

# The Town as Landlord

## Košice and Its Villages before the Abolition of Serfdom

*Abstract:* This paper aims to investigate the complex relationship between a town and its hinterland in the situation where the town acts as landlord for the surrounding settlements. The case study examines the multi-ethnic town of Košice (Kassa in Hungarian), one of the most important centres in the Kingdom of Hungary (and Slovakia's second largest city today), in the years before the abolition of serfdom by the laws of 1848. As a free royal town, Košice was entitled to possess villages due to the privileges bestowed upon it by the kings of Hungary.

The paper first examines the economic aspects of this relationship to provide an overview of the contribution of the villages to the urban economy. It then focuses on the everyday interactions between the town and its villeins to highlight the characteristics of the behaviour of the city as seigneur from a micro-level perspective.

The investigation proves that while the town council's attitude towards peasants was consistently strict, it never acted in a despotic manner. The peasantry, on the other hand, sought loopholes in the regulations and tried to take advantage of lax control or the seigneur's generosity. However, the villagers also regarded the city as indispensable for their livelihoods and as vital support in times of crisis.

*Keywords:* Hungarian history, town as landlord, town-village relationship

In his memoirs, geographer András Rónai recalls the negotiations concerning the new Czechoslovakian-Hungarian border following the First Vienna Award in 1938.<sup>1</sup> After weeks of extensive consultations, the fate of a few villages remained undecided, with the final decision to be made after a site visit. One of the settlements in question was Kavečany, a village immediately north of Košice (Kassa), the second largest city in present-day Slovakia.<sup>2</sup> The inhabitants of this village were predominantly Slovaks who made a living by producing food for the town. In the debate whether the settlement should belong to Slovakia or Hungary, the Slovak party argued with the ethnic composition of the village, while Hungarians emphasized the economic interests of Kavečany.

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- 1 The so-called First Vienna Award, a treaty signed on 2 November 1938 with the support of Nazi Germany, separated territories from Czechoslovakia and awarded them to Hungary. These were mostly Hungarian-populated areas in southern Slovakia, part of the territory that Hungary lost to Czechoslovakia after World War I.
- 2 Throughout this paper, I will use the current official names of the settlements. Therefore, instead of the Hungarian (Kassa), German (Kaschau) or Latin (Cassovia) names of the town, I will use the Slovak Košice.

Rónai recalls the site visit by the committee charged with defining the location of the border. When they arrived, a weekly market was being held in the village's main square. The leader of the Slovak delegation asked a "tall Slovak man" whether the village wished to belong to Hungary or to Slovakia. The man, who was in fact the village judge, took a long look at the delegates in their elegant clothes and uniforms, then rested his gaze on the marketplace and the villagers pursuing their business, and answered calmly: "to Košice."<sup>3</sup> This anecdote illustrates what a nearby town meant for villages like Kavečany: The connection was obviously bilateral and defined by interdependencies, with economic interests interlaced with other factors. In the complex relationship between village and town, certain elements seem to have been permanent, while other aspects depended on the immediate social and political context and were therefore subject to modification when the historical situation changed.

The following study addresses a specific type of relationship between towns and villages in the mid-nineteenth-century Kingdom of Hungary, focusing on the years before the 1848 reforms that abolished all privileges in effect under the traditional estates system. Until that year, villages and their lands as well as their inhabitants as villeins or *iobagiones* were under the authority of their seigneur. Towns, on the other hand, existed in two types: Market or manorial towns were likewise under seigneurial control and enjoyed rather limited autonomy. The other category was that of the free royal towns, which were under direct royal authority and therefore independent of the county administration and landlords (*oppida* and *liberae regiae civitates* respectively, as used in Latin until 1844). In the common legal perception of the mid-nineteenth century, only the latter were considered "real" towns. According to the law in the estates system, free royal towns were granted collective privileges as though they were a member of the nobility. As such, they had their own representatives in the parliament – the Diet of Hungary – and were allowed to possess landed property as well as villages and even market towns. This proprietorship was managed by the city council on behalf of the burghers.<sup>4</sup> One of the most significant laws passed during the 1848 revolution was the emancipation of serfs, which caused the jurisdiction of landlords over villages to cease to exist.<sup>5</sup>

