

FAMILY LIFE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY TRANSYLVANIA. CASE STUDY: THE HALMÁGYI FAMILY

Abstract: This article presents the history of a pre-modern family from the eighteenth century, from the ranks of the bourgeois intellectuals, as revealed by the narrative of the testament drawn up by István Halmágyi Sr. in 1743. Due to the large number of remarriages in this family, and the relatively high number of common children and stepchildren, this spiritual work proves to be an excellent source for analysing the range of mentalities and sensibilities towards the family during the pre-modern era.

Keywords: social history, family history, the eighteenth century, Transylvania, ego-documents

This article presents the history of a pre-modern family from the eighteenth century, from the ranks of the bourgeois intellectuals, more precisely the life of two generations, as revealed by the narrative of the testament drawn up by István Halmágyi Sr. *The Life and Testament of János Halmágyi and István Halmágyi Sr.* was drawn up by the latter in 1743 and presents, as the title suggests, first the adventures of the two, and then the inheritance they left. Due to the large number of remarriages in this family, the relatively high number of common children and stepchildren, this spiritual work proves to be an excellent source for analysing the range of mentalities and sensibilities towards the family during the pre-modern era. This document, which is by no means succinct, fully reflects the attitudes of the Halmágyi family towards marriage, children and biological vs. step-parents, providing a nuanced picture of coexistence of the eighteenth century.

Theoretical background

Researchers on the history of the family and of childhood have identified the eighteenth century as a turning point as regards the meaning of family life and the attitudes towards children and childhood. It used to be assumed that marriage was happier than ever, and that most children enjoyed increased attention and amounts of affection that had rarely been encountered before. According to the British researchers Foyster and Marten, this exaggeration has led to entirely wrong conclusions. In their view, the relationships between parents and children, husband and wife were different, and the relationships within one and the same family could range from emotional and intimate to violent and brutal, just like in any other previous era.² Our studies on this topic fully reflect the conclusions of the aforementioned researchers, so in approaching the subject herein, we will rely on the research model proposed by them. More specifically, we want to analyse

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² Elisabeth Foyster, James Marten, "Introduction," in *Idem, A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in the Age of Enlightenment*. Oxford: Ed. Berg, 2010, p. 1.

the phenomena of private life in their particularity. According to Steven Ozment, if we can accept the idea that history is the continuation and rethinking of human actions, a metamorphosis of the inheritance left by different generations, then the history of the family and of feelings should also be studied in this context.³ The author considers that we must clarify once and for all that generalisations about the institution of the family are irrelevant. The problem lies in the very nature of the family, for it is not the standard product of a universally valid social base, but an organism of human interactions. The family is not a reflection of politics, a microcosm of culture or an authentic image of the state. It will have to be thought of primarily in terms of individuals and not of communities, and will be more interested in the evolution of its members than of the community around it.⁴

In what follows we shall omit generalisations, attempting nonetheless to contextualise the content of the testament by correlating the information presented in the pages of this personal document with other narrative sources of the time.

János Pap

The testament begins by recounting the adventures that János Pap from Hălmeag, the testator's father, went through.

János Pap was orphaned at an early age, and his education was taken over by an aunt who not only raised him to be honest and fed him, but also enrolled him in the Protestant school from Făgăraș. From here, he went to Košice, to the college run by the Jesuit Order, whence he successfully escaped when he realised that the price of education was too steep (in the sense that the Jesuits wanted to convert him and, even more, to ordain him). János Pap completed his studies at the Protestant College in Sárospatak, taking into account the warning of the aunt who had educated him in the Protestant spirit: "remember, especially in our unfortunate days, when souls are hunted everywhere, that your parents and your kin were not Papists, but true Calvinists, and this you must never forget."⁵

After completing his studies and after the anti-Habsburg struggle led by Imre Thököli was defeated, János Pap reached Șimleu Silvaniei, becoming the secretary of Captain Ferenc Bialis. Once settled there and earning an income with which he could support a family, he married Mária Miskolczi (1678). When he got married, János was about 30 years old, as the exact date of his birth is not known.

