

## Development of the Late-Medieval house in Hungary

### Die Entwicklungsgeschichte des bäuerlichen Wohnhauses im spätmittelalterlichen Ungarn

### Le développement de la maison d'habitation rurale en Hongrie au Bas Moyen-Âge

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There was an important change in culture and economy of the Hungarian rural society between the middle of the 13th and the middle of the 14th century. This change is reflected by settlements and dwelling houses. The leading role of the subterranean one-roomed house type came to an end and the more-roomed house type, built on the surface, became more widespread and general in the villages. This development was considered by some ethnographer that the more-roomed late medieval house type came from the one-roomed pit house (*Dám 1979*, 95-99; *Dám 1982*, 117-120; *Balassa 1985*, 92, 151). The archaeological researches and results of the last twenty years put the matter in a new light. The new concept is that the two different house types – pit house and house built on the surface – emerged independently (*Barabás – Gilyén 1987*, 20-21; *Fodor 1989*, 23, 28; *Mesterházy 1991*). According to the written sources it is very likely that houses built on the surface already existed in the 11th-13th century in Hungarian villages (*Mesterházy 1991*, 74-76). They were built of wood, so only few archaeological evidences can be found (*Szabó I. 1969*, 33-40). The late medieval peasant house type with its large size, new structural and heating elements was effected by the contemporary noble, aristocratic and citizen architecture, in some cases the model was given by the dwelling houses of privileged *hospites* who belonged to the upper class of the peasants (*Balassa 1985*, 74-75, 150-153).

Unfortunately there are different chronological and territorial archaeological evidences referring to the late medieval rural architecture. Most of the revealed houses date to the 15th-16th century, the last period of the deserted villages. From the so called transitional phase, from the 14th century, we have a few datas. It is still not clear how fast the architectural innovations spread in the country. Because of the Turkish invasion most of the villages were deserted especially the middle and western part of the Great Hungarian Plane. Traditionally this area has been investigated since the 1920s so the house structures are well known here. The first important medieval village excavations were going on before the Second World War. More than 30 sites were revealed in the area of Kecskemét from 1926 (*Papp 1931*; *Szabó K. 1938*, 79-87). Between 1948 and 1949 the excavation of Turkeve-Móric was led by Mr. István Méri after the archaeological survey of the site which was destroyed during the Turkish rule (*Méri 1954*). In Transdanubia important excavations started

in the 50s: In 1957-58 a church and some dwelling houses were revealed in the centre of Csepely village (*Kovalovszki 1969*), the medieval village of Sarvaly went on between 1969 and 1974 (*Holl – Parádi 1982*, 13-16).

Erosion and modern agriculture very much threatens late medieval sites as they can be found on the uppermost layers. Very often we found only the bottom of pits, trenches and hardly nothing of structural elements. In the case of motorway constructions the late medieval settlement layers are very much threatened to destroy as the humus is taken away by machines.

Summing up the archaeological results of the last 70-80 years the following can be said about the house type development between the 14th and 16th century. The ancient type of houses built on the surface was the two-roomed house with oven (*Barabás – Gilyén 1987*, 20-21; *Mesterházy 1991*, 72-75). According to different functions there was an oven in the kitchen and no heating system in the living room. Enlarging the house with third and fourth rooms, there must have been more different functions: there were spaces for storing, sleeping, in some cases for animal keeping or for workshops (*Barabás – Gilyén 1987*, 21-22). Archaeologically these functions can hardly be defined.

An important innovation kept spreading during the 15th century in Hungarian villages: the oven heated from outside. In this case it was built to the dividing wall and its mouth extended beyond the wall to the other space. With this innovation the room with oven or stove became smokeless and could be well heated, especially if it had a ceiling (*Barabás – Gilyén 1987*, 89-91). At the same time in peasant houses the folk variation of gothic tile stove can be observed with simple decoration but with similar architectonic structure. The fashion of tile stove came to Hungary from south German regions, in the 14th century (Angevin period) artistic pieces could be observed in aristocratic and royal buildings. Peasantry took over a well-developed type in the middle of the 15th century and it caused the structural change of the peasant house (*Méri 1957*; *Holl 1990*; *Sabján 1991*, 19-25; *Kocsis – Sabján 1998*). The tile stove, heated from the kitchen, stood in the smokeless living room. Another oven was built for kitchen functions.

In the course of archaeological investigations foundations, walls, floors and their building process can be well defined together with their material but the

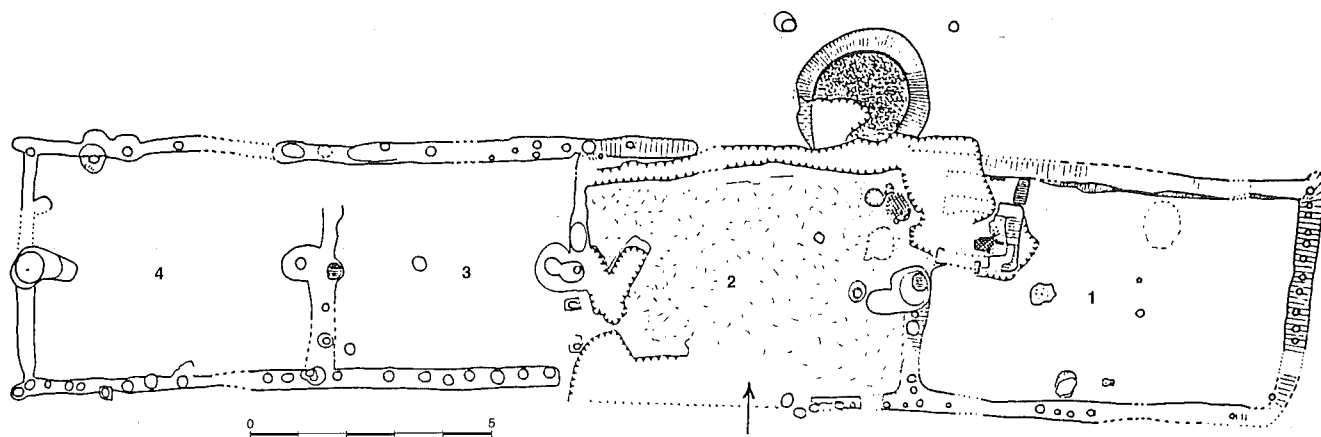


Fig. 1. Szentkirály, house 4/a (15th century), ground-plan (Pálóczi-Horváth 1989, fig. 1).

structure of roofing system can be interpreted in different ways. The variety of technics known from the 18th-19th century ethnographic relics can easily be recognized on archaeological remains, but the medieval building process must have been more colourful and various. The regional types of dwelling houses started developing in the late middle-ages (Barabás - Gilyén 1987, 165-167).

