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Women in the Czech Countryside Through The View of Land Registers¹

Abstract

This article is an attempt to present land registers as a source through which we can look not only at the history of the rural population at overall, but also at the history of (rural) women. Some possibilities of using this source are demonstrated by the example of two Czech land registers kept for the village of Bělá. The data obtained present women in different roles and give insight into the fates and life strategies of the serf population.

Keywords: women, serfdom, Czech countryside, land registers, 18th century, 19th century, household

KOBIETY NA CZESKIEJ WSI Z PERSPEKTYWY KSIĄG GRUNTOWYCH

Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi próbę przedstawienia ksiąg gruntowych jako źródła, dzięki któremu można spojrzeć na historię nie tylko ludności wiejskiej jako całości, ale również kobiet wiejskich. Możliwości wykorzystania

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tęgo źródła zostały zilustrowane na przykładzie dwóch czeskich ksiąg gruntowych prowadzonych dla wsi Bělá. Uzyskane dane przedstawiają kobiety w różnych rolach i pozwalają zajrzeć w losy oraz strategie życiowe ludności pańszczyźnianej.

Słowa kluczowe: kobiety, pańszczyzna, czeska wieś, księgi gruntowe, XVIII wiek, XIX wiek, gospodarstwo domowe

Introduction

There is one often overlooked group in the field of women's history – the women of the countryside. Women's history can generally be considered a relatively young discipline; it was established in Western Europe and the United States in the 1970s as a reaction to grand explanatory theories and as a counter to the prevailing historical discourse – the grand political histories of men. In the Czech historiography, the issue of women's history has received more attention only since the 1990s.² Interest initially focused primarily on women from higher social classes. For a long time, the countryside was on the periphery of scholarly attention, and historians tended to characterize the history of villagers in general, without regard to the specificities determined by gender.³ However, research, especially historical demography researches, from the last decades⁴ shows that this is a very interesting group, which links a large number of topics, issues and phenomena. Researchers' attention has turned, for example, to the issue of village widows, women heads of estates, security in old age, or the role of grandmothers and their influence on the reproductive behaviour of their daughters.

This work also aims to present Czech rural women as a unique topic that deserves attention. Since rural women have rarely been the creators of their own source base, the sources used here are

² Denisa Nečasová, "Dějiny žen či gender history? Možnosti, limity, východiska", *Dějiny – teorie – kritika*, no. 1, 2008, 82–84.

³ Josef Grulich, "Venkovská žena v období raného novověku (16.–18. století)", *Československá historická ročenka*, 2001, 225.

⁴ For example Barbora Janáková Kuprová, "Did women in the role of grandmothers affect their daughter's reproductive behaviour and their grand-offspring survival rates? Case study of the Škvorec domain in the 18th and 19th centuries", *Historická demografie*, no. 44, 2020, 19–47; Lenka Nováková, "Žena v roli živitelky hospodaření žen v 18. století na příkladu hukvaldského panství", in: Svatava Urbanová, Lumír Dokoupil, Jakub Ivánek (eds.), *Valašsko: historie a kultura. II, Obživa*, (Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2019), 309–319; Markéta Skořepová, "The Concept of Gender in the Czech Rural History and Historiography", *Opera Historica*, no. 1, 2019, 91–108.

those that can speak about them. The aim is to depict the rural woman through the eyes of one of these sources, the land registers, and to show some of the possibilities of using this type of source in exploring the women's question.

Sources and methods

The primary source for this research are land registers, some passages are supplemented by data obtained from church registers. Land registers are the basic source for research on serf property tenure. Although land registers also appear in neighbouring countries, their Czech version, so-called *gruntovnice*, are considered to be a unique source documenting the development of law in the Czech lands.⁵ They carry precious information about the rural environment, as they record property transfers, including the course of repayment of various debts with which the properties may have been burdened.⁶

It has already been said that the land registers are not a purely Czech matter, although they have reached an unprecedented general prevalence and significance here. Vladimír Procházka in his work⁷ devoted to the study of land registers compares them with Polish village registers. He sees the difference between them in the fact that the Polish village books are more court books, whereas the Czech ones are more like land books.⁸ Earlier than the Bohemian land registers, there already were few books of the Viennese circle, known from the beginning of the 15th century, which became more widespread only in the second half of the 17th century. Furthermore, land books are also found, for example, in Germany (in the second half of the 17th century) where they mainly recorded mortgages, in the French law circle and in Switzerland.⁹

⁵ Šárka Nekvapil Jirásková, *Protoindustriální společnost: Populační chování a životní strategie venkovského obyvatelstva severovýchodních Čech v 18. a 19. století*, (Pardubice: Univerzita Pardubice, 2019), 65–66.

