

PINCÉZÉS: A DRINKING-RELATED MALE SOCIAL INSTITUTION IN RURAL HUNGARY

Éva Huseby-Darvas, University of Michigan/Dearborn

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In this paper, I explore the social phenomenon of *pincézés* in a Northern Hungarian village, Cserépfalu. *Pincézés*, the cluster of social activities conducted by men in wine cellars in some parts of Hungary, is a regular, important, and judging from all indications, an ancient pastime in many areas of the Carpathian Basin. At first glance it appeared to me that *pincézés* takes place impromptu: that, casually and whenever they can, men simply visit with one another in alternating wine-cellars, and talk, sing, drink wine, and discuss the affairs of family, village, and world. However, early on in my initial fieldwork¹ in the village, it became evident that the institution of *pincézés* has its own etiquette, with particular regularities, rhythms, functions, and inner structures. Even a seemingly simple episode of *pincézés* that involves only two village men has its antecedents and consequences, organization and ceremony. Each such occurrence, of course, can be studied both *sui generis*, and also as an integral segment of the system of village interaction. I suggest here that an examination of *pincézés* reveals the effects of social change and shows the relationship of the village men with one another and the rest of society, just as much as it depicts the lives, images, and circumstances of village women, who, as it is claimed in Cserépfalu, never participate in this activity. Certainly for some functional and other similarities, *pincézés* could be compared to the complex of *tanyázás* in the Hungarian village of Átány that is analyzed by Fél and Hofer (1969:98-99 ff, 1973: 787-801), and the *kafana* institution of the Balkans discussed by Lockwood. (1975: 188-189)

A glance at the regional history of *pincézés*

It is difficult to determine just how far *pincézés* goes back in Cserépfalu and its region. Obviously, it accompanied the development of viniculture; the well-known viniculture of Eger

began in the twelfth century, twenty kilometers from the village.² However, not until a couple of centuries later was there grape-growing and wine-making in Cserépfalu, and some of the other villages of the foothills of the Bükk Mountain. As contemporary tithe-records reveal,³ the golden age of viniculture in Cserépfalu was in the 16th and 17th centuries. For example, between 1549 and 1576 wine production increased 415 percent, with 26.1 percent of the population growing grapes exclusively, while nearly 12 percent of the villagers cultivated them along with various grains. Interestingly, early viniculture was mainly the domain of the poorest serfs, with only 20 percent of wine produced by the more affluent peasants. (Kiss 1966: 215, ff)

By the late 19th century, however, viniculture in the entire region declined. This was brought on in part by ineffective socioeconomic policies following the 1848 freeing of the serfs, and in part by the devastation of phylloxera in the 1880s. Then, during the present century viniculture gained importance once again.⁴ At the time of my research (through the 1980s and in the summer of 1990), the majority of the 482 households in Cserépfalu were involved with viniculture. Yet I discovered that it would be futile to try to estimate just how profitable and how extensive this industry really is. Why? For many reasons, such as complications of taxation, it is impossible to get reliable data about the amount of wine produced or land cultivated. For example, in 1982, the villagers were greatly amused when I cited the official data about their annual production of 62,141 liters of wine. The only thing that is certain is that there is viniculture and it has a crucial place in the economic, social, and cultural life of Cserépfalu. I believe that for the present endeavor this is what really counts, since here I have no intention of offering here a detailed and precise account of

village wine production, *per se*. Rather, as I have already indicated, I will discuss the complex of *pincézés* as a changing yet persistently crucial scene in the shared life of commuting and non-commuting village men, the central point of male social networks, and an indicator of relationships and stereotypes of gender in Cserépfalu.

The *pince* [wine-cellar] ⁵

The area's more than 300 wine cellars are away from the nucleus of Cserépfalu. They are some distance from the village dwellings, as well as from the household plots, gardens, and vineyards. Actually, the rows of wine cellars form an irregular semi-circle on the northern, western and eastern peripheries of the village. These areas are called, in local parlance, Fidóc, Berezd, Csecsláp, and Pincevölgy. Mizser (1977) found that it is possible to trace the etymology of some of these place-names as far back as the 14th and 15th centuries.

