

About the history of Csokfalva and its Unitarian church. By KELEMEN LAJOS.

(Hungarian language original in Kereszteny Magveto, 1982, 3:135-139.)

Csokfalva is a pretty Székely village on the banks of the Little Küküllő, one of the eastern border villages of the old Marosszek. It was far from centers of activity, and for this reason it could not become the scene of great events. Its name comes from the personal and family name Csok. Members of this family lived in nearby Küsmöd in the 17th century. The name is spelled correctly with an “o” rather than an “ó”.

The first mention of the village dates back to 1567, when it is mentioned in the Szekler tax census with 25 denars, and with 22 gates. Csokfalva, however, undoubtedly existed centuries earlier than the first written record of it. As a daughter parish, it belonged to the neighboring parish of Szentistván for centuries. From 1332 to 1337, the name of the latter is mentioned three separate times in the list of taxed locations for the crusade planned for the liberation of the Holy Land.

In 1567, only eight of the 125 villages of Marosszek, plus the city of Marosvásárhely, had as many or more taxable gates as the village of Csokfalva. Two years later the village is mentioned again. In the summer of 1569, King John Sigismund, the Elected King, gave a portion of the treasury tax income of Csokfalva and Bede to János Giczy, who became the subject of the King after abandoning the Hapsburg Emperor Miksa, and on 23 December 1569 he gave another portion of treasury taxes to Imre Pataki of Csokfalva. A decade and a half later (May 19, 1583), Dániel Borla and Sára received a new letter of tax exemption from István Báthori for their house in Csokfalva and its attached properties. From then on, history is silent about Csokfalva again, until on August 16, 1602, the tyrant General Basta swore the men of the village to the loyalty of Hapsburg Emperor Rudolf, as he did with the rest of the Szekler population of Marosszek.

The Szekler inhabitants of that time were made up from the rank of lófő, darabont and Szabados (commoner). There were no Szekler lords (primors), nobles or serfs of high rank living in the village at that time. There were five families of the lófő rank (Szekler who served on horseback, and were equal to

the nobles who owned only one piece of land) from Csokfalva. Their names were András Hadnagy, Gáspár Benedekfi, Lukács Farkas, Mihály Rafai and Zsigmond Hadnagy. For two of them, their rank became their surname, and the Hadnagy family still lives in Csokfalva. There were three of the darabont (infantrymen) rank: János Benedekfi, András Huszár and János Nemes. The members of the darabont rank were the next in line after the lófő. The darabonts were organized and privileged as permanent soldiers by Prince Zsigmond Báthori in Marosszék in 1591. Most numerous, with 31 people, were the members of the szabados rank. These were members of the common families who had been reduced to serfdom after the Székely uprising of 1562, but were freed by Zsigmond Báthori in December 1601. Based on the Szekler Charter Archives, we list only their surnames: Csenter, Csibi, Csukez, Faluvegi, Fodor, Huszar, Kamonczi, Kedei, Kilyen, Kis, Kovacs, Markos, Nagy Nigre, Osvat, Rafai, Sebestyen, Simon, Sipos, Szanto, Szazs, Varga, Vas, Vitalius. A total of 39 men from Csokfalva took the oath. On June 10, 1608, Prince Gábor Báthori granted István Balási, János Benedek, András Huszár, György Kovács, András Nemes and Péter Varga from Csokfalva, together with some inhabitants of other nearby Szekler villages, the privileges of the darabont rank. Some of their descendants still live in Csokfalva.

