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of

Edit Belényesyné Sárosi

on

Landscapes and settlements in the Kecskemét Region, 1300–1700

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Doctoral Dissertation Abstract

Landscapes and Settlements in the Keckskemét Region, 1300–1700

This doctoral thesis provides a descriptive analysis on the changing landscape of settlements in the Danube-Tisza Interfluvial Region, located in the Great Hungarian Plain. More directly, the study aims at presenting the process of development of how the network of late medieval villages and market towns emerged, and how this pattern was replaced slowly by a few nuclei of market towns surrounded by an abundance of isolated farmsteads by the late eighteenth century. Settlement history and especially the development of various settlement forms are among the old-established research fields in Hungary; beside historical, geographical and ethnographical studies, archaeology played an active role in the study of settlement systems from the first decades of the twentieth century. The recent study of settlements, influenced by the frameworks of historical research, broke up to the specialized time frames of the Árpáadian Age (tenth to thirteenth century), the late medieval (fourteenth century until 1526) and the Ottoman periods (1526-1686). In my opinion, the transformations in the settlement pattern can be mostly detected as long-term tendencies, or processes, which are strongly interconnected not only with socio-economic changes and special historical situations, but also varying ecological factors. Thus, one of the main ambitions of my dissertation was to break these theoretical frameworks, and find a context that makes sense of the changes in terms of settlement history. Accordingly, I decided to tackle the period from the late thirteenth-fourteenth century till the late seventeenth century, that is, in the context of the study area in the Interfluvial Region, the period from the formation of the late medieval nucleated villages and the emergence of market towns until the desertion of medieval villages and the formation of the isolated farmstead system in the seventeenth century.

The dissertation comprises three main structural blocks. In the first part, I described my research strategy, the available interdisciplinary source material and the natural environment of the study area in order to familiarize the reader with the elements of the modern landscape and those factors that played an important role in the development of the landscape around Keckskemét (Chapter 2-3). The second major part concerns the landscape of settlements (Chapters 4-7). In that context in the first place I investigated the settlement pattern: hierarchy, dispersion, nucleation as well as desertion processes in the study area. I included three case studies (Keckskemét, Szentkirály and Monostor) in order to demonstrate general patterns as well as local

models of settlement development. In the third part of the dissertation I presented a detailed picture of land management, with a special focus on agrarian production (Chapter 8).

The first set of research questions connect to the **development model and distribution pattern of the settlements** in the study area. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were defined by significant realignment in the settlement pattern, not only in the central part of the Danube-Tisza Interfluvial Region, but throughout the Hungarian Kingdom. This transformation was influenced in part by changes in economic and social structures, and accelerated by the impacts of the Mongol Invasion in 1241-1242. The period witnessed a number of additional changes such as developments in agricultural techniques. The appearance of above-ground, multi-roomed houses instead of semi-subterranean huts and the building of private representative residences were other important elements in the process.

The rearrangement of settlements in the Danube-Tisza Interfluvial Region was notably influenced by movements of Cuman people into the area from the second half of the thirteenth century, giving a special local direction to development, as after the Mongol Invasion, sizeable parts of the depopulated royal estates as well as private lands were let to Cuman kindreds. The development in the settlement system was further affected by the transformation of both royal and private estate bodies in the thirteenth-fourteenth century. The documentary sources suggest that large royal estates were located from the Árpáadian Period till the first half of the fifteenth century in the central part of the Danube-Tisza Region, preventing the formation of extended private lordships. Probably, significant parts of deserted or non viable royal properties (which were not populated by Cumans) were reorganized and attached to surviving and/or developing local market centers such as the later towns of Kecskemét, Cegléd, and Halas. The fact that clusters of deserted early villages are typically found in the vicinity of later urban centers can be regarded as an indicator for this rearrangement. Regrettably, in the absence of detailed written evidence and archaeological data, it cannot be decided to what extent the deserted early settlements were destroyed by the Mongols in 1241-1242. Were these lands subsequently attached to other settlements as physically destroyed and depopulated territories or did these sites (or at least some of them) survive the Mongol Invasion so that their disappearance can be connected to some conscious reorganization process.

