

For the Benefit of Generations to Come or for the Sake of Survival?

Measures for Protecting Forests in Early Modern Hungary

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Abstract. The paper discusses the changes in the forest legislation on different levels of early modern administration in Hungary. By using a wide variety of sources—laws, decrees, instructive documents, and letters—it explains how forests were regarded and handled in the period of the Ottomans’ presence in the Carpathian Basin. In analyzing the sources, the paper shows how the importance of protecting and taking care of forests at different levels of administration can be attested, what the goal of this care for wooded areas was, and how the presence of the Ottoman-age wars changed the ways forests were used in the frontier and the hinterland.

Keywords: Forest management, Ottoman wars, conservation, mining, landscape change, environmental history

“It is certainly known to you my Lord that at the town of Murska Sobota [Muraszombat] there is no forest where trees for the sake of the *palanka* [a wooden palisaded fortification] could be felled but you would have to go wherever you find them.”¹

“In the borders of the village of Pucza [in the borders of Csákánydoroszló] there was a really old pasture, that because of the carelessness of the *pro-visores*, stewards, and *ispánok* was destroyed. The forest took it back, but

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1 “Nagod ellöt nilvan vagion hogh az muraÿszombati varosnak ninchen ollian erdeje ahol palank karot vaghatnanak hanem oda köl meniel az hol talalnak.” Letter of Ferenc Lippich to Ádám Batthyány, 8 June 1652 MNL OL P 1314 no. 29 425.

beforehand 225 cartloads of hay had been harvested there [annually]. The steward should have the pasture cleansed and cleared.”²

The above two sources from the mid-third of the seventeenth century tell two stories of forests in the broader frontier zone of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, in some areas, either because of the construction of palisaded fortifications or for other reasons, there was a lack of forests, at least in high forests; on the other hand, because of the lack of the usage of pastures, reforestation began that endangered the hay-supply originating there. Both Murska Sobota and Pucza were in the hands of a wealthy Hungarian noble family, the Batthyánys. They had one of the largest landholdings in Western Hungary, and much of their lands lay in the frontier zone of the two polities. As such, they not only were heavily involved in organizing effective farming on their holdings but also had to take all measures to protect them from frequent Ottoman raids and plunders in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, even in periods of peace.

In the wars for military defense strategies, for fuel and firewood, for building military buildings, and for other purposes as well as in the economies, forests were of major importance. Hence, measures of managing forests had an important role both in legislation on different administrative levels, as well as in documents connected to the administration of individual estates. The perceptions of forests unfolding from contemporary sources, and the ways war raging in the frontier zone changed the perception of forests are the main questions this article addresses. In doing so, first, it sketches a brief overview of the main research results on early modern forests in the Carpathian Basin. After that, three groups of evidence are briefly presented, laws and royal decrees, decisions made at the gatherings of noble counties, and sources of private land management, which in this case will primarily consist of letters. In analyzing the sources, the paper explains how the importance of protecting and taking care of forests at different levels of administration can be verified and identifies the goal of this care for wooded areas.

When studying the history of forests in the early modern Carpathian Basin, research has been preoccupied with the problem of the loss of forests, and in general with changes in the extent of forest cover on the country level. This can be largely attributed to Hungarian historians' anti-Ottoman sentiments in the early twentieth century. In the important overview of Hungarian history written in the interwar period by two prominent historians, Bálint Hóman and Gyula Szekfű, this view was

2 “Ugian azon pucza neveő falu hataran vagion egi nagi örög Reéth, az ki tisztartok, birak, safarok, es ispanok gondviseletlensege miat el pusztult, Erdeőne leot, az kinmeg teőmet az eleöt, két száz huszon eotszekér széna. Méltó hogi ez monstani Tisztarto az rétet eőszszel meg irtassa és meg tisztitassa.” MNL OL P 1322 Urbáriumok III. No. 20. (Urbarium of the Manor of Güssing [Újvár, Némétújvár], ca. 1630) Urbarium of Csákány. fol. 166.

largely emphatic in the description of the impact of the Ottoman occupation.³ The image of settlements abandoned due to Ottoman plundering and forests, and plowlands becoming wastelands presented in a chapter by Szekfű was later criticized by scholars in different disciplines, including ecologists, historians, and archaeologists. Forestry experts were also critical of this theory already in the interwar period.⁴

Nevertheless, referring to the loss of forests is still prevalent and, even more so, in the context of the frontier zones of Ottoman-Hungarian wars, where in many cases the literature assumes complete deforestation. In a recent article, it is argued that even though locally the felling of trees for military tactics or for the sake of constructing wooden palisades may have caused a scarcity in forest resources—especially in high forests, the trees of which could be used as building material, the consumption of these fortifications was probably rather limited and may have had only a local impact on the forest cover.⁵ Despite recent results in the assessment of the impact of the Ottoman wars on waterways, forests, and pastures, a comprehensive re-evaluation of landscape changes in the areas affected by the Ottomans either by their constant presence or by occasional plundering still needs to be done.⁶