The majority of the wine cellars are traditional, two-room structures that are dug into the soft stone of volcanic origin, the *riolit tufa* of the Bükk mountain. In the outer cell, empty barrels, tubs, and tools are kept along with other assorted paraphernalia of wine production. The inner cell, which is a long, narrow, downward-sloping, rather cold and musty enclave, contains barrels filled partially with wine, pails and sampling tubes. Here, at the farthest point in the cellar from the front door, candles, matches and two or three empty wine bottles stand on a shelf that is carved in stone. Under this shelf, on a wooden table or a big unused barrel, there are glasses and sampling-tubes. The more wine cellars I have visited the more I have noted the order and symmetry in this area. For that matter, the arrangement on and around the shelf and the table gives the impression of a sacred corner.

A note on the few non-traditional wine cellars is in order. These were built or reconstructed in the 1980s and 1990s and strongly resemble some of the summer cottages or weekend homes erected by affluent urban-dwellers throughout Hungary. For example, immediately north of Cserépfalu in the Fidóc area, the owner of a traditional wine cellar spent millions of Forints for the total reconstruction of his traditional two-celled cellar. He added colorful stone walls, a stairway, a flat concrete roof and two rooms, one of which is a so-called *vadász-szoba* ['hunter's room'] with a large

terrace that overlooks the village ball-playing court, and a wine-cellar row. The inside rooms, dedicated to wine-cellar rituals, have electricity, tables, benches, and red brick walls with numerous hunting trophies purchased by the owner in Transylvania. On warm Sunday afternoons, the owner of this two-story, four-room structure drinks wine on the porch while sitting and talking with about a half a dozen of friends and relatives, and periodically yells out to greet or call the attention of villagers passing by. In addition, much to the resentment, criticism, and open envy of fellow villagers, he often watches the various ball games - primarily soccer matches - from the terrace.

At first glance, these multi-leveled, mosaic-laden, ornate wine-cellars appear to convey evidence of rural conspicuous consumption. More significantly, however, they reflect the radical socio-economic change of the last decade or two, along with a transformation in the values and preferences of rural people. They are elements of a general process, of what György Konrád, Iván Szelényi, and others have called the *embourgeoisement* of the countryside - which is also manifest in household furnishings or the recent crypt-cult, and in numerous other examples.

Even though the majority of village families own a wine-cellar, the questions of having or not having one, where it is located, and how it was obtained are still matters of status and thus of great importance in Cserépfalu. The poorest villagers do not own wine-cellars and vineyards, as their parents and ancestors lived in the single- or double-celled cave dwellings on the peripheries of the Cserépfalu, the ultimate indication of poverty in the area. (cf. Bakó 1977; Szabó 1936, 1937) The men from the poorest families rarely have the opportunity to participate in *pincézés*. Rather, they frequent the few *bögrecsárda*, the village versions of underground 'speakeasies,' where they can get drinks for either money or eggs or produce. At the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum, some of the more affluent households own more than one *pince*, because, as I heard the boast, "the extra also came to us through inheritance." Still, in these cases, generally only one wine cellar is designated for *pincézés* and the preparation and storing of wines in particular, while the others are used to store vegetables, along with empty barrels, tubs and timeworn tools.

Pincézés as event

The men taking part in this wine-cellar activity stand in a semi-circle around the table or sit on the so-called *gantár-fa*, a long beam placed across several barrels. They drink, talk, and sing. Without fail, the cellar-owner, after making gestures imitating rinsing the glasses, pours the first glass of wine on the ground.

Scholars familiar with the gesture suggest⁶ that this first glass of wine is offered to the forefathers' spirits. With the ancient rite of pouring the first glass of wine on the ground, the host of the event honors his ancestors. However, when asked why they poured that glass of wine on the ground, the men of the village answered with "My father [or grandfather] always did it just like this, so I do it too," or "That is our way [in Cserépfalu], that is just the way we always do it around here." Another frequent reply was "I am just rinsing the glass." I suggest that these responses illustrate how traditional but still regularly practiced behavioral phenomena may lose their original "spiritual justification" or motivation over time, as well as how they can become associated with a functional custom having a hygienic or other pragmatic value.

