

# THE ROLE OF CHURCHES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERMANENT VILLAGES (MEDIEVAL VILLAGE STRUCTURE IN THE AREA OF CEGLÉD)

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*Edit TARI*

## *Introduction*

In my presentation I would like to display a new point of view on the settlement system of a relatively small territory in the Árpáadian Age (11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries). I hope that questions and the possible answers suggested in this work will show a new direction in the research.

The town of Cegléd and its surroundings are situated in the southern part of Pest County, more or less in the geographic centre of Hungary (*Fig. 1*). The study of the Cegléd area as a separate unit is determined by the fact that most of the medieval settlements belonging to the possessions of the town were deserted until the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and never had been resettled. So, in this case we have the opportunity of examining a unit determined in time and space. From the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century this territory composed a closed body of possessions after absorbing the territories of the deserted villages. This possession has been preserved up to our days as an administrative unit.

The archaeological investigation of the Árpáadian Age sites of South Pest County is characterised by the fact that we have conducted exclusively **rescue excavations**, no systematic settlement research was possible. The majority of the rescue excavations was concentrated mainly at the cemeteries demolished by ploughing (because of the intensive agricultural activity). In the 1990s I succeeded in getting a support for the research of the demolished and endangered Romanesque churches<sup>1</sup>. On the first hand we know the churches from the Árpáadian Age, so through them we can collect valuable information on the settlements.

In the last 14 years I was conducting excavations of nine rural churches at a ca. 20 by 20 km large territory. Only in five cases I succeeded in finding the foundations of Romanesque churches. On the basis of excavation and also that of the results of the field surveys we get an unusual picture. Although there used to be a church only in the half or third of all the villages of the country, we can determine that the surroundings of Cegléd have been not only densely populated (villages were situated 2-3 km from each other) in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century, but all of the settlements in its direct vicinity (around 16 ones) owned a church at that time! The distance between the villages corresponded to the national average (*Fig. 2*).

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## Shortly on the ecclesiastic system of the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries

In the following review I put the accent onto the rural churches. Hungarian tribes reached their final homeland in Central Europe at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century after a long period of wandering. For the semi-nomadic, pagan Hungarians the only way for survival seemed to be a western type, Christian state organisation. The founder of the Hungarian state, Stephen I (Saint Stephen) was crowned in 1001. The king organised the state on the Frank model. He built up a system in which the church supported the state and committed himself to the Latin Church organisation. Christian conversion has started in the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, but became wide spread only following the foundation of the Christian state of king Stephen in 1001. The king divided the country (that used to be twice as big as today) into 10 bishoprics and built churches at the bishop centers. He made it compulsory to go to the church on Sundays. At the very beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century there have been churches at a distance of 3-4 hours walk (15-24 km) from most of the villages. But this was not enough, so around year 1030 king Stephen issued a decree according to which every ten villages were obliged to build a church together and to donate two households, slaves, and lots of animals to the church. The king had to provide clothes and altar-clothes and the bishop had to provide the ecclesiastical books and the priest. In the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century there could have been one settlement with a church among 9 villages. These were community churches organised by Italian pattern and built by village communities: places both for baptising and burials. Early churches were constructed mainly of timber, mud, clay, but not even one has been preserved. They were demolished either during the pagan revolts and later fights, or there have been a new church constructed at their place built of more solid material.

In order to understand the early settlement history we have to study the important data of the laws of the Szabolcs Council of 1092. In these laws king Ladislaus (László) I prohibited to villages to leave or move their churches, or if they had done so, he - using his bishop right - ordered them to return to the original place. These laws make difference between the visit of the mass in case of villages being far from the church, moving farther from the church or that ones who want to leave their church for ever and use another one. *Villages had their possessions already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, they are mentioned together with them, so the wandering of the villages must be interpreted in the limits of their own boundaries.* In the stabilisation of the

