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The Migration of the Slovak Population to Békés County – the Problems of the First Immigrants



Slovak emigration and Slovaks living abroad are an immanent part of the past of Slovaks and are of considerable importance not only for Slovak national history, but also for the present and for the future of the wider European area. The migration of Slovaks to the Lower Land (Alföld in Hungarian) from the late 17th century to the 19th century was a long-lasting migratory movement within the then Kingdom of Hungary and took place in several stages. The Lower Land is an accepted term in Slovak historiography that refers to the central part of the Danube-Pannonian Lowland, which lies on the border of present-day Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Croatia. The core of the Slovak Lower Land consisted of the region of Békés-Csanád, the region of Arad-Banat and the Vojvodina region. In the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, approximately two hundred thousand people emigrated to this area from the Slovak, Upper Hungary provinces. Slovak immigrants gradually created a continuous and compact Slovak settlement in sparsely populated areas, which eventually became the core and starting point of further migration.

Resettlement of Békéscsaba

Békéscsaba¹ is situated in the south-eastern part of Békés County, which is called Békés-Csanád County according to the latest territorial-administrative division. It lies on the Keres Canal, which flows from Gerla to Békés. It is bordered to the north by the swamps of Doboz, Megyer, Kamut and Kondoros. To the east, it borders the town of Gyula and the Kidos and Gerla swamps, to the south Bodzás, Apáka and Földvár, to the west the settlement of Oroshaza and the Csorvás swamp². As for the name Csaba, it is variously mentioned in several written records, e.g. Chaba, Chyaba, Choba, Czaba, Tót-Csaba, Békés-Csaba, etc. The name itself is probably of Hungarian origin, and Csaba was named after a landowner with a similar name. In the 13th century, this locality was referred to as *Csaba mezeje* ('Csaba's field')³.

The Slovak immigrants repopulated the Békéscsaba in 1718 and thus started a new phase of its history and contributed significantly to the development of this settlement in all directions. However, it was not an easy process, and the first immigrants encountered a enormous number of difficulties and complications from day one after settling in Csaba, that arose from securing the most elementary necessities of life.

After the end of the Turkish campaign in Hungary, the Békés region was considerably depopulated and deserted. In the first half of the 18th century, however, three settlements of Slovaks were established there. These were Békéscsaba, Szarvas and Mezőberény. The Slovak immigrants gradually formed a continuous and compact Slovak settlement in the sparsely populated Békés County, which eventually became the core and starting point of further migration. The immigrants came overwhelmingly from the Central Slovak regions, and it can be stated that the dominant part of the Lower Land Slovaks has a distinct and characteristic Central Slovak character. The first wandering serfs settled in Nógrád County as early as the end of the 17th century and eventually left the county together with the large native population. Gradually, they wandered southwards. They found good conditions on the Lower Land road already in the Pest region⁴, where after the Turks left, especially in the south, there was so much abandoned land that everyone could choose as much land as they dared to farm within the free occupation. Three types of settlement can be distinguished in the Békés County:

¹ Békéscsaba – Slovak Békeščaba or Čaba or abbreviated Csaba.

² J. CHLEBNICKÝ, *Čabianska čítanka 1 / Csabai olvasókönyv 1*, Békešská Čaba 1996, p. 20.

³ L.A. HAAN, *Pamětnosti Békeš-Čabánske*, Pešť 1866, p. 5–6.

⁴ J. JANČOVIC, *Z kolísky do Békešskej Čaby*, oslovma.hu/index.php/en/historia/166-historia3/954-jan-janovic-z-kolisky-do-bekeskej-aby [17.05.2022].

- a) unorganised and spontaneous colonisation by individuals – namely, refugees and their families, serfs who fled from their landlord;
- b) direct, already organised migration of settlers from northern Hungary;
- c) migration of settlers from the resettled areas to other parts of the county – or further south, to Bačka, Banat and Syrmia.