⁶ Josef Grulich, *Populační vývoj a životní cyklus venkovského obyvatelstva na jihu Čech v 16. až 18. století*, (České Budějovice: Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích, 2008), 83.

⁷ Vladimír Procházka, *Česká poddanská nemovitost v pozemkových knihách 16. a 17. století*, (Praha: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1963).

⁸ Ibidem, 5.

⁹ Ibidem, 5–6.

The oldest Czech land register dates back to 1472, and this type of registration flourished during the 16th century. At first, in those books were relatively brief entries, but they evolved into a precise record of all the property aspects and sides involved; from the second half of the 18th century onwards, they were complete contracts. Books could be kept chronologically, in the form of insertions, or according to the order of subject matter. They contain several types of entries: basic, supplementary and other entries. Entries in land registers were chargeable and with the 19th century any change in the ownership of property had to be recorded or become invalid.¹⁰

The presented work uses the methods of historical demography.¹¹ The sample was obtained from two land registers¹² for the village Bělá, which partly belonged to the Košumberk estate. The probe into this village was made due to the continuously preserved land registers. The research is made for years 1769–1848 (i.e. from the first entry in land registers referring to older purchases chosen by the period of this study, which is determined as the end of the 18th century to 1848, when serfdom in the Austrian Empire was abolished). Data from land registers were obtained by the method of anonymous and name-based data extraction. Anonymous data extraction became important for obtaining summaries and general results. From the data obtained in this way, a basic database was created to record the phenomena under study, recording, for example, time data, the types of estates transferred or the occurrence of a retirement contract called *výměnek*. The name extraction of the data allowed insight into the specific fates of rural inhabitants and the tracing of their life strategies, since in the next part of the database, phenomena were no longer just recorded, but complete records were created, including names and family ties (valid for records from which family ties could be ascertained).

The research is set in the Košumberk estate, which according to the Theresian cadastre consisted of six villages (Bělá – partly, Zdislav, Štěnec, Srbce, Voletice and Hluboká, latter the settlements

¹⁰ Nekvapil Jirásková, *Protoindustriální společnost*, 66–69.

¹¹ Eduard Maur, *Základy historické demografie*, (Praha: SPN, 1983).

¹² State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, The Košumberk Estate, Land register Bělá (1794–1846), inv. nr. 3490 and State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, The Košumberk Estate, Land register Bělá (1808–1850), inv. nr. 3491.

of Domanice and Košumberk were added).¹³ The estate is situated in an area where the rugged Bohemian-Moravian highlands are turning to wide plains. Košumberk lies on the right bank of the Olšinka river, near the ruins of the old Košumberk Castle, after which the estate was named.¹⁴ The estate was for many years in the possession of the Lords Slavat of Chlum and Košumberk, then it came into the possession of the Jesuits.¹⁵ The Jesuits owned the manor from 1684 to 1773, after which it became the property of the clergy. In 1807 it was sold at auction and 19 years later the estate was bought by the Thurn-Taxis family.¹⁶ They joined Košumberk with the Chroustovice estate to the Rychmburk estate.¹⁷

According to this part it is clear, that the main type of source used for the preparation of this work are detaily introduced land registers. Land registers are a very valuable source for the understanding of (not only) property relations of the rural population and are invaluable for the research of the Czech countryside. They have been processed by methods of historical demography as described above, such as name and anonymous data extraction. Results are presented in the following sections of the article.

Women in land registers

For the purpose of this work, data from two land registers for the village Bělá were extracted. In total, there are 64 entries that fulfilled the basic condition of the selection, i.e. that they were directly related to the transfer of a homestead and that they took place during the specified period of 1769–1848. An *entry* here means a complete agreement, which was usually between one and three pages in length, although some agreements were longer. Entries in the books examined were mostly written in Czech, with some German texts, and were arranged chronologically and by property.

¹³ Aleš Chalupa et al, *Tereziánský katastr český. Sv. 1, Rustikál (kraje A–Ch)*, (Praha: Archivní správa ministerstva vnitra v Praze, 1964), 301.