While the early modern times have recurrently been considered from an environmental perspective as a period of ecological crisis, another series of work on early modern forest history is also to be noted as in many ways it existed parallel to what has already been introduced. As early as 1947, István Imreh drew attention to and published a series of sixteenth to eighteenth-century sources from eastern Transylvania, the Székely Lands (Ținutul Secuiesc, Székelyföld) that presented a different image. These sources are village regulations written in vernacular Hungarian and meant to control the rights of the usage of the natural resources at the commonly held lands in the Székely settlements, including forests.⁷ In Imreh's footsteps Ágnes R. Várkonyi praised these fascinating sources as unique traces of care for the forests, and conscious awareness of the importance of maintaining some special balance with the environment.⁸ The sources repeatedly draw attention to the dangers of resource overuse and emphasize the importance of preserving the forests for future generations. Both Imreh and R. Várkonyi saw these sources as unique forms of

3 Hóman and Szekfű, *Magyar történet*, vol, V, 6. (written by Gyula Szekfű)

4 Vági, "Van-e hazánkban"; Weidlein, "A dülönévkutatás"; Kaán, *Alföldi kérdések*, 11–43.

5 Vadas and Szabó, "Not Seeing the Forest for the Trees."

6 Ágoston, "Where Environmental and Frontier Studies Meet"; Vadas and Szabó, "Not Seeing the Forest for the Trees"; Vadas, *Egy határfolyó környezettörténete*; Sárosi, *Deserting Villages*, 57–94.

7 Imreh, *Székely falutörvények*; Imreh, *A rendtartó székely falu*; Imreh, *A törvényhozó székely falu*.

8 R. Várkonyi, "Ökológiai gondokodás"; R. Várkonyi, *Pelikán a fiaival*, passim.

conservation policies and forest management that may have stemmed from ancient practices.⁹ Two aspects are worth noting about the uniqueness of these practices. First, the Székely Lands had a rather peculiar landownership system, with large areas in the border of villages remaining commons throughout the early modern period.¹⁰ This necessitated much more systematic regulation within the community than with privately owned lands. The second point to be considered is that these regulations also occur elsewhere—throughout Northwestern and Central Europe—if there were significant commonly held lands.¹¹

This twofold image of early modern forest history of the Carpathian Basin is still prevalent in the literature—for some communities, it was a period of constant crisis and a period of the loss of the forested landscape, while for others, it was a period of maintained balance with nature. Along with this rather simplistic view, there has been little consideration in Hungarian scholarship of how the perception of forests changed in the administrations of different European polities at that time. In the past roughly twenty years when historians have devoted considerable attention to forest resources in the early modern period, several analysts have argued that in various parts of Europe, and even outside it, this is the period when forests started to be understood as finite, which resulted in a more conscious management of the remaining resources with a significant involvement of royal administration and legislation.

The promulgation of rather complex legislation on the use of forest resources has been shown in several polities, ranging from Spain through the Venetian Republic, parts of the Holy Roman Empire, and the Ottoman Empire, to as far as Japan.¹² The factors that influenced the change in the extent of available forest resources as well as, of course, the chronology of the process differ in each case, but the problem itself, i.e., understanding the finiteness of the resource, was similar in the above polities. The control of natural resources was an increasingly important aspect of

9 Imreh, *A törvényhozó székely falu*, 244; R. Várkonyi, “Ökológiai gondolkodás,” 59.

10 Tagányi, “Földközösség,” 216–18.

11 Keyzer, “Sustaining Premodern Heathlands”; Starlander, “Conflict and Negotiation”; Sundberg, “Nordic Common Lands and Common Rights.” See also several other studies in de Moor, Warde, and Shaw-Taylor, *The Management of Common Land*; Laborda Peman and de Moor, “A Tale of Two Commons.”

12 For a concise overview of the relevant legislative efforts in Europe at the time, see: Wing, *Roots of Empire*, 19–28. For the different countries, see: Wing, *Roots of Empire* and Arroyo and Trápaga Monchet, “Forestry, Territorial Organization” (for Spain and their colonies); Appuhn, “Inventing Nature” (for the Venetian Republic); Warde, *Ecology, Economy, and State Formation* (for Germany, esp. Württemberg); Mikhail, *Nature and Empire*, 128–136 and White, *The Climate of Rebellion*, 28–31 (for the Ottoman Empire); Falkowski, “Fear and Abundance” (for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth); Totman, *The Green Archipelago* (for Japan).

state-building in the early modern period. In addition, it served as a platform where state control could be expressed.¹³

To gain a comprehensive image of how Habsburg and local administration considered forests, the paper looks at different levels of decision-making, different authorities that had a word in the utilization of forest resources in early modern Hungary, i.e., the state ruled by the Habsburgs, the county, and individual landowners