Given the dynamics of marriages in this century, János Pap was at an age considered advanced for getting married. While the aristocracy seemed to reserve the right to bachelorhood, the bourgeoisie and, especially, the members of the guilds, were limited in this right, in the sense that the city compelled its inhabitants to marriage.⁶

³ Steven Ozment, *Ancestors. The Loving Family in Old Europe*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 2.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 7-8.

⁵ "Halmágyi János és István élete és végrendelete (1743)" in István Halmágyi *Naplói 1752-53, 1762-69 és iratai 1669-1785*, ed. Lajos Szádeczky in *Monumenta Hungariae Historiae*. Scriptores, vol. XXXVIII, Budapest: Ed. Akadémiai, 1906, p. 432.

⁶ Zita Deáky, "Jó kis fiúk és leánykák". *A kisgyermekkor történeti néprajza Magyarországon*. Budapest: Ed. Századvég, 2011, p. 73. For instance, master Eperjesi from the guild of the blacksmiths from Cluj was about to lose his status within the guild because of his reluctance towards marriage: "István Eperjesi alias

Pap's situation was different, even though he lived in a city, was an official in the service of a captain, without obligations to the guild or to the townspeople. However, even in his case there were serious pressures for marriage. János Pap manifested some sensitivity towards an older merchant woman. The two were fond of each other and spent much time together, which sparked rumours among the people of Şimleu. Moreover, during one of the Sunday sermons, the Protestant minister paraphrased the relation between the two by reference to the relationship between the red dragon (János Pap usually wore a red cloak) and the green snake (Mrs. Szarka, in turn, preferred green garments) in not too favourable a light. The irony of fate is that after János Pap (although free to love whomever he wanted as long as he was under the jurisdiction of Bialis) realised the absurdity of the situation and entered the matrimonial market, that Protestant minister, Gáspár Miskolci was not afraid of giving the *dragon* his own daughter. Beyond the fun story, this anecdote reflects in fact the pressure exerted on bachelors by the bourgeois society. Katalin Péter's studies, based on the analysis of legislative sources, prove that in the case of the bourgeoisie there were certain psychological barriers related to marriage. While children born to the nobility were described, until their marriage, as the daughters or sons of such and such nobleman (no matter what age they were), in the legal documents the bourgeoisie, the serfs or the peasantry were defined by their marital status. Thus, girls were called *hajadon* (unmarried) from the age of 13-14, while boys were *nőtlen* (without a woman) after the age of 18 years, which meant that after this age it was appropriate for people to already be married.⁷

The wife János Pap chose was definitely younger, especially since Maria was still fertile after 14 years of marriage. The advantageous marriage of two people of the same faith and belonging to similar social strata fell within the trend of the period,⁸ and it is not at all surprising that the testament did not linger on the sentiment of love, which was not at all the first and most important component of a successful marriage.⁹ We do not wish to deny the existence of this feeling or its importance in setting up a family; we merely want to draw attention to the fact that in previous eras, compatibility entailed several nuances and love in the couple has several connotations.¹⁰

The passage that evokes the image of János Pap reflects the existence of a harmonious couple, the narrative stating that the testator's father had lived in peace with Mária Miskolczi, having a total of seven children (four of whom died at a young age): *Éva* - 1679, *János* - 1680, they died the next three years; *Sára* - 1684, *István* - 1686 (the testator); *Sándor* was born in 1688, he died of a fracture, then *Krisztina* was born in

Kovács has listed the poignant reasons for not having got married yet, stating that he does not want [marriage] even now, while he leads his life as a bachelor, all the married craftsmen will be ahead of him, if he marries, he shall regain his present rank and status." Romanian National Archives Cluj County Branch, Cluj-Napoca (hereinafter SJAN Cluj), Court Protocols (hereinafter POC), II/32:81, on microfilm no. 202/year 1738.

⁷ Katalin Péter, *Házasság a régi Magyarországon (16-17. század)*. Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2008, p. 42.

⁸ Mary Abbott, "Life Cycle" in Foyster, Marten, *A Cultural History of Childhood*, p. 118.

⁹ Foyster, Marten, "Introduction," p. 10.

¹⁰ Péter, "Házasság a XVII. századi Magyarországon" in Tamás Faragó ed., *Bölcsőtől a koporsóig*. Budapest: Ed. Ú.M.K., 2005, p. 90.