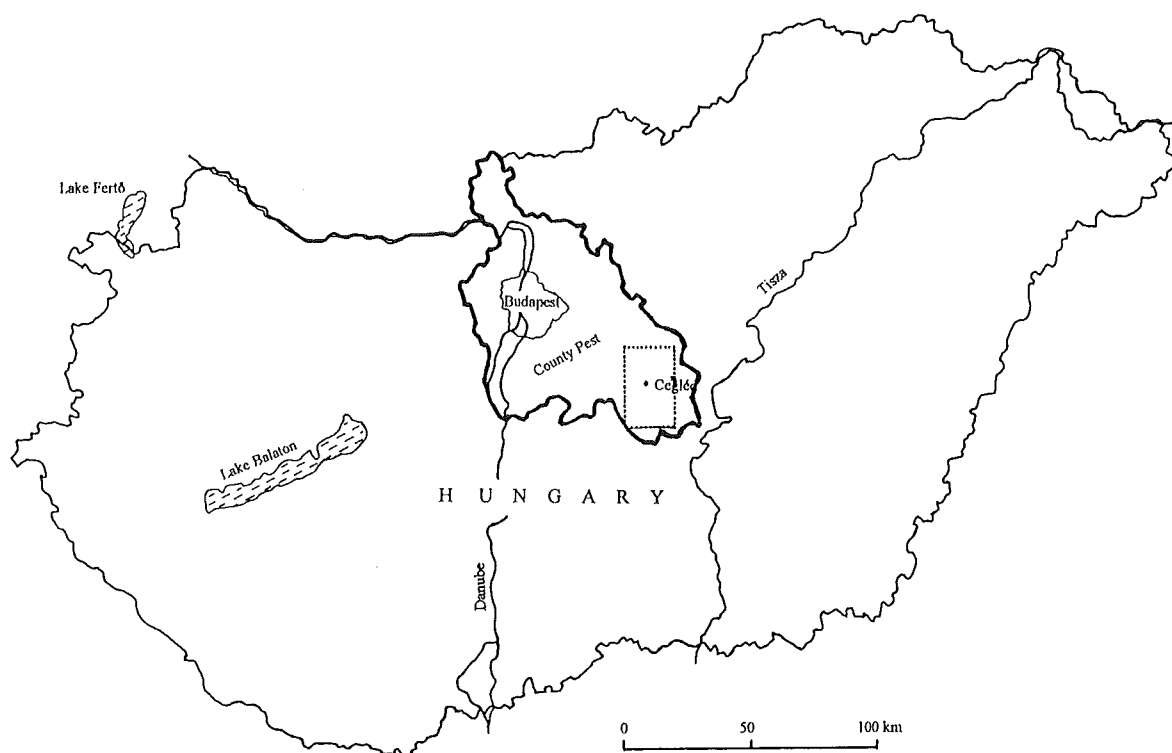


Fig. 1. The area of Cegléd in Pest county.

