

Ondrej Šály, PhD.

Paradigm Shift in the Research of Serfdom in the Early Modern Hungarian Kingdom: Perspectives and Questions

No research method is innocent, Czech historian and philosopher Zdeněk Vašíček used to say. It seems to me that it's no longer very convenient to simply claim that former Marxist views on serfdom were "bad" because of their ideological affiliation with the socialist state – though I used to tent to such valuation for some time. Marxism is in fact a method and philosophy after all, and it was legitimately used also in "Western" historiography. In contrast to the mentioned "negative" approach, we can take a "positive" one: show other ways how to deal with historical sources that would show us facts transcending the limits of Marxist optics. That is the moment when a paradigm shift can occur in Slovak historiography.

The turning away from the "fundamental" economic themes after 1989 has caused that currently Slovak historiography still lacks a single, modern and comprehensive work on the functioning of a certain estate. Therefore, the long-term economic microstructure of the estates located in the territory of Slovakia in the past is not yet known. Another problem concerning historiography is that the more recent literature mentioning serfdom is generally descriptive in nature. However, such works that lack theory and method cannot represent an alternative approach and thus bring about a paradigm shift.

In my presentation I would like to mention two ways of how I try to contribute to the old-new problem of lord-peasant relations. The primary inspiration comes from the fields of social anthropology and historical anthropology, of which the latter has many of its roots namely in Germany. Certainly, several authors have noted the problem of defining historical anthropology, as it has been treated quite differently by a number of historians. I would like to show my point of view in this matter, using inspiration for example from phenomenology (Jan Patočka) or phenomenological sociology (Alfred

Schütz). In this context I want to at the same time show examples from my research concerning estates of the members of the house of Radvanszky, which I dealt with during my PhD studies. Secondly, I would like to confront explicitly economic-historical perspectives on the problem of serfdom, primarily by drawing attention to and criticism of the prominent historian of early modern economic institutions, Sheilagh Ogilvie. In this case, the tension between the application of macro concepts and micro-history comes to the surface in a plastic way.

Kontakt:

Ondrej Šály, PhD.

Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences

ondrej.saly@savba.sk