All three types of settlement may have occurred simultaneously⁵. For example, settlers from Békéscsaba, Sarvaš and Mezőberény (Slovak Poľný Berinčok) moved in an organized way to Mokra – Apatelek in the Arad province (today Mocrea in Romania) in 1747–1748. In 1753, they settled in Nyíregyháza this way, where they continued to go in larger or smaller groups in the subsequent period.⁶

The founding of new settlements had several causes. It was mainly the overpopulation of the original settlements by natural population growth, the arrival of other settlers from the northern counties, land depletion or difficult living conditions⁷. Free migration or escape from the increased tax burden also contributed to the mobility of the subjects⁸. The coordinated and organised settlement of Slovak serfs in the first half of the 18th century is primarily associated with the name of Baron Joanes Georg Harruckern (1664–1742), who owned estates in the then depopulated territory of the Békés, and partly also Csongrád and Zaránd Counties⁹. Beginning in 1722, Baron Harruckern served as the chief governor of the Békés County. He held this post until his death in 1742¹⁰. Harruckern succeeded in acquiring the town of Gyula and the settlements of Doboz, Csaba, Körösladány, Gyarmat (Füzes), Öcsöd, Vésztő, Szentes and Szeghalom, together with the associated land, from the chamber estates¹¹. These settlements were located in the depopulated territory of

⁵ O. KRUPA, *Príchod Slovákov do juhovýchodnej oblasti Dolnej zeme (Békéška a Čanádska župa)*, [in:] *Malý slovenský národopis*, Békeška Čaba 1999, p. 3.

⁶ J. SIRÁCKY, *Slováci vo svete 1*, Martin 1980, p. 51.

⁷ The main occupation of the settlers was extensive cattle breeding. They cultivated the land only as much as they needed for their livelihood, even in a free-range way. They cultivated a certain area until it was exhausted. In time, the hutland could not provide additional grazing land. The land began to deplete rapidly. O. KRUPA, *Príchod Slovákov...*, p. 4.

⁸ J. GOMBOŠ, *Slovenskí osadníci na Dolnej zemi (Znovuosídlenie Komlóša Slovákmí)*, [in:] *Slováci v zahraničí*, vol. XVI, eds. F. BIELIK, C. BALÁŽ, Martin 1990, p. 50.

⁹ J. DRASKOVICH, *Harruckern János György (1664–1742)*, [in:] *Körösök vidéke. Honismereti füzet*, Gyula 1989, p. 80–83.

¹⁰ Joanes Georg Harruckern was a former supply commissioner (intendant) of the imperial troops and an officer. He came from the Austrian town of Schenkenfelden and was the son of a master weaver. During his military career he drew up the modern supply regulations of the Imperial Army in 1716, for which he was promoted to the nobility. E. KISMARJAY-KONRÁD, *Harruckern János György és telepítése*, Gyula 1935, p. 64.

¹¹ J. MENDAN, *Ján Juraj Harruckern*, [in:] *Čabiansky Kalendár. Na obyčajný rok 1942*, Békeška Čaba 1941, p. 58–59.

the then Békés, and partly also of the Csongrád and Zaránd (Zărand) provinces. At the end of July 1719, Harruckern received these former chamber estates of 700,000 morgens of land as a gift from Charles III with the proviso that, once the real value of the estates had been determined, he would pay the difference of more than 24,000 guilders to the Imperial-Royal Chamber. At first, therefore, he received the property only as a deposit. Later, the Prefecture of Szeged valued the aforementioned estates at 37,000 guilders. In 1722, Baron Harruckern paid the remaining 13,000 guilders. In May 1723, the royal deed of donation came into force¹².

However, news of the large amount of free and uncultivated land in these areas had already penetrated among the Slovak subjects before Baron Harruckern acquired the aforementioned estates¹³. The arrival of the first Slovaks to Csaba was organised by the royal chamber as early as 1717. For example, from that year (1717) we have evidence of the settlement of Békéscsaba by Slovak subjects from Nógrád¹⁴. Significant migration of Slovak serfs from Nógrád is documented between 1720 and 1723. Around 5,000 people left Nógrád in this period, and also went to Bačka (Bácska), Srijem (Srem) and Banat¹⁵.

Békéscsaba itself was gradually settled by the Slovak population in three main waves. Between 1718 and 1723, evangelicals from the Upper Hungary provinces – Nógrád, Hont, Pest, Gemer, and Zvolen (Zólyom City) – came here. At that time Csaba was not completely depopulated. In 1717, there were about 22 mostly Hungarian families living there. In 1718, another 14 Slovak families joined them. By the end of 1719, 46 families with 230 members were already living in Csaba. This was a considerable increase in population. In 1725, there were already 115 families, mostly Slovak, living in Csaba. In this period, however, the settlements were characterised by considerable population instability. On the one hand, new settlers were arriving, but on the other hand, as a result of further migration, they were also leaving. This was also the case in Békéscsaba¹⁶.