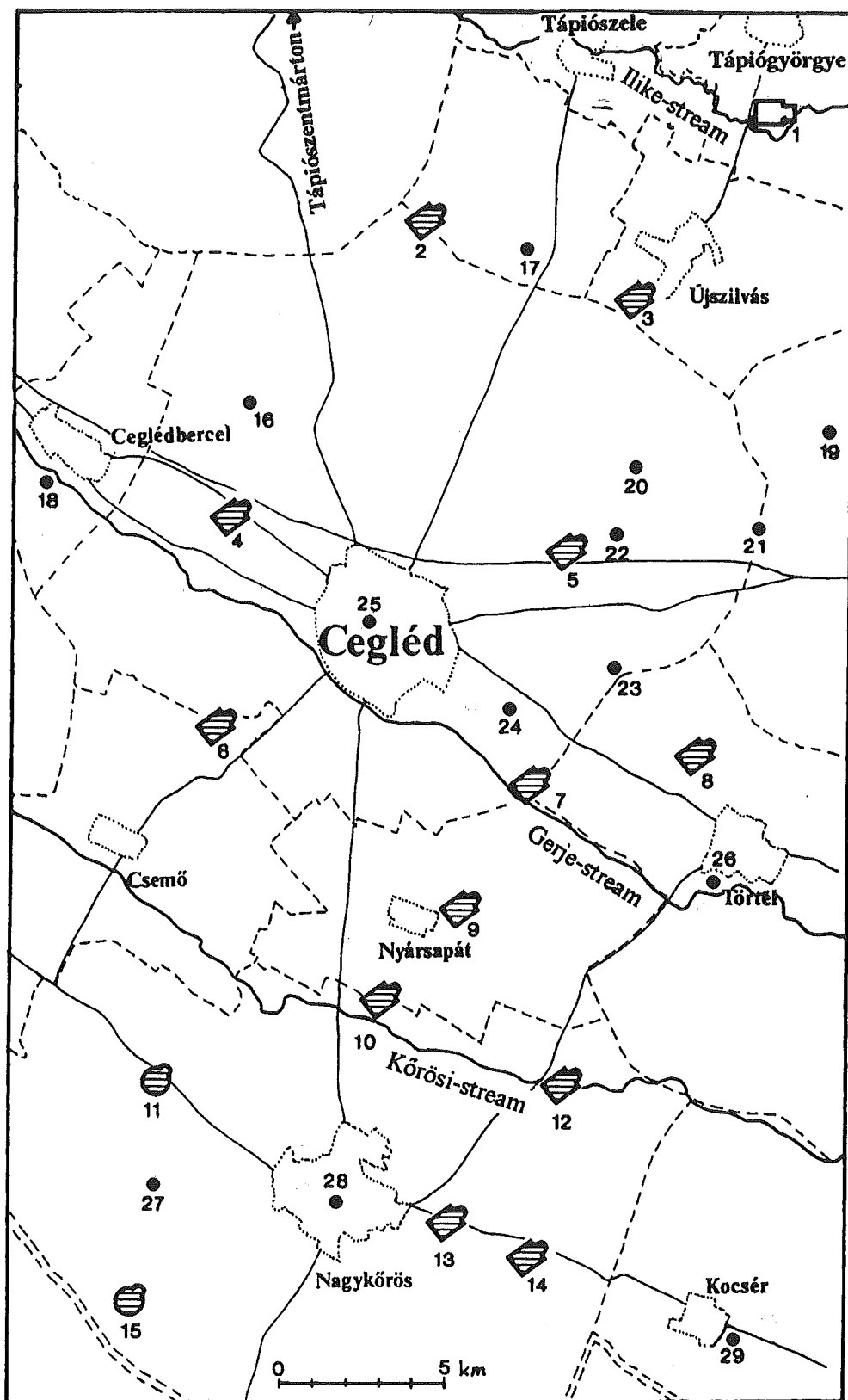


Fig. 2. The area of Cegléd with church sites. 1-15 - the church foundation were excavated; 16 - known round church from written sources; 17-27 - church site, foundation is not known; 28-29 - standing church and ruin without research.

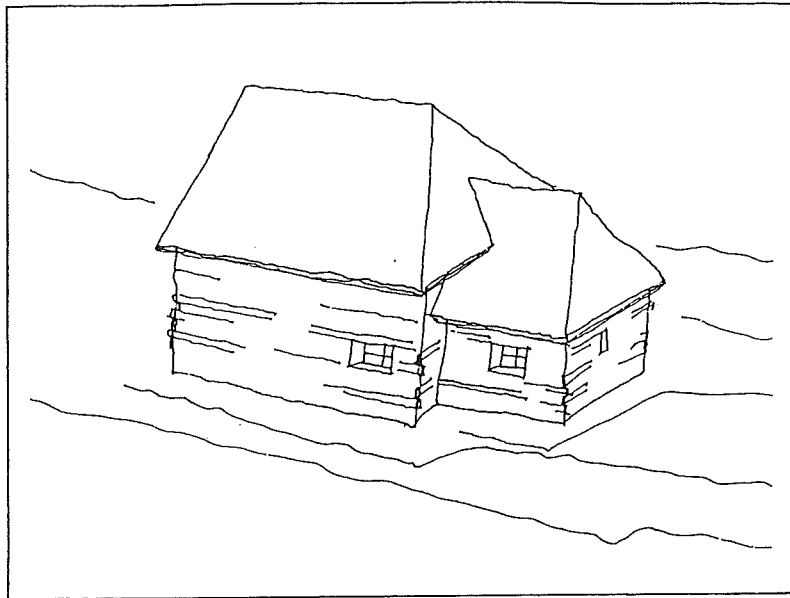
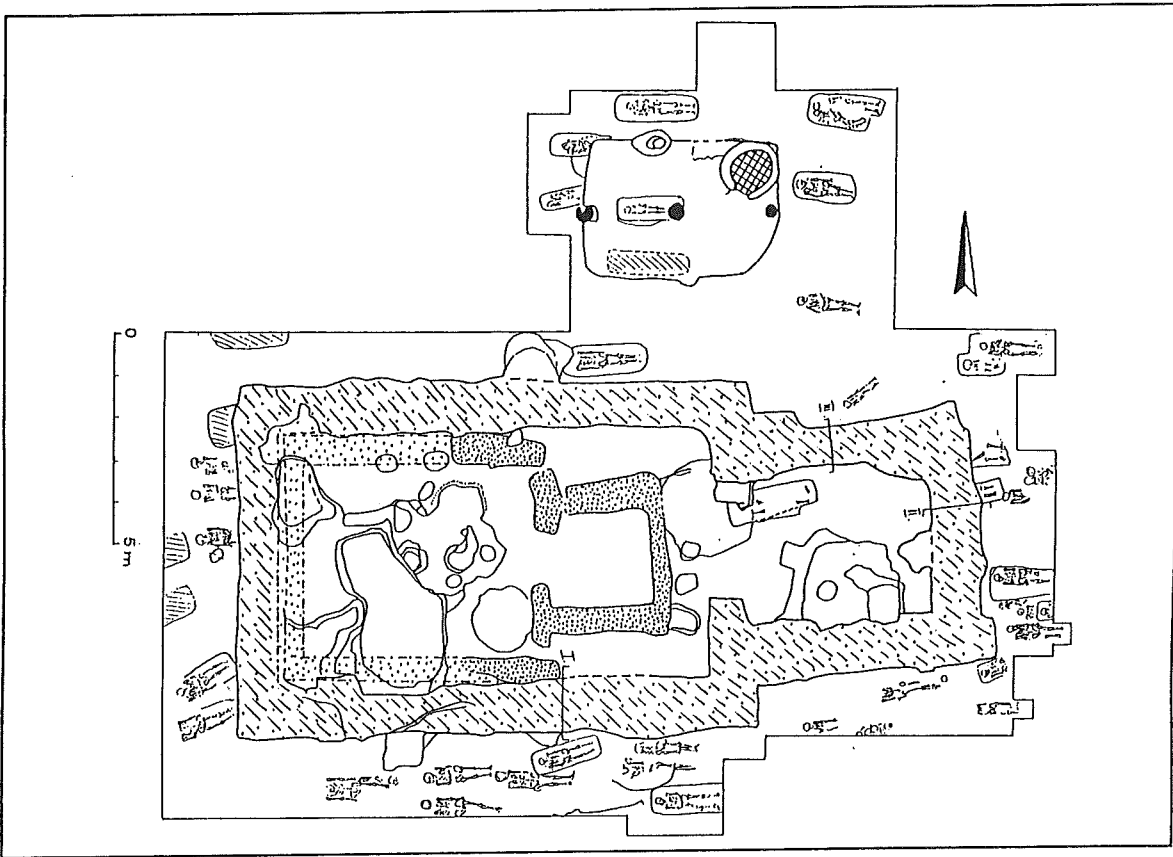