Soon a high-ranking landowner became part of Csokfalva history. On October 16, 1609, Gábor Báthori gave Ferenc Komis a new grant deed for the lands of the part of Erdőszentgyörgy, Csokfalva and Havadtő. The residence of this Szekler lord was in Erdőszentgyörgy, and his mansion was demolished only in 1940, and was dismantled without any plans or photographs being taken. Other landowners followed. In 1628, Mrs János Gáspár Szövérdi, Zsafia Bethlen, protested against the gifting of her farm animals in Csokfalva to Mihály Toldalagi of Iklod by Prince Gábor Bethlen. Several men of the village gained Lófő rank in that century: on March 13, 1652, Huszár András, three years later. During the campaign of György Rákóczi against Vasile Lupu, in the camp of Ploiesti, on June 18, 1655, Faluvégi István and Péter, Mihály Gál, Balázs Nagy, and Mihály Nemes. And on October 12, 1678, Mihály Apafi presented András Farkas with a title of nobility.

Apart from these, the only other traces of the village's history from this century is a long dispute about forests between the people of Csokfalva and the neighboring people of Szentistván.

The first historical records of church life in Csokfalva are only from the end of the first third of the 17th century, although the Reformed congregations, as in Szeklerland in general, were certainly established here by the end of the 16th century.

The church itself initially represented a satellite congregation of the neighboring Reformed mother congregation of Szentistván, and probably only separated from it in the last third of the 16th century, becoming an independent Unitarian congregation, while Szentistván remained Reformed. In Csokfalva the Unitarians were in such a large majority that around 1630 they tried to force the few remaining members of the Reformed church to pay the keep (membership fee paid in bundles of wheat), and they complained to the prince, who of course refused to allow them to collect the kepe.

We see the first written record of the Unitarian Church of Csokfalva in the records of the old Unitarian Church Diocese of Maros, according to which János Farkas gave a piece of land to serve as the church road in 1658 in exchange for the land that was the road to the church. However, the people continued to walk on the old road, which had been taken for a plough, and trampled the wheat, so that the visitation in 1658 imposed a fine of 12 forints for damage by church members, and 3 forints for damage done by private individuals. As the church was then in the hands of the Unitarians, it seems that this church was stronger in Csokfalva from the beginning. It is always mentioned as a separate congregation. The Reformed Church is only mentioned as a satellite church at its first mention in 1662; that church is recorded as a separate church only from the beginning of the mid-18th century in the large register of the Reformed Diocese of Maros, which contains records going back to 1579,

The next entry about Csokfalva is found in the church inspection records of the Unitarian Diocese from 1666. In 1667, in connection with a dispute that allows us to learn the name of the first known minister and the school teacher. The wife of the minister, György Ádámosi, complained against

the school teacher, Balázs Szentmártoni, that he spread the rumor that church authorities decided to punish her with lashes with a thorny whip, and to expel her from the village after. In addition, the school teacher called the priest a hypocrite and he yelled at his own pigs the words "you minister". The complaints proved well founded, and the school teacher was punished.

Later historical records mention the ministers Miklós Bölöni from 1719, János Szentmártoni from 1720 (he continued to pastor there for years afterwards), and Andras Csáka from 1780. In the same years Dániel Csokfalvi, János Karácsonfalvi and Mihály Kováts were the school teachers.

The records also show that the minister and the school master were given 3-3 kalongya (cross or kepe) of wheat and oats by the tax paying church members, of which the master received a third. Those who had no wheat or oats to sow paid the minister 2 bushels of wheat and 20 denarii in place of oats, and the master received half as much. Poor widowed women gave 3 sing (6 feet) of linen, of which 2 sing went to the minister and 1 sing to the school master. In addition, each landowner had to deliver 1 cart of wood, of which two parts went to the minister and one third to the school master. The church specified the delivery of wood as early as 1688, so that two parts of the wood from the six-oxen landowners were to be delivered to the minister and one part to the school master, and similarly regulated the four-oxen and two-oxen landowners. The payment taxes from 1672 onwards, was required to be made in the presence and under the supervision of the churchwarden, on a predetermined day. In 1745, it was also declared that the delivery of the taxes must end at noon, and that the tax payers were obligated to cover the bundles of wheat. Violators of those rules were fined 24 denarii. At the same time, it was decided that any member of the congregation who failed to plough, reap or bring in the grain for hire, or to assist with building the minister's or school master's house or the church, would be fined twice that amount. Those who did not complete the work on the wooden fence around the minister's and the school master's plot and around the churchyard by St. George's Day were fined 1 forint, and in addition they had to complete the work. A church official and the churchwardens reminded the debtors 15 days in advance, and if they did not pay, some of their property with twice the value of their debt was pawned to the church. The pawned property went into the hands of the

minister and the school master, and if it was not redeemed in 15 days, it remained with them.