¹² M. FRANKO, *Založenie Békešskej Čaby v roku 1718*, [in:] *Studia Historica Tyrnaviensia*, vol. XX, eds. M. HOHÚTOVÁ, M. MAREK, Trnava 2018, p. 72–73.

¹³ The first Slovak subjects arrived in the southern parts of the Lower Land, and thus also in Békés County, already in the 1720s and 1730s. Hungary, Békés Megyei Levéltár, R 1, Vegyes iratok, D 1–10 (18th century).

¹⁴ Nógrád is one of the Slovak regions. Today this region does not form a separate territorial unit; the name Nógrád is used as an informal name of the region.

¹⁵ J. JANČOVIC, *Sťahovanie a vysťahovalectvo Slovákov z Pôtra*, [in:] *Slováci v zahraničí*, vol. IX, eds. F. BIELIK, C. BALÁŽ, Martin 1983, p. 155.

¹⁶ The migration of Slovak subjects to the Lower Land could be divided into three main stages. The first stage covers the period 1690–1710, the second 1711–1740, and the third 1745–1790, which was still felt around the middle of the 19th century. The first stage was characterised by the movement of subjects in Nógrád and Hont. It was mainly a spontaneous migration of subjects. After the Treaty

Harruckern's call also had an impact on the successful settlement of the territories in the Békés County. The Baron promised the new immigrants sufficient amount of land, tax breaks and religious freedom. Between 1740 and 1745 the second wave of settlement of Csaba began, which is confirmed by the high growth of population, which was the result of a new influx of settlers rather than natural increase. Roman Catholic immigrants from Nitra County also arrived in Csaba at that time. However, they were no longer given arable land and were therefore employed as cheaper labour in the surrounding farmsteads and shepherds' huts. In 1745, the number of Slovaks in Csaba increased to 2740¹⁷.

Problems of the First immigrants in Békéscsaba – Agricultural Area

Most of the areas of the Lower Land where Slovak immigrants arrived were either devastated, sparsely populated or uninhabited. In many places, it was literally pristine nature with little or no human intervention. Immigrants had to cultivate, adapt and prepare the new environment for agricultural activity, which they had relatively good experience with at home. They had less experience with flooding, the regulation of swollen rivers and the draining of marshy areas that characterised Békéscsaba and its surroundings. They gradually began to build dykes, embankments and canals in the most exposed areas to combat flooding. Because of this, they first started to raise cattle on the wet, marshy, reed fields and, at the same time, ploughed more and more land for agriculture¹⁸.

Before the Turkish occupation, the main livelihood of the local population was cattle breeding and agricultural production, which, however, was followed by Slovak immigrants with considerable problems. Until the end of the 18th century, livestock production was the dominant activity among Slovak settlers in Csaba. The immigrants were mainly involved in breeding cattle, pigs and sheep. At that time, the majority of the region of Csaba was made up of pastures, meadows and vast swamps where cattle could graze freely for most of the year. Livestock farming was thus able to provide at least part of the basic necessities of life for the immigrants and, importantly, did not require much labour or any special care. The early

of Szatmár, the second phase slowly began, not only in Nógrád, but also more intensively in the Pest and Zátisie. The proportion of the population from the more northern provinces increased. In the third stage, the areas in the southernmost part of Hungary, in Bačka, Syrmia and Banát, were settled. Later, Bački Petrovac, Kulpín, Hložany, Kysac, etc. were also settled. J. SIRÁCKY, *Slováci vo svete...*, p. 31–33.

¹⁷ *Čabiansky kalendár*, Békešská Čaba 2001, p. 37.

¹⁸ L.A. HAAN, *Pametnosti...*, p. 15.

settlers sowed only as much as was necessary to provide the bare necessities of life. It was not until the beginning of the 19th century that grain cultivation became more important in Csaba. The first settlers in Csaba sowed mainly millet, wheat and maize. In the second half of the 18th century, vine cultivation was also found there, as evidenced by surviving written records (inventories) from 1767¹⁹. However, the transition to more intensive cultivation was slow. In the early years, the marshy soil, the lack of necessary agricultural tools and, in particular, the lack of draught animals were significant obstacles to more intensive farming. In addition to the above, the fact that there was no grain market in Csaba, so that the local people had nowhere to sell their grain, was not conducive to the development of agriculture. The nearest such market was in Gyula or Oradea. Transporting grain from Csaba to nearby markets was difficult not only because of the distance, but also because of the poor condition of the local roads²⁰.