### 1. Lowland house-type

In the middle of the Carpathian Basin, in the Great Hungarian Plain and its border earthwalls with wooden structure were widespread from the 14th-15th century. The houses were built on the surface, foundation ditches were dug for the walls. The timbers, stood in the ditch, formed the framework of the wall, it was connected with wattling and daubed with clay. The roofing structure was made by a ridge pole held with main support posts, covered with thatch or reed. In the houses the function of kitchen and room was separated very early. In rural architecture tile stoves built in the living room and heated from the kitchen at first appeared in this region. The room had a ceiling. The entrance of the house opened into the kitchen and one could enter the room from the kitchen. The big, round oven jutting out of the kitchen was heated from the kitchen. The third and fourth space could be a living room or a storage place. Agricultural produces were stored in large pits in the yard. In this area on peasant farms animals were never kept in the dwelling houses but kept separately.

The above described lowland house type appears very often among the archaeological assemblages of the 15th-16th century, and it is the antecedents of the so called *Middle-Hungarian house type* which can be found in most region of the Carpathian Basin during the 18th-19th century (Barabás - Gilyén 1987, 170-171). This house type also can be found in the lowlands of West Transdanubia and in South Transdanubia, its connections are provable with the neighbouring Low-Austrian, Czech, Moravian and Southwestern Slovakian territories and also with the

Southern Slavs and Rumanians neighbouring with the Hungarians in South and East (Filep 1980, 320-325). This area is similar to the region where a well developed peasant husbandry and economy emerged from the 14th-15th century.

The late medieval lowland house type is quite well-known between the Danube-Tisza Interfluve (Baracs, Mizse, Nyársapát etc.) and east of the Tisza river (Türkeve-Móric, Karcag-Orgondaszentmikós, etc.) because of the excavations since 1920s. This house type is presented by the reconstructions of houses from medieval Szentkirály village revealed in the 15th century level.

These are represented by house 4/a, 7 and 25 (Pálóczi-Horváth 1989; 1991, 250-253; 1996; 1997; 2000). Szentkirály can be found in the Danube-Tisza Interfluve, 20 km east from town Kecskemét. During the excavation between 1971 and 1990 21 dwelling houses and 29 outbuildings were revealed. From Szentkirály we have very good archaeological evidences from the beginning of the 15th to the beginning of the 17th century referring to buildings built on the same place, changes in the structure of houses. We could observe unique architectural remains such as threshold, fire-guard, parts of the roofing, whitewash of the room, etc. The development of the dwelling house with tile stove could be observed here. With the analysis of thousands of tile pieces the first reconstruction of a rural tile stove was carried out (house 25).

The orientation of the investigated houses were NW-SE, with an entrance of southwestern side. The measures of the buildings: house 4/a (four rooms): length: 26.60 m, width: 5.30 m; house 7, period 1 (two rooms): length: 12.00 m, width: 5.30 m; house 25; period 1-2 (two rooms): length: 12.40 m, width: 4.90 m.

The round ovens jutting out of the kitchen had large heating-space (diagram: 1.94 m; 1.64 m; 1.94 m). The bottom of the ovens was plastered with sherds. Outside, above the ovens there was a hood joining to the roof.

The tile stove remains of the houses 4/a and 7 were found in bad condition. The tile stove of the house 25 was quadratic: 1.45 x 1.45 m. The ground-plan of its interior is rectangular with rounded corners. A cylindrical

