

LETTERS FROM THE BAIÁ MARE ARCHIVES: THE DEBT COLLECTION CASE OF MIKLÓS BETHLEN

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Abstract The paper presents a group of letters written and received by Miklós Bethlen, preserved in the State Archives of the town of Baia Mare, containing a full history of one of the financial matters of the Chancellor of Transylvania. The story revolves around a sum of money lent to the town of Baia Mare by Anna Hátszegi, widow of János Sombori, who was captured by the Tatars in 1660. The woman then left this money to the Bethlen family in her last will. The story begins for Bethlen in the 1680s, the attempts to collect the debt can be traced in five years' correspondence, written by Bethlen and his brothers, and also other dignitaries of Transylvania and the Kingdom of Hungary.

Keywords nobility, personal connections, financial matters, rhetoric of letterwriting

The economic affairs of Miklós Bethlen have been very well researched, and as far as we know, it was an even more frequent subject of discussion of his contemporaries. The Maramureş Direction of the Romanian National Archives in Baia Mare contains a few letters written by him, and most of these letters present a relatively well outlined story of debt collection. The story is interesting not only on account of its characters, but also due to the logic of Bethlen's argumentation, its rhetorical structure, and last but not least, from the perspective of the prudent negotiations of the town officials despite the pressure of the dignitaries. From this point of view, these letters could also be sources for a case study in town history.

The active participants of the story were the Bethlen family members (Miklós Bethlen, his two brothers Sámuel and Pál, and after Pál's death, his son János), the dignitaries interceding in their case, István Csáki, comes of Bereg County, chief captain (*főkapitány*) of Sătmar and judge royal (*judex curiae regiae*), and Sándor Károlyi comes of Sătmar County. Many more of the dignitaries knew about

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Bethlen's legal case and their knowledge was used as arguments in the claims against the town officials. As the letters reveal, Octavian Nigrelli, imperial general and military commander of Upper Hungary, Siegfried Christoph Breuner imperial official (in the letters referred to as Prainer), and even Mihály Apafi I Prince of Transylvania knew about the case. The Prince was familiar with this debt affair not only from the part of the Bethlen family. The correspondence with the Baia Mare town council about this issue is now known from sixteen letters (none of which are written by the town officials, that side of the story can only be deduced from the answers written to them). Eleven letters were written by Miklós Bethlen, two of these signed together with one of his brothers, and the rest were written by intercessors or by Bethlen's administrator, Lőrinc Fekete.¹

The first letter extant – but not the first of the correspondence – is from 1686,² signed by Miklós Bethlen and Pál Bethlen, addressed to the town council of Baia Mare, in which they ask, straightforwardly but with determination, for the sum of two thousand florins lent with interest by “our poor deceased aunt, Anna Hátszegi, wife of János Sombori” to the town, and they complain that although the town would have had to pay back the interest too, they paid nothing. The basis for their claim is Mrs Sombori's will, which they had previously sent to the town council. However, neither here nor in what follows shall we find out why Anna Hátszegi left this sum of money to the Bethlens. At first glance, it could be a family inheritance. Anna Hátszegi, wife of János Sombori is indeed a relative: she is the mother-in-law of the second cousin of János Bethlen, Mihály – mother of Mihály Bethlen's first wife, Borbála Sombori.³ However, the story may be more complicated, if one takes into consideration the story of Anna Hátszegi, as much as we know of it: she was captured by the Tatars.

Georg Krauss mentions in his chronicle Mrs Sombori's captivity when he relates how János Kemény fled to Maramureş to escape the Tatars in 1661:

¹ Probably Bethlen's servant and administrator, his name appeared in other letters of Bethlen as well, see: József Jankovics, ed., *Bethlen Miklós levelei* (Miklós Bethlen's letters) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987), 411, 719.

² The letters starts: “Your Excellencies may remember that last year we wrote already to Your Excellencies...” – so they already contacted the town officials a year before in this case, and that might still not have been the first occasion. Location: Fond 1: Prim. Or. Baia Mare, Acte administrative, anul 1686, fasc. 1., nr. 4.

