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## **Matthias Corvinus of Hungary and the Suky Family of Transylvania**

During his reign Matthias Corvinus of Hungary went through several moments of crisis, such as his conflict with his uncle, the rebellion of the noblemen of Transylvania and also the act of treason of János Vitéz and Janus Pannonius. In each and every one of these issues his power and fame as a king and ruler was at stake and each time he proved a firm and daring ruler and thus managed to turn the situation in his favor.

Till now I have already evaluated the facts of the Transylvanian noblemen's rebellion of 1467 from the point of view of the history of the Transylvanian towns (Rűsz-Fogarasi, 2006: 189-197.). The rebellion was described and explained also by many other studies (Nógrádi, 2005: 131-137., Jakó, 1999: 212-231), therefore my purpose today is not to repeat that action, but I am rather interested in how a Transylvanian family of nobles who rises to the level of receiving offices at the court gets involved in a rebellion against Matthias Corvinus and how its members try to restore their reputation and regain the former possessions and status of the family after the rebellion is suppressed. The material I will present to you today is, in fact, an in-depth study of the consequences a historical event of national importance had at local level, the manner in which it influenced the life of a family from the class of the middle nobility.

But who are the Sukys anyway?

First of all, it's a Transylvanian noble family. The Suky family played an active role in the county administration of the 14th century. Several members of the family held the office of *iudex nobilium*, of vice/comes and some also held positions in the regional administration as vice/voievode or representatives of the king in Transylvania (See Rűsz-Fogarasi, 2009. 1-12.).

During the reign of Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund the status of the Suky family was consolidated, their family crest was renewed by the king's order, they received *ius gladii*, its mean that they had the right to hold a criminal court, and hold capital penitence and also they kept the right to organize fairs in Szovát/Suatu, while several members of the family were highly honored and trusted

members of the king's and the emperor's court.<sup>1</sup> However at this time they do not yet rise to holding positions in the royal administration. And the rise of the family does not go without impediments either, since one branch of the family takes sides with the rebels during the peasant's revolt of Băbolna/ Bobalna. However the family possessions are not alienated, since the other branch of the family manages to regain the possessions confiscated from the rebellious branch.

The good reputation of the family was gained not only by the high positions some of its members held in the 15th century administration, but also by the fact that several members of the family proved to be mighty warriors as well. János Suky and his two sons, Benedek and Mihály fought in the military campaign led by János Hunyadi, the governor of Transylvania against the Turks south to the Danube. As a result and by the request of Hunyadi on 14 April 1443 Hungarian king Vladislaus exempted the villages populated by Romanians owned by the Sukys and their kins' from some taxes namely quinquadecima as a reward for their military merits proved at the Iron Gate, in Serbia, Bulgaria and at Vidin (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 355). This exemption completed an entire series of privileges the Sukys already had. The achievement was the merit of magister János and his two sons old enough to take part in battle.

The most frequently mentioned members of the next generation in the family were Benedek, Mihály and Péter. All three Sukys played an active part in the real estate issues of Transylvania and especially of Kolozs/ Cluj county in the fifth and sixth decades of the 15th century.

Often, Benedek Suky was the advocate of one of the parties in various lawsuits regarding real estate, but he was often mentioned in historical sources as the representative of the voievode of Transylvania or the king in such matters. The first note on his participation to a lawsuit regarding real estate can be found in the minutes sent to the Convent of Kolozsmonostor/ Cluj- Mănăstur of 1421 (Borsa-C.Tóth, 2003: 350-351). All these data show that Benedek Suky was a highly esteemed personality of the Transylvanian nobility.

The lawsuits mentioned in sources dealt only partly with possessions within Kolozs/Cluj county, very often Benedek Suky was asked for his opinion also in matters regarding possessions lying in other counties as well. This also proves how well-known and extremely respected he was in the society of Transylvanian noblemen.

During, at the beginning of the 15th these times the social appreciate of the Suky and Hunyadi families was at the same level, but as we are well aware the of life of the two families took very different turns.

