



Impoverished by Cholera: Widows, Widowers, and Orphans after the 1873 Cholera Epidemic in Kolozsvár

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By analyzing the official sources produced during the communal management of a crisis due to the cholera epidemic, the study focuses on the official definitions of people in need of support as well as the survival strategies of ordinary widows and orphans in the city of Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár in the second half of the nineteenth century. Widows with children were more likely to be considered disadvantaged and receive aid than widowers. Poverty was closely related to a given individual's ability or inability to work. Remarried widows were not considered eligible for aid, regardless of the family's financial resources. The presence of small children was a strong motivating factor for remarriage: widows hoped to get financial support from a new spouse, while widowers needed a wife to care for children. The term orphan often referred not to the family position of a child, but rather to its place within the larger social network.

Keywords: cholera epidemic, orphans, poverty, widows, remarriage

The helpless widow, the abused orphan, and the cruel stepmother are stereotypical figures in both folk culture and literature. The aim of the present study is to describe the individual fates of the widows and orphans behind these stereotypes. In the summer of 1873, the cholera epidemic reached Kolozsvár (today Cluj-Napoca, Romania) and took the lives of 537 people. Censuses of the widows and orphans left behind were compiled to determine who required help. These lists thus offer insights first and foremost into the survival strategies used by widows and orphans of a lower social stratum. They shed light, furthermore, on how the elite of the town defined the concept of orphanhood and, closely connected, that of poverty.

The Legal Background of Orphanhood and Guardianship in Hungary

In every community, the tasks of raising orphaned children were the duty of the family and relatives, undertaken mostly by grandparents and uncles. In their wills, fathers often made their decisions clear as to the guardians and upbringing of their children, as well as the management of their bequests,

listing several possible variations of the latter or rewriting their wills several times in light of any changes in the circumstances of their families.¹ In nineteenth-century Hungary, only children who had lost their fathers were legally recognized as orphans. Prior to the guardianship law of 1877, the guardianship of orphans was regulated in Werbőczy's *Tripartitum*, although these regulations predominantly concerned the wealth of minors. The appointment of guardians followed the order of inheritance based on the protection of the wealth of minors, so it granted guardianship (and, at the same time, the management of wealth and property) to those who were to have a share of the inheritance. In accordance with this, guardians on the mother's side were only appointed if there were no living relatives on the father's side, as stated by Werbőczy:

If, however, the son has male relatives who are due to paternal rights, as well as the inheritance and devolution of the livestock, the inheritance and guardianship of the livestock must be granted to the male relatives and not to the mother.²

The orphan, however, was not necessarily raised by his guardian, since if the mother was still alive, she raised the child in most cases. The guardian's main duty was to manage the orphan's inheritance/estates until coming of age in the absence of the father. The mother as a natural and legal guardian could only have guardianship while she remained a widow. Complications arose if a widow remarried, as the relatives on the father's side took over the management of the wealth so that the new husband and his relatives would not benefit from it. In fear of ill treatment and the squandering of the family fortune, the father could posit in his will that, if his widowed wife were to remarry, the children would be taken from her, "lest they should be abused by the stepfather."³

In 1870 and 1871, guardianship authorities were established in counties, municipalities, and towns to deal with issues of orphanhood. The guardianship law and the responsibilities of guardianship authorities were only finalized

1 Horn, "Nemesi árvák."

2 István Werbőczy, *Tripartitum* (1514), 113/5 §. Accessed November 6, 2019. http://www.staff.u-szeged.hu/~capitul/analecta/trip_hung.htm

3 Horn, "Nemesi árvák," 54–61.

in 1877.⁴ The guardianship law basically followed the guidelines laid out by Werbőczy, but it stipulated with greater precision the responsibilities of guardians and those of guardianship authorities as institutions providing supervision. Guardianship continued to be bound to paternal authority, and the appointment of a guardian was claimed to be necessary only in the lack thereof. The order of possible guardians remained unchanged with one exception: in the absence of a will, the mother became the legal guardian of the minors, but a male guardian could still be appointed to manage the wealth. If the mother was not alive, the next possible guardians in line were the grandfathers on the mother's or the father's side or, as a final solution, the guardianship authority appointed a guardian. The guardianship of orphans of noble birth was rather advantageous to the guardian, as it involved the management of the inherited wealth; thus, conflicts among relatives over guardianship frequently led to litigation. The law included specific articles concerning the upbringing of orphans who were without property or wealth: the responsibility fell on whoever was capable of providing for these orphans or could place them in an institution until they were capable of supporting themselves by working.⁵ As opposed to the guardianship of wealthy orphans, which came with several benefits, taking care of destitute orphans was perceived as a burden, though contributions by children as a part of the labor force in the household were much needed, and children themselves were often exploited as a source of labor.

According to the guardianship law of 1877, minors were legally acknowledged as adults at the age of 24, and from that point on, they could freely dispose of their wealth. Women were regarded as adults from the moment they married, regardless of their actual age. At the same time, the law stated that orphans over the age of 14 could freely dispose of the goods and payments earned with work and service if they provided for themselves. This meant that children 14 years of age could support themselves through their work but were not considered adults.⁶ Even minors engaged in a trade individually could only be declared of full age by the guardianship authorities when they turned 18.

4 Csizmadia, *A magyar közigazgatás fejlődése*, 197–99; Act 20/1877. Accessed November 5, 2019. <https://net.jogtar.hu/getpdf?docid=87700020.TV&targetdate=&printTitle=1877.+%C3%A9vi+XX.+t%C3%B6rv%C3%A9nycikk&referer=1000ev>; Csipes, “Az árvaszék szervezete, működése és iratai.”

5 Act 20/1877, 112 §.

6 Act 20/1877, 4–5 §.

*Sources and Methods*⁷

My research is based on the documents of the Cholera Committee preserved in the archives in Kolozsvár.⁸ The committee was set up for the duration and prevention of the epidemic. The documents include detailed records on the widows and orphans of those who died as a result of cholera, compiled with the aim of providing support for the poor and those in need at the request of the Ministry of the Interior in May and June, 1874.