The phenomenon of the so-called shepherd's hut, which were isolated agricultural settlements that were established in the district of Csaba probably in the 1840s, is also connected with the breeding of domestic animals, although we do not have direct written evidence of this²¹. As far as more organised craft production is concerned, it was not widespread among Slovak immigrants in the Békés area at the beginning of the 18th century. Individual families were able to produce the necessary handicraft products themselves. The householders even provided their own blacksmithing, milled their own rye or processed the hides of their cattle²².

Overall, it can be concluded that, in the early years of their life in Csaba, the nature of the agricultural activity of the Slovak immigrants was rather a regressive process. It manifested itself, for example, in the use of already outdated forms of farming or in the adoption of some archaic or less advanced agricultural practices taken over from the local population. Thus, the decisive sector of farming activity of the first Slovak immigrants was not agricultural activity but cattle breeding, in which they excelled and which ensured their survival in their original settlements (former homes).

Another problem that the first immigrants in Csaba had to solve immediately after their arrival was the construction of new dwellings and the way of housing.

¹⁹ *Urbarium of 1767*, Békés, Csaba, archives.hungaricana.hu/en/urberi/view/bekes_csaba [16.05.2022].

²⁰ M. FRANKO, *Založenie Békešskej Čaby v roku 1718...*, p. 76–77.

²¹ J. ANDO, *Ludové staviteľstvo v Békešskej Čabe*, sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/magyarorszag_i_nemzetisegek/szlovakok/a_magyarorszagi_szlovakok_neprajza_1993/pages/szlovak/007_ludove_stavitelstvo.htm [16.05.2022].

²² In 1736, the representatives of Békés County complained that there was a shortage of tailors, shoemakers, buttonmakers and haberdashers and that the population had to go to distant markets in Arad, Oradea, etc. to buy their products. J. SIRÁCKY, *Slováci vo svete...*, p. 103.

The areas from which the Slovak immigrants came were characterised by wooden houses with log construction. After moving to a new place of residence, they had to sell these houses or leave them to their relatives.

We have very little data on these early immigrant structures. After arriving in Csaba, the immigrants hastily began to build makeshift dwellings from various materials available in the surrounding countryside. The first immigrants built houses only with the materials provided by their surroundings. The most widely-used building materials in Csaba were clay, wood and reeds. Stone was not used for building dwellings because it was simply not available in large quantities in the area²³. The settlers also had great difficulty in finding good quality timber suitable for building²⁴. Lesser quality wood was abundant around Csaba, but quality wood was only available in limited quantities, which severely limited the building possibilities of settlers. The first dwellings were most often in the form of half-timbered houses and their walls were constructed with wattle and reeds, which was also used as roofing material. They hammered wooden stakes into the ground, which they wrapped with wicker and plastered inside and out with clay and mud²⁵. Later, the walls were also whitewashed with lime. Some immigrants stayed in such dwellings for several years, only later building new, elevated houses. In the early periods of the settlement of Csaba, home building was primarily a family affair, but relatives and neighbours also came to help. In almost every family there was a person who managed the building work, knew how to strike (work) wood, build a wall or lay reeds. Those without any knowledge of construction work followed instructions as a helper. The construction of such dwellings by the first immigrants was the result of an existential necessity to have at least a roof over their heads²⁶. Around the middle of the 18th century, the inhabitants of Csaba began to build houses out of adobe – sun-dried bricks made of clay, or using the technique of “clay heavy pressing”²⁷.

Again, we can observe a markedly slow and regressive development in this area of adaptation of the first immigrants to Csaba. Immigrants did not immediately have the opportunity to establish the “standard of living” to which they were accustomed at home. They needed a great deal of time, physical strength and a considerable amount of money to build it up. From the beginning, they had to

²³ J. ANDO, *Eudové staviteľstvo...*

²⁴ The inhabitants of Csaba had to import quality timber from Arad, which they floated down the Kereš Canal, dug in 1777. *Čabiansky kalendár*, Békešská Čaba 1991, p. 77–81.