As I mentioned before, in the history of the Suky family the peasants' revolt of Băbolna/ Bobalna was an important turning point. The rebellion which had such a

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<sup>1</sup> See Rűsz-Fogarasi on the conference about Sighismund de Luxemburg from Nagyvárád in 2007 (forthcoming).

great impact on the entire Transylvanian society divided also the Sukys. While one branch of the family sided with the rebels, the other, including also Benedek and János Suky was supporting the nobility during the conflict.

Benedek Suky was one of the most important personalities in the peasants' revolt, he was among those who signed the first agreement between the nobles and the peasants. The second one was signed not by Benedek, but by János Suky. In the end Benedek, János's son, along with Mihály and Péter, Miklós's sons and Simon Suky's son, János and all the other Sukys siding with the nobility became the beneficiaries of the possessions confiscated from the other branch of the family as a reward for their faithfulness to the king.

The possessions in Kolozs/Cluj and Doboka/ Doboca counties of the Sukys siding with the rebels were given to the branch of the family faithful to the king by the means of a documents issued by Albert, King of Hungary on 25 June 1438 at Buda (Demény, 1991: 113- 116). The diploma provides in regard to the possessions in Zsuk/ Juc, Szovát/ Suatu, Újfalú/ Satu Nou, Köteland/ Gădălin, Magyarsármás/ Sarmasu, Románsármás/ Sarmasel and Omboz/ Mureșeni de Cîmpie of the Sukys fallen into disgrace. According to the note made on the reverse of the diploma, the possessions were registered in favor of the other branch of the family without any opposition.

As we know from the sources processed so far Benedek Suky is mentioned in the documents of the period 1404 - 1456. It can also be stated that in the Middle Ages the most popular member of the Suky family was Benedek Suky, known to many as the person who ordered the famous chalice of Suky. The chalice called „the greatest masterpiece of goldsmithry of the historical Hungary”, mentioned in the inventory of 1531 of the Cathedral of the Transylvanian Bishopry was probably donated by Benedek Suky to the cathedral of Gyulafehérvár/ Alba Iulia (Wetter, 2006: 551-557).

The date of 1437 we find engraved on the chalice can mean both the date when it was ordered, the date when it was finished or the date the donation was made on. Benedek Suky may have ordered the quite valuable chalice in 1437 and paid for it only later, maybe in May 1456 when he pawns both his possession in Szovát/ Suatu and his two possessions in Kályán/ Căianu Vamă to the daughter of Péter Suky, Krisztina for 120 forints (Jakó, 1990, 512).

The fact that Benedek was close to the church is proved not only by his generous donation, but also reflected by several documents of the time. For instance like the one of October 1448 when he permits Transylvanian Bishop Máthé to deal with the problems at hand in the affiliated parish of village Visa owned by him and Mihály Suky (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 356).

A second example for this attitude reflected in a document from 10 September 1449 when Transylvanian Bishop Albert Vetési rules in the lawsuit between János

Suky's sons, Benedek and Mihály and Bertalan Boldocz in favour of the former; (Jakó, 1990: 773)

The same position we can detect clearly in 27 November 1449 when Benedek Suky is authorized to be the representative of the chapter of Gyulafehérvár/ Alba Iulia regarding landmarks; (Jakó, 1990, 390)

Finally, I think all this kind of preoccupation for church was crowned of 4 March 1454 issued in Krakow according to which the general inquisitor of the Franciscan order, John of Capistrano installs Benedek and Mihály Suky into offices of third degree and confers them the right to the privileges coming with the position (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 356).

Sometime before 29 November 1441 Benedek Suky becomes bearer, legal representing of Zsigmond, the son of late Gál Haranglábi and signs an agreement with the blood relatives of his ward in favor of the latter. He must have represented well the interests of the child and he must have been considered a powerful man, since Péter Bogáti also commends his family into his and Miklós Vízaknai's care until his sons will become of age (Jakó, 1990: 468-469).