The number of orphans and widows are added up based on the tables, censuses, and reports found among the documents of the Cholera Committee. Some of the documents were exclusively for internal use, so they reveal how the final list of the people who were granted support was compiled. The first list was a report by assistant physician Mihály Bartha, and it included the names and addresses of 173 widows and the number of children they had. The list served as a guide for district chiefs for the detailed field surveys of districts. Reports by district chiefs also indicated the financial situation of widows, their occupations, and sources of income, as well as the number of their children, their ages, places of residence, caregivers, and sources of livelihood.⁹ The reports were used to compile the list of those recommended for financial aid, so the names of the family members found eligible for support were recorded on five further lists in different versions (lists of those supported). Based on the dates, content, and stylistic features (e.g. words crossed out), one can make inferences concerning the order in which the documents were made, and the documents themselves offer insights into the factors on the basis of which decisions concerning whether or not an individual was regarded as poor were made.

The censuses were compiled in the form of tables, and the order in which they were arranged (according to names of streets) indicates that they were indeed based on field surveys. The lists often include data which those conducting the surveys only could have learned on site, such as the place where the orphaned children were being given temporary lodging and care or the fact that they had

7 I owe a debt of thanks to Ágnes Flóra, archivist at the National Archives of Romania, Cluj County Branch, for having called my attention to and allowed me to consult the documents of the cholera committee.

8 NAR CJ, F 1 Mayor's Office, Documents related to the cholera outbreak 1872–1874.

9 The census was compiled by the following individuals working in the following parts of the city: 1. János Manitzá for the Külmonostor-Külszén district, 2. Mihály Csíki for Hídelve, 3. Gyula T. for the Külmagyar-Külközép district. In the inner city, district captain Lajos Kállai did not compile the data as a table but rather wrote separate reports for each family.

left the city. Furthermore, the word choice is not standard or neutral, which displays a certain subjectivity and uncertainty deriving presumably from the first impressions of those recoding the data: the 51-year-old widow Mrs. Borbála Fodor György Kocsárdi, for instance, who provided for her three children by working the land, was characterized as “not quite poor.”¹⁰

Identifying the families raises several methodological problems, since the records tend to be inconsistent. There are minor differences detectable concerning, for example, the numbers and ages of the children, and the name of the widow was often mistaken for that of the deceased spouse. For this reason, in this paper the records have been complemented with data from registers of deaths, thereby correcting the inconsistencies and identifying nearly 80 percent of the persons indicated on the lists.¹¹

Registers of marriages reveal the rate of cholera widows who remarried and the factors contributing to the decision to remarry or to remain a widow. The research examined widows recorded in Kolozsvár church registers of births, deaths, and marriages over the course of eight years, that is, until 1880.¹² While the censuses always indicated the names of the husbands, registers of marriages often only featured the maiden names of wives, which at times made it impossible to identify widows.

Censuses of Orphans and Widows in Kolozsvár

The huge number of children orphaned at the time of the epidemic shocked the citizens of the city. People were used to losing parents and looking after orphans, but the number of broken families fighting for their livelihood grew at an unprecedented speed in a very short period of time. Information on the total 154 families and the caregivers for and circumstances of 251 underage orphans

10 Other designations included “poor, but able to subsist,” “in the direst destitution,” and “true destitution.”

11 I used all the marriage registers in Kolozsvár, including those for the Calvinist, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, and Jewish communities.

12 Since I only used the registers from the city of Kolozsvár, I was only able to learn about the fates of widows and widowers who remarried in Kolozsvár. Thus, the conclusions I draw may not be applicable in any larger context but apply, rather, only to the people about whose later lives the sources offer some information.

provides a special opportunity to observe the individual life stories and survival strategies of people who belonged to the lower strata of society.¹³

The term underage orphan indicates a child who needed to be looked after and who had not yet turned 18. The age limit of eighteen was determined on the basis of laws in effect at the time and on information provided by the sources. Similar studies regard the age of 13 as the upper limit of childhood.¹⁴ The data, however, are not consistent, and it is often difficult to differentiate between adolescents and smaller children because the only information available is whether the child in question was employed or worked as an apprentice. Thus, children's precise ages cannot be determined. Children of age and married women were named separately, thus they can be identified, even if their exact ages remain unknown.

The Definition of Poverty: Designating Those in Need

After the cholera epidemic, people all over the country were encouraged to donate money to aid widows and orphans left destitute. Concerning support for the poor listed in the censuses ordered by the Ministry of Interior, the municipalities could decide whether to spend the reserves of the guardianship authorities for these purposes.¹⁵ Kolozsvár received donations from the town of Szászrégen (today Reghin, Romania) and from Switzerland for the orphans of those who died of cholera, and mayor Elek Simon gave some of these donations to the orphanage for girls.¹⁶ However, the records do not indicate when the financial aid was transferred to the orphans in the census, nor do they indicate the amounts that were given.

The censuses recorded each member of the families concerned, including several children of age. The financial circumstances of the families were classified

13 I identified a total of 193 heads of families on the lists. In the case of 17 of these heads of families, we do not know whether they had a spouse and a child or children. 22 had no children and were survived only by a widow or widower. The lists contained 396 orphans, 112 of whom had reached adulthood or were married when the lists were compiled and three of whom died. Concerning another 30 children, the sources provide no indication of their ages or their housing situations. As a result, of the total 396 orphans, the present study focuses on 251 underage orphans.

14 Bideau et al., "Orphans and their family histories"; Maddern, "Between Households."

15 *Magyar polgár*, September 24, 1873.