This paper discusses the relationship between towns and villages in such cases where the town acted as landlord. The main purpose of the following analysis is to examine how this relationship between free royal towns and their manorial villages was characterized in the years preceding the abolition of serfdom. In Hungarian historiography, the most systematic study of the ties between towns and their surroundings in the decades prior to the 1848 revolution can be found in the works of Vera Bácskai and Lajos Nagy. Their analysis focuses on the economic relations between towns as market centres and their hinterlands in the entire kingdom.<sup>6</sup> The present study is partly related to the same issue, but it approaches the

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3 András Rónai, *Térképezett történelem* [Mapped history], Budapest 1989, 195, English translations of this and all following quotations by the author.

4 See Árpád Tóth et al., *Urban Communities and Their Burghers in the Kingdom of Hungary (1750–1850)*, in: Justin Colson/Arie van Steensel (eds.), *Cities and Solidarities. Urban Communities in Pre-Modern Europe*, London/New York 2017, 188–207.

5 For a detailed analysis of these laws, their execution, and the consequences, see for example István Orosz, *Peasant Emancipation and After-effects*, in: Péter Gunst (ed.), *Hungarian Agrarian Society from the Emancipation of Serfs (1848) to the Reprivatization of Land* (1998), New York 1998, 53–97.

6 Vera Bácskai/Lajos Nagy, *Piackörzetek, piacközpontok és városok Magyarországon 1828-ban* [Market districts, market hubs, and cities in Hungary in 1828], Budapest 1984; Vera Bácskai/Lajos Nagy, *Market Areas, Market*

relationship between the urban and the rural sphere from a different perspective. It thereby hopes to contribute to a better understanding of how this seigneurial town-village relationship that ended with the abolition of serfdom was structured and what it meant to the two involved parties. Within this far-reaching and complex topic, I will focus on two key questions in particular: On the one hand, I will scrutinize the economic relations between the city and its villages, especially the role of the manorial villages for urban farming. On the other hand, I will investigate what type of landlord the city was by examining in which matters the inhabitants of the villages turned to the city as their landlord and how the city acted towards its serfs. In other words, the main concern is how the everyday interactions between the two parties can be characterized. I will examine these issues in detail for the case of a specific city and its villages from a micro-level perspective.

Košice, the example chosen for analysis, was one of the oldest and most prosperous free royal towns in the Hungarian kingdom and owned numerous landed properties. The city was located in the Hornád/Hernád River valley, where the Great Hungarian Plain meets the north-eastern range of the Carpathians, along a vital trade route linking the Kingdom of Hungary with Poland, Silesia, and the city of Kraków. Its multi-ethnic population numbered around 13,000 in the mid-nineteenth century, making it a medium-sized town at the time, and consisted mainly of Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks, and Jews. Being the seat of regional administrative, ecclesiastical, and military institutions, however, Košice was one of the pivotal centres of the kingdom.

At the time when the 1848 laws declared the emancipation of villeins, Košice had 17 villages and a small market town under its authority. Although there had been some minor changes in the composition of these properties, most of the settlements had been owned by the town for hundreds of years.

As the seigneur, Košice also functioned as an information hub for its villages since it granted access to infrastructure such as markets and postal stations. Moreover, the population of the outlying settlements was under the legal jurisdiction of the town judge and officially paid their obligatory manorial contributions to him. The local parish priests were likewise under the authority of the city, which also held a number of other rights and privileges such as monopolies for operating taverns and slaughterhouses, selling meat, milling and stone mining, and the production of beer and hard liquor as well as lime, tiles, and bricks. It was at the city council's discretion to decide whether and how village folk were permitted to use the surrounding woodlands for grazing their animals, collecting firewood and timber, or even obtaining wood to make coffins. Manorial dependence thus strengthened the bond between town and villages and affected a wide range of everyday activities.<sup>7</sup> A specific example vividly illustrates the closeness of these ties: In 1846, the judges of the small village Zlatá Idka asked

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Centres and Towns in Hungary in 1828, in: *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 1–2 (1980), 1–26. Bácskai also examined the hinterland of Budapest primarily from an economic and demographic point of view: Vera Bácskai, *Budapest and Its Hinterland: The Development of Twin Cities, 1720–1850*, in: Peter Clark/Bernard Lepetit (eds.), *Capital Cities and Their Hinterlands in Early Modern Europe*, Aldershot 1996, 183–197.

