

JOBBAGYRENDSZER A MAGYARORSZÁGI FEUDALIZMUS KÉSEI SZÁZADAIBAN, 1556–1767. By *János Varga*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969. 614 pp. 108 Ft.

This well-documented monograph contains a host of encyclopedic information, on a regional basis, concerning the development and gradual disintegration of the traditional institution of serfdom in Hungary. Compared with Jerome Blum's *Lord and Peasant in Russia* it covers a shorter period but penetrates deeper in its investigation. The book is a complex institutional analysis of political, legal, and sociological forces which by their various degrees of interaction eventually either expanded or loosened their control over agricultural labor. The author carries out his task with considerable sophistication and objectivity. It is a pity that the vast quantity of unearthed data occasionally beclouds the continuity of the otherwise well-developed general theme. The major contribution of the work is its evaluation of serfdom as a pluralistic institution which rarely remained static within its codified confines. The author investigates, after a review of the basic statutes, how the system operated under all sorts of special arrangements, which varied from extra privileges to lack of enforcement, or conversely to the exploitation of labor beyond local tradition or statute.

Mr. Varga recognizes two groups of serfs. The main body of them, referred to as the landlocked or perpetual group, were considered as inventory items and were traded and mortgaged together with the land. The smaller group, who gained gradually in significance, consisted of free serfs, so called because they were free to move and to enter into contractual sharing agreements with landowners. They were the more enterprising, flexible elements of peasantry, constantly battling the landed nobility's resistance to the free movement of labor. In background they varied from foreign colonists to emancipated serfs, or fugitives who were successfully weathering out in another region the time required by the statute of limitations to abolish their landlockedness. Free serfdom was a step up the ladder. The free serfs benefited from lower rental fees. This was an inducement offered by landowners seeking to retain their services in a war-ravished land suffering from an acute labor shortage. For practical purposes these serfs were migrant farm workers and not entrepreneur small holders.

Through half of the period spanned by this book, 60 percent of Hungary was occupied by the Turks. If the work contains any shortcomings at all, one may question why the author ignores the dynamic impact of political conquest and an equally revolutionary reconstruction period. Wars and revolutions traditionally accelerate social change. Their impact on the growth of free serfdom may have been significant. Free serfdom became an important evolutionary step in cracking the walls of feudalism. By the end of the eighteenth century its ranks swelled to include 50 percent of the entire peasantry. It was a slow but irreversible process leading to the abolition of serfdom.

The author, a noted Hungarian historian with numerous publications, is director of the National Center of Archives and former associate of the Institute for Historical Sciences of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

PETER S. ELEK
Villanova University