Fig. 3. Above: The archaeological groundplan of the timber church and cemetery. Below: Reconstruction of the timber church (D. Holnays drawing).

villages a significant role was played by the slow change of the semi-nomadic economic life, the growing role of agriculture. I should add, that this settling process was strengthened by the king who ordered the construction of the churches: from the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century the village was obliged to supply the priest, the church. The compulsory Sunday visit of the church created the judicial frames for the final settling down, for constant settlements. So, **there is a close connection between the building of the churches and the keeping, stabilising of the villages at the same place.** After the Hungarian Conquest the settling of Hungarians wandering between their winter and summer camps happened with different intensity at different parts of the country.

The first great wave of the construction of rural churches must have been finished around the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of king Ladislaus I. By the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century the rule of building a church for each 10 villages must have been out of date: churches supposedly were situated more densely than that. In 1092 an edict was issued about the *reconstruction of old collapsed or demolished churches*. This could be a reference to the timber, timber-frame and mud-wall churches. A foundation of a church with sill-beam construction near Cegléd, in Tápiógyörgye is considered to be a rare speciality. This church could have been built already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (*Fig. 3*).

Spreading church construction works started during the reign of king Ladislaus became even wider in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century also the system of royal estates has undergone serious changes. In the course of economic and social changes, after the presenting royal lands to members of landlords, huge private possessions formed. This process was closely connected with the demand of the private landlords to own churches. They spread their owner rights not only to the land and the peasants, but also to its church and its incomes. In the course of the spread of the private churches in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, not only the king had the right to construct church buildings, but also the landlords under the condition that they maintain the church. So the landlord could choose the priest, place or remove him from the parish. Later the church and its patronage could be granted together with the land. That is to say, the priest was supplied not only by the community as in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century king Béla IV. tried to get back the royal possessions, but it was made impossible by the Mongol invasion.

In the course of time in the life of the most villages the visit of the church and thus the church itself got a stronger and stronger role. The process of stabilisation of villages at one place can be considered finished in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

At certain regions, mainly in the Great Hungarian Plain the Mongol invasion (1241-42) led to a mass demolition of villages. In Pest County around 75 % of the settlements were deserted as a result of the invasion and a large part of them never have been resettled. After the Mongol invasion, in the period of reconstruction a more centralised settlement structure was formed in the whole country. In our region only Cegléd continued its development becoming a borough in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

### Written sources of the Cegléd area

We know only one diploma from the Árpáadian Age dated to 1290 in Cegléd. However, it does not give us any information besides the pure mentioning of Cegléd.

Our most important record comes from 1358. That was the year when king Louis (Lajos) I granted his mother, queen Maria, the possessions around Cegléd. The king bought back and presented the land as "*being a royal estate for a long period of time*".

From a diploma dated to 1364 we know that Cegléd used to be a royal customs place, and its inhabitants were free of duty on the whole territory of the country. It can be evaluated as a privilege of a citizen living in a market-town.