³ Somewhat more is known of János Sombori of Magyarnagyszombor (Zimbor), husband of Anna Hátszegi. He was the cousin of Prince György Rákóczi I, we also know of his offices, he had an important role in the funeral of Prince György Rákóczi I, he was one of the men who held the body of the Prince. Ildikó Horn, who published the text, noted that János Sombori (d. 1649) was cousin of György Rákóczi I, father-in-law of Mihály Bethlen, and comes of Turda between 1645–49. Ildikó Horn, *Ismeretlen temetési rendtartások a 16–17. századból, (Unknown funeral regulations from the 16th-17th century) Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 5–6 (1998): 765.

However, the Tatars lost track of Prince Kemény in Emberfő Mountain, turned to a different path and did not follow the prince. As we shall hear, the prince went on to Sighet, the next day to Técső, and on the third day to the castle of Huszt, where he camped on the field. So the Tatars lost track of the prince in the mountains, who could thus turn left; this happened because of divine providence. The Tatars moved right, towards Baia Mare of Hungary, and found several thousands of fleeing peasants whom they all captured and took with themselves. In the great haste a noblewoman named Mrs János Zsombori, wife of an illustrious nobleman, was a little late in her escape to Baia Mare and was also captured by the Tatars.⁴

János Bethlen's *História* contains this story almost verbatim:

The following day, that is, on Saturday he [Kemény] crossed the Emberfő Mountain and camped at the feet of these mountains that divide Maramureş and the rest of Transylvania near the village of Oláhlápos [Lăpuş]. He wanted to stay there also on the following day, on Sunday. But around eight o'clock that morning they reported that Tatars were seen not far, to the left. The result was evident. The Tatars sent to chase the prince lost his track on Emberfő mountain and after leaving him behind by mistake on the right, they hurried to Rivuli (which in Hungarian is Nagybánya). The widow of one of the noblemen, János Zombori, was unexpectedly captured together with thousands of peasants and moved on in a hurry. They oppressed regions which were under the supremacy of the Kingdom of Hungary.⁵

Somewhat later, the story is again adopted in a similar way in András Huszti's work *Ó és Új Dacia*.⁶

⁴ Georg Krauss, *Erdélyi krónika 1608–1665*, trans. Sándor Vogel (Miercurea Ciuc [Csíkszereda]: Pro-Print, 2008), 558–559.

⁵ Miklós Bethlen's father started to write his history of Transylvania in Latin in the 1660s. Modern edition: Bethlen János, *Erdély története 1629–1673*, trans. Judit Vásárhelyi, P., afterword and notes by József Jankovics, indexes by József Jankovics, Judit Nyerges (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1993), 96.

⁶ "Bontzidáról Kemény János Szomosujvárra ment, onnan Négerfalvára, onnan az Emherfön á tal Oláh Láposra. A' Tatárok pedig mindenütt nyomába érkezvén, az Emberfön az utat elvesztették, és bal kézre Nagy Bánya felé tértenek , és egy Fő Embernek, a' kinek Neve *Sombori János* vólt, a' Feleféjét sok ezer paraszt emberekkel egygyütt véletlenül el-fogták. Szathmár vidékit fel-prédálták, és a' Dománhidi határon egy rakásra hordották, a'hová Ali Basát-is várták. Az alatt *Kemény János* a' Máramarosi Havason által, Szigeth, Tétső és Hufzt

Anna Hátszegi, wife of János Sombori was indeed captured by the Tatars, in her letter to the Prince of Transylvania written in Bakhchysarai in September 1665 she asked help for her liberation: “Anna Hátszegi, widow of János Sombori, to Mihály Apafi [Prince of Transylvania], beseeching for her liberation from Tatar captivity. Written in the town of Bakhchysarai on 29 September 1665.” The letter was published by Lajos Szádeczky in volume 6 of *Székely Oklevéltár*,⁷ the original is found in the Cluj County State Archives in Cluj Napoca.⁸

