well as the Hesel-Lakatos (Lakatos = Locksmith) family, whose members were locksmiths.

The appearance of noblemen in the Miskolc elite and their growing prestige resulted in the fact that from the middle of the 17th century, only noblemen, what is more, landowners filled the position of the chief judge of the market town of Miskolc. Sigismund Balla-Boldisár was a typical representative of this new generation of chief judges at the end of the 17th century, owning several properties and manors in the town. He has become even richer due to his marriage strategy as he married the daughter of a rich merchant of Rimaszombat (today: Rimavská Sobota, Slovakia). The Boldisárs also became related to the abovementioned Dőry family. This was how the noble elite of the former serf market town became stronger in the 17th century.¹⁰

The urban elite generally lived in stone houses in the main street but Miskolc was by far not as urban as free royal boroughs. In the 17th century, it possessed no storeyed house. In spite of this, in the 17th century, Miskolc became an increasingly attractive place of settlement as its non-noble inhabitants also had a quite free legal status, and its populous markets, fairs, guilds, Protestant school and its fence set up as a town wall enhanced its function as a regional centre. As a centre, Miskolc required ever more sophisticated controlling work from its leaders so that the chief judge, the senators and the paid officials had a more important role with enhanced competencies both outwards and inwards.

The power of the town's self-government that at the end of the era, in 1698, was evident when the town court sentenced its chief judge, Micahel Kondai-Kis (Michael Small from

10 GYULAI, É. Gazdálkodás, termelés és árucsera a kora újkori Miskolcon. In *Miskolc története Vol. II. 1526 – 1702*. Ed. Szakály, F. Miskolc 1998, 175-357.

Kondó) to beheading for his riotous way of life. He was executed in the main square of the town by an executioner's sword that we still have.

The right of execution or the punishment of capital crimes with death dates back to the Middle Ages. The monarch, at the same time the landlord, donated the right to Miskolc to deprive of life a criminal caught within its bounds who committed a capital crime. However, earlier it was inconceivable that the urban elite would unite against the first man of the town and sentences him. The sentencing and execution of the chief judge indicates that the new challenges and functions of the Turkish era elevated town leadership and the pressure group to the level of a developed self-government.

ABBREVIATIONS

HOM = Herman Ottó Múzeum [Herman Otto Museum], Miskolc, Hungary

BAZML = Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltár [Archives of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County], Miskolc, Hungary

MOL = Magyar Országos Levéltár [Hungarian National Archives], Budapest, Hungary

DIV = Dobó István Vármúzeum [Dobó István Castle Museum], Eger, Hungary

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Fig. 1. Chief Judge Stephanus Pap, 1580 on his armorial bearing (BAZML XV.3.50. Photo: Tamás Bodnár–BAZML©)



Fig. 2. Bell Tower built in 1554 (Photo: E. Gyulai)



Fig. 3. Application of Laurentius Jakus–Kis, 1563 (MOL NRA 723/50. Photo: MOL©)



Fig. 4. Vice-comes Andreas Aszalay, 1682. Oil, canvas (DIV KGY Inv. No 55.538. Photo: G. Kulcsár)

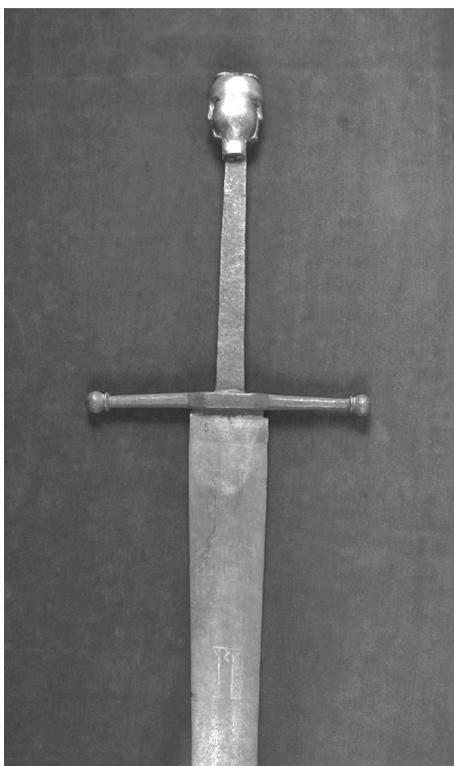


Fig. 5. Executioner's sword of Miskolc, late 17th century (HOM. Photo: G. Kulcsár)