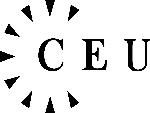
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The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation of

**László Ferenczi**

entitled

**Management of Monastic Landscapes. A Spatial Analysis of the Economy of Cistercian Monasteries in Medieval Hungary**

will be held on

**Friday, 21 June 2018, at 10:00 am**

in the

**Senate Room-Monument Building**

**Central European University (CEU)**

**Nádor u. 9, Budapest**

**Examination Committee**

Chair László Pintér (CEU, Environmental Sciences and Policy Department)

Members József Laszlovszky, supervisor (CEU, Medieval Studies Department)

Balázs Nagy, (CEU, Medieval Studies Department)

Katalin Szende (CEU, Medieval Studies Department)

External readers Emilia Jamroziak (University of Leeds) – not present

Beatrix F. Romhányi (Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church) – present

The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection on the CEU e-learning site.   
Should you wish to access it contact Csilla Dobos (dobos@ceu.edu)

**Summary of the Doctoral Dissertation**

This thesis aimed at studying the economy of Cistercian abbeys in Hungary, demonstrating the potentials of topographical research, combining different types of sources and applying a comparative methodology. A topographical and comparative approach has been warranted by both the need to surmount the difficulties raised by the scarcity of archival records, and to contribute to a more nuanced interpretation of Cistercian economic practices on a regional basis – in this case, Central Eastern Europe. By focusing on the study of local archives concerning a selection of Hungarian Cistercian estates, the thesis intentionally distanced itself from the generalizations concerning a uniform Cistercian model on the one hand – as has been criticized by many scholars like Isabel Alfonso, Werner Rösener and Emilia Jamroziak – and on the other hand from the traditional debate on “ideals” versus “reality”, which entails a predisposition on emphasizing decline not only chronologically, but also in connection to the spread of this model into different regions – instead of adaptation and diversity. In doing so, the thesis generally advocates a practical, functional viewpoint on Cistercian economy, contesting the views of religious and cultural history, which tend to overemphasize deviation from the norms.

Landscape archaeological and historical topographical studies typically focus on the following issues concerning monastic economy: 1) the site location of monasteries, 2) the topography of monastic precincts; 3) the transformation of the landscape in the vicinity of the abbeys (in terms of water management and the expansion of agricultural lands (cropland, pasture) through assarting 4) the re-configuration of estate management (with regard to the changing role of manorial economy) 5) the role of markets and towns. The four thematic chapters explored mainly the last three points, as aspects of manorial economy of Cistercian estates. They relied primarily on archival evidence and included – where possible – comparative research concerning other monastic orders (Benedictines, Paulines) to illustrate how Cistercian practices relate to these strategies and what are the characteristic points.

Chapter 1 looked into the topography of granges and other farms. The comparative analysis of the physical topographical character of manorial sites and farmlands confirmed that despite that there is a great diversity – when looking on a European scale –, evidence for Hungarian, Bohemian and Polish abbeys reflect that farms had a similar layout – characteristic was the regular arrangement, the inner and outer courts and chapels. They typically had relatively large croplands (arable), and as far as the Hungarian examples are concerned, their size was basically identical to that of other large farms of e.g. Benedictine monasteries. Concluding from this, it would be difficult to argue that the size of farms was an innovative element of Cistercian economy in a local context.

In regard to management, the topographical situation of farms can be used as proxy, since data on the role of *conversi* are scant. Farms clearly had a mixed character: some are referred to as being, and could be in fact, managed as granges, supervised by monks and laybrothers, equipped with new buildings, while others were of the traditional type (mentioned simply as *predium*). Different types of manorial farms could sometimes form a conglomerate. Originally, most of the farms we hear about in the records seem to have been established before the Cistercians settled and it seems that the monks were only converting some of them into granges and perhaps new ones were also established (particularly in the vicinity of the abbeys, like the one near Pilis, at Pomáz-Nagykovácsi puszta).