¹⁴ Johann Gottfried Sommer, *Das Königreich Böhmen: Chrudimer Kreis*, (Praha: J.G. Calve'schen Buchhandlung, 1837), 115.

¹⁵ Karel Václav Adámek, *Luže, Košumberk a Chloumek v XVII. a XVIII. věku*, (Praha: n. vl., 1902), 40–47.

¹⁶ Ibidem, 60–62.

¹⁷ Michal Severa, "Východočeská panství na mapách", in: Michal Severa, Markéta Kamenická (eds.), *Katalog výstavby*, (Zámorsk: Státní oblastní archiv Zámorsku, 2016), 26.

The types of homesteads are divided according to the size and extent of the duties of the owned land and homestead. For a long time there was confusion in this terminology, and it was not until the corvée patent from 1717 that brought some stability. The so-called *Berní rula*¹⁸ brought a division into those categories: *sedlák* (they can be specified as farmers), *chalupník* (holding a small area of land, they were small farmers) and *zahradník* (who correspond to the later term *domkář*, they usually had only house possibly with garden). For the sake of clarity of the text and interpretation, these terms are retained in the text in their original Czech wording.¹⁹

Table 1. Number of entries and distribution in time

Time period	Total entries	Sedláci	Chalupníci	Domkáři	Appearance of women	Appearance of women (in %)
1769–1790	11	7	3	1	4	36,4
1791–1810	11	5	5	1	8	72,7
1811–1830	13	4	7	2	10	76,9
1831–1848	29	12	11	6	22	75,8
Total	64	28	26	10	44	68,8

Table 1 shows the total number of entries examined and their subsequent distribution according to the time of their creation and the type of homestead to which they were linked. It should be noted here that the earliest entries were mostly related to confirmation of ownership of the property, which was entered in the land register with reference to an earlier arrangement in another book. However, certain phenomena can still be observed, such as the noticeably increasing number of entries in the 19th century, which corresponds with the information mentioned earlier that recording changes in tenure became an obligation. The social distribution of registrations can also be taken into account, but to draw conclusions, it

¹⁸ The first Czech cadastre from the years 1653–1656.

¹⁹ Procházka, *Česká poddanská nemovitost*, 79–80.

would be necessary to work with the overall social composition of the village. However, for this paper and the questions it asks, it is more important to pay attention to the sixth column, which focuses on the number of entries in which women figured.

Firstly it was necessary to identify the categories that would be taken into consideration. Entries in which women appeared as future wives (brides), current or incoming heads of homesteads, women leaving for *výměnek*, or beneficiaries of inheritance shares were selected for recording and further processing. On the other hand, cases in which women appeared only as witnesses or beneficiaries of debts, for example, were excluded.

The resulting number – i.e., the fact that women fulfilling the above conditions are mentioned in 68.8% of all examined entries – confirms the usefulness of these types of sources for researching a wide range of topics. Indeed, female names occur in them almost as much as male ones. The increase in the number of female names in contracts increases towards the middle of the 19th century. This is not a steep movement; after a significant jump with the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, the numbers increase rather modestly.

Table 2. Women in land registers by the reason of appearance

Reason	Women with inheritance shares	Brides (wedding contract)	Women leaving for <i>výměnek</i>	Women as the head of the homestead
Total	29	10	9	5

This section presented the selected source, i.e. two land registers kept for village Bělá. The problem was defined in more details and also there were determined conditions under which the source was examined – i.e. the time and territorial boundaries, but also types of entries to be worked with. A total of 64 entries fulfilled these conditions. Thanks to this, it was also possible to define four categories examining women according to the type of their occurrence in land registers. These categories are mentioned in the Table 2, with a total of 44 entries representing 68.8% of all examined

entries. Some entries deal with more than one category at a time. These established categories will be further discussed in detail and supported by cited examples directly from the source in the following sections.