1690, and she died two or three years later, and in 1692 the last child was born, after the father's death (May 7, 1692), and they named him *János*. After the death of her husband in 1693, after about one year of mourning, Mária remarried the teacher András Mester Bagaméri. From the second marriage, which lasted only three years, two daughters were born, Mária and Borbála.

As it is clear from the information presented, Mária Miskolczi gave birth to a total of 9 children, 5 of which reached maturity. We have no information on her age at the time of marriage, but the age difference between the spouses was very probably quite high. The marriage was considered a success, as János was the secretary of the captain and Mária was the daughter of the Protestant minister. The new couple lived in the fortress, under the protection of the above-mentioned Ferenc Bialis. The husband died after 14 years of marriage, leaving two minor children (6 and 8 years) and an infant in the care of his wife. Regarding the dynamics of birth, the first child was born just one year after the marriage was concluded, in 1679, followed by the second child in the next year (1680). They died before they got to know their siblings. After 1684, the births took place every two years, until the birth of the last common child, in 1692.

After the disappearance of the first nucleus, the young widow could not do without a companion, all the more so as Bialis had suggested that she should give up solitude. After the mourning period ended, Mária married a promising young man, a teacher at the school in Șimleu who, moreover, succeeded to the post of secretary previously occupied by János. The little fortune left by her first husband was wasted by the alcoholic teacher, so the five children were left within nothing but the assets inherited from their mother.

Meanwhile, the testator's older sister, Sára got married sometime between 1694 and 1695, so at the age of 10 years, an anomaly considering the Transylvanian jurisdiction, according to which girls were considered mature only at the age of 12: "because up until seven years of age, their spirit still lies in the shadow of ignorance and they can hardly distinguish between right and wrong, so before they reach the age of seven years they cannot get engaged. The law considers that they become mature at the age of 12."¹¹ The Catholic Church did not bring many amendments to the existing legislation, so the minimum ages accepted were of 12 years for girls and 14 for boys. The situation was different for the Protestants. The synods from the century under study devoted several debates to this topic. Thus, according to the Reformed Church, a boy was only considered fit for marriage at the age of 18 and girls at 13-14 years.¹²

It is highly likely that Mária had insisted on Sára getting married at this age, because only thus could she ensure the peace of the children born of the first marriage. Under the Transylvanian law, the new couple, more exactly the husband, István Enyedi was empowered to take the orphaned children from their step-father.¹³ The explanation

¹¹ Farkas Cserei, *A magyar és székely asszonyok törvénye*. A manuscript found in the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library, Cluj-Napoca, the Special Collections Department, Mss. 500, 64 v.

¹² Dániel Bárh, *Esküvő, keresztelő, avatás. Egyház és népi kultúra a kora újkori Magyarországon*. Budapest: MTA-ELTE, 2005, pp. 54-56.

¹³ Sára's husband, István Enyedi was raised by an aunt at Șimleu, his father, János Krakкаи, living in Aiud together with his second wife.

for this unusual act should be sought in the legislation, for there were restrictions on the widow's right to bring up her children after remarriage.¹⁴ For the period studied, the most striking (and perhaps the most publicised) case was that of the Protestant noble woman Kata Bethlen, who had her children taken away from her after the death of her first husband, Count Haller, a Catholic, on confessional grounds.¹⁵ Under the law, if the father of the deceased man was still alive, or if there were other paternal relatives (*agnatus*), they had more rights over the children than their mother or her relatives (*cognatus*). Only women who had illegitimate children had full rights over their own children.¹⁶ In the present situation, however, there were no relatives to formulate objections regarding the future of the children, so János Pap was raised by an aunt because there was no paternal relative to claim the education and upbringing of the children or the administration of the goods. It is important to note that Enyedi, in turn, was much older than his wife, Sara, because he had the right to become a guardian only after the age of 24, i.e. when he reached full maturity before the law.

It is not the purpose of this presentation to analyse the two historiographical currents regarding the subject of childhood and parental attachment in pre-modern and modern eras. However, for the uninitiated reader, the survival rate in this family was not exactly reassuring. The situation was anything but more favourable in Western Europe. In eighteenth-century England, only 3 out of 5 children crossed the threshold age of 10 years, which was considerably better than in France, where half the children died before the age of 10.¹⁷ The surveys we have conducted on this topic starting from the personal narratives of the Transylvanian noble elite suggest inconstancy rather.¹⁸ There were noble families with an extremely high rate of infant mortality, such as the family Wass of Țaga (where none of László Wass' 12 children survived), there is also evidence from modest families, such as the one of the priest Hermányi, where the children were cared for and protected in a special way.