By compiling quantitative data on the farms, it was also possible to measure – so to say – the economic footprint of the abbeys. It seems that major Cistercian estates had a considerable network of farms, each with large (ca 200-300 ha) arable section. On the estates of Borsmonostor, Szentgotthárd and Topuszkó 4-5 granges could be counted, and there was a similar number of *predia* as well. These were situated both nearby and distantly, and they were usually tied to tenanted settlement, which were situated in their vicinity. This mixed system – consisting of privately managed farms (granges) and traditional farms – confirms the criticism put forward by Alfonso concerning the neglected feudal character of Cistercian estate management. The topographical data, as well as the scant evidence concerning the *conversi*, suggest that the impact of the order in shaping the medieval landscape through the introduction of grange economy was less substantial than elsewhere. This had been anticipated earlier by László Koszta and Beatrix F. Romhányi, yet, there is now also substantial evidence to argue that major Cistercian abbeys did have a small network of granges and were interested in keeping up grange economy as late as the end of the fourteenth century, most probably focusing their production on special cultivations (predominantly viticulture, crop (wheat) farming) and sometimes managing farms at more distant locations which were of particular importance. Overall, data on the method of management, the economic preferences and activities do not reflect a particularly “Cistercian” character. However, the data illustrate that wealthier Cistercian estates (the royal foundations) were more successful in managing economic assets than other Cistercian foundations.

Chapter 4 and 5 set out to discuss animal husbandry and industrial activities, i.e. themes which have been relatively less well researched or completely ignored, partly due to lack of sources and also due to lack of interest. In connection to large sized farms, potential arable-pasture ratios as well as livestock compositions were calculated based on aggregate data from individual charters. Relying on animal lists (available in foundation charters and late medieval household accounts), it was also possible to “measure” and compare the significance of animal farming of different monastic and lay estates. These examples were geographically diverse and reflected the different landscape character. Based on archaeozoological data and samples of other types of documents – e.g. court cases – as well as historical ethnographical data, it seems feasible to argue that regional preferences in animal farming were just as transparent in medieval times as in later centuries.

However, the comparative analysis of animal lists from different periods also pointed to drastic changes in livestock composition from the early to the late medieval period. Except for pig husbandry (that served the late medieval monastic diet), there seems to have been an almost total collapse of animal husbandry on monastic estates (already in the fourteenth century). Sheep husbandry definitely disappeared, but more generally animal farming – as a labor-intensive branch of economy – did not seem to recover from the socio-economic crisis.

Chapter 5 presented a case study, focusing on the Abbey of Pilis and its nearby grange. Based on topographical and landscape archaeological data from past and recent field surveys, this particularly well-documented example illustrates how landscapes in the vicinity of the monasteries could have gone through a profound transformation. One of the key points made here was the complex use of resources (fishponds, mills, and both agricultural and industrial use of woodland). The economic activities of the Cistercians were likely limited by the fact that their lands were situated within a royal forest, but the scope of their activities was diverse. Chronologically, the creation of a grange likely followed the desertion of an early medieval settlement and was perhaps the outcome of a project coordinated from the Austrian abbey of Heiligenkreuz in the late fourteenth century to renovate monastic life at Pilis. The results of recent excavations have revealed that at a later point the site became a center for local glass production. In connection to the material remains recovered thus far, the themes of technology transfer and production circles were problematized. One could hypothesize that the technology arrived here with the new group of monks recruited from Austrian and German abbeys and that the products of the workshop were intended for the markets of nearby royal towns.

In Chapter 6, the connection to markets and towns were explored further. Rösener underlines that the analysis of the connections between the grange/manorial system and the developing urban centers is a particularly important theme in the study of Cistercian economy. The overall impression is that such connections were comparatively weak in Hungary. While in the northern regions of East-Central Europe it was more typical that Cistercians who took the initiative of founding new urban centres – as they were actively taking part in colonizing these areas with settlers –, this does not seem to be the case in Hungary. The data suggest that the organization of their estates benefited from existing settlement hierarchies (Borsmonostor, Szentgotthárd settled very close to existing marketplaces), but they also promoted – to a certain extent – the legal recognition and economy of central places situated in the vicinity of the precinct or near the abbey. This way, Cistercians also contributed to the late medieval development of market towns, and they (i.e. including their tenants) were definitely “using” the urban networks around the estates to bring produce there. These connections likely developed to a level of regular business, in which peri-urban manors played a central role. There has been some circumstantial evidence found to argue that Cistercians supplied the towns with food from their manors. Their premises could have included butcher stalls (Nagyszeben, Sopron, Pozsony), as well as cellars, wine shanks (Buda-Kelenföld, Pozsony). Due to the geographical positions of the towns of Sopron and Pozsony, along the main water-transport route, the Cistercians of Borsmonostor and Pilis could also use their connections to get involved in foreign trade – similarly to Topuszkó’s unique connection with the Adriatic port of Senj. Notably, the documents concerning Sopron and Pozsony also revealed that Cistercians cultivated excellent relationships with the local elites from the very start and this facilitated business and could have prevented later conflicts.