Sources of three levels of the administration—country, county, estate

Three levels of legislation and decision-making are discussed in this paper. First, laws and decrees from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On the one hand, I chose to include royal decrees from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (up to 1700).¹⁴ These sources provide a good basis for analyzing the Habsburg policy towards forests in the Kingdom of Hungary. The royal decrees of the Habsburg rulers were included in the so-called *Corpus Juris Hungarici*. This—unofficial—collection of Hungarian laws was first gathered in 1584 by Zakariás Mossóczy and Miklós Telegdi.¹⁵ From that time on, laws passed were regularly published in thick volumes throughout the early modern period and the modern times. In 1896, celebrating the millennium of the conquest of the Carpathian Basin by the Magyars the publication of a new series was launched, the editorial work of which was led by Dezső Márkus. This series was the basis of the analysis of forest-related laws in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Most of the legislative documents concern the strategic importance of forests and say less about the royal initiative of forest management, which I have pursued by studying the instructions to the royal officers of the ruler's estates. To gain a more comprehensive view of the royal policy towards forests, and especially to understand whether there is any sign of the changing control or perception of forests, one further type of source is included in the present analysis: royal instructive documents to the chief officers of the royal domains.¹⁶ Two types of documents were consulted when doing the present research. First, the general instructions sent to the leading officers of royal domains were examined, such as the ones edited by István Kenyeres in the above-cited two volumes. Second, one document was studied

13 E.g., Arroyo and Monchet, "Forestry, Territorial Organization."

14 Kolosvári and Óvári, eds., *Corpus juris Hungarici. 1526–1607; Corpus juris Hungarici. 1608–1657; Corpus juris Hungarici 1658–1740.*

15 Mikó, *A középkori Magyar Királyság törvényei.*

16 Kenyeres, ed. *XVI. századi uradalmi utasítások*, vol. I–II.

that was addressed to forest administrators in general. This document, the so-called *Constitutio Maximiliana seu norma silvas camerales propagandi et colendi* was published in 1565 and followed the German antitypes applied in Austria. The document mostly concerns the forestry of the mining areas in Upper-Hungary (today's Slovakia), nonetheless proves to be one of the best sources to shed light on how forests as resources were perceived in the mid-sixteenth century.

The second group of evidence that was consulted when writing this article consists of forest-related decisions at a lower level of administration, on the level of the noble countries. From the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, the noble countries took up new roles. While in the Middle Ages their role was almost exclusively the administration of justice, in the aftermath of the Battle of Mohács (1526) and the deep political crisis of the coming decades, local administration became increasingly important.¹⁷ Noble counties from the mid-sixteenth century onwards were among the most important decision-making forums, where, apart from jurisdiction, local governance, taxation, as well as military issues were discussed.¹⁸ It is from the last quarter of the sixteenth century that the decisions of these gatherings were put into writing (or came down to us). To understand the role forests played in the life of counties, especially at the frontier, the proceedings of these gatherings have been consulted in the case of four counties in Western Transdanubia (*Dunántúl*): Vas, Sopron, Zala, and Győr (Fig. 1).¹⁹

For the regulation of forest use on the local level, an important estate complex has been chosen that belonged to the Batthyány family. Going back to the late medieval period, they were amongst the wealthiest Hungarian families. Not only were they the wealthiest but from the sixteenth century onwards, they had one of the most complex administrative systems of all private landowners in the country. This went a growing literacy related to accounting. A prominent member of the family, Ádám Batthyány I (1610–1659) radically reformed farming methods and the economy of the Batthyány estate complex.²⁰ Part of the reform included building a highly professional and decentralized administrative system. As part of this, the heads of the administration, the *provisores* (*tisztartó* in Hungarian) of the different manors, had to inform the landlord, Ádám Batthyány of all farming, trade, and administrative

17 Tringli, “Megyék.”

18 Dominkovits, “Vármegyei vezetők” (with reference to the most important literature).

19 For Vas: Tóth, *Vas vármegye*, vol. 1–2; for Sopron: Tóth, *Sopron vármegye*; Turbuly, *Sopron vármegye*; for Zala: Bilkei and Turbuly, *Zala vármegye*; Turbuly, *Zala vármegye*; for Győr: Gecsényi et al., *Győr vármegye*. See part of the original sources online: adatbazisokonline.hu (accessed: 4 December 2021).

20 Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*; Póka, “A Batthyány-birtokkomplexum igazgatása”; Vadas, *Egy határfolyó környezettörténete*, 61–68.



Figure 1 Counties and major fortifications in Transdanubia around 1590 (map prepared by Béla Nagy)

issues in the settlements under their authority. This is reflected in the immense number of accounts, letters, and *urbaria* (terriers) preserved in the well-kept archives of the family. The almost 50,000 letters sent to Ádám Batthyány (and the thousands his father Ferenc received) that are available reflect a systematic accounting of the estates. After the death of Ádám in 1659, the administration quickly fell apart, which is reflected in the drastic decrease in the number of documents related to the administration, including letters, terriers, and instructive documents.