A possible explanation for the high rate of infant mortality is found at the level of the collective mentality. Specifically, the analysis of Transylvanian memoirs proves that in most cases, people treated their children themselves, from their own pharmacy, then with the help of relatives, and only eventually did they resort to the services of physicians, or healers, or midwives.¹⁹ The treatise of the Hungarian physician István Hatvani offered the first table on infant mortality and vehemently criticised the

¹⁴ According to the *Tripartitum*, orphaned children remained in their mother's care while the widow still had the name of her deceased spouse, i.e. until she got remarried. *Werbőczy István Hármaskönyve (1517)* in *Corpus Iuris Hungarici*. Budapest, Franklin-Társulat, 1897. P I. Tit. 114. After remarriage, women lost custody of their children, who passed under the tutelage of their paternal relatives. The orphans were taken by the relatives in the female line only if they had no paternal relatives. *Ibidem*. P I. Tit. 116.

¹⁵ Andrea Fehér, "The Lord My God Has Given My Wife a Child. Childbirth in 18th-Century Transylvania" in *Transylvanian Review*. vol. XXI, Supplement No. 2, 2012, p. 222.

¹⁶ Marry Wiesner, "Political, Economic, and Legal Structures" in ed. James B. Collins, Karen I. Taylor, *Early Modern Europe*. Blackwell, 2006, p. 231.

¹⁷ Foyster, Marten, *Introduction*, p. 7.

¹⁸ Fehér, "Bolile copilăriei. Mentalități și atitudini în Transilvania secolului al XVIII-lea" in *Caiete de Antropologie Istorică*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2010). pp. 7-23.

¹⁹ Linda Pollock, "A gyermekekkel kapcsolatos attitűdök" in eds. Zsuzsa Vajda, Béla Pukánszky, *A gyermekkor története. Szöveggyűjtemény*. Budapest: Ed. Eötvös, 1998. p. 201.

Hungarians' lack of sanitary education, suggesting that they were actually completely unaccustomed to seeking medical advice for healing puerile diseases.²⁰ The analysis of the case referring to the family of the nobleman from Țaga reveals that there were families that would send for the doctor only for children aged three years and above, as in the case examined here: all of János Pap's children died before the age of 4 years, which could suggest that the family did not seek medical help in case of illness. Therefore, it was no coincidence that some children died because of some fractures, which even the physicians did not know much about (as proved by the death in the family of Baron Wesselényi, caused by a sprain²¹), while others out of negligence. Negligence, however, was punishable, the trial protocols of the city of Cluj proving that the deaths of children caused by the negligence and carelessness of adults could have severe consequences, and revealing the awareness, at the level of the collective mind, of the role adults played in protecting and caring for children.²² But as stated before, generalisations on the delicate subject of the pre-modern family and childhood are irrelevant and by no means constructive.

Another interesting aspect revealed by the sources is cohabitation with other blood relatives, as both János Pap and István Enyedi were raised by aunts. Amongst the nobility, there were situations where children were reared by grandparents, by relatives who had no children, but although they were abandoned by their parents for long periods, children were usually with their own families most of the time, of course only until the age at which they started their education or entered the services of nobles. While János Pap grew up with his aunt as an orphan, István Enyedi grew up with his dead mother's sister, until his biological father founded another family. By custom, of course, Enyedi's place would have been with his father, but for reasons not stated by him, he lived his life hundreds of km away from his biological family.

István Halmágyi Sr.

The second part of the testament describes the testator's life and the inheritance he left his children who were still alive. The narrative bears the characteristic of memoirs and presents the history of the undersigned from the moment he left home. It suggests that immediately after his mother's marriage to Bagaméri, the author was sent away, according to the indications given by the late János Pap, to study. István Halmágyi attended the College in Cluj, and did not visit his mother during this period, as the description reveals: "they never sent for me, not once, so it's no wonder I didn't remember my mother's face, not to mention my father's, so their image became

²⁰ István Hatvani, *Bevezetés a szilárdabb filozófia alapelveibe* cited by Deáky, *Jó kis fiúk és leánykák*, p. 323.