As for the future prospects of research on the economy of Cistercian houses in Hungary, I would emphasize in the first place – as a possible focus point – the study of historical/chronological aspects, particularly the development of transactions between the abbeys and their neighbors, the discussion of which has been deliberately omitted here. These can be interesting from multiple viewpoints: 1) how the management of the estate was re-focused with regard to the changing role of manorial farms and granges 2) what were the preferential patterns of land transactions (e.g. selling, long term leases, *Rentenkauf* etc.) 3) the economic historical perspective: how this practice reflected / responded to the fourteenth century crisis 4) the social historical perspective: what social groups were interacting with the abbeys – e.g. castle warriors, local nobility, and what were their possible socio-economic motives. To explore these themes, however, there is a very narrow sample of data available primarily on Borsmonostor and Topuszkó.

To improve the quality of topographical analysis, I should also underline the possibility to systematically integrate settlement archaeological and environmental archaeological data into the discussion. On the one hand, this would improve our understanding of the settlement conditions prior to the Cistercians’ arrival. This is the most relevant where written records are not representative of the medieval topography – for example, in case of Pilis and Zirc, and the Pilis and the Bakony woodlands, where Péter Szabó already accomplished this work, or in case of Szentgotthárd, where systematic landscape surveys are yet to be done. Surface collection of archaeological finds would be also desirable to provide relative chronology for the Árpád period (concerning which there is a lack of archival data), and to identify the topographical locations of medieval settlements and farms.

As far as the integration of archaeological and historical evidence is concerned, another challenge is to collect archaeological data on the transformation of Cistercian landscapes. As has been demonstrated with the example of the Pomáz–Nagykovácsi site and the area surrounding Pilis abbey, extensive landscape surveys discovered remains of fishponds, dams and other earthworks and were able to identify economic activities which would have been left unnoticed otherwise as there is no written record on them. Systematic surveys combined with environmental sampling would be required to study other Cistercian estates too, to obtain a possibly complete view on the scope of landscape transformations – focusing on problems of water management and woodland economy. Thus far, environmental investigations have been carried out on fishponds in the Pilis and the results are promising. One should note, however, that environmental conditions in Hungary are generally unfavorable for the preservation of such materials and it is often difficult to make sampling effective for complex environmental analysis – particularly in upland regions. Some of the samples collected in the Vasi Hegyhát region, in the case of Szentgotthárd, as well as in the Pilis (in the case of Pilis) did not return datable or suitable samples.

Nonetheless, it is exclusively through this type of data that one is able to provide a reliable account on changes associated with woodland management and pasturage. The contribution of the present study to this research is that it has identified the potentially interesting sites for future archaeological investigations. Applying both invasive and non-invasive techniques will be able to produce new data on Cistercian farming and management of different natural resources, complementing the study of archival records and perhaps diversifying the picture presented in this thesis.

**Curriculum Vitae**

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SELECTED PUBLICATIONS (related to the subject of the thesis)

2014 Ferenczi, László. “Molendium ad Aquas Calidas. A pilisi ciszterciek az állítólagos Fehéregyházán. Történeti, topográfiai és tájrégészeti kutatás a pilisi apátság birtokán” [Molendinum ad Aquas Calidas. The Pilis Cistercians at the suspected site of Fehéregyháza] *Studia Comitatensia*, new series, 1 (2014): 145–160.

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2010 Ferenczi, László “A ciszterci birtokszervezés és tájátalakítás elemei a borsmonostori apátság példáján” [Estate organization and landscape transformation on the example of Borsmonostor Abbey] *Soproni Szemle* 64 (2010): 115–138.

2009 Ferenczi, László. Észrevételek a topuszkói (toplicai) ciszterci apátság birtokstruktúrájával kapcsolatban. (Remarks on the estate organization of the Cistercian Abbey of Topuszkó (Toplica) In: A ciszterci rend Magyarországon és Közép-Európában. (The Cistercian Order in Central-Eastern Europe) Szerk.: Guitmann Barnabás. Piliscsaba, 2009. (Művelődéstörténeti Műhely. Rendtörténeti konferenciák 5) 277–292.

2006 Ferenczi, László “Estate structure and development of the Topusko (Toplica) abbey – case study of a medieval Cistercian monastery.” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 12 (2006): 83–100.

AREAS OF INTEREST & COMPETENCE

social and economic history of the Middle Ages in Western and Central Eastern Europe; history of everyday life and material culture in the Middle Ages; archaeology, social and economic history of medieval monasticism; landscape archaeology; water management in the Middle Ages; historic landscape characterization; cultural heritage management