

THE REEVE'S WEALTH IN THE 16th–18th CENTURIES

Livia Magina*

Keywords: rural institutions, reeve, wealth, Transylvania

Cuvinte cheie: instituții rurale, jude sătesc, avere, Transilvania

Certain historiographic currents in the 20th century insisted on the indigence of peasantry considering the report work bulk – number of taxes, or comparing it with the nobles' wealth. In what concerns the wealth of a village leader, two major ideas have been perpetuated: either that he used to be the richest man in the locality, or that he got the function due to his indigence. The truth is between and between, as for three centuries long, there were both reeves who were among the richest heads in the village, and cases where the reeves of some villages had nothing, especially by the end of the 17th century – beginning of the next one. The Mureș Seat statutes just insisted that the village reeve be one of the middle wealth inhabitants¹. For his services, the reeve is not paid as following a contract, he benefits only of some financial exemptions. The most important mention should be that one according to which to receive gifts or exemptions for a done service is a constant value of the era. Even the annual salary of the owner's court hirelings or the hired ones in his service, as different reckonings specifies, is quantified both in money and produces or clothes. Therefore, if the owner's employees on oath, as the administrator is for instance, have such a salary, how could the representative of the village receive anything else? Such a mentality is promoted also by law, either central or local, by specifications that the village leader be exempted during his seat. On the other side, we tried to quantify their wealth or poverty comparing to other villagers. Richer villages, with geographical better conditions, with more traditional reduced obligations to their masters, and in better times obviously have more well-to-do inhabitants; any conclusion is by that only local and directly concordant to the year the census was realized

* Muzeul Banatului Montan Reșița, b-dul Republicii, nr. 10, e-mail: liviamagina@yahoo.com.

¹ *Corpus Statutorum Hungariae Municipalium*, ed. Kolosvári Sándor, Óvári Kelemen, I, Budapest, 1885, p. 52; David Prodan, *Judele satului iobăgesc în Transilvania în secolele XVII-XVIII*, in *AIIA Cluj*, 1961, p. 225.

So, yet in the 15th century, but also before of it, those articles of law belonged as an integrant part to the stipulations on the rural world. King Matthias' decree from 1470 specified that the nobles owning only a plot of land (*sessio* – Latin; *sesie* – Romanian) and those who served at their court, including the reeve if a single one in the village, not to be submitted to any taxes². The royal legislation from 1475 and 1478 came to strengthen again the exemption from tax of the village leaders (*villici*), especially of those ones set on the nobles of one *plot of land*³. The legislator doesn't change such a view even in the next century. The Diet session at Turda in 1542 established that within a possession only a single reeve or knez would be exempted from the fiscal charge: *in una quaque possessione unicus Judex aut Kenesius in hac dicatione exemptus sit*⁴. The reeve's situation seems not to have been changed in the 17th century too, if we take into account the local legislations articles. In 1646 the county meeting in Satu-Mare admitted that further on, according to article 62 approved by the meeting of the year 1609, the reeves, servants (of the court, certainly), libertini, vine producers (oenopoli), magistrate judges (the bailiffs, probably), and those the houses of whose were destroyed by fire⁵. Crasna statutes for instance stipulate that the reeve would benefit of a work day performed by each inhabitant of the village, and what is more, be exempted from some taxes⁶. The reeves' exemptions went on after their death, so that a series of articles from the beginning of the 17th century exempted their widows too⁷. At the beginning of the 18th century the county of Szabolcs meetings also considered that the reeves had immunity at taxation and toil obligation of serves (*seriali servitii*), the part they owed being in charge of

² *Decreta Regni Hungariae. Gesetze und Verordnungen Ungarns 1301–1457*, ed. Franciscus Döry, Georgius Bonis, Vera Bácskai, I, Budapest, 1976, p. 183.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 224, 239.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 185-186.