Inheritance shares

Most often, women appeared as heirs to the inheritance share that was written into their books when the homestead was settled. For a long time, the law of inheritance counted with the serf's homestead as a whole, until the 18th century it was also advanced as a whole. It was not until the 19th century when the shackles of serfdom were loosened and the estate began to fragment among the heirs. Until then, heirs who did not remain on the estate received an inheritance share counted of its value.²⁰ The basic form of transfer of property is its sale to a child during the lifetime of the householder, most often from father to son. Alternatively, similar to the father, the mother passes the homestead to the father. On sale, the valuation of the homestead then has a major influence on the determination of the shares of all the children, which are later repaid. This sale value is divided among the children whom the farmer has not otherwise dealt with – they are called '*nevybyté*'. *Vybytí* happens when the farmer gives a child a different property value instead of an inheritance share, either when the child sets up his or her own household or when the child marries. This is done according to the principles of inheritance law.²¹

A woman as the recipient of the inheritance share appeared in 29 cases, which is 54.7% of the occurrence, most often they were the sisters of the incoming householder or daughters-in-law. In some cases it was one girl, but entries where there were more than one girl were not exceptional. In the settlement, the mention of a share for a sister might read, for example: *K ruce nepřítomný dcery Kateřiny Petera a sestry, až do její smrti nebo vyživení a zaopatření, míni po 50 zlatých konvenční mince*.²²

²⁰ Procházka, *Česká poddanská nemovitost*, 453–454.

²¹ Ibidem, 459–461.

²² State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, The Košumberk Estate, Land register Bělá (1808–1850), inv. nr. 3491, fol. 20. Translated as "To the hand of the absent daughter and sister Kateřina Petera, until her death or maintenance and support, mean 50 gold conv. m."

The following excerpt from 1845 tells a bit more about the situation on the homestead, when the homestead was taken over from Magdalena Dobrkovský by her daughter Anna Dobrkovská.

K ruce sirotka Josefa Dobrkovský mrzáka jménem dědičného podílu..... 40 zlt

A tomu samýmu až do smrti teplý světlý a pokojný byt, který se bere na 20 zlt která částka se vyzdvahuje.

*K ruce sirotka Magdaleny Dobrkovský též mrzáka podíl 20 zlt
Pravím: dvacet zlatých, a k ruce tý samý až do její smrti teplý světlý byt a vyživování, které se bere na 60 zlt [...]*²³

In some entries, there were also formulations that set the stated shares straight and prevented possible future problems.

*Dále zde odstupující otec pro urovnání budoucí povstat mohoucích rozepří a námitek zaznamenat nechává, že on pro dceru Annu provdanou za Matěje Jehličku v Dvakačovicích zde proto žádný podíl nestanovil, poněvadž ta samá dle v rukách majících kvitance odstupu-jícího otce Václav Doubravskýho slušně a řádně odbyta jest.*²⁴

However, not everything was always properly covered when the property was handed over. Another of the attached excerpts shows Jakub Petržilka representing his wife, Katherine, as he believes she has been cheated out of her inheritance by things that were not included in the agreement. The authority had the family members work out a solution among themselves and then registered the agreement in the land registry.

V Košumberku dne 29ho listopadu 1800

Toto právní stanovení do knihy gruntovní vedle zápisu Fran-tiška Časlavky vtěliti se povoluje.

Od pravomocnosti kral: panství Košumberg dne 29 listo-padu 1800

²³ State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, The Košumberk Estate, Land register Bělá (1808–1850), inv. nr. 3491, fol. 38. Translated as “To the hand of the orphan Josef Dobrkovský cripple on behalf of the inheritance share 40 zl and to the same until death a warm bright and peaceful apartment, which is counted as 20 zl which amount is raised. To the hand of the orphan Magdalena Dobrkovský also a cripple inheritance share of 20 zl. I say: twenty gold coins, and to the hand of the same until her death a warm bright apartment and maintenance, which shall be counted for 60 zl [...].”

²⁴ State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, The Košumberk Estate, Land register Bělá (1808–1850), inv. nr. 3491, fol. 17. Translated as “Furthermore, the resigning father, in order to settle any future disputes and objections that may arise, records here that he did not therefore set any share for his daughter Anna, married to Matěj Jehlička in Dvakačovice, because the same is, according to the receipts in the hands of the resigning father, Václav Doubravský, well and properly settled.”

František Poul

Spravec

Protocol

Jakub Petržilka v zastoupení své manželky Kateřiny přednesl ústní žalobu proti Františkovi Čáslavkovi ze vsi Bělé, kterak on sobě dozrává, že by na otcovským podílu z ohledu jeho manželky velmi krácený proto byl, poněvadž ze zápisu – neb ze šacunku dobytěk, a nářadí vynechané, a mezi nim jakožto dědicem k účtování nepřišlo, stranám ponavrhnuto bylo, aby oni se po domácku jakožto přátelé narovnali, a když narovnání mezi sebou učinějí, aby se k úřadu přihlásili.