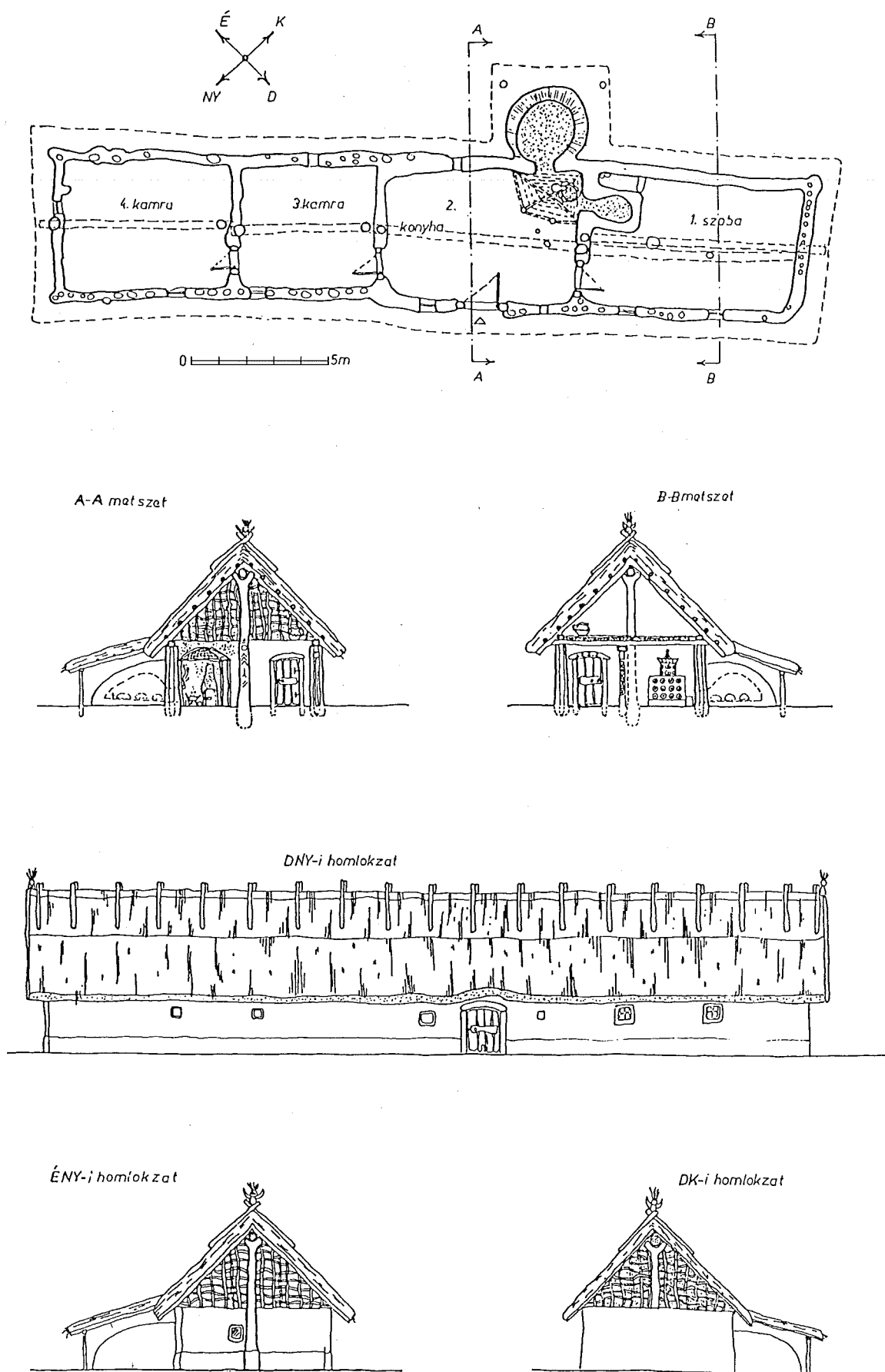
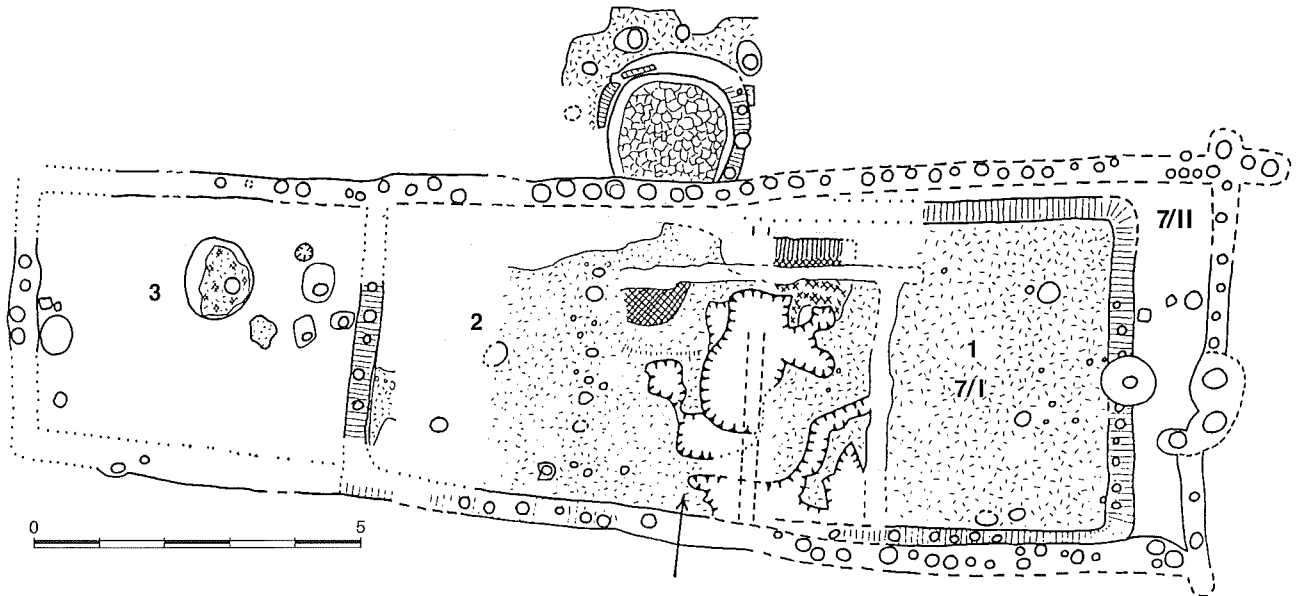
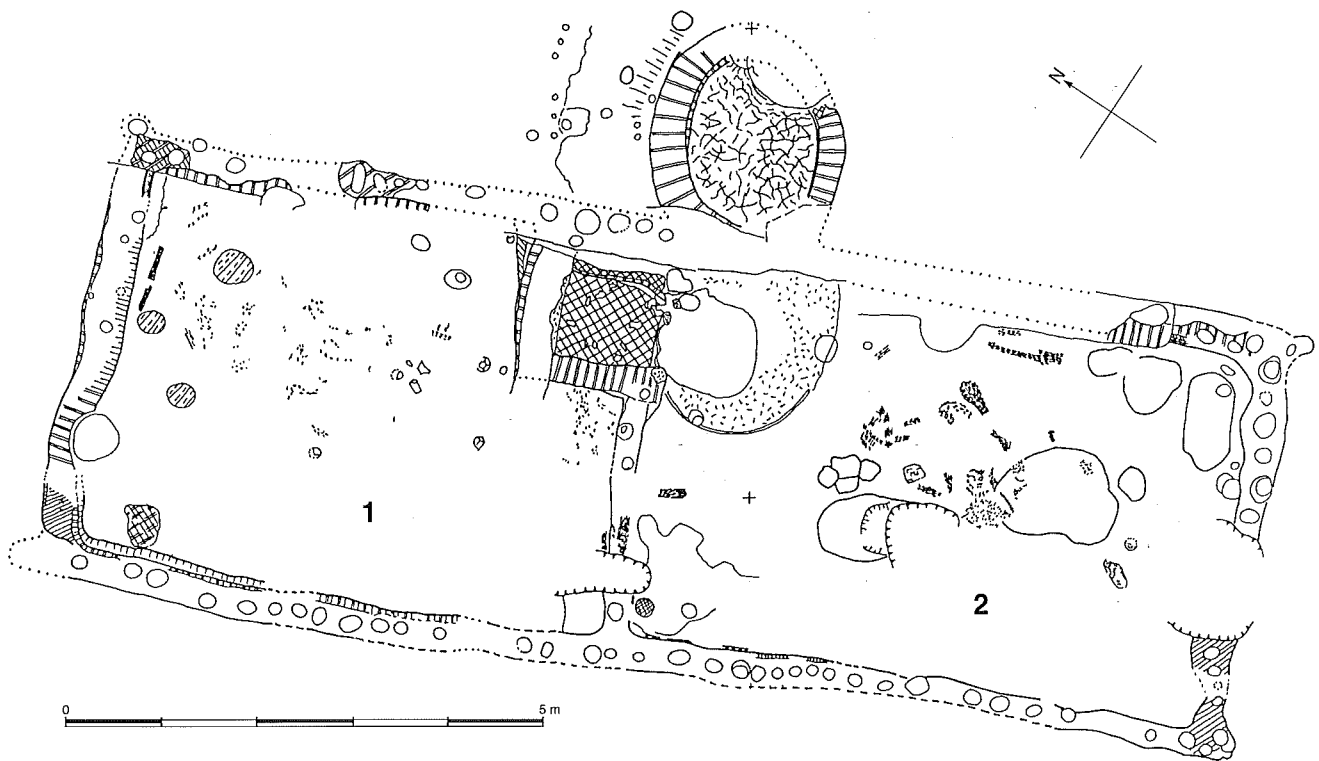


Fig. 2. Szentkirály, reconstruction of house 4/a (drawn by T. Tarnay, Pálóczi-Horváth 2000, fig. 2).