Anna Hátszegi arrived home from her Tatar captivity in 1674 at the latest, as proved by the note in the town protocols of Baia Mare, which claim that on 4 July 1674 the town borrowed through Mr Tamás Gyulai 2000 forints from Mrs Anna Hátszegi Sombori when István Dioszeghi was the judge of the town. The interest for this sum is 200 forints yearly.⁹ Another hand continued that the debt has been paid completely and the town is no longer indebted to Mrs Sombori.¹⁰ This proves that Anna Hátszegi lent 2000 forints to the town in 1674, and the debt was listed in the town debtor’s book. The payment of the debt was also listed, and the case was closed: the debt was paid partly in cash, partly by the village of Fernezely (Firiza).¹¹ Unfortunately, the note names neither the time, nor the people of the pay-off (probably because this volume of the protocols lacks at least one page around this note).

felé Szathmár Várába ereszkedett, és magát Cömmendans *Heisterrel* egyben-tsatolta.” Huszti’s work was edited by Sámuel Dienes years after Huszti’s death: *Ó és Új Dacia, az az Erdélynek régi és mostani állapotjáról való Historia*, (Vienna [Bécs], 1791), 276.

⁷ Szádeczky Lajos, ed., *Székely Oklevéltár*, Vol. 6.: 1603–1698, (Kolozsvár: Ajtai K. Albert, 1897), letter 1245, 305–305.

⁸ Location: Pers. coll. Kemény József, fond 594, doc. nr. 762.

⁹ “Város Ados: 1674. die 4. July Nemzetes Sombori Jánosné Aszszonytul Nemes Hatszegi Annatul, Dioszeghi Istvan *Uram* Biróságában levált a’ Varos Gyulai Thamas ur által *Summa* 2000 *forintot*. Interessi ezen penznek annuarim *summa* 200 *forint*.” (Dioszeghi was chief judge [*judex primarius*] of the town from 1672, and praeconsul from 1677. Tamás Gyulai was praeconsul of the town from 1681 and judge in 1684. At the time of writing this letter, he probably had some office in the town council as well.) [The abbreviations used in the letters are written out in italics.]

¹⁰ “NB. Ezen adossagh ki fizetődött egészen, és Fernezely adatot *forint* 1800. a’ többiről kesz penzel contentaltatott, így a’ város már semmivel sem adoss.” Location: Fond 1. Prim. or. Baia Mare, nr. Inv. 283. Protocol 5, p. 72. (previous leaf numbering p. 71. The next leaf in the new numbering is p. 73, in the old one it is p. 76, therefore two pages are missing. This book of the protocols contained the town’s various debts, and it was started by a special occasion: the collection of the tax of 10000 tallers imposed on the town in 1660 by Pasha Seidi Mehmet. This sum was collected as donations and loans of the inhabitants of the town and the neighbourhoods. Later, other debts of the town to its inhabitants were also listed in there.

¹¹ A village situated at around 10-15 km from Baia Mare.

This loan shows that Anna Hátszegi was a wealthy woman. This was probably also a relevant detail in her escape from the captivity of the Tatars. However, we can only make guesses on who helped her to come back home. We cannot exclude János Bethlen, who was repeatedly asked to help to pay the ransom or intervene for other prisoners of the Tatars. Researches of Mária Ivanics revealed that János Bethlen paid the ransom of people captured during the Polish campaign of the Tatars of 1657.¹²

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The story of Miklós Bethlen and Anna Hátszegi, former prisoner of the Tatars, begins thus, from Bethlen's perspective, in 1685 at the latest.

Bethlen and his brother, Pál, wrote from Sibiu to the council of Baia Mare on 11 March 1686, reminding them of their request addressed to the town a year before: to be paid the money that Mrs Sombori left them in her will.¹³ On 20 March, Bethlen wrote another letter to the town, reminding the council of his and his brother's earlier letter and offers that the town could send him the sum more easily as he is staying at the moment in the nearby town of Sighet.¹⁴ The town probably replied to Bethlen, for a week later, on 27 March, he wrote another letter.¹⁵ At that time he was already aware that other people were also hoping to lay their hands on the debt, and Bethlen warned the town that the copy of Mrs Sombori's will clearly showed to whom that sum of money should go.¹⁶ He was also generous: he said he understood the "great misery" of the town, therefore he did not even claim the