The key to the *pince* as significant status symbol

Regardless of their age, village men never tired of telling me about their *pincézés*, particularly about the first time they were allowed to use the family *pince*. It was a great event when the head of the family gave the son of the household the carefully kept wine-cellar key with the words *Na, fiam, itt van. Menj osz kináld [borral] a barátaidat. Igyatok, de módjával. Vigyázz!* [Well, son, here it is. Go and offer wine to your pals. Drink, but with moderation. Be careful!]⁷ According to some men, they got the key first right after their confirmation in the local Calvinist Church, around the age of fourteen. Others connected it with enlistment in the army, another memorable event in the life of eighteen year old village men. As two brothers, János and István Kocsis, born in 1926 and 1931 respectively, added,

It was only [when we turned eighteen] that grandfather would hand over the key. Up until that point we had stolen it from the *mestergerenda* [the main ridge-beam of the house], where he always hid it.⁸

In both cases, whether following confirmation or conscription, the first authorized wine cellar activity is integrated with an important rite of passage: in the first case by becoming member of the village congregation, and in the second by entering what in the village would be considered the first phase of manhood.⁹ Even apart from these turning points that are so closely and overtly associated with getting their hands on the key to the family wine-cellar in the memories of village men, the key -- both as an object and a symbol -- was an entry into a much desired sphere, the wine-cellar, and thus began a highly coveted, lifelong, and exclusively male activity.

Pincézés in the life-cycle of village men

Indeed, *pincézés* has been and remains to be a life-long social institution among Cserépfalu men. Yet stories of informants made it clear that traditionally the male head of the household had not only the key, but also the actual rights to the use of the cellar. It was a rare and festive occasion for the unmarried and newlywed young men, and an even more unusual treat for one who, most often because of poverty, deviated from the traditional virilocal residency pattern after marriage by moving into his wife's parents' household. In the words of Károly Mohony, who was born in 1925,

Back when I was a kid, our elders did not give you the key just like that, as is the case nowadays. It was well hidden and the owner kept it either in his bootleg, or on the *mestergerenda* [main girder of the house]. He would go to the cellar whenever he wanted, but for the young it was mostly a forbidden territory. We were allowed to work in the vineyard, to help prepare the wine, and might drink in the spinning houses while courting. In the winter, you would get the key for the family wine-cellar for one occasional evening, but even that had to be deserved. But there were some young guys who would spy on their old men for the key and once they got hold of it, made a wax-impression and had a new key made.... If they were found out, of course they got the beating of their lifetime.

For many centuries, the virilocal post-marital residence system was followed in Cserépfalu. However, there were exceptions to this rule. Imre Csergő, born in 1914 as the seventh child of a landless family, moved in "as a son-in-law" - *vőnek mentem*, as he told me

with evident embarrassment - when he married into a family with no sons. As Imre recalled,

a son-in-law had no *pince* rights, no *pince* privileges.... As long as my father-in-law was alive, there was no instance that he would give the key to anybody. If by chance the two of us were coming home together from the fields and he was in rare, I should say exceptionally good mood, then we would drop in together for a glass of wine. But he would rather send me on home while he drank with his *koma* [co-godparent, a fictive kin] and wine-cellar neighbors.

Traditionally, certain occasions served as opportunities for *pincézés*, and unwritten but apparently strictly-observed rules directed who took part, with whom, when, and in whose wine-cellar. Like elsewhere in the area prior to World War II (cf Szendrey, 1938: 124-127), *pincézés* was mostly restricted to the period between the October grape harvest and mid-spring. The relative concentration in time did not mean that villagers did not have wine in the summer. For that matter, according to old informants, one important sign "of a responsible, thrifty, sober man was that he served last year's wine at harvest time."

