



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation in Medieval Studies

of

Magdolna Szilágyi

on

Árpád Period Communication Networks: Road Systems in Western
Transdanubia
will be held on

Friday, 7 December 2012, at 11:00

in the

**Senate Room – Monument Building
Central European University (CEU)
Nádor u. 9, Budapest**

Examination Committee

Chair: Endre György Szőnyi (History Department, CEU)

Members: Alice Choyke (Department of Medieval Studies, CEU)
József Laszlovszky (Department of Medieval Studies, CEU), associate
supervisor
Thomas Szabo (Senior Research Fellow of the former Max-Planck-
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Katalin Szende (Department of Medieval Studies, CEU) – supervisor
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external reader

The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection in the CEU-ELTE Medieval Library,
Budapest, 6-8 Múzeum krt.

Doctoral Dissertation Abstract

The dissertation deals with the road systems of Western Transdanubia (Counties Moson, Sopron, Zala, and especially County Vas) between the eleventh and mid-fourteenth centuries. The various types of roads formed an intricate, both hierarchically and chronologically multi-layered system that was in constant change. The investigated period provides an overview of the chronological and topographical evolution of the sequences of roads from the foundation of the Hungarian State, through the formation of the Árpád Period settlement system, the rise of internal and foreign commercial activities, as well as a one-and-a-half-century-long period of political, economic, military, and social transformations followed by a time of consolidation. Western Transdanubia involving the marchland (Hu. *gyepű*) that separated the Hungarian Kingdom and the Holy Roman Empire represents an ideal territory to observe the processes above and investigate their effect on the contemporary road system.

In lack of navigable waterways it was exclusively land roads that functioned as routes of travel and transport in the investigated territory. These routes played a fundamental role in medieval territorial organisation in various aspects. The settlement system and the road network of any region were equally important, mutually interrelated elements in the landscape that presupposed each other, and the transformation of one necessarily brought about changes in the other. Roads enabled communication between castles and therefore they served as the backbone of the counties' territorial organization and the military defence system. Economy and trade also required roads as goods (agricultural produce, handicraft products, timber, stone, minerals, and so on) had to be transported from their places of production to those of distribution and consumption. Finally, the parish system would have again been unimaginable without roads connecting parish churches with settlements belonging to them.

The road network of medieval Transdanubia (similarly to other parts of the Hungarian Kingdom) represents a rather neglected and understudied field of research in Hungarian scholarship (particularly in comparison with the road system of Roman Pannonia). The only survey discussing the roads of medieval Transdanubia in a comprehensive way so far has been the study of Lajos Glaser published in the journal *Századok* in 1929-1930. Other historians referred to medieval roads only in connection with other subjects, or focused on one single type of road. József Holub (1917), for example, dealt with the medieval roads of County Zala in connection with the toll collection locations of the county. András Diószegi (1909), Ambrus Pleidell (1925), Dénes Huszti (1941) dealt with long-distance trade routes. Gyula Pauler (1888) and István Miskolczi (1933 and 1934) reconstructed the routes of

military campaigns. After the Second World War historians (Elemér Mályusz, Jenő Major, Ferenc Maksay, György Györffy, and András Kubinyi) started to emphasise the role of roads in the formation of the settlement system and urbanisation. Recently there has been a tendency to closely investigate the medieval roads of a minor region using various types of sources and methods (by Gábor Kiss, Endre Tóth, Balázs Zágohidi Czigány, and Csilla Zatykó). In my dissertation I endeavour to join both the pioneering work of Lajos Glaser and the latest road investigations by carrying out an interdisciplinary research on the sequences of Árpád Period roads in Western Transdanubia (with special regard to County Vas).

The dissertation comprises five parts that are followed by a bibliography and three appendices. **Part 1**, comprising six introductory chapters, at first reviews previous research on medieval roads in Hungary, with special regard to the territory of Transdanubia. The second and third chapters are dedicated to the chronological and geographical frames of the dissertation. The third chapter deals with the aims and research questions of the dissertation. The questions are formulated as follows: How can one classify medieval roads in terms of their hierarchy, use, physical properties, and other considerations? How did the relief and the waters of the landscape, as well as the Roman infrastructural heritage influence (restrict or promote) the road network in the Árpád Period? To what extent did long-distance routes passing through County Vas promote the rise of towns and market towns? In what ways did changes in the settlement system affect the road network, and the other way around? How did the current political and economic situation affect the directions of communication? The fourth and fifth chapters discuss those sources and research methods that are applied throughout the dissertation. The most important sources of evidence that the research is based upon are documents from pragmatic literacy (perambulations, letters of donation, letters of division, terriers, and letters of sentence). The written data above are compared and complemented with early modern cartographic evidence (from handwritten road maps, cadastral maps, and military surveys), toponyms, as well as archaeological evidence on Árpád Period sites and monuments located along the routes. It must be emphasised here that the types of sources used in the dissertation have been fundamentally selected on the basis of the aims of the research (which are to interpret the medieval perception of roads and to reconstruct a sequence of long-distance and regional routes). For that purpose the identification and mapping of local roads and tracks in the landscape by field surveys have been neither indispensable, nor feasible within the geographical frames of the dissertation. The last chapter of Part 1 provides an outline of the structure of the dissertation.