**Fig. 3.** Szentkirály, ground-plan of house 7, 15th century (Pálóczi-Horváth 2000, fig. 2).



**Fig. 4.** Szentkirály, ground-plan of house 25, 15th century (Pálóczi-Horváth 2000, fig. 3).

upper part is on a prismatic lower part, and closed by a dome upstairs. Of the several hundred fragments of unglazed pottery tile it was possible to reconstruct the structure and decoration of the stove. Eight different types were identified arranged in systematic order (Sabján 1991, 19-22; Pálóczi-Horváth 1996, 15). The

tiles were put into the clay wall of the stove with their mouth turned outside, the most frequent type is the glass-form type with round mouth. The lines consisting of quatrefoil and triangular tiles show gothic motifs. There were attic ornaments on the upper edge of the stove. The cupola was decorated with so called

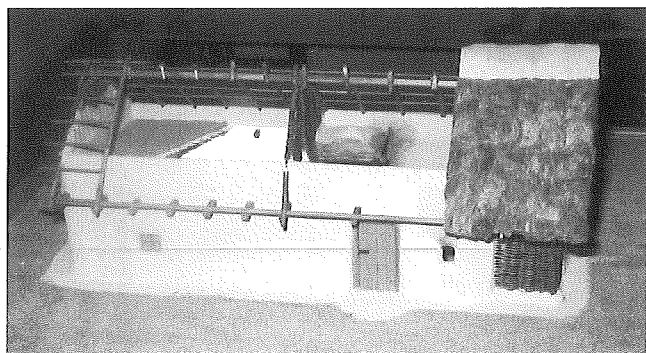


Fig. 5. Szentkirály, model of house 25 (scale 1:25).

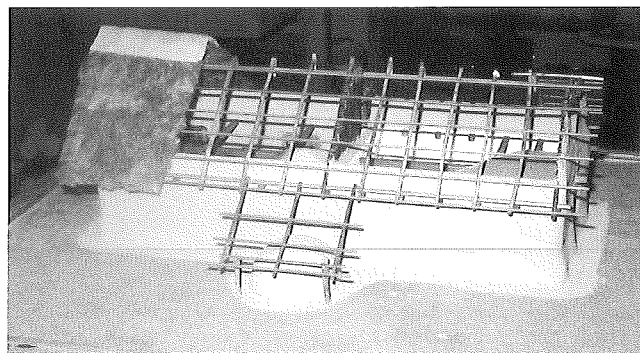


Fig. 6. Szentkirály, back-front of house 25 (model, scale 1:25).

onion shaped tiles, their fragments were found inside of the stove. The tile-stove symbolizes a gothic building, a castle tower (Pálóczi-Horváth 1997, 511-512, fig. 4).

Other decorated tile stoves with similar decoration system were revealed in the house 4/a and house 7. The same type of stoves were used in other medieval villages on the lowlands.

The very good quality and high standard houses of the 15th century became simple in the second half of the 16th century after the Turkish conquest. Ovens from the kitchen and the nice gothic tile stoves disappeared. At the end of the 16th century houses with stove (heated from outside) appear again. There are no archaeological evidences of 17th century houses from this area.

The market-towns of the Great Hungarian Plain – destroyed during the Turkish rule – were important local centres, their archaeological research gave new results concerning the economy, trade and architecture of the 15th-16th century. The research projects of medieval Muhi, Szer and Ete market towns are in process, only preliminary papers came out referring the buildings (Pusztai 1997; Tomka 1999; Vályi 1989; Vizi – Miklós 1999).

## 2. West-Transdanubian dwelling house.

In Transdanubia, where the landscape is hilly and woody, mostly wood was used for the structure of houses in the late middle ages. In spite of the fact that there was a lot of stone in Transdanubia only churches