Just as Benedek, Mihály also accepted to be an advocate in lawsuits, first together with his brother, later also on his own. The documents of the age mention him also as representative of the Transylvanian voievode or the king (Jakó, 1990: 283).

In September 1460 Mihály Suky acts, along with several other noblemen to be a guarantor for Transylvanian Bishop György Máté in the pawn he made in favour of István Kemény of Gyerőmonostor. Thus they, i.e. Mihály Suky, János Geréb of Wyngrad, Miklós, the dean of Küküllő/ Tárnave, László, the castellan of Gyalu/ Gilău, clerk István, the kin of Bishop Máté, András Czyko of Weressmart, clerk Amburus, the comity of Kolozs/ Cluj and György Kabos of Gyerőmonostor offered a guarantee that should the Bishop be unable to pay back 500 forints until the appointed day, they will pay back themselves the afore-mentioned sum (Jakó, 1990: 572).

Mihály is also mentioned in a diploma of August 1461 to have been in the company of Balázs, dean in chief of Kolozs/Colos, notary of the royal chancellery and several other people (János of Gezth, former commander of the castle of Beszterce/ Bistrița, Mihály Zekel of Zenthiwan, the commander in charge of the castle of Beszterce/ Bistrița, Transylvanian voievode Sebestyén of Rozgon, László of Kecheth and László, the son of Jakab Alard of Megesfalwa) when the former was insulted and nearly beaten by Benedek Veres of Farnas at an earlier date (Jakó, 1990: 604-605).

On 4 December 1462 Matthias Corvinus accepts Mihály into his service as a noble servant at the court at the recommendation of treasurer in chief Imre Szapolyai, offering him a payment of two hundred golden forints for a year and a monthly

payment (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 357) equaling the value of 10 horses and states this agreement in a diploma.

Two years later we find that Matthias Corvinus orders tax collectors of county Kolozs/ Colos, Mihály Suky and Miklós Dezső of Pata to come to Buda for rendering of accounts. Mihály Suky was the tax collector, dicator of Kolozs/ Colos county (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 357).

In the documents issued after his death Mihály Suky is mentioned as the cup bearer which means that he must have held that office at the court until his involvement in the rebellion in Transylvania. All this must have increased the king's anger with him, since he offered pardon to several nobles participating in the rebellion, but Mihály Suky was not among them, he was doomed. Our present sources do not reveal the exact date when he was appointed as cup bearer, but it certainly gives us a hint on how important holding such an office by a Suky was to the family. In fact it was the office of highest rank the Sukys obtained in the Middle Ages.

Mihály was well-known in circles attended by the regulars of the court and the most important representatives of the Transylvanian political life. One could see that his first position in court was obtained through the recommendation of Imre Szapolyai in 1462 (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 357). Another meaningful fact is that vice-voievode Miklós Vízaknai appointed him as the administrator of his will along with other important personalities like Transylvanian voievode János Pongrácz of Dengeleg, Dezső László of Losoncz, Geréb János Vingrát and Miklós Székely of Szentiván.

We learned that, the Transylvanian revolt was caused by the fiscal reform of Matthias Corvinus. The provisions regarding the royal income of 1467 were unpleasant news to the people throughout the kingdom and met a great opposition especially in Transylvania, since the serfs who had the obligation to pay a tax which supported the army did not need to pay until then the chamber's profit as well, only the tax to the king. But the fiscal reform passed during the general congregation held at the beginning of April 1467 affected the population quite soon, especially due to the fact that the bill passed on that spring was enforced with immediate effect, i.e. after collecting the chamber's profit at the beginning of the year, they collected also the newly imposed tax for the royal treasury.