7 On the rights and privileges of free royal towns in detail, see István Kállay, *A városi önkormányzat hatásköre Magyarországon 1686–1848* [The authority of city councils in Hungary, 1686–1848], Budapest 1989; István Kállay, *Városi bíraskodás Magyarországon 1686–1848* [Urban jurisdiction in Hungary, 1686–1848], Budapest 1996, 380–389.

for financial aid for inhabitants who had suffered damage in a recent fire. The village had formerly belonged to Košice but had been outside the city's jurisdiction for decades at the time of the incident. In their plea for help, the villagers emphasised the substantial contribution they had made to the urban market. The members of the city council reasoned that the inhabitants of Zlatá Idka had once been villeins of Košice and granted them a generous sum.<sup>8</sup> In the following section, I will discuss the economic aspects of such town-village relationships before providing a glimpse into the everyday interactions between the seigneur and the manorial settlements.

## The economic importance of manorial villages

A detailed summary of Košice's economic standing and the income generated by its properties was published in a national economic journal in early 1848.<sup>9</sup> The anonymous author of the report was well-informed about the town's economy. He began his write-up by noting that it was common knowledge that Košice possessed the largest landed property of all free royal towns: In addition to the mentioned 17 villages and one market town, the city owned extensive vineyards in the famous Tokaj wine region to the south as well as large woodlands (30,000 *jugera*, which equals c. 18,690 acres). He added, however, that these properties did not generate as much wealth as could be expected based on the number of settlements under the city's authority due to the fact that most of the villages were situated in hilly areas and woodlands. The lands around the villages were used by the villeins themselves, who paid the traditional tribute – the so-called “ninth” (the “ninth tenth” of the harvest, after the “tenth tenth” or tithe had been paid to the church) – to the city in return. The report claims that no substantial profit was generated from this form of income, since it was used to cover the cost of administration of the settlements and to pay the priests, schoolmasters, foresters, and haywards. The revenue from the woodlands in the town's possession was more significant: In addition to selling lumber, the city obtained its own firewood and timber from these properties. The report also notes that the importance of the *corvée*, that is the compulsory unpaid seasonal labour by the peasants on the manorial lands, exceeded that of their mandatory contribution paid in agricultural produce. The labour performed by the villagers usually consisted of logging, road construction, and city cleaning. Finally, the report states that the town possessed two demesnes that were managed directly by the city council and available for rent. These were Košice's most profitable landed estates.<sup>10</sup>

An account of the income of the city for the year 1844 sheds further light on the composition of the urban revenues (see Table 1).<sup>11</sup> According to this document, the levies paid by the

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8 Archív Mesta Košice (AMK), Stredna Manipulácia, Választott község üléseinek jegyzőkönyve [Minutes of the general assembly of the external council] 1846; on Zlatá Idka, see József Tutkó, Szabad királyi Kassa városának történelmi évkönyve [A historical annual of Košice, a free royal town], Kassa 1861, 172.

9 Sz. kir. Kassa város leírása, in: Hetilap. Encyclopedikus tartalmú folyóirat különös tekintettel a közgazdasátrra, műiparra és kereskedelemre [Description of the free royal town of Kassa, in: Weekly magazine. An encyclopaedic journal of economy, industry, and trade] 4/6 (1848), 88.