Single young men engaged in *pincézés* mostly in age-graded groups, while for married men the activity meant more of a social gathering with kin, fictive kin, and neighbors. Church presbyters, teachers, and secular community leaders got together at least once each week, as the former village magistrate, born in 1897, recalled,

to visit each other's *pince*, drink a little wine and discuss village affairs in the *pince*. That way, you see, women folks could not get their noses into our serious business and could not gossip about what was going on. ...We took turns each time in going from cellar to cellar since much wine was consumed even though we never got drunk. Drunks were not respected: back then, you had to know how to drink if you called yourself a real man. Otherwise you would not be respected...Still, we enjoyed drinking and had fun in the wine-cellar, but we did it moderately. Nowadays many young people would walk about the village drunk even during broad daylight! We still

drank old wine at harvest time, but these young ones they drink up everything, and their barrels are bone-dry by March.

Sex in the *pince* ?

According to village women, the *pince* is male territory, and *pincézés* is an activity for men. During the day a woman may run out to the family wine-cellar, but most of them would rather ask their husbands, or fathers-in-law, or brothers-in-law to bring home wine, or -- in those cases where produce are stored in or near these cellars -- potatoes or vegetables. However, most informants, both men and women insisted that after dark "a decent woman from our village would not even look toward the wine-cellar rows, not to mention going there."

Thus, ideally, *pincézés* is exclusively male domain in this village.¹⁰ There is, however, certain inconsistency between this ideal and actual behavior; For that matter, there are many indications of female involvement. For example, I found several notations in the local church archives dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries about local village women and men "having to pay public penitence for illicit intercourse in the Berezd *pince*...." It was also implied in 1982 in the angry exchange of words between two village women, as one woman yelled, "you got knocked up with all your kids in the *pince* and you dare call me a whore!" As, among others, 91 year-old András Barkó told me,

the old men way back told me that on Saturday nights some non-village women - - mind you not from our Cserép[falu] -- walked through the wine cellar rows and yelled in [for the men who were in the process of *pincézés*] three times to each wine-cellar: '*cserényi*' [to exchange, barter, swap]. Some men asked them in and *megkamóták* [village slang expression for coitus]. Well, the next day or the following Saturday these women came back and got their pay in grain or wine. (cited in Huseby 1984: 266)

The ideology that decent women do not go to the wine-cellar row after dark made my study of *pincézés* in Cserépfalu most challenging. At the same time, I was convinced that I must get at least a first hand notion of what it looks and feels like. Therefore, on some name-days and birthdays, on four occasions in three different

wine-cellars, I observed and, as much as it was possible, participated in *pincézés* (Huseby-Darvas, 1999). However, my presence in the wine-cellars made all of us present - the participating men and myself - immensely uncomfortable, and, without doubt, changed their behavior. Later, rather than going myself, I asked a number of visiting male friends and colleagues to accept the villagers' invitations to the wine-cellars for these occasions and to study what was going on. While I am certain that their presence also altered the "natural state of Cserépfalu *pincézés*," their visits were less intrusive than mine.¹

***Pincézés* during and after the Second World War**

World War II and the subsequent social and economic changes not only affected but totally transformed the social institution of *pincézés*. Sándor Bodrog, a villager who was born in 1937, recalled that

the proper order of the world was all topsy-turvy [during the war], so it was no problem for me and my pals to steal the wine-cellar key from under the head of my great-grandfather where he kept it in the straw mattress ...my age group and I stole out to the *pince* regularly from the ages of seven or eight....

Aunt Lenke Dankó, born in 1911, recalled that in the forties, none of us had our men; all of them were away, on the front. My man fell at the Don when I was thirty two. The same year I buried my father-in-law. There we were, women and children. We would have made wine, but did not have enough grapes and did not really know how...Well, we ended up making beer from barley. It was good, but different. But everything was different [in those years] and nothing ever became the same as before ever since.... After my man died I had to go to the *pince*, then soon after my sons were confirmed they went to the city to study and then to work (ibid).