The late fourteenth and fifteenth century is characterized by an apparent nucleation resulting in the emergence of few local market centers and a larger body of villages. Looking closer at the hierarchy of settlements in the area between the two dominant urban cores of Szeged

and Pest, Kecskemét and Cegléd became noteworthy market towns with similarly moderate urban functions. The earlier temporary 'dwelling sites' of the Cuman population were replaced by a solid network of nucleated villages whose morphology, architecture, and material culture reflect a comprehensive integration with and assimilation to Hungarian culture. However, the arrival of the Cumans established a new pattern characterized by larger and coherent bodies of lands owned by Cuman landlords, lying between the sizeable lands of market towns and smaller 'islands' of Hungarian villages.

The nucleation process continued in the late fifteenth-sixteenth century; in this period three main chronological phases and types of settlement desertion can be observed. It is not easy to determine which settlements had better prospects for survival. As a general tendency it seems that most of those villages that were inhabited in the sixteenth century are among those which occupied or continued earlier Árpád Period sites and it seems that fifteenth-century Cuman habitation settlements with no known Árpád Period predecessor were more likely to disappear. Environmental factors such as fertility and type of soils and the closely connected economic potential of fields especially given the introduction of new kinds of plows must be an important, however not yet explored aspects of this process. Climate change connected to the onset of the cooling period known as the Little Ice Age was possibly also among the reasons for abandonment, as it was demonstrated in connection with Monostor. Site location is another key issue in understanding the reasons behind this phenomenon. It seems that those sites which remained viable in the longer term were located along roads carrying major traffic, suggesting that the communication networks of the Árpád Period were used in later centuries. The growth of large-scale animal husbandry, and more importantly, the expansion of animal trade might have served at least partly as a background for either the survival or desertion of a settlement. It is apparent that all villages which were probably involved in the raising and trading of animals are situated along major traffic routes.

The first wave of desertion concerned several of the Cuman sites established early, most probably impermanent dwellings were deserted before 1500 (such as Zomokzallas, Köncsög and Bugac). A second wave of abandonment can be ascertained around the time of the Ottoman conquest of Hungary. It is remarkable that some villages, for instance Ágasegyháza, Monostor, Borbásszállás, appear in documentary sources and/or archaeological material as inhabited sites in the early sixteenth century. However, the first Ottoman defter in 1546 records them as deserted lands, which suggests that their depopulation can be directly connected to the Ottoman

occupation of the area. Interestingly, all these deserted lands had been noted as being rented/managed by the citizens of Kecskemét from the year 1546 which means that there was no long break or intermission in the cultivation of the village lands after their abandonment. In my interpretation, this pattern raises the issue of whether the disappearance of settlements was the direct result of wartime destruction or whether it was a form of planned evacuation of settlements initiated by the overlords or the inhabitants themselves. The documentary evidence suggests that the number of villages remained relatively stable during the first decades of the Ottoman occupation until the Fifteen-year' war; all those villages that were recorded as being inhabited in 1546 were registered as villages in 1590. The most intensive phase of desertion occurred between 1591 and 1606 when documentary sources report extensive destruction throughout the Interfluve area. In this period, literally all settlements were abandoned except for the three market towns of Kecskemét, Nagykőrös and Cegléd.

In terms of **morphology**, the data suggest that nucleated villages with regular row elements were the most characteristic features in the late medieval rural landscape in the study area. At present no indications of irregular or agglomerated features in the period between the fifteenth and seventeenth century are verified. The settlements became structured along streets from the early fifteenth century and the peasant holdings were divided into standard tofts, comprising the croft where the above-ground, multi-roomed peasant house was located within a small farmyard and large agricultural lands belonging to the same unit. The presence of sties and stables as well as the possible storage-function connected to the house suggests that the draught animals were kept. Storage areas were available in the farmyard area surrounding the house. The church and the churchyard are also key components of village sites. Market places were present in only the larger villages, many of which appear as market towns in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century.