10 Ibid.

11 The document is attached to city council decision no. 845 of 1845. AMK, Stredna Manipulácia, Magistratny Súd. (J.).

village peasants (the ninth, the tithe, and money paid in place of compulsory labour) made up less than 4 per cent of the city's annual income. By contrast, the demesnes generated significantly higher earnings, with approximately 9 per cent of the overall annual revenue. The brick manufactory in the city generated 16 per cent of the total income. But the largest share came from the granting of licenses for the lordly monopolies (mill, slaughterhouse, tavern, distillery etc.): these made up around 53 per cent of Košice's revenues in 1844. Income generated by woodlands and hayfields made up only 3 per cent, which shows that their primary function was in fact to meet the urban consumption needs. Revenues from the sale of various products (mainly wheat and flour as well as some hay and cattle) contributed more than 8 per cent, while the remainder of the town's income came from other sources (rental of houses and shops, various administrative fees and fines, interest, etc.).

Table 1: Revenues generated by the town of Košice in 1844

Type of revenue	Silver florins	%
Lordly monopolies	42,258	52.9
Brick manufactory	12,762	16.0
Demesnes	6,961	8.7
Sale of products	6,700	8.4
Levies	2,635	3.3
Wood	2,500	3.1
Administrative revenues	2,267	2.8
Rentals	1,430	1.8
Credit	1,000	1.3
Interest	960	1.2
Mine	357	0.5
Total	79,830	100.0

Source: Archív Mesta Košice, Stredna Manipulácia, Magistratny Súd. (J.). Amounts rounded to nearest integer.

The analysis of these urban revenues supports the claims made in the 1848 journal report, whose author suggested that manorial demesnes in the town's possession generated outstanding income while – compared to the incomes from these estates – the villages yielded much lower earnings than one would expect based on their number and size. On the basis of the concrete revenue numbers, we can conclude that the town as landlord earned much more income directly through its lordly monopolies than from its landed properties.

But this picture is not entirely complete. The quoted journal article, for instance, mentions the importance of the *corvée*, which do not appear in the accounts. Fortunately, there

is another preserved report compiled by the urban administration in 1847 that provides information on the compulsory labour performed by villeins on the town's demesne lands.<sup>12</sup> This document reveals that peasants under the jurisdiction of Košice provided almost 20,000 days (19,198) of *corvée* in 1846–47, which must have made a significant contribution to the town's economy.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the levies in goods and coins paid by the villeins, their *corvée*, and the fees they had to pay for the use of the forest or the mill – in other words, their significant role in the urban income generated in connection with the city's seigniorial rights – by no means represent the entirety of the villages' contribution to Košice's wealth. We must likewise consider their part in the trade taking place at the urban market as well as in the demographic growth of the city.

The city market must obviously be viewed as a contributing factor in the economic relationship between the town and its villages. It is equally critical, however, to consider the significance of the demand created by the village populations and the proportion of trade in goods produced in the villages. To what extent did village goods satisfy the city's everyday needs, and how important was the market trade in agricultural produce for peasant households? Due to the dearth of sources and studies on this topic, it is difficult to formulate direct conclusions informed by numerical data. Contemporary reports and travel accounts, however, unequivocally attest to the liveliness of trade in the city market, and they make it clear that surrounding villages produced a steady supply of food and other goods that were sold there.

An 1828 census reveals information about Košice's trade catchment area. Among other questions, this survey inquired which market(s) the population frequented, and the results show that the number of people who visited only markets in Košice and none in other towns was around 136,000, making the city's catchment area the fifth largest in the country.<sup>14</sup>

The key to Košice's prominence as a market town was its advantageous geographical location described above: It held a critical function in the supply of food to the mountainous areas in the north as well as being of key importance for the movement of goods from Transylvania and the eastern regions in general to the north-eastern part of the Great Hungarian Plain and from there to the central areas of the country.