As a consequence of Benedek Veres of Farnas's actions signs of a coming revolt were soon visible in Transylvania. The representatives of the central power, the voievode and vice-voievode concurred with the revolt and became the leaders of the rebels. And not only the lay leaders, but also the clerical ones, for example Transylvanian Bishop Miklós Szapolyai played an important part in the revolt. The leaders of the revolt formulated a letter of alliance in which they displayed the causes of their dissatisfaction and openly turned against the king. The letter of alliance confirmed also by an oath sworn before the convent of Kolozsmonostor/

Cluj- Mănăstur reflected the united will of the three nations of Transylvania (of the Hungarian, Saxon and Székler counties and chairs) (Kubinyi, 2001: 64). The Hungarian nobles of Transylvania were represented by László Losonczy Dezsőfi sr., Mihály Suky, Benedek Veres of Farnas, Mihály Gerendi, Márton Iklódi, István Erdélyi of Somkerék/ Sintereag and Péter Hosszúwazo. In fact they represented the local nobility and also the other parts of Transylvania, since they represented also the Saxons and the Széklers, thus they'd call themselves the people of the kingdom and declared they created the alliance in order to protect Hungary's freedom against the abuses of the king.

According to the sources and the works which processed these sources the idea of this revolt definitely belonged to Benedek Veres of Farnas. Benedek Veres fell out of grace even before the Diet session passing the new fiscal reform, since we know that on 24 March 1467 Matthias Corvinus gave the possessions of Benedek Veres condemned to be executed for reasons which are uncertain yet to Transylvanian voievode János Szentgyörgyi (Jakó, 1999: 222-223, 226). All in all Benedek Veres must have been a very determined organizer of the revolt in Transylvania, since he had nothing to lose. And he must have also been very convincing to have been able to talk the voievode who received all his possessions to take sides with the rebels. Despite the fact that documents and narrative sources leave no doubt regarding his role in the revolt Benedek Veres is not among those executed for he managed to flee to Poland in time, right after the suppression of the rebellion. Lajos Kelemen suggests that Mihály Suky got involved in the revolt due to his kinship with Benedek Veres of Farnas, although it is not quite sure what is kinship there may have existed between them (Kelemen, 2006: 99).

In the documents by which he donated the possessions of Mihály Suky to Miklós Csupor Matthias Corvinus declared about the part played by Mihály in the revolt that he joined the revolt organized by Transylvanian voievode János who was beheaded for going astray himself and leading others astray as well with his ill thought advices (Jakó, 1999: 223).

The undisguised opposition of the Transylvanian noblemen against the king had as a consequence Matthias Corvinus visiting Transylvania in 1467. Matthias acted in a quick and determined manner against the rebels. He fought them and also imposed his will by his presence in the region for several months. He pardoned the nobles rebelled against him, but he mercilessly punished the leaders of the rebellion executing several noblemen and civilians. The measures he took, the diplomas offering privileges he issued during his stay in Transylvania reflect the steps by which he solved the state of conflict that had been created.

All those who signed that letter of alliance, nobles, townspeople, Széklers were all searched for and punished. Some of them were beheaded, others managed to flee, others were pardoned.

Matthias had Mihály Suky found and beheaded in the main square in Nagyszeben. His possessions were confiscated and given to someone else.

Afterward the Sukys had to use every effort to regain the lost possessions of the family and to rehabilitate the family's reputation. According to Lajos Kelemen's evaluation the possessions of the Sukys lay from the outskirts of Kolozsvár and Apahida to Boncida and east to Boncida up to the middle area of the central part of Transylvania called Mezőség, a piece of land of 2-300 km (Kelemen, 2006: 99). The various branches of the family had in their possession various parts of this vast piece of land.

First the king gave the confiscated possessions of Mihály Suky to János Geszti, but on 23 March 1468 he orders the convent of Kolozsmonostor/ Cluj-Mănăstur to register the land on the name of voievode Csupor (Jakó 1990: 659).

When the possessions were handed over parts of János of Felsőcsuk possession were taken along with Mihály's possessions. János protested and the matter was quickly solved by returning the parts belonging to him.