At *Monostor*, I applied field-walking, excavation, aerial photography, geophysical survey in addition to the collection of documentary and cartographic material. The results allowed me to deduce that there were two main cores to settlements, one in the southern Alsómonostor part and another in the northern Felsőmonostor area. The dispersed farmsteads and the early village at Alsómonostor were deserted in the early fourteenth century at the latest based on surface finds, while at Felsőmonostor the village was continuously inhabited from the eleventh to the late sixteenth century. Lacking systematic excavation of the deserted sites themselves, the exact date and cause of their abandonment is unknown. Searching for the reasons for their abandonment, I

correlated my observations to recent climate studies which describe the early fourteenth century as the beginning of a cooling period with more precipitation. The deserted early sites expanded to areas lying 103-111m above sea level and were often located on areas near lakes or swampy areas, while late medieval settlement features avoided areas below 108m above sea level, which pattern in my understanding means that one possible reason for the settlement desertion was the rise in ground water levels related to climatic change. At Felsőmonostor the connection between the settlement and the monastery is essential from both chronological and morphological point of view. The field surveys indicate that the early village surely preceded the foundation and the building of the monastery, which was founded in the twelfth century and abandoned in the early fourteenth century. Among other elements of the villagescape, the parish church was surveyed and some parts of the street (or one of the streets?) were identified on aerial photos, an observation which suggests that the late medieval site at Felsőmonostor was a street-village-type settlement.

A similar interdisciplinary approach was employed *Szentkirály*, where the earlier surveys of András Pálóczi-Horváth were supplemented with new excavations and aerial photography. The data suggest that there were three major settlement cores with parish churches within the territory of the later village during the *Árpád Period*, which were all abandoned by the time the Cumans arrived in the area around the turn of the thirteenth century. They chose the site of their permanent settlement around the ruins of one deserted *Árpád Period* church and village, first referred to as *Szentkirály* in 1354. Their site selection clearly demonstrates that their settlement was influenced by the former habitation pattern of the *Árpád Period*. The focus of the settlement in the late medieval and early modern period remained the *Árpád Period* church which was renovated and enlarged in the Gothic style in the fifteenth century. The archaeological investigations revealed that the late medieval village was in fact settled at the junction of the roads that led from the direction of *Kecskemét* towards crossing points on the *Tisza River*. Several sections of this road, identical with the main street of the late medieval village, were excavated by both András Pálóczi-Horváth and myself. The presence of shallow ditches and fences along both sides of the road indicate that communal and private areas were physically separated in the late medieval period. The transitional phase of the Cuman settlement process ended in the first half of the fifteenth century when the first fixed houses were built. The houses were located at distances of 100-105m from each other, permitting the inference that the width of the inner plot of each house was around 70-75m. The above-ground multi-roomed houses display substantial

similarities in their building techniques and formal traditions; however, there were several variants of houses with complex heating systems.

Kecskemét represents a special regional model of urban development. Until the mid-fourteenth century, Kecskemét was one of the emerging sites, with the same potential to develop into an important local centre as any other village. The situation changed from the second half of the fourteenth century, as all surrounding properties were donated to private landowners, partly to Hungarian noblemen and partly to members of the Cuman elite. These processes opened up short-term prospects for Kecskemét, which remained part of the royal estates until 1439. The function of Kecskemét as a major node of commerce and political importance in the central part of the Danube-Tisza Interfluvium Region from the mid-fifteenth century is beyond doubt. Based on its advantageous geographical location, royal patronage encouraged the town's participation in regional and long distance trade. Spatial growth was another important factor in the development. The annexation and later renting out of nearby deserted village lands used as free expansion zones for agricultural production, played a significant role in the town's growth. Livestock husbandry, in particular the large-scale breeding of cattle and sheep, dominated. In this respect, the urban development of Kecskemét represents a special model, as instead of specialized crafts or industries, animal husbandry, especially the breeding of cattle and sheep were the two major motivating features besides trading that encouraged urbanization.

The most prominent urban indicator of Kecskemét was its role as a major traffic junction; eleven other central places could be reached from the town without going through other centers. Three annual fairs and a weekly market were among the major urban activities conducted in the town. In addition, the presence of self governance in the town, the royal customs office, and the administration of salt production in the fifteenth century reflect Kecskemét's urban potential. In respect to judicial activities, Kecskemét's role as a Cuman seat should be mentioned. The presence of crafts can only be discussed from the mid-sixteenth century when data on three guilds (goldsmiths, furriers and tailors) and specialized craftsmen appear in the sixteenth century. Many of these activities were connected to the processing of animal products. The Ottoman tax rolls suggest that in 1559, around 20% of registered family heads were craftsmen, a percentage corresponding to similar occupation proportions in major market towns in the Great Plain Region.