16 *Magyar polgár*, December 12, 1873; *A kolozsvári „Mária Valéria” Árvaház évkönyve 1884*, 26.

into three categories: 1. *poor*, 2. *in adequate condition*, and 3. *in good condition*.¹⁷ The list of names in need of financial support was modified on several occasions due to subsequent clarifications. The best example of such modifications is the case of the nine-year-old Jóska Makó, the stepson of a poor army officer, who according to a report in May was “ill-treated in the hands of strangers.” The boy’s name was not featured in the final list of those eligible for support, since, as indicated by a clarification in the margins, he was in fact being raised by a relative, Mihály Makó paid by his father and thus did not need any external financial aid.

The census takers tried to determine different “levels” of poverty; for instance, they highlighted if an individual was very poor, destitute, or lived in extreme poverty. The authorities differentiated between levels of poverty in order to determine the “degree of need” of individuals in comparison to one another and depending on the amount allotted to provide aid. Those who were classified as “in adequate condition” or “in average condition” were naturally not considered in need of financial support. The financial conditions of some families were not indicated, perhaps because in their cases there was no need for support.

On the lists of those recommended for financial support 46 families can be identified, while the final list features only 35 families (22.7 percent of the families registered).¹⁸ Fully orphaned siblings (ten families) and widowed mothers and their children (18 families) were prioritized, whereas only four widowed women and three widowed fathers were granted support. Widows and their orphaned children were assured a place even on the strictest of lists, as they were unequivocally regarded as poor and disadvantaged due to the absence of the head of the family.¹⁹ Men, on the other hand, were not considered to be in a vulnerable situation owing simply to the fact that they were widowers (i.e. men). Sándor Losonczi, a widowed tailor with four children, for instance, was recorded in the census as being poor, but he did not make it onto the final list. Thus, as a widower who was capable of working, he was not considered eligible for aid, since he was still able to pursue his trade, even if, as the head of the family, he

17 Various terms are used, for instance “very poor,” “without property,” “destitute,” and “in an ordinary condition.”

18 Of the four lists, two were drawn up before May 14, 1874, when it was reported that the final statement had not yet been drawn up. The additions that were made to the third list suggest that it was made for internal use.

19 Oris and Ochiai, “Family Crisis.”

still lived under the most modest conditions. György Heuberger, on the other hand, was considered eligible for financial aid because he was physically disabled and lived in poverty with his seven-year-old daughter and eleven-year-old son. His inability to work made him poor and qualified for aid.

Mothers who remarried were not qualified for financial support either, regardless of their financial circumstances, since the new family was considered a self-sustainable economic unit. 13 of the widows of those who died of cholera (6.7 percent) were already remarried when the census was taken. Remarks by those compiling the lists did not necessarily refer to these women's livelihoods. In the newly formed families, the mother's role as caregiver and the father's role as breadwinner complemented each other nicely, so the children were seen as having a secure future and their financial circumstances were not regarded as a decisive factor.

112 of the orphans recorded in the censuses were of age, so they were not considered eligible for aid. Women were regarded as adults from the moment they married, a fact stipulated by law,²⁰ thus not a single married woman is found among those who were given financial aid. Young women who were able to work (for example in the cigar factory of Kolozsvár) or made a living of sewing or as maids, were not considered in need of aid, regardless whether they were married or not.

According to their contemporaries, the individuals featured on the lists for support were indeed all poor, and no families are found among them who lived under better circumstances and were only recommended for financial aids on the basis of biases. Nothing in the lists indicates favoritism concerning representatives of any professions either, as illustrated by the case of shoemakers. Two district chiefs among the census takers were borough council members of the Shoemaker's Association, and yet only three of the thirteen families of shoemakers were granted support.²¹ Some of these families, such as the Perdelis, were indicated as wealthy. According to the census, Károly Szathmári, who had been a member of the guild since 1869, and his two daughters were very poor;

20 Act 20/1877, 1 §; Act 23/1874. Accessed November 5, 2019. <https://net.jogtar.hu/getpdf?docid=87400023.TV&targetdate=&printTitle=1874.+%C3%A9vi+XXIII.+t%C3%B6rv%C3%A9nycikk&referer=1000ev>

21 In 1872, the Shoemaker's Guild was transformed into the Shoemaker's Association. Mihály Csíki (the chief of the Hídelve district) was a board member, and János Manitzsa (the chief of the Külmonostor-Külszén district) was the president of the association beginning in 1872. On the guilds see Kovách and Binder, *A céhes élet Erdélyben*; NAR CJ, F2 Document of the Shoemaker's Association, 52. Proceedings of the Shoemaker's Guild 1820–1899.

nevertheless, they were not recommended for support.²² This may be explained by the fact that, as suggested by the documents, the shoemakers' association appeared to be a well-operating society which provided aid for members who were struggling, so any shoemaker in need of financial support would have put the association in a bad light.

Although there are no signs of partiality in the lists of people who received financial aid, the absence of widows who lived off the land is noticeable: the final list includes only one mother who worked the land.²³ The more favorable conditions of widows of husbandmen²⁴ left alone after the epidemic may be explained by the fact that small landowner families were self-sufficient, as they could produce the food necessary for their livelihoods. Surprisingly, however, since they were seen as having a place to live and adequate food for their children, farmers' widows with several children were not eligible for financial support even if they had an infant to take care of, which obviously placed a considerable burden on their time and their ability to work.

Taking Care of Underage Orphans

A typology of the lives of underage orphans is a difficult endeavor, since their stories are rather varied.²⁵ As part of a similar research endeavor, Alain Bideau and Guy Brunet examine the possibilities orphans had after having lost their parents. Bideau and Brunet offer several individual yet indicative examples. I agree with their claim that there was no such thing as a "typical orphan," but that there was, rather, a host of different situations that had an impact on orphans' lives.²⁶ Nevertheless, based on the specifications used in the Kolozsvár census, I attempt to delineate some categories of housing and livelihood: 1. orphans raised by *relatives*; 2. orphans raised "*out of mercy*"; 3. *working orphans*; 4. orphans

22 I was able to identify six individuals from the families who had suffered deaths from cholera on the basis of an 1869 list found in the guild documents. With the exception of Károly Szathmári, according to the 1874 census, they were all adequately well-off financially.