⁵ *Corpus Statutorum*, V, p. 110.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Monumenta Comitalia Regni Transilvanie /Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek*, ed. Szilágyi Sándor, IV, p. 580: *Efféle jobbágy számlálásában szabadost, kenézt, falusbirákat, bérest, nyomorúlt özvegy asszonyokat ne computáljanak*. The article was taken back in 1608 – *Ibidem*, VI, p. 112: *Mely rovástól a falus birák, szabadosok, molnárok, udvarbeli szolgák, szegény özvegy asszonyiállatok, nőtelen legények exemptusok lgyenek. A connumeratióra penig minden vármegyékről az ispan mellet két-két meghitt tökéletes atyankfiait bocsássák, hogy kedvezés a dologban ne essék*.

the inhabitants of the village they had their post⁸. The Austrian administration also tolerates this way of rewarding the villages' representatives, as it results from Maria Theresa's asking from the 3rd of October 1753 that is related to the exempted ones. The stipulation regarding the reeves rested as before, as like for other rural categories, nobles of a plot, spinsters, officials, priests: *Judices quoque pagorum capitibus exemptionem merentur ita ut horum onera communitates in quibus praesunt ubique tolerant*⁹. Being exempted all along their functioning allowed some of the reeves to go up in the world and to accumulate considerable goods.

The financial estate of a reeve is important and put on side how rich he was and what was his social position. If in a first phase we may presume that reeve used to be elected according to such an aspect, by the end of the 17th century, the personal wealth seems not to be necessarily a trump in election/appointing in that function. In main part the censuses notice the function by the name of an individual, so we can draw a conclusion on the reeve's place within the economical hierarchy of the village. In the second part of the 17th century – the beginning of the 18th one, on Gurghiu domain, the reeve is not always elected from the well-to-do ones. Considering his wealth, he seems to be in many cases poorer than the majority of the village inhabitants are; many times he is one without cattle or with less heads of cattle. But he is exempted here too from tax and toil obligation for serves¹⁰. The captain of the fortress of Şimleu also agreed in 1675 that the reeve be exempted due to the multitude of his obligations and services he makes for his community and master¹¹.

The exemptions from taxes made possible that the one in such a function for more years constitute his fortune or increase the one he had yet. The reeves are exempted from due together with nobles, boyars, libertini, trabands, priests, helpless people, day-laborers (zsellér – Hungarian) and widows. In 1750 one of the conscriptors' questions was: *Qualis distinctio inter immunem et exemptum?* – a question the answer of which consists in examples: priests were immune from taxes, and among others the villages reeves – *villici pagorum* were exempted from them *pro ratione officii aut servitii de praesenti non*

⁸ *Ibidem*, V, p. 294.

⁹ Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL), F 234, Erdély Fiscalis Levéltár, XXII szekrény., fasc. 86, nr. 22.

¹⁰ Ana Ilea, Gh. Mudura, Veronica Covaci, *Conscrierea domeniului Beiuş la anul 1721*, în *Crisia*, X, 1980, Annex.

¹¹ Koncz József, *A hódoltság történetéhez*, in *TT*, 1894, p. 696.

*contribuunt*¹². It was as formerly. The taxes quantum went on from the 16th and 17th centuries, with the same destination: the princely needs, the army, roads, and fortresses maintenance. Tax is in money but fulfilled with food provisions for people and animals. The tax increasing from 2 forints yearly/unit, to 20 or even 50 forints in 1650, or more, to 300 forints by the end of the century does not affect the reeve's position. In Șercaia, Făgăraș, for instance, the reeve's tax would have been of 24 dinars, but he did not give: *biro nem ad adot*. Keresztel Peter, reeve of Cașva, Gurghiu, has by his name the mention: *kenez semmivel nem szolgál*, he doesn't serve with his palms. At Comori (Kincses, Mureș) the reeve of the village gives only half a tax: Huszar Peter, *biro, fele adaiat igerte megh adni*. La Sânmihai, the reeve is totally exempt for tax, but he must give to the bailiff of the fortress, on Saint George's celebration day, a calf: *Az mint refferalyak az falus biro az udvarbironak Szent Gyorgy napban egy berbecsel, vagy egy juhval tartozik*. But at Cașva (Kasva) Dobrin Gabor, the village reeve has nothing, nor even children¹³. In the county of Maramureș, in the eight's of the 18th century, the reeve has a minimum of obligations: "not to pay anything else, except certain service he did for his master or at least for other the three pounds from the unit tax"¹⁴.