Based on the first detailed topographic representations, especially the map of the First Ordnance Survey, it was possible to define topographic layers in the town plan and identify numerous continuous features in the present-day townscape. I suggest that the settlement

developed from compound settlement clusters. More closely, I believe that the town developed from two medieval settlement cores, with two individual parishes, one dedicated to Saint Nicholas and the other to Virgin Mary. Accordingly, the dense, irregular clustered areas around the medieval parishes supposedly represent the earliest texture in the town plan. The second layer in the texture are the lines connecting the two early settlement cores with the inner market place around Saint Nicholas' and the outer market place (*Vásártér*, 'Fair-ground'), which seem already to have been laid out by the late fifteenth-early sixteenth century. The Ottoman tax rolls and the emerging town protocols name twelve streets in the mid-sixteenth century showing that the town had a composite, multi-street plan by that time. The town was defended by a system of a ditch and palisades in the late sixteenth century. Most possibly, the town expanded radially along the main channels of traffic during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Hence those small convergences of four to five minor streets along these major streets on the eighteenth century town plan, might refer back to earlier stages in town development, namely, a former town boundary. The possible direction for the growth of the settlement in the seventeenth-eighteenth century was influenced by the location of the *Vásártér* (the 'Fair-ground'); the special spatial needs of the fairs presumably blocked expansion towards the South. Thus, the main expansion was directed towards the north- and northeast. Consequently, the more regular, grid-like street pattern north-, north-east of Delló Lake may well be the remains of a planned expansion along the prolongation of Kőrösi Street, which probably happened in the seventeenth and eighteenth century period.

Continuity is another relevant aspect in the townscape of Kecskemét; the factors displaying the strongest and most visible permanence in the townscape are the streets, both the name and the pattern of the streets, many of which still exist today. Beside the streets, the latest possible path of the former defensive ditch system and the sites of the five major gates had further major impact on settlement morphology. The available information on the pre-modern town plan of Kecskemét suggests the settlement most definitely had an urban character by the second half of the sixteenth century. The urban use of space is represented by the dense pattern of streets connected to high densities of houses located around the parish churches, the widened main streets, the accommodation of the market places, and the presence of the defensive structure around the town. Still, the pre-eighteenth century architecture of the settlement presumably resembled rural settlements, as the townscape was dominated by one-storied buildings built in the fashion of village houses.

In the third part of the dissertation I described **land management**, with a special focus on agrarian production. This contributes to an understanding of the way how interactions between the town and countryside contributed to urban development. Various features associated with land use were interpreted such as the boundaries, the system and the pattern of the fields. Woodland, vineyards and orchards in the context of the production and ownership were also considered since these are aspects that have not been highlighted in previous studies.

In terms of the visible frameworks of land management, I tested available information about boundary-lines in the study area to see if it was at all possible to connect documentary sources and topographical representations with existing landscape features. The preliminary results of this experiment were unexpectedly successful. The outcomes of the present survey showed that it is worth dealing with the survival and field survey of pre-modern boundary marks, since they seem to be among the rare surviving and continuous pre-modern landscape features in the region. The pattern of boundaries was apparently influenced by settlement nucleation and dispersion processes in the area. In that regard, the most important observation is that the town directly absorbed deserted village lands into its economy. The “puszta economy” meant that one part of these lands were divided and distributed by the town magistrates as parcels among the citizens; both extensive pastures and arable fields, called ‘gardens’, were allotted. A few *puszta* lands were leased by private companionships of wealthy citizens. The ‘gardens’ were actually free leaseholds. In this manner, the people of Kecskemét became freeholders of lands by the seventeenth century, but remained tenant peasants under Hungarian law. It seems that the majority of these allotted fields was situated around the core areas of the town and was managed as arable land. Sometimes vineyards are also mentioned in or among the gardens, but animal husbandry is not referred to explicitly.