¹² Ivanics Mária, *Rabszerzés és rabkiváltás a Krími Kánságban a 16–17. században (Az 1657.évi lengyelországi hadjáratban fogságba esett erdélyiek történetéhez)* (Prisoners in the Khanate of Crimea in the 16th–17th century. Data for the history of Transylvanians captured during the Polish campaign of 1657.) *Századok* 6 (2007): 1483–1514. János Bethlen in his memoirs mentions one case when he paid the ransom. The Grand Vizier wanted the wife of Ghica, Voivode of Wallachia – after the Voivode fled to Poland – but after some wrangling they agreed on 4000 tallers that the woman had to pay in order not to go to the Grand Vizier's camp. Although the Voivode's wife could not pay this amount, János Bethlen lent her half of the sum. The Voivode's wife was escorted to Hungary where her husband resided under the protection of the Roman Emperor. "Jóllehet ezt az összeget a vajdáné készpénzben megfizetni nem tudta, de Bethlen János annak fele részét rendelkezésére bocsátotta. A vajdánét pedig illendő kísérettel Magyarországra küldték, ahol férje a római császárnak az oltalma alatt töltötte a napjait." János Bethlen, *Erdély története*, 248.

¹³ Location: Fond 1: Prim. Or. Baia Mare, Acte administrative, anul 1686, fasc. 1., nr. 4.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Kegyelmetek a Somboriné Aszonnak Testamentumát tudván; tudván azt is, hogy (...) szabadgyon etiam cum praejudicio fratrum et Consanguinorum disponalhat."

capital, only the interest, not only for his own use, but also in the town's interest, so that the town would not have to pay even more interest in the future.¹⁷

The next letter we know of in this correspondence comes from 1688, the only one from that year.¹⁸ Perhaps there was no other letter written between this one and the previous one mentioned. This letter also reveals that the town had not paid back its debt in the meantime. Making reference to the family relations and the testament, Bethlen requested again that the town paid at least the interest.

From the year 1689, no personally written letter of Bethlen addressed to the town council of Baia Mare has been preserved. However, his administrator, Lőrinc Fekete, wrote to the town twice.¹⁹ In a letter dated 24 February 1689, he informed the council of Baia Mare that Bethlen wrote to the *commendans* of Košice about the debt, also mentioning the name of János Dancs, the other pretender to the money (this is the first appearance of his name). Fekete repeated Bethlen's earlier warning not to give the money to János Dancs. István Csáki²⁰ replied to the letter sent by the Baia Mare town council in a letter sent from Levoča on 20 March 1689: since the town had turned to him for justice, he examined Mrs Sombori's original testament which the Bethlens had made available to him, and on that account he ordered the town not to give the money to Dancs, but pay off the Bethlens. He also contacted the imperial general Nigrelli, warning him not to interfere with military force on Dancs's side to get the money. One month after Csáki's letter, the *comes* of Sătmar County, Sándor Károlyi, also wrote a similar letter, somewhat more detailed, to the town of Baia Mare.²¹ Károlyi reminded the town that his father, the former judge royal, also knew about the case and saw who was right in it. On this account he also tells the town to pay back the money to the Bethlens. The next letter is again written by Lőrinc Fekete on 15 April 1689, reminding the council of the preliminaries (that Csáki wrote to Nigrelli on the matter, and, as the legitimate owner of the money was clarified, the Prince was also

¹⁷ "Ami a' Capitalis meg adasat nezi, kegyelmetek sok nyomorusagat és az időnek gonossagat meg tekintven, kivalkeppen penig hogy azon egy *Isten* szolgálai vagyunk; én halaszthatom [word underlined by Bethlen] de az Interestet egy atallyaba meg várom kegyelmetektől – ide, most [to Sighet], mert aval kegyelmetek tartozik és igen felette meg sem terheltetik, nagyobb akadallyara lenne kegyelmeteknek jövődőbe sokkal, ha az Interestis a' Capitalis hatara hadna nőni."

¹⁸ Location: Fond 1: Prim. Or. Baia Mare, Acte administrative, anul 1688, fasc. 1., nr. 9.

¹⁹ The letters written in 1689 are preserved in: Fond 1: Prim. Or. Baia Mare, Acte administrative, anul 1689, fasc. 1., nr. 3. According to the register of the archive, Miklós Bethlen wrote a letter with his brother Sámuel to the town about the debt. This letter is missing from the fascicle.