23 The assisted widow for whom assistance was provided, Mrs. Katalin Szász József Mezei, still lived on her husband's plot at the time of the census with her two children. She married again in 1876 at the age of 35. Bodányi, *Szabad királyi Kolozsvár város*, 44.

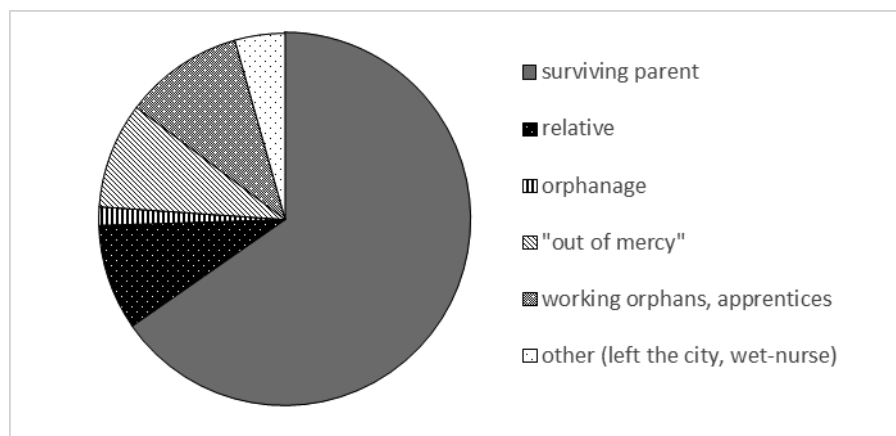
24 The inhabitants of the outskirts of the city, the so-called "hóstáti," considered themselves the urban farmers of Kolozsvár. Their community was forced to give up their land and previous lifestyle in the 1970s and 1980s, when under the communist regime the districts they inhabited were used for the construction of new housing blocks. See Pillich, *Városom éngyűrti*; Gaal, *Magyarok utcája*.

25 Bideau et al., "Orphans and their Family," 321.

26 Bideau and Brunet, "The Family, the Village and the Orphan."

raised in *institutional care*; 5. motherless or fatherless orphans raised by a *surviving parent* (Figure 1).²⁷

Figure 1. Taking care of underage orphans after the 1873 cholera epidemic in Kolozsvár



Relatives

Most of the orphans living in the households of relatives had lost both their parents. These orphans were predominantly raised by their grandparents, uncles, and aunts, who fulfilled their unwritten duties even if they were poor. To the extent that they were able, they raised an orphan or two. The nine-year-old and six-year-old daughters of János Pap, for example, were raised by the mother's sister, Mrs. Sándor Csáki, who was probably a servant living in her employer's household. A total nine of the 23 children (9.2 percent) who were able to reside with members of their families were taken care of by their uncles or aunts, three by elder siblings, five by grandparents, and six by other relatives. In the case of motherless or fatherless orphans, this situation was only temporary, until the parent who had survived could create the conditions necessary to bring up his or her children, for instance until fathers deemed unsuitable for raising their children remarried. Bideau and Brunet explained the decision reached by a few French fathers not to undertake to rear their children even after they had remarried as a consequence of financial concerns.²⁸ As my research revealed,

²⁷ In addition to the aforementioned groups, three orphans had already passed away, six were living in another city, two small children were being taken care of by a wetnurse, and one girl was attending the teachers' training institution in Kolozsvár.

²⁸ Bideau and Brunet, "The Family," 364.

after István Gombos had remarried, his three-year-old child continued to stay with the grandparents on the mother's side, who provided better conditions than the father, despite the fact that Gombos could have provided lodgings for the child.²⁹

Older children were generally taught to take care of younger ones; after the death of the parents, they frequently had to take on the responsibility of raising their younger siblings and providing for the family.³⁰ One could cite a few examples among the orphans in Kolozsvár. After the widow Mrs. Ferenc Májer passed away, her 18-year-old daughter made a living for herself and her four-year-old brother by sewing, while the 22-year-old son of Mrs. Mátyás Mózsza had to take care of his brother and sister, aged fourteen and eight.

Orphaned siblings could not always remain together, especially if there were many of them, which meant that they often had to be separated. The same thing happened when a widow could not take care of all her children alone, in which case the grandparents and uncles took on the upbringing of one or more of the children.³¹ Relatives rarely raised more than two children, as that would have been burdensome financially.³² Károly Balázs and Teréz Kremplin left behind three young children, one of whom, the five-year-old Ilona, was accepted into the Mária Valéria Orphanage with the help of the Women's Charitable Association, whereas Mari, aged two, and Aladár, aged four, continued to stay with Samu Bányai. We do not know exactly how he was related to the late parents, but he was certainly very poor himself. Mrs. Antal Prohászka's five children likewise ended up living separately. Joséfín got married, Lujza was a student at the Teachers' Training College of Kolozsvár, Károly was admitted to the Terezianum Orphanage in Nagyszeben (today Sibiu, Romania), and Ida and Emma were temporarily taken care of "thanks to the kindness of good Samaritans."

