

The importance of water in the life of the rural settlements of Medieval Hungary

Die Bedeutung von Wasser für die ländlichen ungarischen Siedlungen im Mittelalter

L'importance de l'eau dans l'environnement rural de la Hongrie médiévale

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A study about the use of water can also mean a trivial topic. Due to the fact, that the water represents an essential element of the human life. As a consequence of this, the aim of this communication is not to bring proves to underline this importance, but to show the different ways of its utilisation. The main question to be posed is therefore not why but how. The importance of the investigation of the different ways of the water usage not only in Medieval Hungary but also in the other countries of Medieval Europe, is underlined through the fact that results of this analysis can be treated as an indicator. An indicator to show not only the character of the natural environment, but also the efforts of every single community, to adapt itself to it.

In my attempt to give a brief overview of the researches concerning the usage of water in the rural settlements of Medieval Hungary I have to deal with an abundance of sources big enough to cause difficulties in the presentation. Further difficulties derive from the fact, that the vast majority of the items in this database is fragmentary, and needs an explanation in order to be evaluated. Therefore I had to pick out some data, mainly archaeological evidence, and – instead of seeking the totality – to present the importance of water by interpreting these, from my point of view, characteristic sources, and to outline trends according to their testimony.

My first remark is refers to the topography of the rural settlements of Medieval Hungary. In the scientific literature one can often find a simplifying opinion about the desert-like natural environment of Hungary. This wide spread opinion relies on the fact, that the Great Plain, the largest region of the land, is the westernmost part of the Eurasian steppe. But one must not forget an obvious discrepancy in the humidity of the various parts of this steppe, caused by the different level of the rainfall (*Győrffy 1977*, 402, fig. 57; *Győrffy – Zólyomi 1996*, 910, fig. 11). As the central part of the Carpathian basin is – and most likely was – the moistest part of this steppe, it can be by no means compared with dryer regions, e. g. with the Khazak steppe, Takla Makan, or the desert of Gobi. Furthermore, as the Carpathian basin is extremely reach in water courses and lakes, the most common natural environment was most likely not the dry desert but the swamp. To such an extent that Károly Kogutowicz, one of the most known geographer of Hungary in the first half of the 20th century, reconstructed this basin at the times

before the great anti-inundation works of the 19th century, as one eighth part of it was covered with water (evaluation of the quoted map: *Bálint 1991*, 196–197; reprint with modifications: *Hidas (ed.) 1998*, 108). The credibility of the Kogutowicz's reconstruction was reinforced by the fact, that the same result was obtained through several geologists, dealing with this problem recently (*Sümegei 2003*, 177–178). All studies of this type emphasised the importance of the inundation areas around the water courses partially and/or temporarily covered with water.

As the quoted reconstruction was carried out by geographers analysing geological sources, the question rises: are there archaeological databases to contribute in the favour, or perhaps to contradict against this reconstruction. In the early 1960ies began the program called "Archaeological topography of Hungary" led by the staff of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (*Török 2002*, 22–23). This program is also carried out in 2003 but in a regrettably restricted way. The main cause of the decreased activity lies in the luck of finances, but there were and are also problems with the collaboration of the Institute with some local museums. Nevertheless, systematic and very thorough fieldwalking was carried out on more than 15 % of Hungary, and some 100.000 of archaeological spots were identified or reidentified and mapped on topographical maps of the scale 1 : 10.000. Concerning the importance of water courses in the topography of Medieval rural settlements the diversity of examined areas is an advantage in the analysis of the quoted mapping. The topographical investigations were carried out in the hilly county of Veszprém in Transdanubia (*MRT 1–4*), in the central part of the country, around the capital, Budapest (*MRT 5, 7, 9*), and – last but not least – in the hearth of the Great Plain, in the County of Békés (*MRT 6, 8, 10*).

Concerning the regions Northwest to lake Balaton, the so called Balaton-highlands, an interesting observation derives from the fact, that almost all findspots are lying beside little watercourses: streams running from the hills to the lake (*fig. 1*). The vast majority of findspots of the former villages were to be located close to the inundation area of these streams, on the borderline of the area affected by floods. In spite of the fact that the hills are not high, their top regularly does not exceed 150–200 meters, measured from the level of the lake. The water level of the quoted little streams varies