²⁰ *Comes* of Bereg County, chief captain (főkapitány) of the castle of Sătmar, judge royal.

²¹ 31 March 1689, Sătmar. Sándor Károlyi joined Rákóczi's war of independence in 1703, he was involved in concluding the peace treaty of Sătmar.

informed about it). He reminded the council that the Prince of Transylvania contacted Sándor Károlyi's father, László Károlyi, the previous *comes* of Sătmár (the letter did not say precisely when), after János Dancs had turned to him for legal assistance. (Prince Mihály Apafi I took measures indeed: he had the estates of Mrs Sombori be given to Dancs²²). The truth is no longer at issue, as proved by the intervention of all these dignitaries, and Bethlen urges the council through Lőrinc Fekete to hurry and collect the money, being certain that these interventions will have their effects. Lőrinc Fekete already mentions in this last letter János Bethlen, son of Pál Bethlen who died in 1686, as the third lawful claimer of the debt.

However, after all this, the council of Baia Mare was still reluctant to collect the money. István Csáki ordered the town in February 1690 to pay their debt to the Bethlens without any further delay.²³ Soon after Csáki's letter, on 27 February, Miklós Bethlen also wrote a letter from Košice, saying that he did not want to cause any trouble, knowing that the situation of Baia Mare was different from that of Transylvania (depending on "Hungarian direction" too), therefore he did not want to take the case to even higher instances. Nevertheless, he talked about it with "Prajner" [Breuner] and Nigrelli, but for the time being he only asked the judge royal to intervene in his case. Besides the authorities, Bethlen uses the argument of conscience as well, saying that the town should not delay the payment of the debt but hurry to free themselves of it.²⁴ However, the case was not settled, and Bethlen – right after his return from Vienna with the *Diploma Leopoldinum* – wrote his following letter on 3 November from Kővár. At this point he was already willing to negotiate, and proved his generosity and indulgence: he let go 400 forints of the interest, and asked only for the remaining 600. He did not discuss this concession with his brother, Sámuel, so, if he did not agree with it, he himself would pay his brother's part of the money. His representative is Mihály Ajtai. Bethlen was appointed in the meantime, in October that year, *comes* of Maramureş County. After that, a relatively dense correspondence followed again. Five letters of Bethlen

²² "Apafi Mihály 1688 márcz. 18-dikán Fogarasban kelt levelével megparancsolja Balis Ferencz, somlyai főkapitánynak, hogy néhai Sombori Jánosné Háczei Annának eddig a fejedelmi kincstár számára lefoglalt birtokait Kövecsesi Dants Jánosnak, illetőleg nejének, Szénás Borbálának adja ki." Petri Mór, *Szilágy vármegye monographiája*, Vol. 5. (Budapest: Szilágy Vármegye Közönsége, 1903), 328. One can perhaps suspect that the estates of Mrs Sombori, or a part of them, were pawned to get the money for the ransom – as it was a very frequent solution – and this is how they may have reached in the possession of Dancs.

²³ "Kegyelmeteknek Fő Birój autoritásunk szerent parancsollyuk, az fellyül megh irt nehaj Sombori Janosne kegyelmeteknél lévő pénzt, Interessével edgyüt, ne másnak, hanem emlitet Bethlen Miklós, Samuel, és Janos Urameknek, adgya, és megh fizesse."

²⁴ "kegyelmetek a pénznek megadását ne halassza, hanem igyekezzék könnyebbíteni magokat az adósságtól."