Dnešního dne tehdy se obě strany na cí. kancelář dostavily a přednesly, že se takto narovnaly: František Čáslavka hned Jakub Petržilkovi – a neb jeho manželce Kateřině vysázel 15 cm hotových peněz, který žalující taky v hotovosti přijmul a na gruntě Františka Čáslavky nic více k pohledávání míti nebude, a nemá, poněvadž v těch 15 jak gruntovní protence 4 zl 40 x tak jako za dobytek a nářadí z účtování jsou. Část ale dobytka na druhý polovici gruntu Jozefa Čáslavky dotýče, to sobě žalující dalejc vyhledávati vyhrazuje.²⁵

This section dealt with inheritance shares for women – daughters of leaving householders. These shares were entered in land registers when the homestead was transferred. This is the most frequently represented role of females in selected categories and is showed that this is an interesting problem of the women's question. The simple entry about the inheritance share could

²⁵ State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, The Košumberk Estate, Land register Bělá (1794–1846), inv. nr. 3490, fol. 460. Translated as “In Košumberk, on the 29th of November 1800 This legal provision is permitted to be entered into the land registry alongside the entry for František Čáslavka. From the jurisdiction of the royal estate of Košumberk on the 29th of November 1800. František Poul Administrator Protocol Jakub Petržilka, representing his wife Kateřina, presented an oral complaint against František Čáslavka from the village of Bělá, in which he acknowledged that he was very much deprived of his paternal share due to his wife. This was because, according to the entry – or from the inventory – the livestock and tools were omitted, and as an heir, he was not accounted for. The parties were advised to settle the matter amicably as friends, and when they reached an agreement, to report to the office. On this day, both parties appeared at the district office and stated that they had settled as follows: František Čáslavka immediately paid Jakub Petržilka – or his wife Kateřina – 15 zl in cash, which the complainant accepted in cash, and on the estate of František Čáslavka, he would have no further claims, as the 15 zl were settled according to the land registry as 4 zl and 40 kr for livestock and tools. However, part of the livestock concerning the other half of the estate of Jozef Čáslavka is reserved for the complainant to seek further.”

reveal, for example, evidence of health condition or, above all, could reveal family strategies of the village population.

Brides

*Zasnoubily se Wáclav Rabas a Kateřina Pavlíček a slibují sobě lásku, věrnost a svornost do smrti setrvati chtějí.*²⁶

The wedding was undoubtedly a turning point in a woman's life; it is a so-called rite of passage, when a person moves from one state to another. While men often left for apprenticeship or service before marriage, girls usually stayed in their father's house until marriage. Marriage brought with it the final recognition of adulthood. It was the result of the intertwined family ties across village society that determined the strategy in trying to best provide for the child. Even children from the same family did not have the same prospects – inheritance law predetermined the heir to the estate, who usually married a partner from the same social class. His or her siblings were entitled to a share of the inheritance, which could be variable, and could thus experience a social fall. It was therefore the wedding that was the turning point that decided the social position of the new family.²⁷

Women were registered as brides-to-be in wedding contracts. The marriage contracts, which were recorded in the land registers, included an agreement on the further course of action of the property, which the farmer transferred to his son, or to his new son-in-law and his new wife. It was always also recorded what the other side brought to the union. This type of entry is of particular interest in connection with women and their relationship with the village society according to its insight into marriage strategies. It is also important to observe the property that the newlyweds bring into the marriage. In some cases, the departing married couple or

²⁶ State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, The Košumberk Estate, Land register Bělá (1808–1850), inv. nr. 3491, fol. 30. Translated as “Wáclav Rabas and Kateřina Pavlíček have betrothed themselves and promise each other love, fidelity, and unity, wishing to remain so until death.”

²⁷ Alice Velková, *Krutá vrchnost, ubozí poddaní? Proměny venkovské rodiny a společnosti v 18. a první polovině 19. století na příkladu západočeského panství Štáhlavy*, (Praha: Historický ústav AVČR, 2009), 372.

the widowed parent himself negotiated *výměnek*, in other cases the old farmer continued to farm on the land as long as he wished.