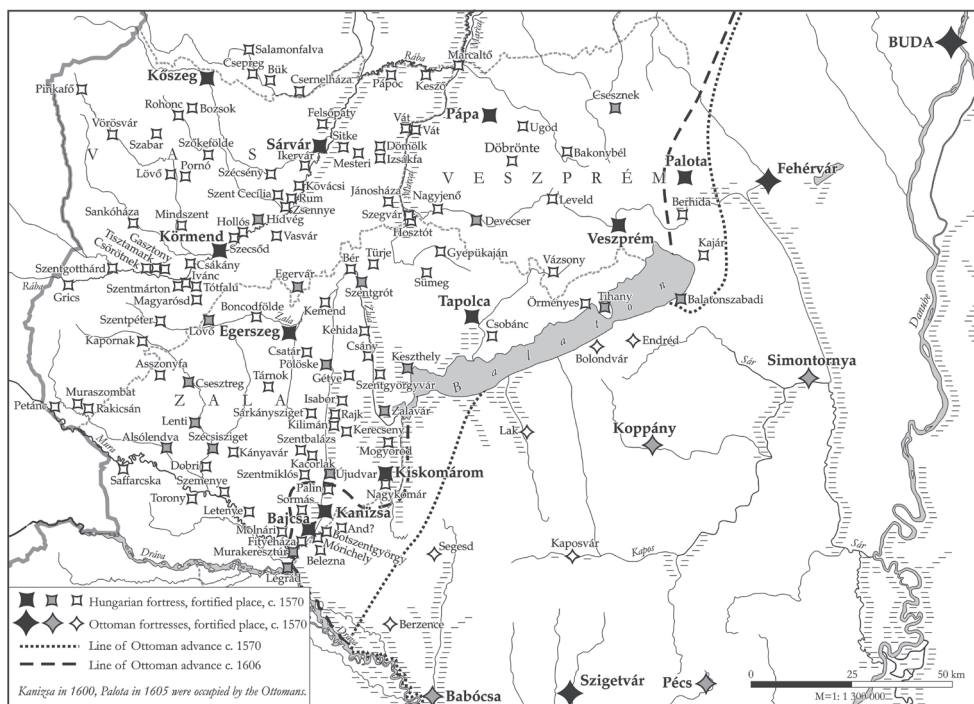


Figure 2 Western-Hungary and the fortifications in the region after the fall of Kanizsa (1600) (map prepared by Béla Nagy)

The estate complex was organized around the small town of Körömend. From the Fifteen Years' War (1591–1606) onwards, the town was at a strategic location in the broader frontier zone between the Kingdom of Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. As such, it was not only the center of the local economy and farming but of the military with a series of fortifications along the River Rába (Raab) where the town lies.²¹ Because of this, there were two different administrative systems in Körömend: the military, and the civilian. The defense of the town was in the hands of the captains or rather of the vice-captains, as in most cases the latter were office-bearers who

21 Vadas, *Egy határfolyó környezetétörténete* [For the history of the frontier]. See: Pálffy, “The Habsburg Defense System”; Pálffy, “The Origins and Development.”

resided in the town. They were responsible for the maintenance of the planks and the moat. They had to organize supplies for the German mercenaries who lived in Körmend and were in charge of guarding and controlling the riversides—watching for the Ottomans. The issue of border defense was, however, very much connected to the local economy and farming. Mills and mill dams regulated the water levels along the river, and forests provided an opportunity to control the right bank to hinder raids. The latter also concerned the leaders of the civilian administration, the *provisores*, who had to manage local farming, as some of the lands of the manorial complex were on the right bank. Because of this dual role of forests, in the thousands of letters, instructions provided to the *provisores*, an important role appears to be attributed to forests.

Forest legislation in early modern Hungary—from the Kingdom to the county

Following the Battle of Mohács and the gradual occupation of the central plain areas of the Carpathian Basin by the Ottomans in the 1530s and 1540s, the most important endeavor of Ferdinand I and his successors on the Hungarian throne was to secure the remainder of his newly gained realm. This is well reflected in the forest-related legislation, which almost exclusively concerns the protection of the country from the Ottoman advance. The most important element of these regulations was to secure forest resources for the sake of war. The basis of these laws was Ferdinand I's 1563 decree in which he authorized the cutting down of forests in similar cases—both for fuelwood of military complexes and for fortification works—which was renewed by later Habsburg rulers and extended to other areas:

“It has been established that forests of lords, such as nobles, that are in the vicinity of the places to be fortified (if these places do not have enough forests of their own) can be freely cut down for the buildings and the wall of the fortifications, but for that, and only for that purpose.”²²

This proved to be the basic principle followed throughout the presence of the Ottomans in the Carpathian Basin. Some of the later regulations specified the areas from which trees could be cut to ease the fortification works; nonetheless the regulations provide little insight into the royal policy towards forests.

22 “Statutum est etiam, ut silvae, tam dominorum, quam nobilium, locis muniendis vicinae, pro fabricis, et structuris munitionum finitimarum (quae scilicet proprias, et sufficientes silvas, ipsae non habuerint) tantum, et non in alios usus ad succidendum debeant esse liberae.” Kolosvári and Óvári, eds, *Corpus juris Hungarici. 1526–1607*, 492 (1563, no. 22). See furthermore: 802 (1596, no. 51), 886–88 (1600, no. 17).

One further issue related to forests appears in the early modern laws of Hungary, and that is the potential threats associated with forests. Roads crossing them were prone to robbers and bandits, which rulers tried to minimize to stabilize trade and secure the related income.²³ In response to the presence of bandits in the mid-sixteenth century—probably not independent of the growing internal crisis—in 1548 Ferdinand I decreed the following:

“As these robbers, who tend to endanger the safety of roads, usually hide in thick forests in that area, it has been decided that forests along roads should be cleared [of trees] in the width of 200 cubits by the tenants of the neighboring counties so that the robbers would not have a chance.”²⁴

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, apart from the above regulations, very few decrees addressed the issue of forests at all in the Kingdom of Hungary. This was somewhat different on the level of the counties, where forests had a crucial importance and were the foci of many local negotiations in each of the counties discussed above.