written to the town in 1691 were preserved,²⁵ one of which, the last one, is signed together with his brother, Sámuel Bethlen. The first letter is an answer written on 6 January, sent from Sibiu, to the council's letter written on 8 November 1690 (which was, in turn, a response to Bethlen's letter from 3 November, there were no letters written in the meantime). In this short message, contrary to his previous indulgence, he now applied the means of threat. He wrote he would pay back his own debt with this money, and informed the officials of his decision to make Mihály Ajtai his representative, but, were they not to accept it, he threatened he would transfer it to pay his own debt to a German gentleman who would be perfectly capable to take it from them [the town].²⁶ In May he wrote again. He said that he agreed for them to pay 500 forints less of the 3000 forints debt (previously, in his letter on 3 November 1690, he talked about 400 forints), but he could no longer wait and claimed the whole sum, or else – he threatened them again – he would leave the money to the treasury of Szepes County, to which he was also indebted, and they would take the whole sum of 3000 forints from them.²⁷ The town council replied on 7 June, as indicated from Bethlen's next letter written to them. The payment had still not been made, but for some reason Bethlen was visibly indulged, as shown by his letter sent from Sibiu on 15 June.²⁸ This letter revealed that the town was interested in the original testament, but he said he could not give it away because it also contained other things. But he would send a transcript, an authenticated copy, and the town should do with that for as long as he would go personally to Baia Mare and show the original document to the council.²⁹ He offered to make further concessions again, and suggested that the town pay back the money in two instalments, 1150 forints at Gál's day and 1150 forints at Saint Michael's day. Should the town be unable to pay

²⁵ These are contained in the same fascicle, in three distinct groups.

²⁶ "En ugyan valamiben tudok *kegyelmeteknek* bizony jó szível szolgálni, kész vagyok, de egyáltalán annyi pénzért csak szép szóval contentálodgyam lehetetlen; hanem im Ajtai Mihály Urat elő *kegyelmet* teszen ez irasom által Plenipotentiariusomnak, ha *kegyelmetek* contentál bene, ha pedig nem: egy levelem Betsbe vagy Cassára egy betsületes Nemeth Urhoz [küldöm] a' ki minapibannis kere én töllem azt az adossagot és ugyan Betsbe le akara énnekem tenni azt az adossagot, én annak adom, az tudom meg tudgya venni *kegyelmeteken*, és oka ne legyenek sok *inconventiának*, melyet fog *kegyelmetek* szenvedni miatta, de ell hitesse *kegyelmetek* magával hogy így leszzen (...)"

²⁷ Letter dated 29 May 1691, no place indication. Location: Fond 1: Prim. Or. Baia Mare, Acte administrative, anul 1690–1691, fasc. 1., nr. 1.

²⁸ Location: Fond 1: Prim. Or. Baia Mare, Acte administrative, anul 1691, fasc. 1., nr. 20.

²⁹ The Baia Mare registers contain very accurate and detailed records of all the cases connected to the town. These included all the testaments as well which were somehow connected to the town. Indeed, this story would have been truly complete if I had found Mrs Sombori's testament among these records, which unfortunately I did not. It was either not copied in the registers for some reason, or Bethlen failed to send even a transcript of the document.

the money and would rather pay in kind (“valami haszonnal contentálna”), he should be informed through Ajtai. In his penultimate letter, written in August, he only offered his services to the town.³⁰

In December, Bethlen wrote another letter together with his brother Sámuel. They said to observe the acknowledgement received from Ajtai, and reminded the town that they had already renounced a part of the sum, and although they received some estates from the town, they could make no use of it.³¹

Eventually, by the end of that year, an agreement had been reached between the Bethlen brothers, their nephew and the town of Baia Mare. Both copies of the agreement – the Bethlens’ and the one written by the town – have been preserved in the Baia Mare archives. Another copy was received and signed by Mihály Ajtai, Bethlen’s administrator, as well. The village given in exchange for the debt was handed over on 31 December 1691 (only ten days after signing), as proved by the receipt signed by Péter Balog, councillor of Sătmar. The text of the two documents is basically identical, but the justification of the agreement is somewhat more detailed in the town’s copy: the main argument for the legitimacy of the Bethlens’ claim was the name of János Bethlen, to whose heirs Anna Hátszegi had left the sum of money in question in her will.³² The reason for the testament is unclear: perhaps it was the family relations, or as a sign of gratitude for János Bethlen and his heirs for helping in her release from Tatar captivity, or perhaps both.

Bethlen’s political career probably also played an important role in reaching this agreement. He was elected Chancellor of Transylvania at the beginning of that year, and his powerful office was an important matter also for the town of Baia Mare, which belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary. This is the confusing period following the *Diploma Leopoldinum*, when Transylvania and Baia Mare practically already belonged under the same ruler. Since the documents extant do not reveal the background deals of this agreement (if there were any), one must only advance assumptions about these. Nonetheless, we know that the case was solved after at least six years in December 1691.