The royal grant of 1358 is connected with a record from 1368 in which queen Maria presented the whole Cegléd possession to the nuns of the Óbuda St. Clair Order and on this occasion a perambulation was conducted. In the perambulation record several roads, outstanding trees, ponds, hills and ruined churches were mentioned. As a boundaries order point four ruined stone churches have been mentioned at the northern part of the possession, and one at the western part. This diploma is of outstanding importance for us, because it

lists Árpáadian Age churches evidenced with the methods of archaeology, built 100 or even 200 years before, but certainly being out of use by 1368. Their dating with a 100-200 years earlier time and longer period of existence are evidenced by the large number of multi-levelled graves surrounding the churches. It is questionable whether the term "*being royal estate for a long period of time*" was based on facts or was used only as a phrase customary in a grant.

For a long time historic works considered the surroundings of Cegléd to be poorly populated because of the lack of Árpáadian Age records. Historians' stereotype according to which the territories of the Great Hungarian Plain without records were poorly populated and economically retarded, has been contradicted by archaeologists for several times (for example in the recently published volumes of topography - lists of archaeological sites). In the territory between the Danube and the Tisza historians suggest a late settling on the basis of the village names. However, this can be contradicted with archaeological data: for example, in the surroundings of Cegléd we know only the name of two settlements (Cseke, Cegléd), but at the same time 14-15 villages with unknown names have been revealed with the methods of archaeology. These villages must have been deserted already in the Árpáadian Age, which clearly contradicts the opinion of historians. In the Árpáadian Age the system of settlements was much denser than it seems to us on the basis of the records. There is a significant gap between historical and archaeological sources. In the territories where records are silent, the history of the settlements of the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century can be outlined exclusively with the support of archaeological results.

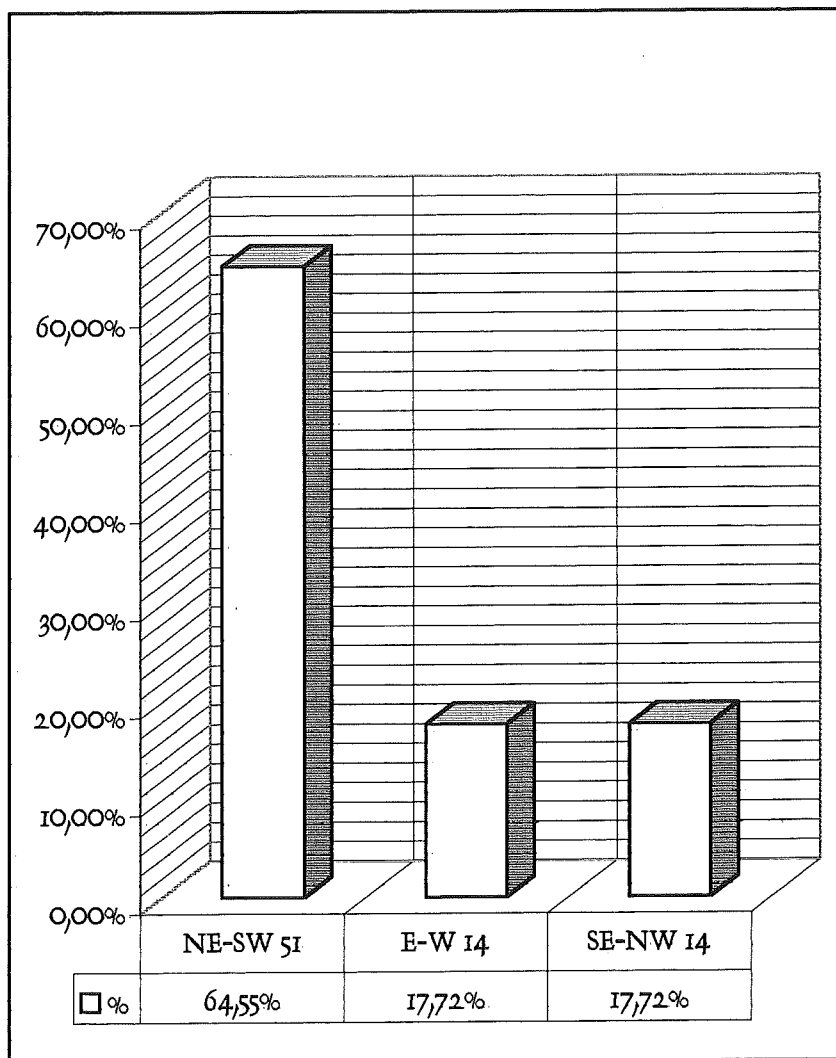


Fig. 4. Church orientation in Pest county.