The most significant issue that unfolds from the proceedings of the county gatherings is frontier protection and the role of forests in it. While on the level of the state, Habsburg rulers took measures to secure forest resources for the construction of the major fortifications that served to protect Vienna—such as Győr, Komárom–Komárno (Révkomárom), or Nové Zámky (Érsekújvár)²⁵—that meant to withhold the main Ottoman campaigns, for the counties in addition to these, minor raids also proved threatening. In trying to prevent them, the self-organization of defense on the county level proved crucial. This included several measures that is in all the above counties’ decisions.

In several decisions, the landlords of the counties obliged themselves to fell a certain number of trees for building smaller fortifications, ramparts, and other safety measures. Not only did they have to cut trees but, in some cases, their tenants had to transport the felled trees by cart to the construction site.²⁶ There are further forest-related issues also appearing in county decisions. First, there is a good number of occasions when forests were cleared for strategic reasons, so that Ottomans would not be

23 Cf. Szilágyi, “Utakról és utazókról.”

24 “Et quia latrones hujusmodi, a quibus infestari solent itinera, in partibus illis sylvarum densitate solent delitescere, statutum est; ut hujusmodi sylvae, per ducentorum cubitorum spatium, circumquaque penes vias, per colonos vicinorum comitatuum succidantur, ut commoditas illis latronibus sit sublata.” Kolosvári and Óvári, eds, *Corpus juris Hungarici. 1526–1607*, 244 (1548, no. 49).

25 Pálffy, “The Habsburg Defense System”; Pálffy, “The Origins and Development.”

26 See e.g., Turbuly, *Sopron vármegye*, vol. 2, 15 (no. 453).

able to approach the frontier unperceived.²⁷ Second, Vas County recurrently ordered the felling of trees into rivers, flooding certain areas and hindering crossing.²⁸ This was practiced widely from the early years of the Ottoman advance in the Carpathian Basin. In the 1570s it was the north-south running valleys in Zala County that were regularly flooded in these ways, and following the fall of Kanizsa (today Nagykanizsa) in the center of Western-Transdanubia, it was mostly the valley of the Rába and the gallery forests that served the protection of the hinterland.²⁹ This is reflected not only in the county decisions of Zala and then Vas County, but is very much put forward in the letters and other sources connected to the military and the civic population of the area. This is shown by the letters sent to Ádám Batthyány I and to other members of the family, as well as by instructive documents from the period.

Forest management at manorial complexes—royal and private

While on the level of the Kingdom, as well as on that of county administrations, forests mostly appear in the context of war and frontier protection, at the level of private land ownership and land-management, they were important sources of income and considered as economic assets. The case of the estate complex of the Batthyány family, mentioned in the introduction to this article, well reflects this fact. Their case is particularly interesting, as their policy towards forest management could not disregard the proximity of the frontier zone, and the leading members of the family were involved in military defense.

The manorial complex studied here with Körmend in its center only had one major forest, the so-called Dobogói Forest, supplemented by some smaller groves. This woodland was situated at the confluence of the River Rába and the River Pinka,³⁰ one of the former's larger tributaries. The trees—mostly oak—could withstand temporary water cover in the forest, but the lack of acorns, which were the basis of pig foraging for a good part of the year, caused problems in the economy. The Dobogói Forest was one of the two forbidden forests (*silva prohibita*) at the manor. “Forbidden” or “prohibited” forest is a term frequently found in the legal evidence in Hungary at this time. Dozens of *urbaria* refer to their existence, which helps understand the idea behind their formation in the second half of the Middle

27 Bilkei and Turbulý, *Zala vármegye*, vol. 1, 45 (no. 208), 46 (no. 216); Tóth, *Zala vármegye*, vol. 3, 41 (no. 1938).

28 On this in details, see: Vadas, “A River Between Worlds”; Vadas, *Egy határfolyó*, 69–98.

29 Tóth, *Vas vármegye*, vol. 1, 45 (no. 120), 155 (no. 584), 243 (no. 719).

30 “Item penes eandem possessionem Nadallja silvam dolorosam et glandiferam ad prefatum castrum Kermendh pertinentem inter fluvios Raba et Pynkwa in territorio dicti dominij Kermend existendi sitam.” MNL VML XII.1. Jegyzőkönyvek. 1589. no. 85. fol. 120.

Ages.³¹ These were forests that formed part of the landlord's private property, usually referred to as an allodial part of their holdings. "Forbidden," or in Hungarian *tilalmas* or *tiltott* refers to the utilization of forests by the tenants. This forbidden nature of the Dobogói Forest is important, as every single time local administrators needed wood or wanted to use the forest, they had to ask their landlord for permission. The letters testify to intensive usage. The main function—as usual with oak forests—was to provide acorn (for masting), while the timber produced was initially only of secondary importance.