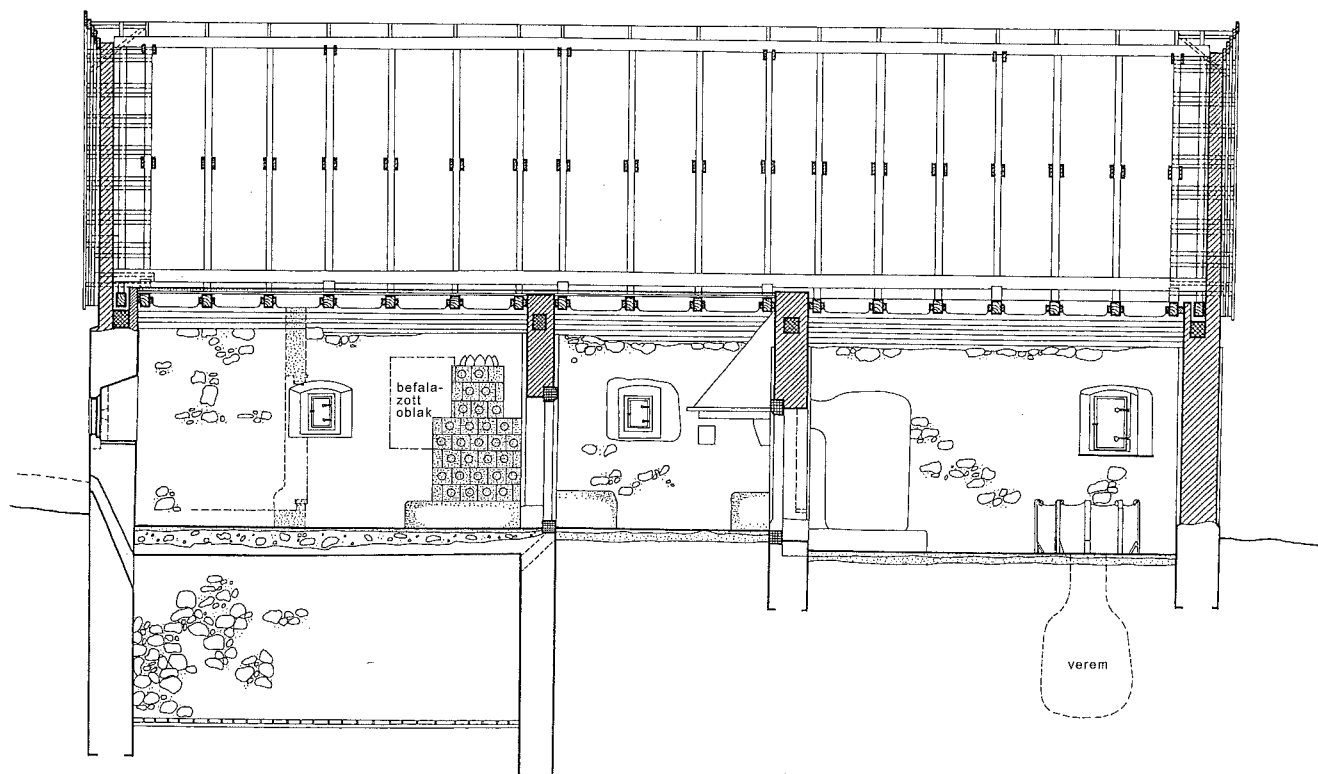


Fig. 7. Pásztó, section of the schoolmaster house, 15th century (I. Valtér 1996, 68).

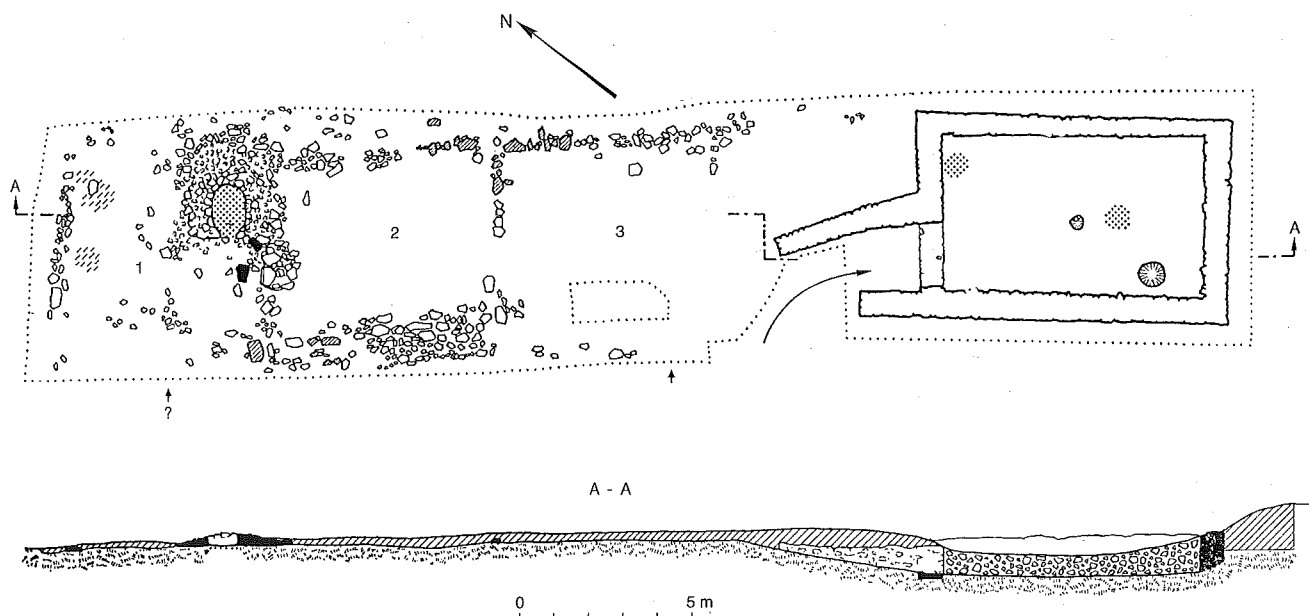


Fig. 8. Sarvally, house 15, ground-plan and section (Holl - Parádi 1982, pl. 6).