In my opinion it is wrong to sharply separate the analysis of the types of rural settlements from the examination of the church organisation. This can lead to serious mistakes. The intention of the researchers proposed almost fifty years ago, according to which we need entire excavations of villages well documented by written records, could be fulfilled only sporadically in Hungary. In the way of constructing the churches, in their decoration we can observe much more characteristic and spectacular features than in the case of rural houses. It can be suggested that the analysis of the churches can give us data for the judicial status of the villages.

*What are the criteria of a village? What size of settlement can be considered to be a village? What is a minimum population of a village? What is the difference between short life settlements, dwellings, farms, hamlets and villages in the archaeological material?*

It seems to us that historians and archaeologists give different answers. It is indubitable that on the basis of written records of the Árpáadian Age several settlement types can be differentiated. Terms like *villa*, *predium*, *possessio*, *locus*, *terra* etc. probably are associated with different types of settlements and judicial status. It is suggested that there must have been even more variants connected with this or that term. However, it is very difficult to harmonise the written records with archaeological traces. Terms mentioned in the diplomas could change their meaning during the past centuries. Only the meaning of *villa* is unequivocal. The village in a narrower sense meant the settlement itself, and in a wider sense the whole territory of the village with its possessions and the inhabitants themselves, that is to say the village community.

On the basis of the records the number of the houses varies from seven to one hundred and seventy in a village of the early Árpáadian Age. The average number of households was thirty-six on the basis of records, but judging from archaeological data it was less: 10-20 households. Usually we do not have data on the foundation or demolition of the villages, we only have the facts of the existence of villages. Archaeological records give us detailed data on the length of the life of the settlement - in the best case. The investigation of the church and the cemetery in many cases gives us much more accurate data on the period of the life of the village, than the excavation of the houses, but we cannot speak about it in a general sense. For example, in the case of the archaeological topographies (lists of sites) we cannot leave out of consideration that it is very difficult, sometimes impossible to determine unequivocally from surface finds whether we have found traces of a continuous settlement or temporary camp, farm, or dispersed settlement and whether they existed synchronously or following each other? In the topography of the northern part of county Pest, at a 863 km<sup>2</sup> large territory of Szob and Vác district, the average of 65 villages known also from records was taken into consideration. On this basis it was calculated that at a territory of a 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century's late medieval village (about 13.3 km<sup>2</sup>), traces of 5-6 villages from the Árpáadian Age can be found. So, the statistical approach can be wrong, and even the use of large proportions can be doubtful.

The village was obliged to supply its priest (giving him land for two ploughs and animals), so it is improbable that in the case of little, farm like settlements the existence of churches could be suggested. Perhaps we can think of "*prediums*" (private farms of the landlords), where the labour force was represented by population of "*servus*" status. Large settlement of village character could have been mainly the dwelling place of agricultural population. The development of the agriculture could have gone parallel with the small family property and the private possession that became widely spread in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The questions of land use, the use and division of the territories belonging to deserted settlements can be hardly traced by the methods of archaeology. Without getting in deeper into this group of questions, **we can assume that if a settlement had had a church, as the ones around Cegléd, it could be considered a village.**

Although I have recently finished to collect the Medieval churches of county Pest, the quality of the data represents such a wide scale that they do not help us in the research of the settlements. The number of medieval settlements with a church is 372 of which are rural churches and 217 of them are churches of the Árpáadian Age.

**If we'd like to trace the judicial status of a settlement lacking written records, a church can be more informative concerning the landlord, than dwelling houses, farm buildings, artefacts of a village.** In my opinion we could better approach the answers, if we include into the group of problems the churches. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the church regulated and canonised the unified eastern direction in the case of the axis of the church buildings, that is to say: the apse was directed to the east. It can be suggested that before that other, dissimilar orientation rule was also accepted. Several religions attach great importance to the East starting from the Antique times. It also played an important role in the liturgy of the Catholic church (for example, the priest and the believers turned to the east during prayer). In a liturgy book written before 1130 the

following is said: "Churches are directed toward east, where the Sun rises, because so adore we the Sun of the Truth and they say that the Paradise, our homeland, also used to be in the East" (*Honorius Augustodunensis*). In contradiction with the ecclesiastical rule of eastern orientation, all the churches in the Cegléd area deviated from this and were directed NE-SW. The ground plan of the excavated churches also was of unified form with a semicircular apse. *Could it be suggested that they were built before the regulation?* This question cannot be answered at the present moment.

In the case of the churches of Pest County I succeeded in collecting the orientation data of 79 churches. (A 5° deviation was considered to be belonging to the main direction taking into consideration that the poles were pointed out without a special device). From the 79 churches the axis of 51 ones was NE-SW (64,55 %), 14 ones were oriented E-W (17,72 %) and 14 churches were oriented SE-NW (17,72 %). Only 11 churches had an accurate E-W orientation. Among the 51 NE-SW oriented churches 38 ones can be confidently dated to the Árpáadian Age, 2 of them are uncertain and 7 ones belong to the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century. So, we can see, that more than 60 %, a significant number of the unearthed foundations significantly deviates from the E-W axis to the north (*Fig. 4*).