The Dobogói Forest's importance in providing acorns for pigs is emphasized, for instance, in a letter from 1646. It explains how the local *provisor*, as was usual for issues related to local farming and provisioning, warns the landlord that the acorns left in the woods after a flood would only support the pigs for about a month.³² This estimate may have been cautionary—or intentionally exaggerated to urge reaction from the landlord—, but by the end of the year, there was no mast left at the domain.³³

Pigs provided an important income for the landlord, and probably to the locals who drove their pigs to the forests in secret, as well as to administrators who also had their animals there for months. Accepting pigs by local administrators in allodial forests was a recurrent issue that is well reflected in regulations (instructions) of royal estates in the Kingdom of Hungary, as well as in the regulations of princely estates in Transylvania. The so-called *Compilatae Constitutiones*, published in 1669, collecting the laws passed in the 1650s and 1660s in Transylvania includes the following on this issue:

“Therefore, when driving the pigs of the treasury out for the acorn to the royal manors and the forests, the officers of the district shall arrange to have enough acorn, and the pigs should be taken to the royal forests with due consideration [to the available acorn]. Up to the present, there have been numerous abuses by the vice-officials, who would not allow the local poor to drive their pigs to the forests, but instead took in pigs to herd amongst those of the royal treasury.”³⁴

31 For the Szabó, *Woodland and Forests*, 60, 66.

32 Letter of István Nemsem to Ádám Batthyány, 28 September 1646 (MNL OL P 1314 no. 33 647).

33 Letter of István Nemsem to Ádám Batthyány, 22 December 1646 (MNL OL P 1314 no. 33 651).

34 “Ennek utána mikor makkra hajlatnak a fiscus sertés marhái, a Regius fundusra és erdőkre, azon széeknek tisztai illendőképpen intézzék el, honnal juthatna illendőképen makk, s ahhoz képest hajtassanak a fiscus marhái a regius funduson lévő erdőkre. Mivel pedig sok helyeken eddig abutáltak a vicetisztek, sokszor a magok erdeikből a szegénység marháit kirekesztvén, más idegen marhákat fogadtak a fiscus marhái közzé.” Kolosvári and Óvári, eds, *Corpus Juris Hungarici, 1550–1848. évi erdélyi törvények*, 303.

At Körmend, the Dobogói Forest had a role not only in herding pigs. Although it was not primarily reserved by the Batthyány family for their usage to harvest timber, the Forest proved an important timber reserve in case of emergency. For instance, in early 1648, after a major flood on the River Rába, when it turned out that all the wooden parts of the manorial mill had to be replaced,³⁵ the wood was provisioned from outside the domain.³⁶ But when there was an immediate need, such as in 1641 or in 1651, the landlord was asked to provide permission for the use of the forbidden forest for harvesting timber.³⁷

Even though the Dobogói Forest was not used systematically for wood supply, it had to be regularly maintained, especially after floods. A letter from 1655 leaves no doubt about this. After a flood in February 1655, the accountant of the castle of Körmend orders tenant peasants from two nearby villages, Boldogasszony and Győrvár (both belonged to the manorial complex for only a short period), to collect the fallen trees in the forest. The job was not completed for a while, as a few days later the Rába inundated the forest again and the tenant peasants had to be sent home.³⁸ Eventually, the fallen trees were collected, and a letter dating from ten days later tells of timber processed there and prepared for delivery to the mill's dam.³⁹

It seldom happened, but there is at least one occasion when tree was harvested from the forbidden forest when the emergency was only 'celestial'. In a letter, the provisor of the estate András Hidasy asked for permission from the landlord, Ferenc Batthyány, the father of Ádám I, to allow the harvesting of timber from the forest to build a dwelling for the preacher as winter was approaching.⁴⁰

35 "Mivel az Nagod parancsolatia szerint az Uyvarj álcz ala iút volt az itt valo malom nyzetni, azt mondgya az aálcz, hogy itt az minymeö faia vagion az malomnak, az mind oda vagion..." ["as ordered by you my lord, the carpenter from Güssing came down here to see what happened with the mill here. The carpenter says all the timber of the mill is busted"]. Letter of István Nemsem to Ádám Batthyány, 3 January 1648 (MNL OL P 1314 no. 33 676).

36 Letter of István Nemsem to Ádám Batthyány, 20 January 1648 (MNL OL P 1314 no. 33 677).

37 Letter of András Hidasy to Ádám Batthyány, 16 September 1641 (MNL OL P 1314 no. 19 265), and letter of István Nemsem to Ádám Batthyány, 21 March 1651 (MNL OL P 1314 no. 33 801).

38 "Kegmes uram ha Ngod io valia Dobogoi Erdöben nemmÿ dült fa vagion Györvarÿ gialogokat, Boldogaszony falviakat ra haitom, es hasogatast csinaltatok, s, az vár, elöt valo keret be keritem ne legien az vár kert nélkül, be is iútek volt az gialogok, de nagy Viznek miatta haza boczatam úketh..." ["My lord, as there are many fallen trees in the Dogobói Forest in case you gave permission, I could order the tenant peasant of Győrvár and Boldogasszony to chop the trees, and I will have the garden in front of the castle surrounded by a fence so that the castle would not be without a garden. The peasants came to do the work, but I had to let them go because of the high waters"]. Letter of Mihály Szokoly to Ádám Batthyány, 12 February 1655 (MNL OL P 1314 no. 48 128).