²⁵ A. KRUPA, *Szlovákok Békéscsabán*, Békéscsaba 1980, p. 34.

²⁶ L.A. HAAN, *Pamietnosti...*, p. 14.

²⁷ S. LIPTÁKOVÁ, *Slovenské osídlenie békeško-čanádskej oblasti*, [in:] *Ružomberský historický zborník I*, Ružomberok 2007, p. 184.

learn new technological and construction methods and use the building materials that were available. In the early years of building new dwellings, therefore, solutions were often makeshift. The first dwellings had only hastily and primitively constructed interior furnishings and only *ad hoc* animal housing²⁸. These first makeshift dwellings were not at all concerned with their appearance, aesthetic design or structural precision. The main concern was their usability²⁹.

Hygiene and Healthcare

Hygiene and health care for the first immigrants were also difficult in Csaba. The damp environment and swamps attracted many insects, birds, rodents and voles. In an unhygienic and humid environment full of pests, without sufficient drinking water and inadequate health care, various diseases, infections and fevers often arose, threatening both humans and domestic animals and often resulting in death. In 1738, there was even a plague in Csaba, which resulted in the death of 65 local inhabitants³⁰. Health care among the immigrants at that time was poor and the doctor was often located in more distant settlements (in a remote location). The prevention and treatment of diseases were therefore left to the family members themselves. The early immigrants were self-reliant and practiced various home treatments, making their own medicines or various ointments and also relying on the help of God. Faith in God had a firm place in the healing process. Folk healing itself stemmed from the life experiences of Slovak subjects, who had long lived in close connection with nature and used the power and healing effects of its basic elements, especially plants, minerals, water and light. For a long time, this knowledge was their only – at least partially effective – weapon against various diseases, epidemics, accidents and misfortunes. In the families of the first immigrants, the physician was represented by a woman, the mother³¹. Throughout the year, especially in summer, the women collected various medicinal herbs or roots,

²⁸ For example, the first immigrants used only so-called makeshift beds made of wooden construction instead of beds, or they simply slept on wooden benches. V. KANTÁROVÁ, *Vývoj lôžkového nábytku u Slovákov na Dolnej zemi*, [in:] *Slováci v zahraničí*, vol. VII, eds. F. BIELIK, C. BALÁŽ, Martin 1981, p. 59.

²⁹ EADEM, *Funkčné využitie slovenských obydli na Dolnej zemi*, [in:] *Slováci v zahraničí*, vol. VIII, eds. F. BIELIK, C. BALÁŽ, Martin 1982, p. 59.

³⁰ L.A. HAAN, *Pamätnosti...*, p. 15.

³¹ P. KOMOLY, *Ludové liečenie ľudí a domácich zvierat*, sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/magyarorszagi_nemzetisegek/szlovakok/a_magyarorszagi_szlovakok_neprajza_1993/pages/szlovak/011_ludove_liecenie.htm [16.05.2022].

which they dried, preserved and, when necessary, made into home remedies. The treatments consisted of administering home-made medicines and the sick person was treated at home.

The Cultural and Religious Area

The Hungarians, Slovaks, Serbs, Romanians, Germans and others represented in the Lower Land differed from each other in language, religion, customs and folkloric traditions, clothing, etc. However, as a whole, over time they also began to share certain common features of the culture of the Lower Land or Pannonian type, which distinguished them from the culture of other geographical areas³².

As far as the culture and cultural heritage of the first immigrants in Csaba is concerned, there was considerable diversity among them in this area. The immigrants came from different villages, different regions and different areas. In the processes of social and cultural consolidation, the Slovak emigrants primarily proceeded from their own cultural heritage, which they brought from their original homeland³³. The differences were manifested, for example, in language, clothing, food, ceremonies, customs, songs. It can be said that the immigrants differed in most components of their material and spiritual culture. Moreover, in the new environment, the immigrants began to come into contact with the local culture and spiritual values. It took a long time for them to develop a new and unified cultural acclimation. It was a very complex process of cultural adjustment, influenced by many factors. As we have already indicated above, two basic (and contradictory) tendencies characterised the development of each minority (ethnic enclave), and thus also of the community of the Lower Land Slovaks from the Békés region. One tendency was the more or less pronounced features of ethno-cultural persistence, which manifested itself in the adherence to cultural values from the original homeland, i.e. the preservation of the features of the original ethnic background. The second developmental tendency was characterised by numerous economic, social and cultural influences of other ethnic communities on a certain minority ethnic group and manifested itself in diverse processes of acculturation. The building of new social ties and relationships between immigrants contributed significantly to the new cultural adaptation. This accelerated the blurring of individual differences in their culture. In time, Békéscsaba became the cultural centre of Slovak immigrants in the south of the Lower Land.