The villages' judges have also the right to a diversity of produces given the fact that the take tart to the due collection. In 1585, for example, knez Davis received two green ewe cheeses because he required that he had had to take them, and in 1587, he received a sheep and a lamb for having taken part in collecting of *quingagesima*. The same one from Feleac received from the judge of the town of Cluj, 10 forints from the total earning of the village in 1578, for traveling to the county, and in 1580, he was paid with 16 forints per year¹⁵. According to his law duties, the reeve receives a part of damages, a third regularly for him and the other two ones for the master if the lawsuit takes part at the village judgement seat. Such earnings from lawsuits are registered also at Beica de Jos, in Gurghiu domain, at 1697: *Pereket tizenharmad fel forintig a biro szekin inchoalhattyak onnen seniora revisiora az udvarbiro szekire vizsik*.

¹² Costin Feneșan, *Izvoare de demografie istorică. Secolul al XVIII-lea. Transilvania*, București, 1986, p. 252-253.

¹³ Liviu Ursuțiu, *Domeniul Gurghiu (1652-1706). Urbarii, inventare și socoteli economice*, Cluj-Napoca, 2007, p. 48.

¹⁴ Aurel Răduțiu, *Reglementarea urbarială a Mariei Theresa din 1767, textele românești*, in *AIIA Cluj*, 1979, p. 320.

¹⁵ David Prodan, *Iobăgia în Transilvania în secolul al XVI-lea*, I, București, 1968, p. 706.

For his performance at the village judgement seat, the reeve receives part of the amount the guilty one has to pay for his penalty atonement. In the case of a judgement in front of the land lord one paid 40 dinars, and in front of a *villic*, that one cashed 20 dinars¹⁶. From the blood damage (*vérbirság*) that regularly was of 1 forint, and from the bruise damage (*kékbirság*), of 60 dinars if shown to the judge, that one received 60 dinars, for example, in the villages of the domain of Aleşd. At Cluj-Mănăştur, the blood damage is only of 33 dinars and the bloody wound if shown to the judge is of 30 dinars for the judge paid by that who did it. From the heft damage (*orvbirság*), the reeve has his part too. At Lona that punishment was of 12 forints (!) and it went to the village, and that meant, to the village reeve. For rape, the do-called “bull damage”, it was of 3 forints, one third, so to say 1 florin, belonged to the reeve.

The same reason of receiving something for their services leads to reeves’ abuses. In the instructions of 1634, György Rákóczi I, for instance, advises the administrator of his court from Alba Iulia to defend people against the officials “infestations”. That one had to take care that the reeves not to burden or “to angrieve” the community with too many taxes, with improper supplies, or supplements in money, food or hay for travelers’ hosting, but the reeves better be given from the earnings of vineyards, mills or the village tavern¹⁷. So to say to be attentive how the reeve manages the community money and wealth. These reeves’ abuses are more obvious during social disturbances, as the tumult of 1784 was. The reeve of Ponor, Alba County, announced the domain cellarer, in 1784, that the former reeve Sim Burz and his family had been killed because Burz had been known as an abusive individual. That one had been declare yet in 1766 no to be worthy of being reeve as he had damaged the village with 2,000 forints¹⁸. That abusive behavior of taking more from the countrymen under some traditions or articles of law is well illustrated in the Banat area too, during the 18th century.

According to the village tradition, the reeve must have paid his dues within the village duties. At Sălişte de Vaşcău, knez Fwtor Peter paid in 1581 the pigs tithe¹⁹; the knezes on the domain of Beiuş had to give, in 1600, a blanket on Saint Elisha’s celebration day, 2-3 green ewe cheeses and a pail

¹⁶ *Decreta Regni Hungarie*, I, p. 272.

¹⁷ D. Prodan, *Iobăgia în Transilvania în secolul al XVII-lea*, II, Bucureşti, 1986, p. 11.

¹⁸ Idem, *Răscoala lui Horea*, II, Bucureşti, 1984, p. 413.

¹⁹ Viorel Faur, *Istoricul satului Sălişte de Vaşcău (judeţul Bihor)*, in *Crisia*, XI, 1981, p. 87.

of vine at *quingagesima ovium*²⁰. Some cases from Transylvania whole territory along the three centuries we have in sight outline a picture of the leaders of villages wealth. The data come mainly from the 17th–18th centuries, for the reason that the previous documents are more lacunary. For example, the urbarium of Gilău, from the 16th century noticed only the number of drive animals from a household, oxen and horses. The reeves from Mănăștur, Băgara or Leghia have 4 oxen each one, the one from Baci, 8, the one from Chinteni, 10. The mayor from Șimleu has only 4 oxen. The reeve from Husasău has 42 horses²¹. On the domain of Oradea in 1600, the reeves' wealth outruns the general average of the domain, but they are not the most well-to-do subjects and not frequently the richest ones. The 30 reeves have thus together 39 oxen, 25 cows, 16 horses, 12 sheep and 165 swine²². On Șiria domain, Stephanus, the knez from Sârbii de Jos, has a vineyard and 6 oxen, and knez Sigismundus has 8 oxen, 16 horses and 400 sheep²³.