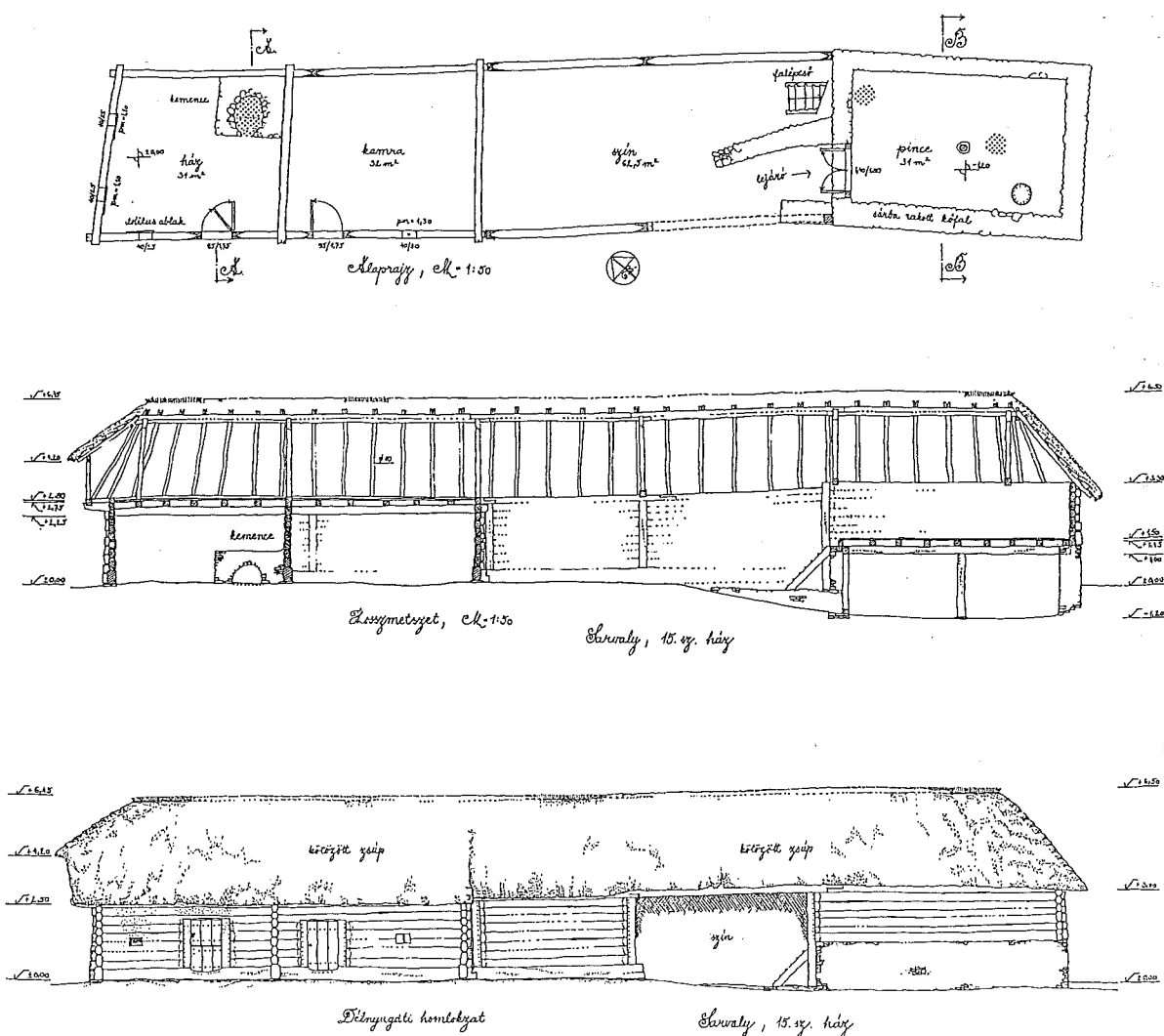
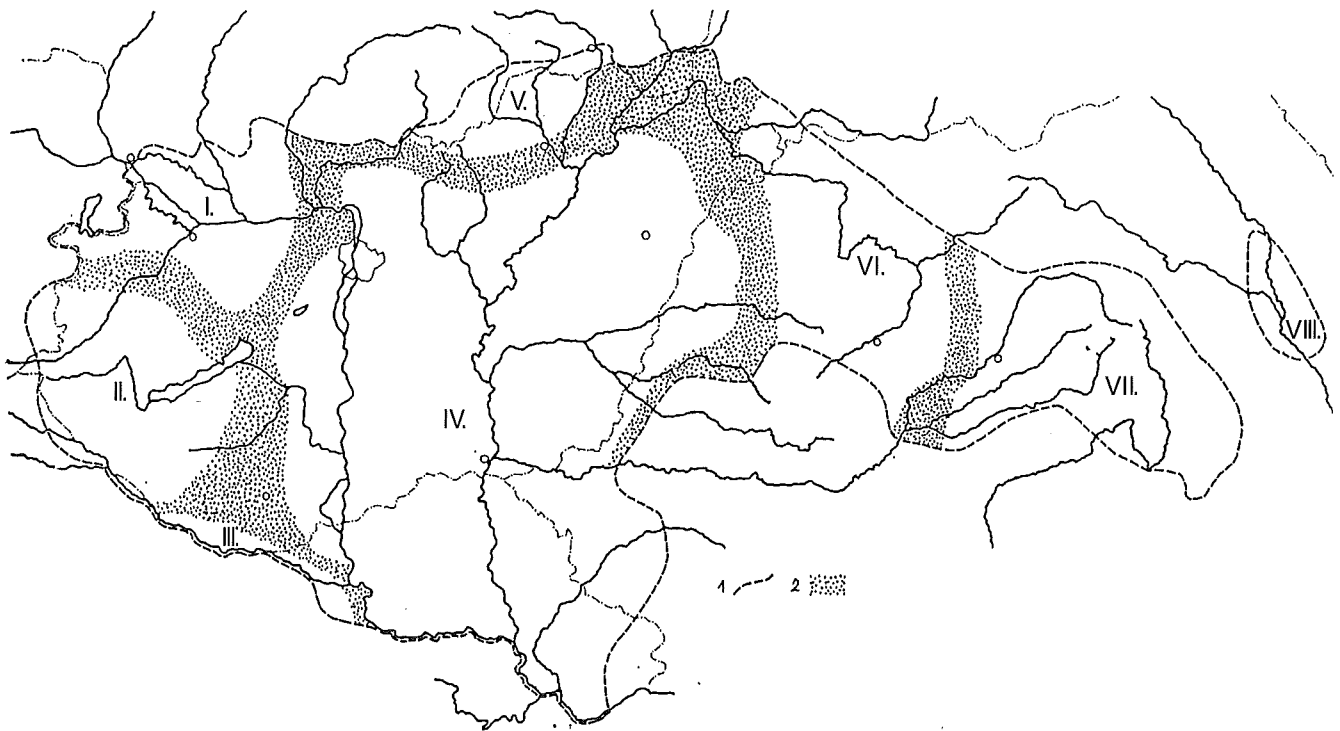


Fig. 9. Sarvally, reconstruction of house 15: 1. ground-plan; 2. long section; 3. SW façade (drawn by T. Sahján).



Fig. 10. Sarvoly, ground plans of houses 17, 26 and 12 (15-16th century) (Holl 1979, fig. 9).



**Fig. 11.** Area of the Hungarian house types in 17-18th century. 1. Border of the researched area. 2. Meeting zone of different types. I. the plain in Northwestern Hungary; II. Middle- and SW-Transdanubia; III. Drava-area; IV. Great Hungarian Plain; V. Northern region; VI. Szamos region; VII. Area of Székely house type (Barabás - Gilyén 1987, fig. 306).

and manor houses were built of stone. Written sources give information about wood houses too. In the 14th-15th century records we can read about landowners who removed by force other landowners' villains and their houses. Only wooden houses could be pulled down and carried easily. The 22nd statute of law 1495 says that moving villains must not remove their houses, buildings, fences and any wooden structure fixed in the soil (Szabó I. 1969, 40.). It has to be mentioned that not only the houses of villains but also village noblemen's manor houses were built of wood.

Among archaeological researches carried in Transdanubia the most important was the excavation of Sarvaly medieval village, 20 km north of lake Balaton between 1969 and 1974 (Holl - Parádi 1982; Holl 1979). This village was inhabited by lower nobility. The revealed log-houses had traprock foundation. The wooden remains prove oak and beech. Some of the revealed 17 houses had a cellar jointed to one edge of the house or it stood separately. Only one room was heated of the three-four or five roomed houses. This heated room was smoky. Tile stoves were found only in two houses but only one was heated from outside, from the yard. This was the only house in the village which had a smokeless room (house 17). Multifunctional spaces (kitchen-room) were common. In the case of house 10 and 17 there were hearths in two different spaces, so the kitchen was used separately. Rooms without hearths are identified pantries, there are open spaces in front of the entry of cellars or stables. All spaces opened into the yard.