Table 3. The benefits of the newlyweds given to the marriage

Groom bringing household (in %)	Bride bringing household (in %)
80	30

* In one case both of the fiancées got household.

An interesting marriage contract from 1845²⁸ is one of Anna née Dobrkovská and Václav Remeš. Both of them were orphans at that time and acted with their guardians. The groom Václav brought 160 zl and one cow to the marriage, the bride Anna, according to the legal assignment, had a house number 26 in Bělá, which become part of the marital property. It was therefore a favourable union for the groom, as he got to the hold of the property.

And there can be even found interesting parts with informations from the everyday's life, for example when in one entry was written, that the future couple already had one child outside the marriage bed, but the bridegroom claimed as the true father and acknowledges kid as his own.²⁹

However, parents often thought about the future marriage of their children when transferring the property and determining inheritance shares. In addition to these, they often assigned other duties for the new farmer towards their siblings.

*A bude nastupující hospodář povinen a zde se váže jeho sestře Anně však jen na ten pád kdyby se provdat měla, jednu dvouletou klisnu v prostřední podstatě a ceně pak jednu pětiletou krávu dáti, kdyby se však neprovdala, tehdy se uvaluje hospodáři ji až do její smrti s příbytkem, teplem a světlem pak bezplatnou zdravou (stravu) proti jejímu zdraví přiměřený práci zaopatřiti.*³⁰

²⁸ State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, The Košumberk Estate, Land register Bělá (1794–1846), inv. nr. 3491, fol. 39.

²⁹ Ibidem, fol. 13.

³⁰ Ibidem, fol. 23. Translated as "And the incoming farmer shall be obliged and bound here to give his sister Anna one two-year-old mare, but only in case she should marry, one five-year-old cow in the middle of the usual price, but if she should not marry, then the farmer shall be obliged to provide her until her death with housing, heat and light, and free healthy (food) against her health and adequate work."

The role of a bride was very important for every woman. In this section, attention was paid to women who appeared in marriage contracts which were in land registers and dealt with a transfer of households. In this case, more often were households into the marriage union brought by grooms. Marriage contracts also appeared as a valuable source for interesting informations about the daily life of the rural population. Parents' worries about the maintenance of their children were also part of other entries where they tried to provide some kind of security for their offspring.

Women with the retirement contract called *výměnek*

A very interesting phenomenon of the Czech countryside is the institution of the *výměnek*³¹, which was intended to provide for the farmer or other persons from his close circle in the event that they were unable to provide for themselves, for example in old age. *Výměnek* was established at the time of the transfer of the property and was recorded in the contract with all other particulars. This entry contained all the contents of the agreed *výměnek*.³²

*Povinni jsou nastupující Jan a Kateřina Trunec manželé v tomto nastoupeném domku pro mateř Dorotu Trunec jak pro sestru Kateřinu Trunec až do jejich obou smrti teplý světlý a pokojný byt popřáti.*³³

Výměnek could represent a grain allowances, which were paid annually. It could have been grain, or it could have been peas or potatoes, fruit or firewood, but this is by no means the end of the list. The amount varied according to the type of homestead, but also according to the family relationships and the capabilities of the new farmer. In addition to this, *výměnkář* could also receive extra money. The advantage was that the *výměnkář* could sell part of the naturals and get more money with which he could buy other things

³¹ For details about the topic see Cyril Horáček, *Výminek: Úvaha agrárně politická*, (Praha: Jointly published by Rozhledy and the Association of Czech Lawyers Všehrd, 1900) and Vladimír Procházka, "Výbava a výměnek na české vesnici v 16. a 17. století", *Český lid*, no. 49, 1962, 55–63.

³² Velková, *Krutá vrchnost*, 275.

³³ State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, The Košumberk Estate, Land register Bělá (1808–1850), inv. nr. 3491, fol. 16. Translated as "The new holders of the homestead Jan and Kateřina Trunec are obliged to wish their mother Dorota Trunec and sister Kateřina Trunec a warm, bright and peaceful place to live until their death."

like clothing or shoes. This type of *výměnek* was only linked to *sedláci* and *chalupníci*, i.e. farms with fields. For smaller holdings, *výměnek* usually included only an abstract description of a place to live or food. However, it could also consist of benefits, such as the use of fields and other land or burial.³⁴

Table 4. *Výměnek* in Bělá

Total of entries	Contains <i>výměnek</i>		Contains <i>výměnek</i> for woman	
64	32	50%	22	68.8%

Výměnek appeared in the land registers for the village of Bělá in half of all recorded contracts. However, a more detailed analysis will be given below only to the agreement of *výměnek* intended for women, which accounted for 68.8% of all records containing an agreement.