²¹ Fehér, *Bolile copilăriei*, p. 21.

²² The analysis of trial protocols from the city of Cluj reveals that the most drastic measures related to cases of infanticide (see the description in SJAN Cluj. POC. II/29:22 and II/32:23-24), which were usually settled by death sentences. The healers were also not safe: if children were cured by methods that were unknown to the doctors and could be associated with magic, the physical punishment of the healer and the prohibition of returning to the city were customary sentences (SJAN. Cluj, POC. II/41: 60); this is also how cases of death caused by negligence were actually solved (SJAN. Cluj, POC. II/34: 7). Clearly, one of the most interesting cases is that of a husband who took his wife to court for not behaving honestly towards her children (SJAN. Cluj, POC. II/42:145).

obliterated, as if I had never seen them.”²³ He was not even present at his mother’s funeral. As we mentioned before, after the death of their mother, the minors came under the protection of the married sister, specifically under the tutelage of István Enyedi. He turned out to be as expected, especially since financed his brother-in-laws’ studies. The testator was sent to Aiud, where he was helped not only by his brother-in-law’s stepmother, but also by the brothers and sisters of his mother, Mária Miskolczi. After discontinuing his studies in Aiud (due to the liberation struggle), he returned to Șimleu, where, in 1711, he entered the service of István Wesselényi.

István Halmágyi was 23 years old when he returned to his hometown and had been Wesselényi’s secretary for four years when he gave up the job because of his incurable disease, which he had identified as scurvy (severe arthritis). After many treatments and different receipts, he went to Debrecen, where he was cared for by a famous doctor, thanks to whom he recovered, returning to Șimleu in 1718. He had turned 30 and was still a bachelor. According to his account, one of the reasons he had postponed marriage derived from his scepticism towards married life: “I have seen many failed marriages; I could not get out of my mind the vain lives of these couples, because of which I was afraid of commitments.”²⁴

Finally he made this step: in March 1719 (when he was 31) he married the widow of Sándor Bölöni, Zsófia Détéi, because “I dared to take a liking to her and become associated with her all the more so as I had known her both as regards her temperament and as a skilful housewife, living with her under a roof in the house of István Tordai.”²⁵ The woman had had two husbands before Halmágyi: the first, Bölöni, had died, while the second, Sámuel Lévai, had got divorced.

From this marriage there were born: 1719 - *István*,²⁶ 1722 - *Ferencz*, 1725 - *Mihály*, 1727 - *Mária*, 1729 - *Sámuel*, 1731 - *János*. Of these, only two died and four survived. Zsófia Détéi already had two sons and a daughter from her first husband: Sándor, László and Zsuzsanna, so the family raised 8 children altogether.

From the travelogue of István Halmágyi Jr. we learn more about his two half-brothers, whom he did not distinguish from his blood brothers, mentioning them fondly every time and calling them *my brothers*. István Halmágyi Sr., manifested also special affection for Bölöni’s two sons: “I have treated them as on my own children, I sent them to college and I gave them expensive meals, paying for their clothes, books and tutors.” As for Zsuzsanna Bölöni, she was sent to Wesselényi’s court, specifically in the service of Lady Kata Bánffy: “as there did not exist, in my time, a more suitable house in Transylvania to prepare a girl for marriage.”²⁷

István Halmágyi Sr. had a promising career, and after completing the services of secretary, he became assessor of Crasna County, was appointed as a delegate to the Diet in Bratislava, then also carried out the duties of a notary and vice-comes. In 1730 he went to Vienna to present the requests of the Protestants from Șimleu (1731), during this while

²³ *Halmágyi János és István élete és végrendelete (1743)*, p. 436.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 453.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 443.

²⁶ Autrul jurnalului political-administrativ: István Halmágyi, *Naplói 1752-53, 1762-69 és iratai 1669-1785*.