39 Letter of Mihály Szokoly to Ádám Batthyány, 22 February 1655 (MNL OL P 1314 no. 48 121).

40 Letter of András Hidasy to Ferenc Batthyány, 18 September 1622 (MNL OL P 1314 no. 19 075).

These sources testify to a well-defined set of regulations regarding the forbidden forests. Nonetheless, regulations sometimes did not meet practice, which is reflected not only in alien pigs being kept in forests but, naturally, in other trespasses as well. Two examples from the holdings of the Batthyány family testify to that. Both are related to the illegal felling of trees. A letter of complaint was sent to Ádám Batthyány by an administrator at nearby Csákány (cited in the introduction) that tells of tenants who ‘tricked’ the forest-shepherd (*erdőpásztor*) and used the felled trees as firewood.⁴¹ The winter was not particularly cold according to regional reconstructions, which shows that such forests were probably recurrent places of trespasses and were not products of extremely harsh winter conditions.⁴² It was not only the tenants who probably posed a threat to these forests, but a letter from a few years later complains that the local forbidden forest was completely destroyed by soldiers stationed in the small fortification.⁴³

It seems that on the local level landlords such as Ádám Batthyány took numerous measures to take control over the incomes connected to the forests. In this process, banning the common usage of forests was an important step. This move towards conscious management of available resources is well reflected in the above-mentioned instructions of royal officers of the royal domains. The instructions recurrently refer to the lack of care for forests and the possible incomes that could be realized by the conscious usage of these areas.⁴⁴ Even more typical of the management changes—or the idea of managing woodlands—is the above discussed *Constitutio Maximiliana*. The document, known in Hungary as a “forest-directive” (*erdőpátens*), reflects very complex ideas of managing forests that officials had to follow. It includes a set of regulations on managing the ruler’s forests (King Maximilian II at the time) but also surveyed the available resources. The level of detail and the purpose of the survey is highlighted by a passage from the document:

“On the other side, to the left, there is a nice pine forest mixed with beech. As of now, it has also been devastated by the shepherds of the goatherd; we order and will have them banned [from the forest] so that our forests would serve the goals of our copper smelter more carefully. [...] Leaving Bistra, our officers went back to Schemnitzka, from there they rode alongside the Schemnitzka Stream to Polonka, then on foot [they went to] to the River Hron. Christoph Falbenstainer from 1548 until now has lived

41 Letter of Ferenc Gencsy to Ádám Batthyány, 25 February 1643 (MNL OL P 1314 no. 15 839).

42 Dobrovolný et al., “Monthly, Seasonal and Annual Temperature Reconstructions.”

43 Letter of Ferenc Gencsy to Ádám Batthyány, 15 September 1649 (MNL OL P 1314 no. 15 883).

44 See e.g., Kenyeres, *XVI. századi uradalmi utasítások*, vol. 1, 111 (no. 7), 212 (no. 15), 226 (no. 28), 354 (no. 25), 411 (no. 16), 435–436 (no. 18), vol. 2, 574 (no. 10), 594 (no. 8), 620 (no. 32), 746 (no. 11).

up the trees along both banks of the River Hron from Polonka towards the Schemnitzka Stream and has the wood drifted on the Hron for the new copper furnace. In this area, only a small part of the forest has been left standing and only a couple of trees have been left at the heights. [As however] these trees are not productive, and neither is the small untouched grove, unlike the other forests, it could not be used for the said purpose, to provide some benefit, we forbid this farming to him and order to leave nursing trees in places protected from winds to facilitate the renewal of the forest. As they noticed there in part of the cleared forest, nothing has been left that could at least give some hope of the forest to regenerate. Furthermore, they noticed, that the tenants of Lehota turned the different places used for charcoal burning and the clearings for their benefit by turning them into plowlands and meadows. We strictly forbid that not only to them but also to anyone who attempts the same, in order to help the necessary regeneration of forests.”⁴⁵

The above quotation is only a small segment of the rather lengthy instruction for handling forests at royal domains. Nonetheless, it helps to identify the main principles along which forestry was envisaged in the mid-sixteenth century Habsburg