The revealed 15th-16th century buildings are antecedents of the so called western Hungarian house type (Holl 1979, 45-50; Barabás - Gilyén 1987, 169-170; Vándor 1995, 176-179). Traditionally the building material of this house type was wood, the living rooms were smoky for a long time. From the late medieval it became generous that the living space was under one roof with storing spaces and animals.

However stone buildings are rare in medieval villages in the central part of Transdanubia, on the upland of Lake Balaton quite a lot of such buildings came to light dated to the 14th-16th century. The stone buildings excavated in the centre of the settlement can be defined as noble country houses or parsonages (Kővágőrs-Ecsér, Szentkirályszabadja, Vilonya, Alsódörgicse, Zirc, etc. Rainer 1997, 100-106). These buildings differed from the other types of the houses not only of their building material but also of their seize and furnishing. In most cases there were ovens in the room heated from (Csukás 1997, 55-56). Stone buildings from other part of the country were also built by the upper level of the village society. In the Northern region, in the centre of the medieval market-town, in Pásztó, the survived gothic building belonged to the schoolmaster (Valter 1996).

In the northern woody highland of medieval Hungary (nowadays it belongs to Slovakia) and Transylvania (nowadays it belongs to Rumania) wooden structured buildings were common during the 14th-16th century. There are some important archaeological results from Slovakia referring to medieval Hungarian manor



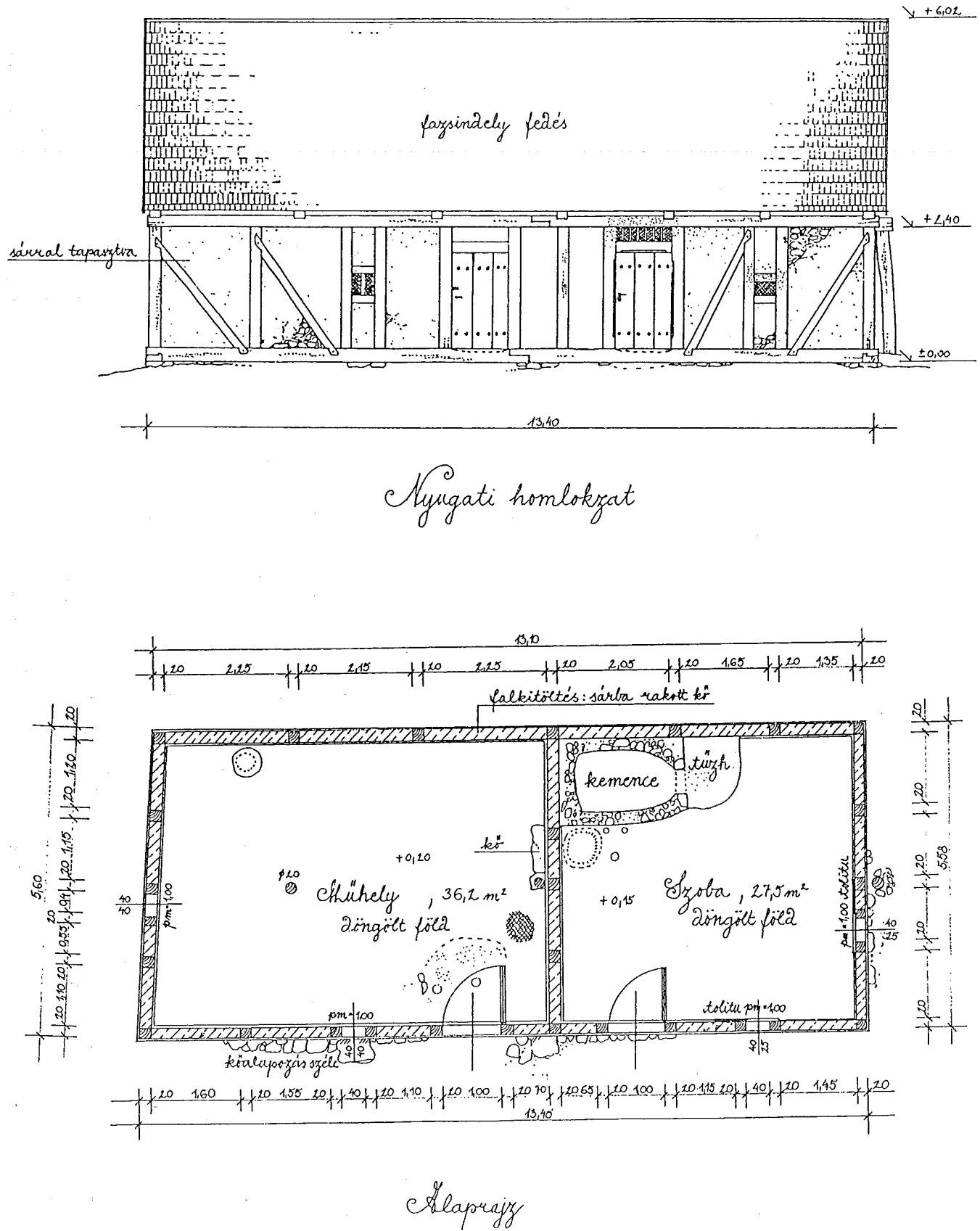


Fig. 12. Visegrád, suburbium settlement, reconstruction of house 1 (beginning of the 14th century): W façade and ground-plan (drawn by T. Sabján).

houses of small-holder nobles: Nemešany-Zalužany/Zsaluzsány, Liptovská Sielnica-Parižovce/Párizsháza (*Habovštiak 1985*, 291, 297-298).

In rural architecture of northern Hungary the three-roomed house type (room, kitchen, pantry) was widespread during the 15th-16th century, antecedents of the so called *north-Hungarian house form* (*Balassa 1989*, 68, 79-81).