³² J. BOTÍK, *Slovenská Dolná zem*, Nadlak 2019, p. 15.

³³ IDEM, *Dolnozemskí Slováci. Tri storočia vysťahovaleckých osudov, spôsobu života a identity Slovákov v Maďarsku, Rumunsku, Srbsku a Bulharsku*, Nadlak 2011, p. 8–9.

The picture of the Slovaks of the Lower Land would not be complete or convincing if it did not take into account the role played in their lives by the Evangelical-Lutheran faith. In the geographical and demographic core of the Slovak Lower Land (the Békés-Csanád, Arad-Banát and Vojvodina regions), relatively compact Slovak areas were formed in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, whose inhabitants adhered to the Lutheran faith (with the exception of a part of the Catholics of Csaba and Selenčany)³⁴. Faith and the Evangelical Church were inseparably linked to the lives of most of the inhabitants and to the life of the entire community³⁵. Almost all of the early immigrants were baptized, most were church-married and later buried. In addition to these significant events, church life took place mainly on Sunday and at holiday services and so-called weekday prayer services. Church life also consisted of religious instruction and preparation for confirmation or small home devotions, prayers and the singing of hymns from the *Tranoscius hymnal*. The Evangelical Church in Békéscsaba was formed immediately after the arrival of the immigrants.

Upon their arrival in Csaba, the immigrants had to think through the arrangements for church life, especially the expenses for the future church congregation. If they wanted to build their own schools, it was not only enough to construct buildings, but also to secure a sustainable income for the aforementioned church congregation well in advance, which would be sufficient to cover the ever-increasing operating costs, including teachers' salaries, as well as the construction of additional school buildings and facilities. It was unthinkable to pay for such expenses with church money at that time, so the immigrants sought income for the church coffers wherever they could³⁶. The small (old) church began to be built of brick and stone in the spring of 1745 and was consecrated on Martin's Day in the same year. The preacher Tomáš Koníček came to Csaba with the immigrants in the years 1717/1718. Ludovít Haan writes in his *Memoirs*: "that he came as a fired pastor from one of the churches where the first immigrants came from. He served only temporarily until the arrival of the first regular pastor in the person of Jan Šuhajda at the end of 1718"³⁷.

³⁴ IDEM, *Dolnozemskí Slováci...*, p. 33.

³⁵ After the Slovak Evangelicals and Catholics, Greek Catholics of the Byzantine Rite, who came there from Romania, also appeared in Csaba. T. TUŠKOVÁ, A. UHRÍNOVÁ-HORNOKOVÁ, *Etnické zloženie a život minorít v Békešskej Čabe*, "Človek a spoločnosť – Individual and Society" 22, 2019, Supplement, p. 138.

³⁶ J. PORUBSKÝ, *Formovanie národného povedomia Slovákov v 19. a začiatkom 20. storočia v Nadlaku*, [in:] *Slováci v zahraničí*, vol. XXII, eds. S. BAJANÍK, V. DENĐUROVÁ-TALAPAGOVÁ, Martin 2005, p. 73.

³⁷ L.A. HAAN, *Pametnosti...*, p. 14.

Their modest, yet impressive burial sites have become indispensable proof of the presence of Slovak immigrants in the Lower Land. With the burial of their dead, they multiplied and even deepened the roots they put down in the newly settled land. The intervening years cemented the community while legitimizing the immigrants' claim to the place they occupied and their new home. Cemeteries, accessible to all, with headstones shaped by Lutheran and local tradition, with accompanying texts, symbols, and ornaments, not only marked the places of the deceased, they also protected them from oblivion. They were like birth certificates and heraldic emblems of buried ancestors. They became the genealogy of individual families and the chronicle of the whole community³⁸.