*What could be the possible reason for that? Is it plausible to suggest some regularity, ecclesiastical or owner's prescription, same judicial status, same owner on the basis of the churches of the same character?* My answer is yes. The same orientation, ground plan, similarity in time and space makes it possible to suggest the construction of churches with similar judicial status and liturgy. That is to say: we have to look for its explanation in the similar possession conditions and not in the corresponding time of construction of the churches. The reason could be the same possessor. The sentence from a diploma cited above, according to which the king had bought back something "*being a royal estate for a long period of time*" must have been based on facts. It can be suggested that the Cegléd area in the Árpáadian Age continuously was a royal possession, and at royal possessions the ground plans of the churches had been pointed out according to a unified rule. Although we have no information on such a prescription, an analysis based on the material of whole Hungary could lead to assuming of general rules, if there had been such.

*Is it possible that regularities observed at rural churches belonging to the lower level of the ecclesiastical hierarchy are suitable for making conclusions concerning the connection between the churches built in ecclesiastical and royal centres?* Perhaps. Some example: the church of Esztergom built in the royal and ecclesiastical centre at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and consecrated to St. Stephen, the protomartyr, is considered to be the earliest Hungarian church. It was also oriented NE-SW. It is widely accepted that the church was erected in the time of prince Géza. Its early dating is supported by the choice of the patron saint which refers to the close connection with the Passau church. But the church of St. Adalbert, main cathedral of the Archbishop of Esztergom, the head of the Hungarian church, built at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century was also oriented in NE-SW direction etc.

There were attempts made in the Hungarian literature to approach the judicial status of a village with similar analysis, but these studies were taking into consideration exclusively the ground plan of the churches. However, no investigation like the one in the Cegléd area has been conducted until now. I mean the excavation of all the rural churches at a relatively small territory. So, I have no material for comparison in order to examine whether my conclusions were right or not. We miss comparable material due to the fact that from the records we know either the service of the inhabitants, the owner of the village and its territories, or - from archaeological sources, only the church. We cannot compare the two source groups, and in some cases when its possible, we have only data on single villages and not village groups at our disposal. We may never find the answer for the extraordinary density of churches in the villages around Cegléd.

Aspects examined here are new because I have included into my analysis the *orientation of the churches*, which - for liturgical reasons - was of great importance in the course of construction of medieval churches. At the same time the research neglects this aspect, so even in the new publications authors do not consider it to be important to mark the northern direction.

My questions were born in the course of the work described above. It was not my goal to create suggestions that cannot be proved by the moment. The rising questions also show the further direction of my studies. I am facing a very detailed, scrupulous investigation: the comparison of the known data concerning possession data with the ground plans of churches, the comparison of the orientation data in whole Hungary. This is a new direction in the medieval church research in Hungary. However, I hope that with the help of comparable material it will be possible to answer certain questions.



## DIE ROLLE DER KIRCHEN BEI DER ENTWICKLUNG DER STÄNDIGEN DÖRFER (DAS MITTELALTERLICHE DORFSYSTEM IN DER UMGEBUNG VON CEGLÉD)

Aus völligem Mangel an Urkunden galt die Geschichte der Umgebung von Cegléd in Árpádenzeit (vom 11. bis 13. Jahrhundert) als ein weißer Fleck für die Historiker. Die Siedlungs- und Kirchengeschichte dieser Gegend können zwischen den erwähnten Zeitgrenzen nur noch mit archäologischen Methoden skizziert werden. Vielleicht scheint es gewagt zu sein, muß man doch den Versuch anstellen, da das Vorkommen von schriftlichen Quellen über diese Gegend nicht mehr zu erwarten ist. In einem ca. 20 x 20 km großen Bezirk etwa (40 000 ha) konnte ich in den vergangenen 13 Jahren die Grundrisse von fünf Kirchen durch Ausgrabungen klären und die gefährdeten Teile der Friedhöfe um weitere vier Kirchen freilegen. Vor 1985 wurden Ausgrabungen nur an der Stelle von drei zerstörten Kirchen durchgeführt, und es wurde mit den Geländebegehungen begonnen. Die Untersuchung der Gegend von Cegléd als eine selbständige Einheit kann dadurch begründet werden, daß sie von der zweiten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts an – durch eine Grenzbesichtigungsurkunde dokumentiert – ein selbstständiges, geschlossenes Grundstück war und das in Form einer Verwaltungseinheit bis heute besteht.