29 Bodányi, *Kolozsvár házirtokosainak névsora*, 15.

30 Deáky, *Jó kis fiúk és leánykák*, 82–85.

31 Bideau and Brunet, "The Family," 364.

32 Bideau et al., "Orphans and their Family," 315–25; Maddern, "Between Households," 72; Horn, "Nemesi árvák," 60–61.

Orphans Raised in Institutional Care

After the epidemic, altogether four children (1.6 percent) ended up in institutional care.³³ The Mária Valéria Orphanage for Girls in Kolozsvár, founded the year before, applied to the Ministry of Interior for a state subsidy of 1,500 forint per year to be able to admit children who had been orphaned by the pandemic. The application was rejected, and they were sent a single sum of 500 forint, which made it impossible for them to admit more than a small number of orphans.³⁴ At the same time, the heads of the orphanage probably knew about the financial support granted for orphans of the cholera, since the presidency and board members of the orphanage were all wives of the urban elite. In the end, the orphanage granted admission to only two girls from among the orphans, both in return for payment: Mrs. János Rhédey paid for Róza Orosz's education, and Ilona Balázs's upbringing was paid for by the Women's Charitable Association in Kolozsvár.³⁵

Róza Orosz was admitted to the orphanage in 1873, and Ilona Balázs moved in in 1874. At the time of the May 1874 census, Róza's mother, Mrs. Ferenc Orosz, made a living as a servant. When the list of widows and orphans was compiled, Ilona was being raised by a temporary caregiver in dire poverty. Both girls stayed at the institution until the age of 14. Róza then returned to live with her mother, and Ilona went to stay with her relatives.³⁶ At this point, they were both able to work, thus their upbringing did not cause financial difficulty, since they were a part of the labor force.

Two orphaned boys were granted admission to the Terezianum Orphanage in Nagyszeben. Károly Prohászka, a descendant of a farmer family, finished the eighth grade in secondary school in 1880.³⁷ Only good students were sent to the secondary grammar school. The other students were taught a craft or trade after they had completed the obligatory grades. The other orphaned boy, József

33 Also, two infants were turned over to the city wetnurse, because their father was in prison. The wetnurse was paid using funds from the city's coffers. NAR CJ, F 1 Mayor's Office, 2578/1874.

34 Transylvanian Reformed Church Archives, D3 Documents of the Kolozsvár Mária Valéria Orphanage for Girls, 1 Presidential Diary (1872–1880).

35 The association which ran the Mária Valéria Orphanage was a spinoff of the Kolozsvár Women's Charitable Association. There was considerable overlap between the two from the perspective of their members. *A kolozsvári árvaház évkönyve 1874*, 31.

36 The source does not indicate precisely how the person who took her in was related to her.

37 On the fate of the other four siblings see the subchapter entitled Relatives. *A nagyszebeni kir. kath. Terézárvaház értesítője az 1883/4 tanévről*, 11.

Butyka, was admitted to the orphanage at the age of 13. According to the register of deaths and the admission records of Karolina Hospital in Kolozsvár, József's mother, Róza Butyka, wife of comb maker Sándor (or Elek) Babos, lived in Torda (today Turda, Romania). As József bore his mother's family name, he was probably an illegitimate son. After finishing six grades of elementary school, he was sent to a saddler in Nagyszeben to learn the trade. His apprenticeship ended in 1886. Vocational education lasted for four years, during which time the apprentice was under the supervision of the master, who provided him full board, which meant accommodation, clothing, and food. The orphanage paid a certain amount of money to the master in return for taking on the apprentice and then releasing him, and it paid a final bonus to the boys when they left.³⁸

The aim of the orphanages was to provide knowledge and skills for the children in their care that would enable them to earn their own livings. In the Terezianum Orphanage in Nagyszeben, the vocational training of boys proved to be the most effective way to achieve this goal. For the heads of the Mária Valéria Orphanage for Girls, finding jobs for their girls was a much greater challenge, and they were almost only able to find employment for the girls that was connected somehow to household duties. In the institution, the girls could acquire the skills necessary for housekeeping and learn how to sew, and then they were sent to work as housemaids.³⁹

Working Orphans and Apprentices

Children were called on to do work in every family, depending on their state of development and abilities. This was considered an important part of teaching them to work and of rearing them to function as adults. Losing a parent brought significant changes in terms of children's work as well, since an orphaned child had to take over the roles of the absent family member. Orphans had more responsibilities, and the amount of work to be done increased, and orphans were often compelled to leave the family home earlier and take an active part in providing for their families. Widows were incapable of raising several children by themselves, so, if possible, the older children were sent to work as apprentices or housemaids.⁴⁰ For poor parents, sending one child away to work was a help, since they then had more food left for the children who remained in the home.

38 *A nagyszebeni 1883/4*, 14; *A nagyszebeni 1887/8*, 46.

39 A kolozsvári "Mária Valéria" 1880. Supplement. 10–11.

40 Deáky, *Gyermekek és serdülők*, 21–24; Oris and Ochiai, "Family Crisis," 55–61.

The Kolozsvár census recorded 26 orphans (10.4 percent) working for a salary or as an apprentice (most of them were 14 to 16 years old). Two of the eleven orphaned girls made a living from sewing. The others worked as maids. Seven of the boys were apprentices, and the other eight worked as servants, day laborers, or in another branch of business. None of them was supported by his or her parents. The boys were generally taken on as apprentices at the age of ten or twelve, and their master was obliged to provide them housing, food, and clothing. These young men learned their master's trade in these three to five years as apprentices.⁴¹

Corporal punishment was an everyday reality for apprentices. “The masters who were raised by the slap, the belt, and the switch still cannot break the habit of corporal punishment,” claimed the director-physician of the Kolozsvár State Children's Asylum in a report in 1912.⁴² The physician pointed out a “tradition” of corporal punishment prevalent among craftsmen, which the orphans of the 1874 census who were taken on as apprentices frequently experienced. The relationship between master and apprentices was often compared to father-son relationships, which thus meant that master had the right to discipline. Corporal punishment was certainly used for this purpose, but while at the turn of the century apprentices often lived in the cellar and their clothes were shabby, earlier the guilds made sure they were well kept. The living conditions and overwork demanded from apprentices in towns in the early 20th century was a horrible phenomenon, which may be explained by the fact that at this time the strict orders of guilds no longer regulated the treatment of apprentices, and that with the development of manufacturing industries, cheaply manufactured products meant a huge competition for the small workshops.⁴³

The right to use corporal punishment also concerned orphaned girls employed as housemaids, a practice that was regulated by the Housemaid Law of 1876. Gábor Gyáni's research⁴⁴ provides a comprehensive picture of the issue of housemaids, their social positions, and their daily lives. Despite the dangers and their vulnerable position as housemaids, it was during these years that the young girls could acquire the skills needed for housekeeping and earn the dowry necessary for starting a family, so their job played an important part in their transitions into adulthood. As a housemaid was dependent on her employer,

41 Deáky, *Gyermekek és serdülők*, 247–60.

42 *Jelentés az állami gyermekmenhelyeknek 1907–1910 évi munkásságáról*, 96.