Another fact to be taken into consideration is that Košice's population doubled between the late eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth century, and that this increase was largely due to inward migration: According to the census conducted in 1784–87 by order of Emperor Joseph II., the town had a population of 7,590, while the 1847 municipal census counted 14,959 people and the national census of 1850/51 registered 13,034 inhabitants. Naturally, the speed of this population growth was not uniform. There was a slightly increasing trend with considerable annual variation until the middle of the 1820s and a noticeable decline at the beginning of the 1830s due to the cholera epidemic of 1831. The population growth accelerated once more from the middle of the 1830s, which continued throughout the follow-

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12 Kivonat azon úri munkáknak, mellyek szabad királyi Kassa városa helyység jobbágyosság által 1846–47 katonai év által végehez vitettek. [A report on the labour performed by the villeins under the jurisdiction of the free royal town of Košice in the military year 1846–47.] A document attached to the city council decision no. 4261 of 1848, AMK, Stredna Manipulácia, Magistrátny Súd. (J.). Henceforth: Kivonat, AMK MS 4261/1848.

13 Ibid.

14 Bácskai/Nagy, Piackörzetek, 45. For the description of the census, see *ibid.* 29–44.

ing decades with a short but serious interruption following the events of 1848/49.<sup>15</sup> Data on the social standing and origin of the migrants are lacking for the examined period, however, and it is impossible to tell how many people settled in the city versus how many worked there only for a short period of time as day labourers, servants, seasonal workers, carpenters, or stonemasons. Such information is available only for individuals who settled in the town for good and eventually rose to the status of burghers proper. The provenance and profession of those who attained this rank was recorded in the so-called *Book of Burghers*, a registry the city maintained for this particular purpose.<sup>16</sup> According to my own database compiled for previous research, villagers constituted approximately one third of the newly admitted burghers of Košice between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> In the final volume of the burgher registry beginning in 1781, however, I was able to identify only 23 persons who came to Košice from the surrounding villages under its authority. Although moving to the city and becoming a burgher meant a significant increase in social status for a villager, gaining acceptance as a burgher was simultaneously a costly enterprise, and it was therefore primarily craftsmen and merchants for whom this opportunity arose. This also sheds light on the social distance between village folk and the burghers of Košice, in whose name the city exercised its seigniorial authority over the small settlements.

## Everyday interactions

In order to gain a better understanding of the ties and everyday dealings between the town and its villages, I selected two settlements and investigated the contexts in which they are mentioned in the records of the city council, consulting records from the 1840s up to the 1848 revolution.<sup>18</sup> The two chosen settlements are Košická Nová Ves and Myslava.<sup>19</sup> The 1851 *Geographical Dictionary of Hungary* listing all of the country's settlements places Košická Nová Ves at a walking distance of 1.5 hours from Košice. Its 855 inhabitants, all Catholics, cultivated vineyards and traded in fattened pigs, pork, and bacon, which they sold at the Košice market. The same gazetteer states that Myslava was an hour's walk away from the city and inhabited by 961 people of Slovak and German backgrounds. They were Catholics as well, and made a living with the production of fruit brandy along with bleaching and laundering the clothes of Košice townsfolk.<sup>20</sup> Both settlements are peripheral boroughs of Košice today. Cases discussed by the Košice city council that involved these villages offer a glimpse into the

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15 Gábor Czoch, Košice in the European Migration Process (1781–1848), in: Mária Hajduová/Martin Bartoš (eds.), *Košice in the Coordinates of European History*, Košice 2013, 291–301, 291–292.

16 *Liber Neoconciuium*. AMK Supplementum H. III/2. Civ. 3.

17 Gábor Czoch, "A városok szíverei." *Tanulmányok Kassáról és a reformkori városokról* ["Cities are arteries": Studies on Košice and other cities in the Hungarian Reform Era], Pozsony 2009, 112. On the geographic origins of burghers, see also Czoch, Košice, 293–294.

18 The council meeting minutes, known until 1840 as *Protocollum sessionum magistratualium* and from 1840 to 1848 as *Tanácsülések Jegyzőkönyve*, AMK, Stredná Manipulácia, Magistrátny Súd. (J.), henceforth: AMK MS. I will refer to the minutes of the town council's sessions by specifying first the number of the decision and then the year. I decided not to extend the study period to the changes brought on by the 1848 emancipation.