Rusza Petru, the swineherd of the village of Chiherul de Jos was considered among the needy reeves in the 17th century²⁴. Indeed, he is His Highness' swineherd, but his estate, in 1698, consists in: 5 horses, 4 oxen, 4 heifers, 6 cows, 20 sheep, and 6 swine. He is not to be taken for a poor man, as the village has many inhabitants below his material situation²⁵. In fact, we are speaking about a difference in what we understand today by a swineherd and its statute within a community from three-four centuries ago. In essence, the social statute an individual is mentioned in documents does not necessarily reflect his material situation.

The 18th century comes with much more data on the material situation of the reeves comparing with the former information. In the urbaria of the time new columns appeared according to need of an exact identification of the subjects' situation and wealth for a more detailed taxation. Therefore, on the Bârgău Valley, in 1783, one of the richest reeves was Vasile Vreszmasz from Prundu Bârgăului, with three children of 9 to 19 years old, who had 10 horses, 6 oxen, 2 cows, 4 heifers, 6 swine, 5 beehives, and 60 sheep and goats, while Alb Maftej, from the same village, was the poorest in the conscription,

²⁰ D. Prodan, *Răscoala lui Horea*, II, p. 846.

²¹ Jakó Zsigmond, *A Gyalui vártartomány urbariumai*, Koloszvár (Cluj), 1944, passim.

²² D. Prodan, *Iobăgia în XVI*, II, p. 840.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 454.

²⁴ Idem, *Judele satului iobăgesc*, p. 222.

²⁵ L. Ursuțiu, *Domeniul Gurghiu*, p. 201.

with only one horse, two cows and two heifers²⁶. At the beginning of the 18th century, on the domain of Beiuș, the reeves seem to come from the “middle class” of the village. From the all 126 villages and 13 territories of abandoned villages (*predia* – Latin), the poorest reeves had a quarter of a plot of land, some land, hey field, 1–2 oxen, as many cows, 1-2 horses, 4–6 swine, but also there are cases of reeves’ families that was exempted from taxes, had two plots of land, 10–16 Bratislava measurement units of land, hay field within the village limits, drive animals and swine. Even if the former century they had mills in that area²⁷, now a single one, namely the reeve from Tărcaia, is registered as owning 1/2 mill; Dancs Flore, the reeve from Cusuiuș, is the single one that had an alembic, while only the swine tax was compulsory for all the villages, together with the yearly rent, the due that is to be paid in two parts, on Saint George’s celebration day, and on Saint Michael’s celebration day, and 4 forints, the equivalent of several fox and marten hides²⁸. The Jesuits Collegium’s domain with the villages in the fortress of Cluj neighbor was extremely well registered. There, Ioan Kelemen, the domain bailiff, 48 years old, had four sons of 9 to 15 years old, a horse, 4 oxen, 5 cows, 5 calf, 4 sheep, three swine, and a whole plot of land. The village reeve Antonie Jsko is registered near by him, 40 years old, with 4 sons of 3 to 12 years old, 3 cows, 6 heifers, 2 sheep, a whole plot of land, and an orchard outside the village (*pomarium extra pagum sita*), and he is mentioned as a day-laborer²⁹. Much precarious seems to be the Marcus Chirila’s material situation; he was *judex loci* at Giomal and possessed a whole plot of land, a hay field, a vineyards with 6 urns of wine, two carts, and two cows. Metes György, *judex subditor* looks more well-to-do, with a plot of land, hay field, 2 vineyards, 14 swine, 1 horse, 2 oxen, 2 cows, and a cart³⁰.

The below table presents a selection of other examples from different places and periods:

²⁶ Mircea Buta, Adrian Onofreiu, Andreea Salvan, *Bârgăul sub pajura imperială*, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, p. 38.