43 Deáky, *Gyermekek és serdülők*, 247.

44 Gyáni, *Család, háztartás és a városi cselédség*.

parents usually sent their daughters to work for families they knew and who, they felt, would surely treat them well.⁴⁵ István Albert from Kolozsvár, for example, sent his daughter to work as a housemaid for a family living in the same street. Four of the orphans of the cholera epidemic worked outside of the city. The rest worked for families in Kolozsvár, so the parents could easily get news about their child's wellbeing.

Orphans Raised "Out of Mercy"

If they were without family members to provide some level of care for them, some orphans were (temporarily) taken care of by godparents, neighbors, or other acquaintances. To use the term used by the census takers, the group of orphans raised "out of mercy" consisted of 23 children (9.2 percent) who had no familial or other clear relationship to their caregivers, at least as far as one can determine on the basis of the sources. Presumably, they had no family tie whatsoever to their caregivers, since family relatives raised orphans not out of mercy but as an obligation. Whenever the census takers did not indicate a familiar relationship, they stressed that the orphans were raised *out of mercy*, which points to the voluntary and temporary nature of the act. The situation of the orphans of the Aikler family suggests uncertain housing and a frequent change of place of residence. According to the sources, the children had no permanent residence. At the time of the census, the twelve-year-old girl was living with a poor relative, and her eight-year-old brother lived "somewhere else."

Not all children taken into strangers' households were fully orphaned. Ten children had one parent who was still alive but who was incapable of taking care of the child owing to poverty or lack of employment. The children were usually sent to live with strangers in the absence or lack of the mother until someone took the role of the mother in the family, for example until the father remarried. Mrs. Julianna Szemeriay Sándor Márkus had two daughters who resided in Sándor Nagy's home while she worked as a servant. The two daughters of Ede Horváth, who was struggling to make ends meet, were taken in by Mrs. Hirlich, wife of a locomotive stoker, and taken to his station in Ung county (today Ukraine). Dániel Máté's orphans, the two-year-old Dani and the three-year-old Róza were given lodgings in the court of Count Mikó out of mercy. The father was a day

45 Deáky, *Gyermekek és serdülők*, 230.

laborer working for the count, and the children were presumably taken care of by a female member of the household.

The examples listed above prove that it was not only children who lost both their parents who could be regarded “orphans” and sent to stay with strangers. The difference between orphans and fatherless or motherless orphans has only recently been acknowledged. At the time, no distinction was made between the two. One’s “ability to raise a child” was thus often determined by the financial situation of the surviving parent. Widowed fathers were not expected to take care of their children either, so those who were incapable of raising their children were exempted from their duties by society. In this interpretation, orphanhood referred to a social situation, i.e. abandonment due to poverty. Thirty years later, in the Ordinance from 1903 completing the Child Protection Act, the definition of *abandoned child* was formulated as follows:

Children without property under the age of 15, with no relatives obliged to or capable of providing for and raising them and with no relatives, patrons, charity institutions, or organizations to provide for properly and raise them, must be regarded as abandoned.⁴⁶

It was children whose relatives were unable to raise them due to poverty that were taken into state care, much like the children who were raised “out of mercy” in 1873.

Widows and Their Orphans

The majority of the children listed in the Kolozsvár census lost one parent in the cholera epidemic, so 164 minors (65.3 percent) continued to be raised by the father (in 25 families) or the mother (in 40 families). As Bideau and Brunet note, as long as the one parent (especially the widowed mother) was alive, young children remained with him or her in the family home, but relatives (uncles, grandparents) were also present in the family’s life and provided support for the widow.⁴⁷ Still, the absence of the father always had a negative effect on the financial situation of the family, even if it did not necessarily lead to destitution or dire poverty.⁴⁸ Widows of craftsmen could continue their late husband’s occupation with the help of apprentices. Secondary literature on the topic offers several examples

46 Ordinance 1/1903 Ministry of Interior; Gyáni, “Könyörületesség, fegyelmezés,” 76–77.

47 Bideau and Brunet, “The Family,” 364–65.

48 Oris and Ochiai, “Family Crisis,” 19.

of widows engaged in their deceased husband's craft for a long time.⁴⁹ Among the widows in Kolozsvár, Mrs. Róza József Bogdán Szathmári, the widow of a shoemaker, for instance, practiced her husband's profession, though not for long. Running the business, doing the housework, and raising her one-year-old son at the same time was too much of a challenge for her, so less than 18 months later, she remarried to a bachelor of the same age. As Eleonóra Géra points out, taking on both motherly and paternal roles at the same time was a great burden, so widows with older children were more likely to be able to continue their late husband's craft or business.⁵⁰ The widowed mothers featured in the census tried to make a living predominantly from domestic service, needlework, sewing, and washing. In farmer families, widows tended to continue farming, but the male labor force proved to be indispensable in the long term, and thus if a widow did not have a son or sons of her own, she was compelled to find a new spouse or take advantage of a son-in-law as a source of labor.⁵¹

Among the women widowed during the cholera epidemic, I identified 32 individuals (16.6 percent) in the registers of marriage in Kolozsvár. Though it was difficult to identify women who had been widowed, as the names of the deceased husbands were not indicated consistently, I could find as many widowed mothers who remarried as widowed fathers. In the following, I focus on the lives of 28 widows and widowers (14.5 percent) with orphaned children (15 women and 13 men). According to secondary literature, widowers remarried at a higher rate, so the similar rate of widowed men and women remarrying is probably due to the low number of the sample.⁵² It is quite probable that a greater proportion of men found new wives from outside of the city, but there are no records of these marriages available. It seems unlikely to me that widowed mothers would have been willing or able to move to another settlement, especially if the house had been the property of the late husband. I think they took this step only in cases of dire need.