19 Respectively in Hungarian: Kassaujfalú and Mislóka.

20 Elek Fényes, *Magyarország geographiai szótára* [A geographical dictionary of Hungary], Pest 1851, vol. 2, 105 and 233.

everyday life of their inhabitants while simultaneously illustrating the city's attitude toward its village subjects. The council acted as a body of authority, and most of the recorded hearings thus deal with complaints, requests for help, offences committed by peasants, or the levies and obligatory contributions to be paid to the seigneur.

Villeins were not the only group to submit complaints and help requests to the council. The analysed material shows that it was mostly the parish priests and innkeepers who initiated such procedures. The free royal town as seigneur had the advowson (*jus patronatus*) to appoint parish priests in the villages under its jurisdiction, and the city council therefore controlled all ecclesiastical income while at the same time being responsible for paying the wages of the parish priests and the maintenance costs of their residences. During the studied years, parish priests frequently complained about the poor condition of their dwellings and asked for repairs. Although these requests were not turned down by the city council, it seems that maintenance and renovation of these buildings was a slow and cumbersome process. In one case, it took three years to repair a collapsed fence at a priest's house.<sup>21</sup> The city was also the primary holder of innkeeping privileges and rented out the local inns and taverns, which were apparently in similarly bad shape: The tenants operating the inns complained about the state of the buildings, including leaking roofs and collapsing wooden walls. Their main grievance, however, concerned the villagers who violated their innkeeping privileges. According to the tenant innkeepers' testimonies, villagers produced their own hard liquor and also regularly smuggled in alcohol purchased elsewhere at a lower price, illegally offering it for sale in their own houses. Although the city council ordered an investigation, all cases were closed due to lack of evidence, and no action was taken.<sup>22</sup> It should be kept in mind in this context that it was not the city itself that suffered damage from these violations, as it simply rented out the buildings and assigned innkeeping licenses. The Košice administration seems to have been much stricter and more consistent in cases where the city's own profits, such as those resulting from the use of woodlands, were at stake.

The index of the council records reveals that almost a quarter of all cases listed in connection with Košická Nová Ves and Myslava concerned woodland use and management.<sup>23</sup> This is partly due to the geographical location of the villages and the extensive manorial woodlands in Košice's possession, but it also demonstrates the vital importance of wood as fuel, as timber for building, and as a raw material for the production of objects for everyday use. In addition, woodlands played a key role in animal husbandry as areas for pannage, browsing, and grazing. It comes as no surprise that instances of wood being stolen are mentioned often in the city council records. Even more frequent, however, are cases concerning villagers' appeals for wood from the seigneur – with a wide range of justifications. Peasants could obtain wood only with seigneurial permission and under the supervision of the city's foresters, and they had to pay a fee or provide a service in return. The deliberations on such requests show that the city exercised its rights in a strict manner and strove to safeguard and promote its own

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21 AMK MS 1792/1841, 5884/1842, 2819/1844.

22 On the poor state of the inns and taverns, see for example: AMK MS 3755/1842, 3924/1844, 880/1846. On the illegal production and sale of alcohol, see for example: AMK MS 1364/1842, 185/1843, 420/1843, 4895/1845.

23 A detailed index of the minutes of the town council's meetings was prepared annually and attached to the minutes of the respective year in a separate volume. The index lists the cases discussed in alphabetical order, with the number of the respective council decision and a brief reference to its content.



interests.<sup>24</sup> Seigneurial authority, however, went beyond the assertion of city privileges: The parish priest of Myslava regularly asked for free wood to make coffins for the poor, and the city council granted these requests every time.<sup>25</sup> Still, it is clear that villagers also frequently tried to circumvent the official procedures of manorial woodland management. A typical example of such offences was that peasants performing wood cutting as their compulsory labour would sometimes steal small branches. In February 1844, the people of Košická Nová Ves were obliged to cut down 164 oak trees for the city. According to the forester's calculations, however, the firewood received was only about half of the expected amount as a result of the villagers taking home the rest of the wood as "fallen branches."<sup>26</sup> In another instance, the villagers offered to cut up firewood for the city for free on the condition that they would be allowed – "according to old custom" – to take home the small branches deemed unsuitable for fuel. The city council rejected this offer in order to prevent abuse of the kind mentioned above.<sup>27</sup>