²⁷ *Halmágyi János és István élete és végrendelete (1743)*, p. 454.

both his wife and his daughter passed away: “I arrived home grieving, finding my daughter buried, my wife in the coffin, the children desperate, the cellar and the granary emptied. In such misfortune I prepared for the burial with the five children, István, Ferencz, Mihály, Sámuel, János (who was still in the nurse’s arms). I deserved everyone’s pity. [...] In the following years, I spent my time, distressed as I was, weeping.”²⁸

A year and a half after the death of his first wife, on 3 February 1733, the testator married another widow (Kata Pap Vid, the widow of János Török): “all the more so as I needed a wife, my children needed a mother and the house a good housewife.” With this marriage the domain increased (as did the number of children, because Kata also had two children, Zsigmond and Krisztina Török), and the couple was forced to keep two households, one in Șimleu and one in Acâș. In the years that followed, the new family lived in Șimleu together with the smaller children, their sons, István and Zsigmond Török being sent to the college in Cluj.

Thus István Halmágyi Sr. married twice, in both cases going for widows. In the case of Halmágyi, as shown by the will, what prevailed in choosing the ideal wife were her temperament, their compatibility and her household skills. This does not mean that there was no special affection between the spouses, but in choosing a life partner, civil servants, the members of modest social structures, deemed that domestic skills were as important as emotional compatibility. Despite the supposed masculine economic superiority, men needed a consort who would support their economic or household activities, so the importance of a good wife rested on her practical qualities and skills.²⁹ As evinced from the studies of Margit Sárdi, the economic factor was by no means negligible.³⁰

From the descriptions provided by the testator, there appears another important aspect of the dynamics of Transylvanian households, namely the fact that several families lived together under one roof. The author had met his first wife, living with her, while she was married to another man. Especially in towns, households incorporated several families, not just the nuclear one, and kinship often derived from such cohabitation. The testament is clear evidence that in this region too, marriages were not concluded only among young people, even though studies in the field have revealed that widowers remarried more frequently than widows;³¹ hence, almost every woman had the chance to marry at least one time even in a society where the number of men was lower than the number of women.³² This was also the situation in modern Transylvania, as the sources studied show that, in most cases, widowers chose the path of remarriage.³³

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 447.

²⁹ Joanne Bailey, “Family relationships”, in Foyster, Marten, *A Cultural History of Childhood*, p. 20.

³⁰ Margit Sárdi, “Lánykérés, házasság, szerelem” in ed. Géza Szabó Szentmártoni, *Ámor, álom és mámor. A szerelem a régi magyar irodalomban és a szerelem ezredéves hazai kultúrtörténete*. Budapest: Ed. Universitas, 2002. p. 51.

³¹ *Eadem*, 64.

³² John Hajnal, “Az európai házassági szokások térbeli és időbeli összehasonlításban” in *Bölcsőtől a koporsóig*, p. 87.

³³ According to the calculations of Katalin Péter, in most cases the matrimonial customs of the elites denoted a large number of marriages, usually three. The sources we have reviewed for Transylvania typically indicate two marriages and more rarely three.

This case is highly suggestive, the author of the testament opting for two widows, even though according to Bethlen's memoirs, this was to be avoided "lest the devil and the body should make me want a virgin, thus falling into sin even worse than if I were unmarried."³⁴ The studies that we have conducted on this topic have revealed the preference of aristocratic men for choosing young girls, regardless of the age difference, which sometimes was half a century.³⁵ Widows were certainly preferable, especially if they were wealthy, but in most cases noblemen chose virgins. The analysis of trial protocols demonstrates an increased interest, especially among older men, to have intimate relations with young girls,³⁶ so the topos mentioned above by Count Bethlen seems to have been valid in several cases. However, for the testator, these desires and temptations of the flesh were of secondary import, far behind the household qualities and skills.

From the will we may also learn the fact that the second marriage was prolific, as the couple had two daughters, whose names and years of birth are not mentioned. The author therefore raised and educated a total of 12 children, five of which were his wives' children. These women, in turn, brought other children into the family and the relationships with the "inherited" relatives varied from case to case. While in the case of Mária Miskolci the second husband was a cause for alarm, in the case of István Halmágyi's marriages, cohabitation between children and stepparents did not seem to present difficulties, as shown in the testament: "You should know, my dears! that this second wife has been good to you from the beginning, has loved, educated and helped you as if you were her own children."³⁷ This can be verified in the political-administrative diary of one of Halmágyi's sons. The 12 children and the stepmothers apparently lived together in harmony. However, the large number of children and the material investments necessitated by their education dried up the family wealth. There followed difficult years in which the family had to change their domicile and give up one of the households. Meanwhile some of the children established their own families with separate households, some of the boys were sent to college, and the girls to nobiliary households. Although the sons of the first wife had no obligations to Halmágyi, the man who had raised them, they often visited him, or hosted their stepfather, manifesting, in this regard, special affection for the one who had invested in their growth and their education.