There are few archaeological evidences concerning the Transylvanian house development during the 14th-16th centuries. The development seems archaic, the one roomed pit house was used until the 15th century (*Benkő 1992*, 36, 57-63). In the 15th-16th century in the villages there may have been one or two-roomed log houses or houses with wattle-and-daub wall. In the 16th century the two or three-roomed houses appeared with stove or chimney piece heated from inside, so the room was smoky. The clay wall of the stove was decorated with tiles. In Székely land a high-standard tile craft is known with gothic and renaissance motifs from the 15th-16th century (*Benkő - Ughy 1984*).

In the end the reconstructed form of a 14th century house is presented here – excavated in the *suburbium* settlement of Visegrád (from the northern garden of the royal palace). It was a two-roomed house with a large stove inside. The house was built with Fachwerk-technic (with stone foundation). In the Hungarian rural architecture this technic is unknown (in the modern time), but according to this archaeological data it must have existed in Hungary in the 14th century. The inhabitants of the *suburbium* settlement may have been craftsmen settled here by the king in the 13th century. They belonged to the privileged *hospes* layer of the 13th century rural society. The presented dwelling house is much more developed than the contemporary rural houses.

## Zusammenfassung

Unsere Vorlesung versucht, die Entwicklung des spätmittelalterlichen Dorfhauses in Ungarn zu beschreiben und die archäologischen Denkmäler zu systematisieren, einschliesslich die Baumaterialien, die Bauweise, die Feuerstelle und die Heizung sowie die Räume und die ihre Funktionen.

Im 13. Jahrhundert wurde im Karpatenbecken die herrschende Rolle des Grubenhauses in der dörflichen Architektur beendet. Was die Kultur und Lebensweise der Bauern betrifft, scheint das 14. Jahrhundert in mittelalterlichem Ungarn die Zeit der grossen Änderungen gewesen zu sein, als sich das auf die Oberfläche gebaute Wohnhaus mit mehreren Räumen durchsetzte. Im 15. Jahrhundert entwickelte sich der modernste mittelalterliche Typ der Dorfhäuser, das Haus mit komplexer Feueranlage (mit Zimmerofen, Ofen und Feuerstelle in der Küche). Das Zimmer in diesem Haus war mit Decke versehen und rauchfrei. Dieser Bauernhaustyp kommt unter den mittelalterlichen Denkmälern der Grossen Ungarischen Tiefebene vor, die meistens aus Holz und Erde gebaut wurden, d.h. mit Holzkonstruktion und gestampfen Wänden. Diese Bauweise herrschte im Spätmittelalter auf den Niederungen des Karpatenbeckens. Die archäologischen Forschungen in der Hügellandschaft und im bewaldeten Mittelgebirge von Transdanubien entdeckten mehrere Formen des Holzbaues aus dem 14.-16. Jahrhundert. In den Dörfern dieser Gegend

kommt der Steinbau relativ selten vor, solche Gebäude gehören meistens den oberen Gesellschaftsschichten (Haus des Landbesitzers oder das Pfarrerrhaus, u.s.w.).

Aufgrund der archäologischen Forschungen in den verwesteten mittelalterlichen Dörfern haben wir die Grundrisse der typischen Häuser der einzelnen Gegenden angefertigt. Die mittelalterliche, volkstümliche Bauweise der Tiefebene wird von zwei Häusern aus dem mittelalterlichen Dorf Szentkirály vertreten (Nr. 4a, Nr. 25), ihr Kachelofen wurde auch rekonstruiert. Der Holzbau in Transdanubien wird mit der Hilfe der Häuser aus Sarvaly vorgestellt (Nr. 15, Nr. 17), die ein Steinfundament hatten mit anschliessendem Keller. Das Haus Nr. 1 der Unterburg-Siedlung (*suburbium*) in Visegrád, das Anfang des 14. Jh. datiert wird, repräsentiert die Denkmäler der privilegierten Völker. Zur Rekonstruktion der Hausstrukturen und der Dachstrukturen konnten wir die Erfahrungen verwenden, die wir bei der Abbrucharbeiten der traditionellen volkstümlichen Gebäuden im Rahmen des Entwicklungsprojekts des Ethnographischen Freilichtmuseums in Szentendre erworben haben.

## Résumé

Notre conférence essaye d'esquisser le développement de la maison rurale en Hongrie et de classer les vestiges archéologiques au bas Moyen Âge, en tenant compte les matériaux et le mode de construction, le foyer et le chauffage ainsi que les pièces et leurs fonctions.

Dans le bassin des Carpathes, le rôle dominant du fond de cabane dans l'architecture rurale a pris fin au XIIIe siècle. En ce qui concerne le mode de vie et la culture de la paysannerie de la Hongrie durant le Moyen Âge, le XIVe siècle paraît l'époque de grands changements où la maison d'habitation pluricellulaire, construite à la surface s'est généralisée. Le XVe siècle voit la formation de la maison rurale médiévale de type le plus évolué, celle de la maison aménagée du chauffage complexe (poêle dans la chambre, four et foyer dans la cuisine). La chambre de cette construction a été garnie d'un plafond et fut exempte de fumée. La maison paysanne hongroise de ce type figure très souvent parmi les vestiges médiévaux de la Grande Plaine hongroise, construite en générale en bois et en terre, c'est-à-dire une ossature en bois avec des murs en pisé. Cette manière de construire était dominante au bas Moyen Âge dans le pays plat du bassin des Carpathes. Dans le pays de collines et dans les montagnes boisées d'altitude moyenne de la Transdanubie les recherches archéologiques ont découvert plusieurs formes de la construction en bois des XIVe-XVe siècles. Dans les villages de cette région, la construction en pierre se rencontre assez rarement, les bâtiments de cette sorte appartiennent en générale à la haute couche de la société villageoise (maison du propriétaire, maison du curé, etc.).

D'après les résultats des fouilles archéologiques menées dans certains villages désertés médiévaux nous avons fait les dessins des maisons caractéristiques de la région. L'architecture populaire médiévale de la Grande Plaine est représentée par deux maisons découvertes à Szentkirály (Nos 4a, 25), leurs poêles de carreaux sont aussi reconstruits. Nous faisons voir la construction en bois de la Transdanubie par des maisons de Sarvaly (Nos 15, 17) qui ont des fondations en pierre et une cave ajoutée. La maison No 1 de la basse-enceinte (*suburbium*) de Visegrád, datée au début du XIVe siècle, peut représenter les monuments des peuples privilégiés. Pour pouvoir reconstruire la structure des maisons avec la construction de toiture nous avons profité des expériences faites à l'occasion de la démolition des bâtiments populaires traditionnels, dans le cadre des travaux du développement du Musée ethnographique en plein air de Szentendre.

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