Cases involving manorial services, levies, and compulsory labour represent another category frequently encountered in the records. Villeins repeatedly appealed to the Košice city council for a reduction of manorial services and levies. Sometimes they complained that the levies imposed were higher than they should have been. In times when unfavourable weather damaged the crops and poor yields were expected, they asked for a reduction in the amount of produce to be paid; in other cases it was the amount of compulsory labour they disputed, asking the seigneur to waive at least a part of it. The city council did not inevitably reject such appeals and was sometimes willing to ease the peasants' burdens after thorough investigation. On the other hand, the appeals recorded by the city council show that the villagers understandably seized every possible opportunity to try to have their duties reduced. For example, the peasants of Myslava requested a reduction of their levies in 1841 and 1844 due to poor harvests, but the city council turned down their pleas.<sup>28</sup> In 1842, however, when a hailstorm caused severe damage to the crops, the council organised a site visit and subsequently approved the peasants' request to lower their levies.<sup>29</sup>

Peasants failing to perform compulsory labour posed a major problem for the city council as well. In the period under scrutiny, it frequently had to deal with cases of such "stubborn peasants" who neglected to show up for manorial work.<sup>30</sup> The enforcement of this obligatory service seems to have been a recurring problem for the council, though detailed information on the matter is available only for the years 1846 and 1847. Between autumn 1846 and autumn 1847, peasants skipped 15 per cent of all compulsory manorial labour.<sup>31</sup> This extent of eschewing obligatory work must have been exceptional, however, and was probably due to famine striking large areas of Europe from 1845 onwards. Unfavourable weather condi-

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24 See for example: AMK MS 2408/1841, 2665/1841, 4429/1841, 752/1842, 3755/1842, 6071/1842, 1802/1843, 3269/1844, 5723/1844, 6984/1844, 6252/1845, 7574/1847.

25 AMK MS 1251/1841, 2071/1842, 961/1843, 6040/1844, 1602/1846, 210/1847.

26 AMK MS 1008/1844.

27 AMK MS 5683/1841.

28 AMK MS 4213/1841, 1538/1844.

29 AMK MS 4229/1842.

30 AMK MS 3594/1841 or 1497/1847. Both sources use the adjective stubborn ("makacs") to characterize peasants reluctant to perform the compulsory labour, the *corvée*.

31 Kivonat, AMK MS 4261/1848.

tions resulted in poor harvests in combination with the potato blight – which, as is widely known, caused the most disastrous famine in Ireland. In Hungary, it mostly affected the hilly northern regions where crops were scarce.<sup>32</sup> The situation in Košice was most severe during the second half of 1846 and the first half of 1847. According to the accounts of the manorial estates, the famine considerably weakened the population: Epidemics swept the region and the death toll was on the rise. Some families abandoned their tenant plots, something previously unheard of in Košice's history. In response to the situation in the villages, the city council decided to decrease the amount of compulsory labour and even reduced the levies, as it was simply impossible to force the population to pay them. To tackle the crisis, the council's first move was to examine the situation. Its main objective was to ensure a continuous production of food, which was also in its own interest. Most of the measures taken therefore involved the peasants still capable of working in the fields, who received sowing seeds, seed potatoes, and fodder for their livestock on multiple occasions on the condition that "in more fortunate years, the same amount should be given back to the city," meaning that aid was provided in the form of a loan.<sup>33</sup> In order to combat the famine, the council also had to maintain public order both within the city and in the manorial estates. Beggars who left their homes trying to escape hunger, "roaming and spreading diseases," were seen as the greatest threat.<sup>34</sup> The city unsurprisingly became a magnet for people in need, and the city council assigned guards to watch the roads leading to Košice so that beggars trying to reach the town could be stopped. The guards were ordered to differentiate strictly between beggars coming from the city's villages and those from other settlements, however: According to the council's decision, the former likewise had to be sent back to their homes, but the city tried to secure provisions for them similar to the aid it provided for its own needy inhabitants. Once a week, the city judge had to report back to the council on families who needed aid, and the administration regularly dispensed food rations. The soup cooked for this particular purpose was distributed among those who "could not prepare a meal for themselves due to illness or old age" under the supervision of the local parish priests and village judges.<sup>35</sup>