From the memoirs of Halmágyi, it appears that the will was not drafted because there were several domains to be divided, but rather to explain to posterity, namely his children, the reason for the impoverishment of the family. Thus, instead of an administrative testament, István Halmágyi Sr. left a spiritual legacy, justifying all the deeds he had committed both professionally and personally: "how I got well off, how

³⁴ Nicolae Bethlen, *Descrierea vieții sale de către el însuși*. Cluj Napoca: Casa cărții de Știință, 2004. p. 119.

³⁵ As it was also the case of Mihály Cserei, who was 53 when he concluded his second marriage, while the girl he chose, Zsuzsanna, was only 17.

³⁶ As was the case of András Szatmári, who was constantly watched by his wife because he "will not rest until he takes the diadem off the head of a virgin" (SJAN. Cluj. POC. II/35:16-17), just like the old man György Kovács, who, despite his age, was "doing things that are not worthy of a man of his age and status" (SJAN. Cluj. POC. II/35:71).

³⁷ *Halmágyi János és István élete és végrendelete (1743)*, p. 457.

my house filled with children; the good Lord has blessed me in my marriages, so there was no year in which the cradle (and sometimes two) was placed [aside], moreover, my wives did not have enough milk, and this lack always had to be supplanted by wet nurses.”³⁸ The text suggests that as regards newborn children, breastfeeding and weaning represented some of the most frequently invoked aspects of private life. The large number of references to this aspect of life proves that the feeding newborns was considered to be an act of the utmost importance, and the fact that the testament repeatedly emphasised the material sacrifices entailed by hiring a nurse suggests a kind of economic strain. This pressure was also felt among aristocratic families, where children were not usually breastfed by the mothers. It is just that the aristocracy, in ideal cases,³⁹ afforded to raise objections and requirements as regards the nurse’s skills. They requested information concerning these women’s biological endowments, namely the number of children they had given birth to, whether they were healthy, if they had had an abortion, etc. The wet nurses had to be healthy and clean, kept on a diet to ensure the highest quality of milk. Many believed that they to be loving, for their milk would mark the infants’ temperament,⁴⁰ so it was desirable that the women who breastfed should have pleasant physical and moral traits. Many authors preferred wet nurses who had given birth to boys, others favoured women who highly resembled the biological mother of the child, so as not to create a gap between the child and the mother.⁴¹ The wealthy bourgeois, especially if they lived in a small town, did not have many options and paid wet nurses regardless of the quality of the services they provided. Thus, the money and the goods offered to the wet nurses were an issue that equally touched the existing social structures in Transylvania. In contrast with the Western sources, we have no knowledge of cases where children were sent away for breastfeeding, as the wet nurses were usually received into the family home, as it happened in the Halmágyi family.

As shown in the above quotations, during the first years of the child, material concerns essentially boiled down to the costs entailed by hiring a nurse, and then to the physicians. Of the 12 children Halmágyi raised, only seven were his, and it is assumed that only two of these died, which was very rare even for noble families, which allegedly spent more money to care for their children. Thus, either thanks to favourable circumstances, or to the appropriate care of children, they reached maturity. In fact, the first death among the children was evoked with much dramatism. The death of Maria, the only daughter (from the first marriage) of the author, was characterised by epithets like “my much beloved daughter,” “that God gave me besides the five boys,” “the delight of my eyes,” denoting a special attachment to this child. Seldom do we find direct references to the fact that our ancestors would have preferred a specific gender or

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

³⁹ There were also isolated cases when due to the tense political situation, even nobility, otherwise willing to pay for the services of a wet nurse, did not find respectable women for breastfeeding the babies. We got most of the information from Wesselényi’s diary, who hired 20 wet nurses over the course of five years. Fehér, “The Lord My God Has Given My Wife a Child.” pp. 229-230.