Part 2, dedicated to the semantics of Árpád Period terminology for roads and river-crossing places, is one of the most substantial parts of the dissertation. The survey is primarily based on common terms occurring in Árpád Period written documents, complemented with toponymic and early modern cartographic data. The collected terms on roads are divided into eight main categories: (1) Hierarchy, (2) Legal aspects, (3) Functional aspects, (4) Modes of travel and transportation, (5) Connections to other roads, (6) Physical properties, (7) Vegetation, and finally, (8) Date. One chapter is dedicated to each category, followed by a ninth chapter on river-crossing places (bridges, ferry-ports, and fords). In some cases only a small number of items could be included in the categories listed above. The uneven availability of data can be explained by the relatively low number and incidental survival of the Árpád Period sources rather than the complete absence of certain types of roads. That is why, in this part of the dissertation, the frames of the survey had to be broadened to some extent, and – while still focusing on the period and territory defined above – written data after the mid-fourteenth century and beyond the territory of Western Transdanubia had to be taken into consideration, as well. The aims of this part were to illustrate the variability of historical terms indicating roads and river-crossing places, to uncover the semantics of these terms, as well as to provide an overview of the characteristics and use of the different types of roads in Árpád Period Western Transdanubia.

Part 3 is dedicated to those landscape features that existed prior to the conquest of Transdanubia by the Magyars, and therefore determined the formation of Árpád Period routes from its inception. The territory has a geographically structured surface comprising various landforms (mountains, valleys, low hills, plateaus, and plains). From the aspect of overland communication, the most dominant element of land relief was the chain of mountains belonging to the Fore-Alpine region forming part of the western frontier of Hungary. Travel across the mountains overgrown with vast forests was restricted to natural passes, which therefore fundamentally determined the potentials of communication to the east and west. After landforms, the hydrological conditions were the second most important elements in the natural landscape that affected the directions of travel and transport. Western Transdanubia was covered with a network of rivers and streams that rushed from the Alps to the plains of Transdanubia in a north-east—south-west direction, as well as their tributaries. Roads and settlements often developed in the valleys of these watercourses at the edge of the inundation zones. On the other hand, hydrological features also posed restrictions on travel partly because crossing over rivers and streams was limited to bridges, ferry ports, and fords, and partly because the main communication routes tended to stay away from marshes and fens.

The third type of landscape feature that influenced the development of the Árpád Period road system of Transdanubia is represented by the remains of ancient Roman roads. Some of those roads that remained in relatively good condition even centuries after their construction were re-used for communication in the Árpád Period. Other Roman roads that did not fit in the medieval infrastructure or were too heavily worn were used as boundaries of landed properties, or became completely abandoned.

In addition to *Part 2*, **Part 4** represents the most lengthy and essential part of the dissertation. This part seeks to provide a reconstruction of the road network of County Vas between the eleventh and mid-fourteenth centuries, and to investigate how the general findings of the two preceding parts can be observed in practice. The first chapters are dedicated to those long-distance routes that, having passed through the territory of County Vas, led to foreign lands. These are the north-south directed Sopron—Muraszombat route that evolved more or less along the ancient Roman Amber Route, as well as the main routes leading across the county to the West – the *Via Latinorum*, *Via Theutonica*, *Katonák útja* (i.e. Soldiers's Road), and the road along the Pinka Valley. The subsequent chapters describe the regional routes of County Vas that evolved around five nodal points of the road system, namely the towns of Vasvár, Kőszeg, Szombathely, Körmend, and Sárvár. This part of the dissertation provides a closer view at the relationship between the formation of long-distance and regional routes as well as the development of the settlement system and the rise of central places. In order to make the route descriptions easier to follow and compare, each road is characterised according to seven main points, namely (1) Árpád Period sites along the route; (2) Árpád Period written data (to road sections, bridges, fords, tolls); (3) Data yielded by early modern maps and toponyms; (4) Archaeological sites and architectural monuments (castles, churches, etc.) along the route; (5) Natural environment (landforms, watercourses, and vegetation), (6) Ancient Roman heritage; (7) Conclusions, previous scholarly investigations and their critique. Understanding is also facilitated by detailed maps found at the end of the appendices indicating the long-distance and regional routes discussed as well as the sites along them. In addition, the written, cartographic and toponymic data used for the reconstruction of the routes are arranged in charts in the first part of the appendices, providing a better overview of the great amount and diverse types of evidence. The third constituent element of the appendices is a collection of those charters dated between 1000 and 1350 which provide evidence on roads, tracks, river-crossing places, and toll collection locations in County Vas. These documents – arranged topographically and within that in chronological order – are referred to by their serial numbers throughout the work.