Second marriages were generally characterized by some inequality between the spouses in terms of both age and financial situation, since a second marriage was influenced by several factors. Widowed mothers primarily expected their new husbands to provide financial stability, while for widowed fathers, the tasks

49 Szende, "Craftsmen's Widows."

50 Géra, "Városi és kamarai árvák."

51 On peasant widows who managed their lands on their own, see Péter, "Paraszti özvegyek."

52 Pakot, "Megözvegyülés és újráházasodás," 76; Van Poppel, "Widows, Widowers and Remarriage"; Oris and Ochiai, "Family Crisis," 69.

involved with raising children (especially infants) constituted a major challenge and thus the main motivation for remarrying.⁵³ Many of the widows in Kolozsvár were quite young even at the time of their second marriages, sometimes the same age as unmarried women. They were also appealing as potential spouses because several of them, including some of the widows from Kolozsvár, had inherited their late husbands' lands or businesses.⁵⁴ Seven of the 16 women married a bachelor, who thus took on the upbringing of sometimes as many as three orphans (meaning children who had lost their fathers). Five of the 13 widowers married single women, who then took care of their husbands' children by their first marriages.

According to the secondary literature, widows and widowers tended to remarry relatively soon after having lost their spouses.⁵⁵ Widowers rarely undertook the task of taking care of young children alone, and the presence of a stepmother was also linked to the likelihood of a child reaching adulthood.⁵⁶ This was true among widowed parents in Kolozsvár: 21 of 29 widows and widowers remarried within a year of having lost their spouses. The motivation behind this may have been the need to provide care for children in the family. Each mother and father had underage children. The community did not expect fathers to raise young children alone, but it was the father's responsibility to find a suitable person and create the proper circumstances for childrearing.⁵⁷ Károly Kis, one of the widowed fathers in Kolozsvár, remarried as early as one month after his wife's death. The reason for the unusually short mourning period was his one-month-old child, who had been left without a mother, whom he could not take care of, so he married a 23-year-old maiden. The 27-year-old farmer Mihály Szöllősi remarried two months after his wife's death, also because he was unable to raise his small child alone.

As for marriages between a widow and widower, it can be assumed that both parties brought children to the new blended family, but only one such case can be found documented in Kolozsvár, where both the new husband and the new wife had underage children who had lost a parent. Márton Tárkányi and Júlia Engi, who lost their spouses in the cholera epidemic, both had one daughter

53 Pakot, "Megözvegyülés és újránházasodás," 22.

54 For instance, the widow of stonemason János Szabados married the stonemason Ferenc Bálint in August 1873.

55 Pakot, "Megözvegyülés és újránházasodás," 72, 81.

56 Skořepová, "Orphaned children in Bohemian rural society," 225, 229; Åkerman et al., "Survival of Orphans," 85–86, 99.

57 Oja, "Childcare and Gender," 85–86.

when they married in October 1873. They were both Calvinist farmers, so the new marriage did not bring about any changes in their lifestyles. Based on their respective addresses, one sees that, as they were neighbors, they presumably had known each other for a long time, which was probably an advantage for the children, since their new stepparent and sibling were people they knew well. Furthermore, they did not have to leave the neighborhood, as they only moved next door. The girls were roughly the same age, so one could even assume that in this case, two playmates became siblings. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine whether any of the widowers who remarried followed the otherwise common practice of taking a close relative or the sister of the deceased spouse as the new wife, which ensured continuity between the old family and the new.

The sources reveal that most of the widowed persons in Kolozsvár *did not remarry*.⁵⁸ It cannot be determined the extent to which this phenomenon can be attributed to the decisions or preferences of the individuals involved, since in the end, the lives of widows and widowers were predominantly determined by their financial circumstances. Poverty, for example, was not an obstacle to remarriage, as several widows categorized as poor were able to find a new spouse. In contrast, widows living in destitution due to ill health could not remarry, because due to their inability to work, they could not improve their circumstances (for instance a blind mother or a widower unable to make a living for himself). In cases like these, a widow or widower had little to no chance of remarrying.

Nor are data adequate to explain the extent to which the community or the family accepted the independence of widows without children of age or, in contrast, urged them to remarry.⁵⁹ Young widows were still very much under the influence of their families. If, however, remarriage is interpreted as a survival strategy, then the possible reasons the tendency among the widows in Kolozsvár not to remarry may perhaps be explained in several different ways. If she did not have to remarry for financial reasons, a widow may have chosen to remain unmarried for personal reasons. Widows with children who had already reached adulthood or were able to work, for instance, were less likely to remarry, presumably because their children were able to help provide for the family or take over household duties from their widowed mothers so that she could focus on taking care of smaller children.⁶⁰ In families in which the presence of children

58 35 widowers and 52 widows did not remarry.

59 Pakot, "Megözvegyülés és újraházasodás," 82.

60 Oris and Ochiai, "Family Crisis," 29; Pakot, "Megözvegyülés és újraházasodás," 72, 82; Skořepová: "Orphaned children," 225, 228.

who had reached adulthood can be verified, widowed parents usually did not remarry. In the Profanter family, for instance, the two older sons were 20 and 16, and they were able to work as bricklayers, as their father had done, so they were able to contribute to the family earnings while the widowed mother was taking care of her seven-year-old and eight-month-old children.