The first census of church furnishings dates back to 1688. At that time there was a silver cup with a shield-shaped decoration, 2 pieces of 1-pint pewter pitchers, 1 piece of half-pint pewter pitcher, a pewter plate, a knife, a Karakai (Cracow) tablecloth, one embroidered and one striped tablecloth. These were kept in a chest, and were valued at 56 frt each.

That collection was increased time after time through generous donations. For example, in 1695, during his general visitation, the Unitarian bishop presented the church officials with an ornate table cover sent to the church from Kolozsvár by Mrs. János Karai. In the same tradition, in 1748, the synod of Dicszentmárton presented the church with a silver cup with a golden lip, inscribed "Daughter of Benedek Zabó, Kata, 1612." Very interesting from 1722 is the story of the secretary called Daniel who bequeathed to the church a green parchment-bound gradual (hymnal) written in 1698, with the pious wish that it "be kept incessantly on the choir stalls and sing from it to the glory of God." In 1750 Mrs. János Ráfa, Dombai Kata, donated a leather-bound, worn Thordanus gradual; and the large register of the old Unitarian Diocese of Maroskör preserves the names of several women of Csokfalva who donated tablecloths, shawls, scarves for the altar, the priest's chair or the pulpit. In this way, the church was in a position to donate an embroidered tablecloth to the Unitarian congregation of Alsóboldogasszonyfalva in Udvarhelyszék in 1751.

Money and grain reserves were also multiplying. The latter consisted in 1720 of 57 bushels of new wheat and 12 bushels of poorer quality old wheat. Their cash on hand was then 36 forints 23 denarii, and by the end of 1751 it had increased to 240 forints.

We have very little information about the internal life of the church, but numerous records testify that divorces, minor disputes and quarrels among the churchgoers were quite frequent. We find several decisions on church seats. The explanation for this can be found in the fact that churches in Széklerland were once built by public works, and the allocation of seats was based on the rank of the family and the contribution of financial and labor

resources. The seats then became inherited, and the descendants, by right and tradition, held on to them tenaciously. In many places those traditions continued despite the decree of the Unitarian High Council of 1762, which stated that “no one shall have a chair or seat of his own in the church, but shall sit wherever he finds an empty place”.

We mention here as a curiosity from the life of churchgoers the case of János Faluvégi, who left his wife, went into hiding, and after 10 years of absence married another woman in Kökös, in Haromszek. Four years later, he returned home with her, and everything came to light. The secular authorities had the woman lashed, while her husband escaped the threat of severe punishment by going to the service of viceroy Tamás Dósa, who obtained a pardon for him. The church then officially declared his divorce from his first wife and obligated him to marriage the second wife. In the same year Anna Poson brought a divorce suit against her husband, and one of the grounds being that he had not kept his promise to attend Unitarian church services with her.

The first record about the number of Unitarian worshippers is from the beginning of 1693, when the number of tax payers was 58. After the invasion of Transylvania by the armies of Lipót I, in 1693-94 Csokfalva was overrun by German soldiers, who pillaged the village and destroyed its peace. Then, at the beginning of the 18th century, alternating plague and famine ravaged the village so that by 1720 the number of tax payers had dwindled to fifty. When the Unitarian bishop submitted his official census in 1765, there were 255 Unitarian inhabitants in Csokfalva, 76 of whom paid taxes. A census of 1780 estimates the value of the taxes paid at 76 forints 54 denarii to the minister and 40 forints 19 denarii to the school master.