Die bisher erzielten Erfolge der archäologischen Forschungen sind:

1) Die archäologischen Forschungen bewiesen mehrmals, daß man in der Árpádenzeit mit einem viel dichteren Siedlungsnetz im Land rechnen muß als das aufgrund der Urkunden vorstellbar wäre. Die Umgebung von Cegléd nimmt einen besonderen Platz unter den árpádenzeitlichen Siedlungen Ungarns ein, da diese nicht nur eine dicht bevölkerte Gegend war (die Dörfer lagen 2-3 km weit voneinander), sondern alle Siedlungen in seiner Gemarkung (ca. 16) im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert eine Kirche hatten. Der Abstand zwischen den Dörfern entsprach dem ungarischen durchschnittlichen, aber anderswo gab es eine Pfarrkirche in jedem zweiten und dritten Dorf. Da die Siedlungen in der Umgebung von Cegléd (mit Ausnahme von zwei Dörfern) bis Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts verödeten, kann man eine geschlossener zeitliche und räumliche Einheit untersuchen. Dazu können die Friedhöfe um die Kirchen, die geschätzte Bevölkerungszahl der Siedlungen, die durch Geländebegehungen bestimmte Größe der Siedlungen usw. eine Hilfe leisten.

2) Das kirchengeschichtliche Bild unseres Gebietes konnte ebenfalls ergänzt werden. Im Gegensatz zur im 12. Jahrhundert kanonisierten kirchlichen Regel, wonach das Heiligtum der Kirche nach Osten orientiert werden mußte, wichen alle Kirchen in dieser Gegend davon ab: Sie waren NO-SW-orientiert. Weiters waren die Grundrisse der freigelegten Kirchen einheitlich, mit einem halbkreisförmigen Chorschluß. Die gleiche Orientierung, das Abstecksystem, der Grundriß, ferner die zeitliche und räumliche Verwandtschaft der freigelegten Kirchen machen die Existenz von Kirchen mit gleicher Rechtsstellung und Liturgie wahrscheinlich. Zur Bauweise der Kirchen konnten merkwürdige Angaben gefunden werden. Die erste und bisher einzige Holzkirche mit Sohlenbalkenkonstruktion konnte in der weiteren Gemarkung von Cegléd erschlossen werden. Man konnte auch abwechslungsreiche Gründungstechnik dokumentieren, so z.B. Opus-spicatum-Grundmauern aus Ziegel, Steinreihen zwischen gestampften Lehmschichten, ohne Verband in Graben gelegte große Steine usw. Die Analogien dieser Erscheinungen sind im Ausland bekannt, und aus den neuen Angaben ist es auf die Anwesenheit von wandernden Baumeistern auch in unserer Gegend zu schließen.

3) Aufgrund der neuen archäologischen Angaben können manchmal ungewöhnliche Fragen gestellt werden, und interessante Zusammenhänge tauchen auf, z.B.: Wie beeinflusste das dichte Kirchennetz das Siedlungssystem dieser Gegend und was war der Grund dafür? Die Gesetze aus dem 11. Jahrhundert verboten den Dorfbewohnern, ihre Kirche zu verlassen und von der Gegend wegzuwandern. Es ist auf der Spur zu folgen, daß die innerhalb ihrer eigenen Feldmarken wandernden Dörfer durch die Errichtung von kirchlichen Bauten an Ort gebunden wurden. Von Ende des 11. Jahrhunderts waren die Dorfbewohner verpflichtet, sonntags eine Messe anzuhören, den Priester und Kirche zu besorgen: Dadurch wurden die gesetzlichen Rahmen zur endgültigen Ansiedlung der Dörfer geschaffen. Auf diese Weise ist ein fester Zusammenhang unter den Kirchen und der Stabilisierung der Dörfer feststellbar.

Ist es möglich, kirchliche Vorschriften oder solche des Besitzers die gleiche Rechtsstellung, denselben Besitzer aufgrund der ein einheitliches Bild aufweisenden Kirchen zu vermuten? Ist es möglich, aus der Übereinstimmung gewisser Elemente (Bauform, Orientierung) auf die vorigen zu schließen? Anstatt vorläufig unbeweisbare Antworten zu geben, möchte ich unseres Denken durch diese Fragestellung in eine andere Richtung lenken. Mit Einbeziehung des Vergleichsmaterials ist es doch möglich, einige Fragen zu beantworten. Man muß aber die geographischen Gegebenheiten vor Augen halten, um die stereotypen Antworten vermeiden zu können.

*Übersetzt von Katalin H. Simon*

## LE RÔLE DES ÉGLISES DANS LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DU VILLAGE PERMANENT (STRUCTURE DES VILLAGES MÉDIEVAUX DANS LE TERRITOIRE DE CEGLÉD)