The findings of the dissertation are detailed in individual chapters found at the end of the Parts 2, 3 and 4. The main points are as follows. First of all, eight main categories of appellative terms indicating medieval roads have been identified with the help of medieval written records. The denomination and use of these terms could be defined by the sources themselves, but it must be emphasised that the definitions of the terms have to be treated with relative flexibility. Second, I have pointed out that in the territory of Western Transdanubia the most important landscape feature to determine the direction of overland routes in the Árpád Period was the morphology of the terrain followed by watercourses. The remains of Roman roads were used for travel and transportation in the Middle Ages only if and to the extent that they fit in medieval infrastructure. Otherwise they were abandoned. Third, I have called attention to the relationships between long-distance and regional roads and other features in the landscape (the natural environment, the man-made heritage from former periods, contemporary settlements, agricultural resources, non-agricultural resources, ritual foci, and demography). Fourth, I have demonstrated the way the different processes of Árpád Period political, military and economic history are reflected by the transformation of the settlement system and road network of Western Transdanubia from the eleventh to the mid-fourteenth century. These conclusions are briefly referred back to in **Part 5** in order to examine to what extent these findings are unique phenomena and whether they might be extended to other geographical regions and periods. It is also here that I call attention to the fact that the sources and methodology I applied in the dissertation enabled me to re-think several routes and road sections formerly reconstructed by Lajos Glaser, which demonstrates the need for future road investigations in other parts of Transdanubia, as well.

Curriculum Vitae Magdolna Szilágyi

Education

2005-2012: PhD in Medieval Studies, Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

2003-2004: MA in Medieval Studies, Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

1997-2002: MA in Archaeology, Faculty of Arts, University of Szeged, Hungary

1996-2002: MA in English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Szeged, Hungary

Work experience

2008-2010: archaeologist and project coordinator, Field Service for Cultural Heritage, Budapest, Hungary

2004-2006: archaeologist, Aquincum Museum of the Budapest History Museum, Hungary

Teaching experience

2007: “Utazók és zarándokok: a térbeli mobilitás kérdései a középkori Nyugaton” [Travellers and pilgrims: Spatial mobility in the medieval West], seminar held with Dr. Balázs Nagy, Department of Medieval and Early Modern History, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

2006: “Utazók és utazások a középkori Nyugaton” [Travellers and travels in the medieval West], seminar held with Dr. Balázs Nagy, Department of Medieval and Early Modern History, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

2006: “Anglo-Saxon History and Archaeology,” seminar, Institute of English and American Studies, University of Szeged, Hungary

Research project participation

2006: The Ravenna-Classe project: Archaeology of a Deserted City

Scholarships and grants

2011-2012: Write-up Grant by CEU (six months)

2010: Scholarship for Young Researchers to the Collegium Hungaricum Vienna (CH2) by the Hungarian Scholarship Board (one month)

2010: PhD Travel Grant by CEU, University of Leeds, UK (one week)

2009: Scholarship for Young Researchers to the Collegium Hungaricum Vienna (CH2) by the Hungarian Scholarship Board (two months)

2008: PhD Research Grant by CEU, Vienna, Austria (one month)

2007: Summer University, CEU (one week)

Research interests

Main field: historical geography; landscape archaeology

Special interests: Roman and medieval topography, infrastructure, and territorial organization

Related conference paper presentations

“Networks of roads and traffic management (Western Hungary, 11th-14th century).” *The 17th International Medieval Congress, Travel and Exploration*. University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom. 12-15 July 2010.

“Utak az Árpád-kori Nyugat-Magyarországon – a középkori útkutatás módszertani kérdései” [Roads in Árpadian-age Western Transdanubia –methodological questions of medieval road investigations], paper delivered together with Máté Stibrányi. *Fiatal Középkoros Régészek I. Konferenciája* [I. Conference of the Young Hungarian Archaeologists of the Middle Ages]. King Matthias Museum of the Hungarian National Museum, Visegrád, Hungary. 26-28 November 2009.

“The Perception of Roman Roads in Medieval Hungary.” *Die Welt der Straße 2, Straßen und Brücken in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*. Institute for Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Krems an der Donau, Austria. 29-30 November 2007.

“Communication Systems in Towns of Western Transdanubia: Changes after the Romans.” *Towns and Communication (Communication in Towns)*. International Commission for the History of Towns, Zagreb, Croatia. 27-30 September 2006.

“Change and Continuity of Roman Communication Systems in Medieval Transdanubia.” *Urbes Extinctae: Archaeologies of Abandoned Classical Sites*. School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester, Leicester, United Kingdom. 13 May 2006

Related publications

“The Perception of Roman Roads in Medieval Hungary.” In *Die Vielschichtigkeit der Straße. Kontinuität und Wandel in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit. Internationales Round-Table-Gespräch, Krems an der Donau, 29. November bis 1. Dezember 2007*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012: 147-171.

“The Sequence of Roman and Medieval Communication Routes in Transdanubia.” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 13 (2007): 241-262.