To this day, it is still not clear what education the Slovak serfs and impoverished small peasants who settled in Békéscsaba brought with them from their original settlements. The educational requirements and also the ethnic self-confidence of the evangelical Slovaks settled in Békéscsaba at the beginning of the 18th century were primarily determined by their religious affiliation. Their educational requirements were closely related to their ethnic awareness. The elementary schools in Békéscsaba, founded by the Evangelical Church and already proliferating in the 18th century, differed in many respects from the type of Evangelical schools in the upper part of the country in the 18th century. After the settlement in Csaba, the schools gradually abandoned Latin, previously strictly compulsory for some "teaching subjects". It can be assumed that Biblical Czech was not strictly required in schools either. Although the not very numerous textbooks, usually published by the local church or ecclesiastical district, were of course written in Czech, the linguistic motivations of the children most often "compelled" the teacher or spiritual pastor to speak to the pupils in his own mother tongue, possibly incorporating elements of the local dialect as well. Later, this language style used in social communication became fully established in all school communication, although the lessons from the textbooks had to be interpreted by the pupils in Biblical Czech. Very little is known to us about the content of the 18th-century teaching material and teaching methods. However, we do know a few contemporary records of the fact that a large number of Slovak Evangelicals – including the population of smaller settlements – could read and write³⁹.

It is a fact that the evangelical Slovaks, even though they had to lay the foundations of their existence first, built their first public institutions – namely, a church and a school – very soon after settlement. They did that so as to provide elementary education for their children, even in conditions of profound existential insecurity.

³⁸ J. BOTÍK, *Dolnozemskí Slováci...*, p. 32.

³⁹ P. GAJDÁCS, *Tót-Komlós története*, Gyoma 1896.

This can be explained by the deep-rooted and inherited claims to education from the original settlements in the past⁴⁰.

In the present study, we have tried to outline, using the example of the settlement of Békéscsaba, how Slovak immigrants tried to establish themselves in their new home in new surroundings and climatic conditions, pointing out the problems of acquiring a livelihood, the difficulties of building new houses and the revival of economic activity. Slovak immigrants gradually managed to overcome all the difficulties, although it took a considerable effort.

In addition to cultivating the land, the first settlers had to focus on cattle breeding, which even became their primary livelihood in the early years after settlement. Almost immediately after their arrival, the immigrants set about reshaping the local landscape, which they sought to regularise and adapt to agricultural production. In this respect, a significant factor in the Slovak immigrants' perseverance was their peasantry. The immigrants were characterised by a high degree of self-sufficiency, and they produced almost everything they needed and consumed what they produced. This was also linked to the fact that most of the members of these farming families made a living on their own family farms. However, this meant that peasant families were characterised not only by economic but also by considerable social closure. They had to adapt to their new environment in every way, which cost them a great deal of physical and mental effort. The first immigrants' standard of living declined rapidly, almost overnight, after arriving in their new home, and in several areas of adaptation to the new conditions, we saw a slow, even regressive, development. The regression was most pronounced in the areas of housing, livelihoods and education.

In the study, we also looked at the basic issues of health care for early immigrants, which, from today's perspective, was at a really low level. As we noted above, the doctor was often replaced by a mother – a woman – an herbalist who produced medicines from local natural resources and treated them according to the inherited knowledge and experience of her ancestors. The evangelical (Lutheran) faith was one of the most important factors in the early immigrant communities, which brought them together and helped them to survive and adapt to their new living conditions. Faith in God and hope for a better life played a leading role in the lives of the early immigrants and helped them internally to overcome everyday problems and difficulties. The Slovak immigrants were characterised by a truly strong will, deep-rooted faith and ethnic self-confidence. Their religious foundation as well as linguistic and cultural heritage, which they brought from

⁴⁰ A. DIVIČANOVÁ, *Meštianske inštitúcie slovenskej kultúry v Békésskej Čabe v zrkadle etnokultúrnych zmien*, "Národopis Slovákov v Maďarsku" 12, 1996, p. 45–73.

their original homeland, preserved their continuity and socio-cultural existence. The cultural vitality they brought from home and also the aspirations for continuity in education were already evident in the first immigrants. The immigrants tried to maintain the level of their education even in the new conditions, and as soon as they arrived in their new home they set about building elementary schools, which, however, differed in Békéscsaba in many respects from the type of evangelical schools in their homeland. Latin was gradually abandoned in the teaching, and teachers increasingly educated the children in their mother tongue, intertwined with the local dialect. Importantly, however, the immigrants maintained and even raised their level of education over time.

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