The first to protest against confiscating the possessions of Mihály Suky in Zsuk/ Juc, Szovát/ Suatu, Kályán/ Căianu Vamă, Omboz/ Mureșeni de Cîmpie, Kötelend/ Gădălin, Béré/ Bărai, Visa/Vișea, Magyar-Sármás/ Sarmas and Román-Sármás/ Sărmășel and giving them to Miklós Csupor were Mihály's children who handed in a document of protest to the chaplain of Nagyvárad/ Oradea on 7 September 1468 (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 357). But despite this attempt Mihály Suky's possessions remained with Transylvanian voievode Miklós Csupor who benefited from them until the end of his life.

As a result of the mediation of Transylvanian Bishop Gábor king Matthias grants to the Sukys, i.e. to the sons of former royal cup bearer Mihály Suky, Pál and his elder brother János as a royal favor the possibility to try to regain and keep their former family possessions received as donations from the king or gained in any other circumstances currently being in the possession of persons not belonging to the family. Parts of the possessions Csupor returned to the Sukys during his life, others were regained after the governor died. Still a great part of the former Suky possessions was owned by people who were not members of the family, i.e. László Pongrácz of Szentmiklós and his wife Jusztina Szilágyi who received them as a donation from the king.

The sons of Mihály Suky protested in a document of 31 May 1474 against the king donating their inheritance to other people and against the registration of the land in favor of other owners (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 358). However their actions had no results. The only concession Matthias Corvinus offered them in a letter dated 2 February 1477 was to try to regain the possessions owned by their father and lost due to his participation in the rebellion and to his showing unfaithfulness to the king and currently owned first by voievode Csupor and then by Mrs. Jusztina Pongrácz in the court of law (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 359).

The Suky brothers did not miss out on the opportunity they had been offered and brought an action against Mrs. Jusstina Pongrácz, already a widow by that time. During the lawsuit Transylvanian governor Antal Kendy in his ruling of 15 July 1478 deferred the proceedings in order to give Mrs. Pongrácz the chance to prove that she owns the former Suky possessions as a donation from the king and that she has a good reason to act as the owner of that land. The final outcome of the proceedings was a surprising one, the parties, i.e. Pál Suky and Jusstina Szilágyi married and thus the Suky possession were regained by members of the family (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 359).

On 16 February 1479 Pál and Jusstina Suky agree having Transylvanian voievode Antal Kendy visiting Suk as their witness to offer Pál Suky's sister, Ilona who was Ambrus Porkoláb of Sándorház's wife the possessions in Báré/ Băraii and Nagydevecser as a gift (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 359). Ilona must have protested against the small part of the possessions she received as a settlement gift, for another diploma issued on the very same day donates also a quarter of the possessions in Omboc to be permanently used by Ilona. She was registered as the owner of the afore-mentioned possessions in June that very year.

At the end of 1479 the ward of János of Felsősus/ Jucu de Sus and Zsigmond Haranglábi the stepson of Suky Benedek also protests against the king giving away the possessions of Pál and János, the already dead sons of Mihály Suky (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 359).

Still the agreement which came into effect as a result did not last long, since Pál Suky died and Jusstina Szilágyi and Ilona Suky remained in conflict.

It seems that during this conflict the king decides in July 1482 to act in defence of Ilona Suky against Jusstina and her last husband, János Erdélyi (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 360). It may be due to the pressure created by him that János representing the Suky family, János Erdélyi and Jusstina in September 1482 come to an agreement which they promise to keep or else pay a 1000 forints fee (Petrichevich Horváth, 1942: 361). But the parties come to a final agreement later after some confrontations, only after February 1496 when László Erdélyi pays Ilona Sukys part from the engagement present and the maiden quarter (Jakó, 1990: 145-146).

As we could see the Sukys did not spare any effort to regain the ownership of most of their possessions confiscated by the king. However this endeavour took up all their energy, therefore the historical sources do not inform of any Suky holding an office in the county administration from the second half of the 15th century, regardless whether the office would be that of the comity, the advocate or the witness. Matthias Corvinus did not pardon Mihály Suky for his treason, neither did he relieve his sons from bearing the consequences of their father's actions. The treason of Mihály Suky and the confiscation of his possession that followed as a consequence prevented the family to ascend to higher positions in Transylvania or at the court.

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