Table 5. *Výměnek* for women

Time period	Total	Wife (part of complete married couple)	Widow	Sibling
1769–1790	0	–	–	–
1791–1810	6	2	2	3
1811–1830	5	3	2	1
1831–1848	11	8	3	1
Total	22	13	7	5

Table 5 presents the women who gained *výměnek*. Some of the entries were a combination of *výměnek* for more than one person at the same time, typically a widow with children. Most often, women were on *výměnek* together with their husbands; in most

³⁴ Velková, *Krutá vrchnost*, 292.

cases, the other spouse then continued to receive half of the naturals after the death of his or her husband or wife and was also entitled to it until death. Widows themselves followed in numbers, the daughters of the departing householders are the least. The reason for *výměnek* for a sibling could also be, for example, the disability of a sister.

*Pro sestru ženicha Barboru Šavelka, která na zdraví churavá jest, pojišťuje se až do její smrti byt a vyživování při hospodářově stole.*³⁵

It is necessary to discuss at least briefly the content of *výměnek* that was given to the women. This was very varied, with both modest agreements containing only place to live and food and on the other side very rich agreements with large benefits in kind. The minimum requirements, i.e. only the requirement to provide a place to live and possibly food, were met in five cases, in two cases by siblings, in one case by a widow with a sibling, and in the remaining two cases by a married couple. Three of the homesteads were *domkář* and one was *chalupník*. The most common were wheat, rye, barley, potatoes, peas, lentils and millet, but also eggs, butter and poppy seeds. The great variation in quantities can be seen in the example of cereals, all amounts are in *korec*³⁶: the highest amount of wheat taken was 8, the lowest 1, the average being 3.1. Rye ranged from 1 to 6, averaging 4.3, and barley from 1 to 6, averaging 4.2.

From the results it can be interpreted that the poorest arrangements were given to sisters, who were mostly only guaranteed a place to live and food. The position of widows depended on the type of homestead, with two widows from rich farmsteads (*selské grunty*) receiving a very rich *výměnek*, one *chalupnice* receiving a fair *výměnek*, and one *domkářka* receiving a poor *výměnek*. The situation of the women who went to *výměnek* with their husbands was somewhat volatile, as they were only entitled to half of the benefits in case of their husband's death, which could have considerably worsened their situation.

³⁵ State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, The Košumberk Estate, Land register Bělá (1808–1850), inv. nr. 3491, fol. 38. Translated as “The groom’s sister Barbara Šavelka, who is in poor health, shall be insured until her death place to live and support herself at the farmer’s table.”

³⁶ 1 *korec* is 93.58 litres, see I. Hlaváček et al., *Vademecum pomocných věd historických*, (Praha: H+H, 1994), 172–173.

The issue of *výměnek* turns out to be a very interesting and complex problem that often directly affected the rural women. In the presented case it was in 68.8% of all cases of established contracts. A woman could gain *výměnek* together with her husband, as a widow or, for example, as a sibling of the new householder. The fulfillment varied and it depended on many factors, such as the size of homestead or the status of the woman. *Výměnek* could be quite rich, but it also could include just a place for living and providing food.

Women as heads of the homestead

The last part deals with the entries of the women who were the head of the homestead at that time. Until the end of the 18th century, in Bohemia, a woman leading the homestead was perceived as a provisional state. On the other hand, male farmers often died before their heirs reached adulthood, at which point women could take over temporary leading. It was possible for a daughter to inherit the homestead, but the authorities often resisted unmarried female heirs because they had no guarantee of male labour on the farm. Thus, women were more often the head of the household among the *domkáři*. Moreover, until the end of the 18th century, it was unusual for a married female heiress to be listed in the land registers as the sole holder of the property. The patent from 1791 About the right of inheritance on peasant holdings (*O právě dědické na selských statcích*), which provided, among other things, that if a husband and wife entered into an agreement on joint ownership, the one who survived the other could hold the property for as long as he or she wished, had a considerable impact on this problem. Joint ownership between spouses was thus becoming common practice.³⁷