The function of widows as heads of the household was usually only temporary, lasting only as long as they had underage children.⁶¹ In some cases, it is again difficult to determine whether a widow did not remarry as a consequence of a personal decision or simply because she had a lack of options. If she had several small children, she might have been less appealing as a potential spouse since her new husband would have to shoulder the burden of providing care for them. Mrs. Katalin Dávid József Gyulai had five children. The oldest was nine, the youngest only two months old at the time of the census, and they lived in her house with her. The widow Mrs. György Vinczi also had five children. The youngest was two weeks old, but her 16-year-old daughter and 14-year-old son were already working, so they were able to help her shoulder the burdens of providing for the family. Both women were widows of farmers. It cannot be determined whether anyone else lived in the two widows' households (such as a grandparent) or whether they perhaps relied on assistance provided by relatives living nearby, but they definitely did not remarry. It seems that both managed the households on their own and raised their underage children on their late husbands' farms. In the secondary literature, there are a number of examples of widows who did not remarry. When the mother was left a widow, the family did not fall apart. The underage children remained with their mothers, and there are also records of family members (e.g. a grandparent or sibling) who provided help or moved in.⁶² I believe this might have been the case with the two aforementioned widows from Kolozsvár. Furthermore, neither of them was featured in the list of those who received financial support. Although Mrs. György Vinczi was initially recommended for support, she was left off the final list, and, as the cadastral map reveals, compared to the other farmer, the plot with the house she inherited from her late husband was relatively large.⁶³ The census takers' assessment was probably influenced by their knowledge of widows having inherited properties, which practically meant that, in their cases, housing

61 Oris and Ochiai, "Family Crisis," 33–34; Skořepová, "Orphaned children," 229–30.

62 Bideau and Brunet, "The Family," 364–65.

63 Szabad királyi Kolozsvár város térrajza az új házszámzás szerint [The Map of Kolozsvár Free Royal City], ed. Sándor Bodányi (Kolozsvár, 1869). Dimensions of the map: 119 × 83 cm.

and livelihood were regarded as ensured, so the two widows were not considered poor, even given the responsibilities involved in raising small children.

Since widowed fathers rarely undertook the duty of raising minors alone, the relatively high number of single fathers as caregivers for small children is surprising. Unfortunately, the sources offer no information concerning the help they may have received in providing care for the children with, but based on the register of addresses in Kolozsvár, it is clear that they had relatives who lived nearby. In all likelihood, they had family members who helped more than the data recorded by the census takers would indicate. Farmer József Baga seems to have raised his six young children on his own. The youngest child was only one year old, the oldest eleven. The register of addresses indicates that his plot and the one right next to it were the properties of György Baga's heirs, which may mean that at least one sibling lived nearby. The adjacent plot also belonged to the Baga family, and in the neighboring street there lived a houseowner by the name József Baga. The addresses thus reveal a large family of farmers living in the Hídelve district, so József Baga probably did not have to take care of his children entirely on his own, but received help from female members of the family or the grandmother.⁶⁴

The case of István Albert was similar. He had six children. One of them had reached adulthood, two worked as domestic servants, and three daughters (aged six, eight, and twelve) lived with him. The elder daughter who worked as a housemaid served nearby. György Albert, presumably István's brother or perhaps older son, so again, in this case the members of the family lived nearby.⁶⁵ As for carpenter János Molnár, the explanation may lie in the fact that the eldest of his three orphaned daughters, Zsuzsa, was 21 years old, so she could do the housework and take care of her two younger sisters, aged 9 and 13.

Summary

The aim of the census recording widowed parents and orphans after the cholera epidemic was to assess the social problems caused by the epidemic and to identify and provide support for those in need. Among the beneficiaries, underage orphans and widowed mothers were prioritized. The concept of poverty was linked to the tasks involved in rearing children and a given individual's ability

64 Bodányi, *Kolozsvár házirtokosainak*, 45.

65 *Ibid.*, 15.

(or inability) to work and earn money. For the census takers, a poor person in need of financial support was someone who did not work and/or had a young child, or in other words, predominantly widowed mothers who were raising their children on their own. The lists compiled of widows and orphans of the cholera epidemic and the categories into which people were divided on these lists offer insights into the practices involved in the placement of orphans living in poverty in the nineteenth century, practices in which the family and relatives played a pivotal role. According to the census takers, who were members of the urban elite, the word orphan referred not simply to a child who had lost both his or her parents (the census takers did not even draw a distinction between children who had lost one parent and children who had lost both parents) but also to children whose parents were too poor to provide for and raise them. Orphanhood, thus, referred often not to the position of a child within a family, but rather to the child's place within the larger social network.

The loss of a parent or parents brought about several changes in the lives of young orphans. Most orphans who had lost only one parent were raised by the parent who survived, and the surviving parent was often given assistance by relatives living nearby. One-parent families consisting of a mother and a child or children were more frequent than one-parent families headed by a father, as widowed fathers with minors tended to remarry. The upbringing of children who had lost both parents (or whose parents could not provide for them) was usually undertaken by grandparents and close relatives. Providing care for orphaned children was an unwritten family duty, one which family members usually accepted, even when they were poor themselves. Some of the orphans in Kolozsvár, however, were not related to the adults who raised them, and their uncertain situations were noted by the census takers. Older children actively took part in providing for the family: as the part of the deceased parent had to be filled, they took on more tasks or contributed to the livelihood of the family with their salaries. They could ease the burdens which fell on the widowed parent by working as apprentices or housemaids so that the widowed parent would not have to provide for them. Very few orphans were admitted to orphanages: a total of two girls and two boys were placed in institutions in Kolozsvár and Nagyszeben.

After the epidemic had passed, several young women and men had been widowed, and their private lives can be traced back according to the information in the registers of marriages. The decision to remarry was determined by several factors. For women, the main motivation to remarry was to ensure a livelihood

for their family, while men mainly sought to provide security for their young orphaned children and to find a new mother to take care of them. Second marriages characteristically came rather quickly, before the end of the year of mourning. In the sample examined here, the rate of those who did not remarry is rather high, which underlines the importance of predominantly financial factors. Some were unable to find a new spouse because they were poor, while others, in contrast, were under no financial pressure to find a spouse, as they were able to subsist on their own. Alongside financial factors, help from children who had reached adulthood or a relative living nearby also decreased a widowed parent's need to remarry.

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