LOCAL SETTLEMENTS
OF THE ROYAL RESIDENCE OF ESZTERGOM AND THE LANDOWNING SYSTEM OF THE ÁRPÁDIAN AGE (11TH-13TH CENTURIES)

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The City of Esztergom, is one of the oldest cities in Hungary and is situated on the northern border of Hungary. Recently extensive archeological and historical researches have been carried out in connection with its history, and would deserve detailed analysis in an article of greater duration than this paper allows. Hence this article will contain only a brief description of the economic and social importance of the settlement.

The city was built on the right bank of the Danube opposite the estuary of the River Garam. It became the most important city of the Danube region in the course of the 11th and 13th centuries which was largely due to its favourable geographic situation. The oldest fordable section of the Danube developed at the point where the two rivers met. The surmounting castle hill from its vantage point controlled not only the waterways but all the major land routes including the important east-west trading route between Regensburg (Ratisbon) to Kiew which followed the line of the river Danube. Smaller vessels which had to wait could always find a safe wintering harbour here as the hot springs of the Little Danube river prevented the water from freezing over. Hungary's most important market evolved at the foot of the castle hill next to the harbour, attracting both merchants and artisans from far afield.

Previously the Romans had recognised the strategic importance of the settlement, and its favourable location on a major trading route. However, it was not until the reign of prince, Géza in 972, (a descendant of Árpád who led the Hungarian tribes into the Carpathian Basin) that it became a place of great significance. Prince Géza transfered his seat from the Lower Danube Region to Esztergom as part of his policy of turning towards the west. From that time onward Esztergom was regarded as one of the two royal seats and was often referred to as the capital city in contemporary sources of the Árpádian Age.

Géza's son, Saint Stephen (969-975), the first King of Hungary was born here and was crowned in the city in 1001. The organization of the Hungarian church also coincided with this date where Stephen established the Archbishopric of Esztergom to head the other ten bishoprics founded by him. He also erected a cathedral in 1010 named after Saint Adalbert which became a major place of worship. Stephen established the first, and for a long time the only royal mint of the country here.

Apart from the first king's activity as a founder of royal and church seats, Esztergom developed into the most important economic centre in Hungary at that time. The city enjoyed the most ancient staple right among the Hungarian cities whereby foreign merchants were forced to present their goods at the Esztergom market first and it was only after paying their duties that they were allowed to take their goods to other markets of the country. In addition, the annual taxes levied by the kings of the Árpád Dynasty were also collected here.

As an organizer of state administration Stephen established a system of royal counties. Consequently, the region around Esztergom castle also became part of a royal county adding to the functions of the city as a royal, ecclesiastical, and economic centre.

After this brief introduction I would like to give an insight into the archeological and historical research of the villages around the royal castle.