There were five women in the role of independent sellers or buyers, four of them were *chalupnice* and one was *domkárka*. All cases date back to the 19th century, which all confirms the trend described above – the youngest example dates from 1817, when the property was sold by Anna Marková as an independent holder to Tomáš Mrázek. In 1833 Kateřina Trávníčková inherited the household from her mother Anna Trávníčková, her sisters had inherited

³⁷ Velková, *Krutá vrchnost*, 247–248

shares. More detailed conclusions could be reached by a detailed comparison of land registers with other types of sources, such as church registers. In this way, it would be possible to find out how long the women had independently managed the homestead.

The story of Anna Truncová, who inherited her parents' small household in 1832, is also worth mentioning. The entry begins with the sentence: *Jest projednání pozůstalosti po dne 26 dubna 1832 zemřelém Jan Trunec z Bělé 31, jak jeho manželce rozený též Truncový, kteří po sobě těž jednu dceru Annu ¾ let starou zanechali*. Little Anna became an heiress before she was even 1 year old. Her parents died shortly after each other – her mother Kateřina passed away on the 20th April 1832, her father Jan six days later. This happened during the devastating cholera wave, although according to the church register it took away only her mother, Jan died of a stroke.³⁸

Table 6. Wave of cholera in Bělá in 1832

Month	Total number of dead	Died because of the cholera
1	4	0
2	2	0
3	2	0
4	18	14
5	4	2
6	0	0
7	1	0
8	0	0
9	1	1
10	1	0
11	1	0
12	0	0
Total	34	17

³⁸ State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, The Košumberk Estate, Land register Bělá (1808–1850), inv. nr. 3491, fol. 18.

The attached table illustrates how the cholera that made Anna a young heiress swept through the village. By comparison, in 1833, eight people died here in a whole year, and in 1834, ten people died.³⁹

The last part of this article dealt with women who appeared in entries as independent heads of homesteads. All five cases in total fall in the first half of the 19th century. For more general deductions land registers would need to be combined with other types of sources, but they alone provided a good insight into the issue. They also for example confirmed that by the 19th century women were often written in the pages of land registers as owners together with their husbands.

Résumé

Land registers are certainly a source that can tell us a lot about the village population – not excluding women. Whether it is the possession of homesteads, agreements about *výměnek* or other property aspects of rural women's lives, a unique perspective on the chosen subject can be found in this type of source. This paper has attempted to present some of the uses of land registers and the questions that can be asked of them in research in the field of women's history.

Women's names fill the pages of land registers in a similar amount as men's. They appear in 68.8% of all cases – and this is taking into account only the pre-established categories that were designed to represent women and their relationship to inheritance shares, women in the role of brides, women with the retirement contract called *výměnek*, and finally women as heads of the homesteads. Women with inheritance shares were the most frequent, they represent 54.7% of all recorded cases involving women, what is more than a half, and 65.9% of the appearance in all entries containing some of the established categories. The remaining less than

³⁹ All data were obtained from this church register: State Regional Archives in Hradec Králové, Collection of the East Bohemian church registers (NAD 190), Church register of deads Chlumeck + Luže (until 1855), Bělá (2.1824–1.1864), Dobrkov (6.1824–7.1864), Doly (2.1824–1.1862), Domanice (from 4. 1824), Bílý Kůň + Košumberk (until 10.1861), Lozice, Radim (6.1824–7.1864), Hroubovice (until 11.1863), Srbce (since 2.1824), Voletice (until 7.1867), Zdislav (7.1824–11.1861), signature no. VIII; stored under nr. 5829.

half of all appearances of women (53 appearances in 44 entries) are divided among the other three categories. The second most represented group are women as brides in marriage contracts (18.9%). Women leaving for *výměnek* appeared in nine cases (17%) and the least represented category were women as heads of homesteads who gained or left homesteads on their own (9.4%).

Each of the categories presented above introduced the topic and demonstrated it on the example of two processed land registers for the village Bělá, which was partly the property of the Košumberk estate. The chosen time frame (1769–1848) captured a dynamic period in terms of women and their property ownership options as a Czech serf population in general. The chosen methodology allowed working with a relatively large amount of data, but at the same time provided enough space to highlight individual cases, human fates and strategies that accompany the whole work and complement it in appropriate passages.

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