Košice thus served as a vital source of support for the villagers in times of need. As a letter composed in the name of a village judge put it:

"Except for the world's Creator, we have no other patron and caretaker to turn to in our greatest need but the Honourable and Noble City Council, which is our only hope. We therefore appeal to them as our most gracious perpetual overlord, prostrating at their feet with the deepest humility. We the peasants of this village are in a crying and

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32 On the famine, see e.g. Gábor Czoch, *La gestion de la famine en Hongrie, 1845–1847*, in: François Walter et al. (eds.), *Les cultures du risque (XVIIe–XXIe siècle)*, Geneva 2006, 139–154; László Ungár, *Az 1845–47. évi felvidéki éhínséggel kapcsolatos intézkedések Pesten és Budán* [Actions undertaken in Pest and Buda in response to the 1845–47 famine crisis in north Hungary], in: *Tanulmányok Budapest múltjából* 6 (1938), 170–179.

33 AMK MS 1867/1847.

34 AMK MS 3910/1847.

35 Czoch, *A városok szíverei*, 176. The so-called Rumfurt soup, a dish also known as the "soup of the poor," was made of onions, potatoes, barley groats, lard, peas, and beans, and was seasoned with vinegar, salt, pepper, and ivy leaves; it was cooked for several hours until it thickened.

desperate need, and if the most honourable Seigneur does not deign to have mercy on us unhappy villeins, by the spring we will surely all perish of hunger.”<sup>36</sup>

The crisis passed, and a comprehensive report submitted to the government authorities by the council in the spring of 1848 suggests that the danger of starvation was indeed successfully averted by the municipal leadership.<sup>37</sup> There is no mention in the sources of mass starvation in Košice or the villages under its jurisdiction.

As demonstrated above, the city council acted mostly upon economic considerations in times of crisis, though mercy and benevolent patronage were also important factors. The contemporary leadership of Košice gives the impression of a calculating seigneur that was clear about its own interests while at the same time assuming responsibility for its subjects and acting as a patriarchally supportive custodian. This tone was generally typical for all the investigated council records, not only for those associated with the famine crisis: The city council’s attitude towards peasants was consistently strict, but it never acted in a despotic manner. It aimed to manage the system effectively and according to its own priorities. The peasantry, on the other hand, looked for loopholes in the regulations and tried to take advantage of lax control and the seigneur’s generosity to secure greater freedoms and material benefits.

The new legislation passed in 1848 and the emancipation of serfs entailed far-reaching consequences for the unique connections between the town and its villages. Nevertheless, the new administrative regulation concerning the villages as well as the practical implementation of the abolition of serfdom were not immediately settled. This would occur only after the defeat of the revolution and the war of independence that broke out in the autumn of 1848, and further research is necessary to analyse these transformations. It is worthwhile in regard to the subsequent developments, however, to cite an incident illustrating how upholding old customs and implementing new top-down processes became intertwined at the local level, shaping the interactions between the town and its former villages. In the autumn of 1848, the peasants – this time without the mediation of their parish priest – approached Košice with an appeal, as was customary: They once again asked for a donation of wood from the manorial forests to make coffins for the poor. The city council responded that “according to the most recent regulation, as all seigneurial bonds have been abolished, the request cannot be granted.” The villagers repeated their request shortly thereafter, and this time the city council decided to grant them the desired wood, albeit not for free: The villagers received it on the condition that they had to pay “the same price as any stranger would be obliged to pay.”<sup>38</sup>

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36 Document attached to AMK MS 1690/1847.

37 AMK MS 2215/1848.

38 AMK MS 5157/1848 and 6649/1848.