³⁰ Location: Fond 1: Prim. Or. Baia Mare, Acte administrative, anul 1691, fasc. 1., nr. 20.

³¹ “sőt annak a hitván helynek is talis qualis contentatioul való elvétele nekünk nagyobb kárunkúl vagyon sokkalt, mert mi annak hasznát sem tudgyuk venni, a pénznek pedig minden nap hasznát vettük volna.”

³² Ibid. “Mi Nagybánya szabad kiralyi Varossanak Biráia, Tanacsa és Jurata Communitassa; Adgyuk tuttokra mindenkinek, a’ kiknek illik ez irasunk altal; Hogy *boldog emlékezetű* Eleink kértének volt Varosunk közönséges szükségére kölcsön Nehai *Tekintetes Nemzetes* Sombori Janos Uram özvedgyetöl, *Nemzetes*. Haczege Anna *Aszszonytul florens* 2000 / hungarical, melly Summat Varosunk, a’ sok terheltetesekek és nyomorusagok miatt, emlitet jo emlekezetű *Creditrixnek* eletiben meg nem adhatván, hatta volt Testamentaliter azt Nehai *Meltóságos* Urnak Bethlen Janos *Urunk* eö *Kegyelme* *Tekintetes* *Posteritasinak*, ugymint *Tekintetes* *Nemzetes* Bethlen Miklos, Bethlen Pal, es Bethlen Samuel *Uraimeknak* eö *kegyelmeknek*.”

The story involves 2000 forints and the interest for five years. Anna Hátszegi, as apparent from the record in the town protocols, lent this money to the town of Baia Mare in 1674. The Bethlens did not claim the interest for the entire period, only for the last five years, meaning that they considered themselves to be legal possessors of this sum only since 1685. The letters reveal quite clearly that the reason for this was not that the town had regularly paid the interest before that date. It is more probable that Anna Hátszegi died that year, and before her death she had personally attended to that business. When the agreement was signed, the town paid 500 forints of the total sum of 3000 forints to which the loan and the interests amounted, and subsequently the parties always talked about 1800 forints, which suggests that the Bethlens eventually made a deduction of 700 forints. The agreement meant at the same time taking mutual responsibility: the town assumes to pay the sum in two instalments, and before the payment is completed, they hand over the village of Felsőfernezely to the Bethlens, which they return to the town when the second instalment is paid with no argument, and take responsibility thereof in the name of their heirs as well. The Bethlens also agreed to negotiate with the other pretenders to Mrs Sombori's money and would not allow them to harass the town with their claim. The agreement specifically mentioned that such a claim could be expected from János Dancs of Kémer, and if the Bethlens did not settle this affair with him, the town would not have to pay the Bethlens, or if it had already paid them, it could reclaim the money. This was one end to the story.

The other end to the story extends into the 18th century. A letter of Sándor Ajtai, Mihály Ajtai's son, written on 5 May 1724 reveals that eventually the town failed to pay, Felsőfernezely was moved into the possession of Mihály Ajtai, who paid the 1800 forints, the town's debt, to the Bethlens. Ajtai's son wrote to the town about his right of possession over the lands and the bridge of the village.

The written sources of this story are thus the 11, hitherto unpublished letters of Miklós Bethlen, two of them signed together with a brother (one with Pál, and one with Sámuel), and the agreement signed with Sámuel, also in the name of János (son of Pál). Two other letters were written in the case by his administrator, Lőrinc Fekete; two high officials, judge royal István Csáki, and *comes* of Sătmar Sándor Károlyi also intervened on behalf of the Bethlens, and several imperial agents followed the case.

Miklós Bethlen's letters were published almost thirty years ago. Their editor, József Jankovics, never considered that the collection of sources had been closed, he hoped that other letters of Miklós Bethlen could still come up in various document collections. His hope was not in vain: today, we know of unpublished letters of Miklós Bethlen from various sources, which should also be collected and published in the near future.

Translated from the Hungarian by Emese Czintos