⁴⁰ Count László Székely was breastfed by 14 nurses, which is why he was called “the one with 14 characters.” *Autobiografia lui László Székely*. Manuscript found in the Széchényi National Library, Budapest, Manuscript Collections, Quart. Hung. 4312, pp. 851-852.

⁴¹ Shulamith Shahar, *Gyermekek a középkorban*. Budapest: Osiris, 2000. p. 105.

another, in most sources the enthusiasm being equally high if it was a girl or a boy.⁴² Still, usually, especially in the noble families, the joy was more euphoric if the newborn was a boy. The explanation is quite simple, as a son could ensure the continuity of the family, the ancestors lived through him, and only he could possess the family wealth.⁴³ If an aristocratic family died out without male offspring, that family had to suffer both economically and socially, but especially symbolically.⁴⁴ The situation is similar for the bourgeoisie and religious elite. In the family of the minister Hermányi, for example, the whole family was concerned especially with the boy's health, as he was the only male child. This did not, of course, exclude attachment to the other children, to the girls, but in the period in question, the importance of a boy was always greater. Of course, it was possible for the reverse situation to be the case. Apparently, the death of Halmágyi's first daughter (which was soon followed by the death of his first wife) caused a peculiar sadness because she was the author's only daughter. It is especially interesting that the testament does not mention the names of the two daughters born of the second marriage, which may suggest that attachment to children was different, and that emotional ties were not created with the same ease between all the children and their parents.

When the children reached puberty, the family resources were drained, this time by the money needed for studies. The Halmágyi family, as suggested by this presentation, prized learning, as evidenced by the careers of both János Pap and Halmágyi Sr., but especially by that of the young gubernatorial *concupiscit*, István Halmágyi Jr. Although the author of the testament managed to educate his stepchildren and his two children, István and Ferenc, he could no longer provide equally good education for Mihály and János (the latter remaining only a grammarist - the first tier of education). Hence, the exhortation formulated for his stepsons: "I hope that my sons, Sándor and László Bölöni, whom I raised and educated, then married, will take the trouble to educate the little one, so that he will not end up as a digger."⁴⁵ The British researchers' studies also prove the concern among the bourgeoisie and the elite to provide as much intellectual support to their children as possible. The parenting mode of the Enlightenment assumed a total man, who, besides the affection manifested towards his children, also provided the material support for their evolution, either professionally, in the case of boys, or sentimentally, in the case of girls. Of course, it was assumed that this sentimental and material investment would be returned later, when the parents reached old age, through "comfort, consolation and happiness,"⁴⁶ but the will indicates, Halmágyi Sr. had doubts about the ability of the 12 children to take care of him: "It is known everywhere that it is easier for two parents to raise ten children, than for ten children to take care of a mother, or a father or their poor families."⁴⁷

⁴² Péter, "A gyermekek első tíz esztendeje" in ed. Eadem, *Gyermek a koraiújkori Magyarországon*. Budapest: Ed. MTA, 1996. p. 26.

⁴³ Abbott, "Life Cycle" in Foyster, Marten, *A Cultural History of Childhood*, p. 114.

⁴⁴ Deáky, "Jó kis fiúk és leánykák", p. 77.

⁴⁵ Halmágyi János és István élete és végrendelete (1743), p. 456.

⁴⁶ Bailey, "Family relationships," p. 27.

⁴⁷ Halmágyi János és István élete és végrendelete (1743), p. 456.

Instead of conclusions

This article has proposed a brief overview of customs related to marital life, reflecting the attitudes of a bourgeois family towards marriage, the family, and the household. Researchers who operate with retrospective narrative sources will, however, find it very difficult to make generalisations based on single sources, or to outline an authentic picture of what we call the marital life of the pre-modern era. As evinced by the studies of researchers in the West, family-related experiences diversified according to social class, economic status, or the position in the town structures, and inside the family, they also varied according to criteria of age, marital status or family size and living standard.⁴⁸ But even so, we hope that this foray, which started from the analysis of a simple testament, has provided a dynamic and, why not, interpretable picture of Transylvanian private life.

⁴⁸ Wiesner, "Political, Economic, and Legal Structures," p. 237.