Since the Second World War, three parallel and mutually reinforcing processes altered essentially all aspects of village life, including, of course, *pincézés*. First, forced industrialization brought about large-scale mass commuting between the village and industrial and mining centers, as well as permanent out-migration. Approximately six-hundred people

moved away from Cserépfalu between 1949 and 1960. Secondly, from the early 1950s on, the drastic reorganization of agriculture and its branch industries radically changed traditional relationships and hierarchy both within and between families. One result was that most households with extended families broke up into nuclear families after having been forced to join the cooperatives. Also, atomization is evident in all generations and all strata throughout village society. Thirdly, expanding mass communication has strongly influenced the views, values and aspirations of the villagers and accelerated the complex processes of *embourgeoisement* in rural communities during these decades.

Without doubt, these processes changed the traditional order, practice, and meaning of *pincézés* in Cserépfalu. Today wine cellar activity has an immense attraction particularly for men commuting to and from the village, for teenagers and for old men. Rather than being more-or-less seasonal, today *pincézés* is potentially a year-round activity. Of course, the key occasions for this gathering are Friday and Saturday evenings, Sunday afternoons, the eves of all holidays, the village's patron saint's day, or the various male name-days. According to most accounts, today it is much easier for young men to get a key to the family cellar than it used to be: "These kids simply get it if they ask for it...for us it was not so easy...," remarked a villager born in 1921. It is generally held by middle aged and elderly villagers that for today's youth everything is much more effortless and available than it was for previous generations of Cserépfalu natives.

The *pince* is still said to be primarily male domain, where, as men claim they can "get away from our women folk." cit? In some sense, the local ideology about how "decent women must keep away from the *pince* rows after dark" still prevails. Yet there are indeed generational differences: Younger men and some returning former villagers take their fiancées, wives, or families with them to the wine-cellar in the late afternoons or early evenings to fry some bacon, drink a little wine, or talk and sing a little. But then they walk the women back to the village, returning at night for what they call the real *pincézés*.

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Notes

- ¹ The present endeavor is based on fieldwork that I started in 1982-1983, and on my annual visits to the village. In the summer of 1990, I returned to rural Hungary and studied gender differentiated attitudes and behavior regarding both aging and the uses of alcohol. The fieldwork was made possible with the help of University of Michigan Alcohol Research Center's grant No. P50-AA07378 from the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. In 1982-83, 1984, 1985 and 1987, field trips to Hungary were supported by grants from IREX [the International Research and Exchanges Board], Fulbright-Hays, and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The generous assistance of these institutions is thankfully acknowledged.
- ² Where, among other wines, the well-known "Bull's Blood of Eger" is produced.
- ³ Mezőgazdasági Statisztikai Adatgyűjtemény 1870-1970 [Agricultural Statistical Data Base 1870-1970]. Budapest: KSH.
- ⁴ As the following figures illustrate, this tendency did not last long:
- Area of Cserépfalu Vineyards between 1895 and 1966

Year	Vineyards, in <u>holds</u> [1 hold=1.42 acres]
1895	27
1913	62
1935	116
1962	104
1966	131

(*Mezőgazdasági Statisztikai Adatgyűjtemény 1971*)

In 1982-83 the vineyards occupied just under 75 *holds* land that was privately owned, and 52 *hectares* [1 *hectare* = 2.41 acres] of land that belonged to the regional Agricultural Cooperative (data courtesy of János Hilóczy, president of the Agricultural Cooperative)

- ⁵ See, in particular, Bakó, 1961, 1989; Huseby 1983, 1984.
- ⁶ For this interpretation, along with general consultation about *pincézés* in this area of Hungary, I am most grateful for the help of my dear friend and colleague, Ferenc Bakó.
- ⁹ I would define the second and third phases of manhood as marriage and fatherhood, respectively. An unmarried man, regardless of age or the amount of time he may have spent in the army, is still referred to in Cserépfalu as *fiú*, meaning boy. (Huseby-Darvas, 1987)
- ¹⁰ Elsewhere in the Carpathian Basin there were separate and clandestine women's *pincézés* on certain occasions, according to Szendrey (1938) and Ujváry (personal communication).