Generally, this management system can be described as a model with agricultural zones around the town consisting of inner arable fields and pasturelands on faraway deserted lands. However, the system was more complex as the population was capable of maintaining farming and in the context of deserted lands. Consequently, the choice between arable farming and animal husbandry was not made on the basis of the distance from the town alone; other factors such as carrying capacity, soil fertility, or in case of stock-breeding the distance of pasture from the place of the market, were among the factors considered in the selection. Moreover, it is important that even if large-scale animal husbandry dominated the management of the deserted lands, documentary sources suggest that arable farming was also continuously present.

Woodland management and horticulture have received relatively little scholarly attention compared to animal husbandry in the study area. I demonstrated that some elements of the woodland steppe, which is regarded as part of the natural ecology of the Great Plain Region, was present from the medieval period until the nineteenth century in this area, especially around Cegléd, Nagykőrös and Kecskemét. Beside woodland, forest pastures were also present as at Bugac, Szentkirály and Cegléd. Gardens, vineyards and horticulture are unexplored subjects as well within the field system of Kecskemét. The free legal status of the vineyards of Kecskemét played a key role in the early modern expansion of the town in addition to the produce from meadow gardens.

Finally, both the **patterning and structure of settlements** was part of a dynamic system in the fourteenth to seventeenth century period in which the frameworks for living and production in the changing political, economic and climatic circumstances were adopted. Still, it is only partially possible to review the late medieval and early modern history of villages, even if most of the late medieval rural settlements around Kecskemét have been mapped. The biggest problem is the insufficient information on the individual histories of settlements, for instance in terms of desertion, a crucial feature when describing overall patterns and changes in the landscape. The results of the present dissertation suggest that settlement desertion cannot be automatically interpreted as a synonym for destruction, as the abandonment of settlements could equally result from planned spatial realignments or economic reorganization of an area, rather than from a series of random events. In this respect, the present discussion has highlighted and suggested some key directions for future detailed investigations.

At last, the dissertation has successfully demonstrated that a conscious synthesis of methodology and the application of multi-disciplinary source materials may greatly enhance the perception and interpretation of past landscapes. Hopefully, it will be regarded as an inspiration for future landscape studies in Hungary and will provide useful comparative material for international scholarship.

Curriculum Vitae
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Education:

- 2001-2004 Ph.D. Studies, Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary;
- 2000-2001 MA in Medieval Studies, Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary;
- 1995-2000 MA in Archaeology, Department of Archaeology, Loránd Eötvös University Budapest

Employment:

- 2004-present inspector of archaeology in Veszprém County (Public Administration Office for Planning and Heritage of Veszprém County)

Scholarships and Awards:

- 2011 NKA (National Cultural Fund of Hungary) research grant, RURALIA IX conference in Götzis, Austria
- 2010 NKA (National Cultural Fund of Hungary) research grant to participate at the 45th International Congress on Medieval studies at Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA
- 2009 DAAD research-scholarship, Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the University of Göttingen, Germany
- 2009 NKA (National Cultural Fund of Hungary) research grant to attend RURALIA VIII conference in Lorca, Spain
- 2007 CEU Travel Grant to attend RURALIA VII conference in Cardiff, England
- 2005 Leonardo da Vinci Partnership- exchange scholarship
- 2004 Doctoral Research Support Grant of CEU, Discovery Programme, Dublin, Ireland
- 2001-2004 Open Society Foundation Scholarship to undertake PhD in Medieval Studies, Central European University
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Recent Publications (related to the topic of the doctoral thesis):

“The development of a market town and its market places in the Hungarian Great Plain: Kecskemét, a case study” *Historia Urbana* (accepted for publication, forthcoming in 2013)

Kecskemét. Magyar Várostartörténeti Atlasz. Hungarian Atlas of Historic Towns (forthcoming in 2014)

”A kecskeméti piactér és vásártér történeti földrajza” [The historical topography of the market places at Kecskemét] *Történelmi Szemle* 53 (2011): 615-632.

“Hungarian grey cattle on the European market between the 15th and the 17th century”. In: *Ruralia 8. Processing, Distribution of Food. Food in the Medieval Rural Environment*, edited by Jan Klàpštè and Peter Sommer, Turnhout: Brepols, 391-398.

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“Landscape and the possibilities of archaeological topography.” In: *People and Nature in Historical Perspective*, edited by József Laszlovszky and Péter Szabó, *CEU Medievalia 5*, Budapest: CEU Department of Medieval Studies & Archaeologia, 2003, 313-343.