45 “Ex opposito huius loci ad sinistram manum etiam pulchra aequae subnigra, fagisque abundans silva est. Eam similiter caprigeni pecoris magistri ac pastores hucusque attriverunt, qui ut hinc quoque cum gregibus suis amoveantur, et ut silva praesertim cum in commodum cupri officinarum nostrarum converti possit accuratius alatur, mandamus ac praecipimus. Wistra relicta commissarii nostri in regressu ad Schemnitzkam, inde Polunkam ac postea secus decursum Schemnitzkae fluvioli ad Granam fluvium equis ac pedibus contenderunt. Ubi incipiendo a Polunka iuxta Schemnitzkam fluviolum ab anno 1548 in hodiernum usque diem Christophorus Falbenstainer ultra spatium unius in longitudinem protensi integri milliaris ex utraque Granae fluvii parte, quicquid illic sylvarum fuit, sustulit lignaque inde excisa ad novam cupri conflatorem officinam per eundem Granam fluvium demisit. Et licet in eo tractu parvam quandam sylvae particulam praetergressus sit, arboresque nonnullas in locis aeditioribus intactas reliquerit, tamen quia arbores illae neque foecundae, neque neglectae sylvulae portiuncula, quam tam aequae ut reliqua ligna ad destinatos usus convertere poterat, quid emolumenti, cum tanti non sit, adferre possit, hoc amplius per ipsum ne fiat, illi interdictum volumus, simulque iniungimus, ut deinceps in locis, ubi a ventorum impetuosos flatibus persistere possunt, arbores foecundas pro renascentibus sylvis relinquat. Compertum enim ibidem est, in utraque excisae sylvae parte prorsus nihil, quod saltem spem aliquam repullulandi prae se ferret extare. Quin et hoc deprehensum est incolas pagi Lehottae exactas areas, sylvarumque ad dexteram excisarum loca, suos in usus pro coficiendis ibidem agris ac pratis convertisse. Quod non tantum ipsis sed et relinquis similia comentibus omnibus pro necessario sylvarum incremento severe prohibitum esse volumus.” – ÖSta FHKa Sonderbestände, Sammlungen und Selekte Patente 3.49 (Waldordnung für Ungarn) (15 May 1565). For the edition: Tagányi, *Magyar erdészeti oklevéltár*, vol. 1, 96–167 (no. 143). The document was produced in German and was then translated into Latin (I used the Latin version in writing the present paper).

administration. The main principle, similarly to what the Batthyány family material pointed to, was to secure every possible income for the Hungarian Chamber (and the ruler), which included locals herding animals in the forests. This is reflected in the above quotation on the ban of herding goats in particular forests. The problem does not seem to have been grazing itself, but the fact that it threatened forest regeneration. This shows an awareness of the difficulty of forest regeneration with sheep and goat grazing.

The most important priority in the *Constitutio* was the facilitation of the mining process, in this case of copper mining, a major income of the Habsburg rulers in the sixteenth century.⁴⁶ That large amounts of wood required, the accessibility of which was crucial to the successful functioning of copper furnaces in Upper-Hungary. This priority is well reflected in the discussion of forests which only proved “useless” if they lacked a waterway to drift timber towards the furnaces.

The above paragraph testifies to a systematic attempt to take control of one of the most important economic resources the Kingdom of Hungary provided, namely wood. This resource was even more crucial in the context of war, as it had a special strategic value as shown by the bans on the trade of this commodity.⁴⁷ This was just as much the case with the Habsburg administration and private landowners, especially those—such as the Batthyány family—that accumulated significant knowledge of farming and administration.

Conclusion

The forest regulations on different levels of Hungarian administration tell at least two stories. The first, very similar to numerous early modern states, is that rulers, as well as landlords on different levels, extended their lordship to forests. On the one hand, this is connected to the commodification of timber and fuelwood, which in the early modern times proved an important source of income, on the other, there was a fear of the exhaustion of forest resources.⁴⁸ Both these processes appeared in other polities in Europe of the period, both in areas where forests were much scarcer at the time,⁴⁹ as well as in areas that were apparently amongst the richest in forests.⁵⁰ This striving for securing the resource can be attested on the level of individual estates,

46 Kenyeres, “I. Ferdinánd magyarországi,” 89. For the importance of mining in the forest resource-use: Romhányi, Laszlovszky, and Pinke, “Environmental Impacts,” 263–73; Magyar, *A feudalizmus kori erdőgazdálkodás*.

47 Várkonyi, *Ünnepek és hétköznapok*, 53–54.

48 Warde, “Fear of Wood Shortage”; Warde, “Early Modern ‘Resource Crisis’”. For Poland, see: Falkowski, “Fear and Abundance.”

49 E.g., Warde, “Fear of Wood Shortage”; “Early Modern ‘Resource Crisis’.”

50 Falkowski, “Fear and Abundance.”

such as those of the Batthyánys, who took several measures to secure forest-related income for themselves. It was not only this family that took measures, but so did the Habsburg family through the instructions sent to the royal officials at different estates of the Chamber, as well as in the forest-directive discussed along these lines.

The forests however tell another story as well, that is only partially present in other parts of Europe, namely their strategic importance in war. This means not only the importance of timber and fuelwood as war material, but rather is a key element of the military tactics of the Hungarian–Habsburg defense against the Ottomans. This is reflected in the legislative sources—the laws decreed by the king—and in the decisions of the noble county gatherings. This role of forests is seen not only in administrative sources on the state or the country level but also appears in the decision-making on forest use on the local level, such as at the frontier estates of the Batthyánys.

The above sources could not shed detailed light on how the Habsburgs and the Hungarian military and civic administrations combined these two purposes; nonetheless, they demonstrate that when writing about early modern forests in the Carpathian Basin, neither a simplistic view that concentrates on the conservation and the concern for the resource, nor its view as a “victim” of wars tells enough.

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