²⁷ L. Borcea, *Obștea sătească din Bihor; voievozii și cnezii în secolele XIII-XVII*, in *Crisia*, XII, 1982, p. 139

²⁸ *Ibidem*

²⁹ MOL, F 234, Erdély Fiscalis Levéltár., XX/a szekrény, fasc. 4, without number.

³⁰ Șt. Meteș, *Viața agrară a românilor din Ardeal și Ungaria*, I, 1508-1820, Cluj, 1921, p. 7.

Year	Locality	Name	Children	Animals					
				horses	oxen	cows	heifers	swine	sheep
1638	Macău	Andras Antal		-	4	1	-	7	-
1640	Mănăştur	Kalos Mate	-	-	6	1	1	-	-
1652	Caşva-Gurghiu	Keresztel Peter	3	-	4	4	4	10	-
1652	Felso Koher	Manczo Demeter	2	3	4	3	-	8	20
1674	Porumbacul de Jos	Komsa Szarak	2	19	5	3	6	18	40
1685	Iernuţeni, com. Turda	Nagy Istvan	3	3	5	1	4	7	-
1715	Pâclişa	Vasii Iuon	-	1	2	3	1	3	30

A particular situation is registered in the villages where certain professions were practiced, the reeve being elected from among the handicraftsmen. An inquest occasioned by the election of a priest in the village of Slimnic (Sibiu) at the very end of the 14th century, mentions a reeve of Slimnic, an ironsmith by trade (*faber*), named Ioan. Other two ones are also mentioned together with him³¹. The fact that the reeve from Lechinţa and an inhabitant from Dipsa, Bistriţa had the right to pick up from the archive of Bistriţa, two privileges of the members of corporation from Lechinţa in 1625, makes us believe that he himself was the leader of that corporation³². Other examples come again from Cluj-Mănăştur, a village that was contaminated by the urban circumstances from its neighborhood. Among the reeves here, we may speak about a shoemaker (*Czismadia* Boldisar), an ironsmith (*Kováts* Gyorgy), and a handicraft the document doesn't specify the profession: Szerenyey András, *mester falus biro*³³. In 1706, at Beica de Sus (Oláh Bolkeny), the reeve is also a cask-maker – Borda Iuon, *kadar es biro*³⁴, but it doesn't result that he was also the cask-makers' leader in that area.

There are also sporadic mentions on particular professions of the leaders of villages. On Abrud domain, in 1566, the reeve of Soporul de Sus

³¹ Ştefan Pascu, *Meşteşugurile din Transilvania până în secolul al XVI-lea*, Bucureşti, 1954, p. 30-31.

³² Serviciul Judeţean Cluj al Arhivelor Naţionale, *Fond Primăria oraşului Bistriţa, nr. 9478/ The town of Bistriţa Fund*, No. 9478.

³³ MOL, F 234, Erdély Fiscalis Levéltár., XXII, fasc. 15 and 17, without number.

³⁴ L. Ursuţiu, *Domeniul Gurghiu*, p. 348.

and Soporul de Jos, was but Ioannes Pap, the local priest (*sacerdos in hac possessiones*)³⁵. Another special case is that of Mirion Goia from Galda de Sus, who was registered in 1715 as *piscator et iudex loci*³⁶.

Even a few, the above examples show that depending on the area and period, the reeves might be elected from different social-economical categories, not only from among the richest villagers or only from the poorer ones.

STAREA MATERIALĂ A JUDELUI SĂTESC ÎN SECOLELE XVI-XVIII

Rezumat

Judele sătesc se constituie în principalul personaj al lumii rurale, nu numai din punctul de vedere al legislației. În ierarhia economică a satului acesta nu pare a fi la limita inferioară, după cum nu se poate spune că nici la extrema cealaltă nu se află. Condițiile fiecărui sat în parte influențează și starea materială a celui care se află în fruntea sa. Pentru eforturile sale, judele este scutit de anumite dări, el poate astfel să-și crească propria avere. El oferă o mostră a stării materiale a satului pe care îl reprezintă și constituie unul dintre puținele cazuri în care se coagula o avere țărănească.

³⁵ MOL, *Urbaria et Conscriptioes*, fasc. 101, nr. 46.

³⁶ Șt. Meteș, *Viața agrară*, p. 69-70.