Esztergom County was divided by the Danube into a southern and a northern part. However, the river was no obstacle to the population living in the northern part of the county in the course of their communica-
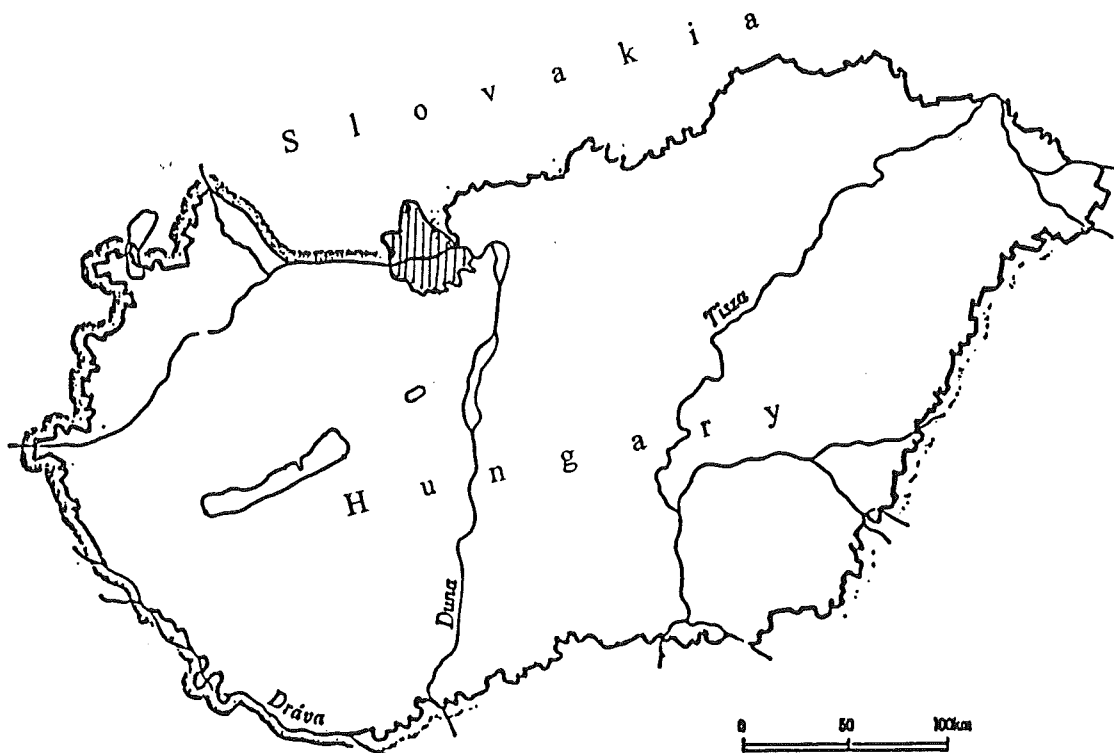
IIIIII Esztergom county in middle ages

Fig. 1. Esztergom county in middle ages.

tion with the county seat, because the renowned Esztergom-Kakat ferry (1075) which still exists served as the main link between the two parts.

Nowadays the Danube is the border line between Hungary and Slovakia, so the southern part of the former county belongs to Hungary whereas the northen part today belongs to Slovakia. *(Fig. 1)*. Consequently, the historical-archeological reasearch of the area is divided between Slovak and Hungarian researchers.

Among some other researchers, it was György Györffy, a Hungarian historian, that dealt with the early period of the history of the city *(Györffy 1979*, 7-11.) and the county quite extensively. He published a historical-geographical work based on contemporary records in the 1987 *(Györffy 1987*, 207-318).

A large scale archeological survey was begun in Hungary in the 1970s which is currently known as 'The Archeological Topography of Hungary' and it is still under way. Its main objective is to identify sites of archeological importance in the terrain, describe, and record them in maps under the guidance of the Archeological Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In accordance with this survey two archeologists, István Horváth and István Torma explored the southern terrain of the county *(Horváth - Kelemen - Torma 1979)*. They identified and recorded the sites of devastated villages. These settlements were mainly destroyed during the Turkish wars in the middle ages and were never rebuilt.

There have also been archeological research projects undertaken in the northern part of the former county belonging to present day Slovakia. I would like to mention Alojz Habovštiak's activity carrying out excavations in Bény which is the most renowned archeological site of the northern part of the county *(Habovštiak 1985*, 254-257, 281, 297, 324). The Slovak Institute of Archeology has also compiled a brief list of medieval findings encompassing the territory of the whole of Slovakia, including the above mentioned area *(Bialeková 1989)*.

However, no archeological topographic survey has yet been complied describing the terrain which could complement the one published in Hungary. For this reason, I have carried out researches in the area myself and managed to find and identify the sites of several medieval settlements in the terrain (*Molnár 1996*).

There are 23 settlements in the southern part of the former county and 24 in the northern part. Altogether the sites of 47 settlements have been analysed.

On the basis of the available archeological-historical data the complete network of settlements in the Árpádian Era can be outlined as follows:

The city itself, as early as the 12th century, consisted of a conglomerate of smaller and larger settlements whose boundaries extended beyond the present borders of the city. (*Fig. 2*).

The city centre comprised three separate units as follows:

1) The castle, built on the right bank of the Danube opposite the estuary of the River Garam, served as a royal seat after Stephen's coronation for 250 years. The grandest secular and church buildings of the kingdom owned by the king or the archbishop were built here.

2) The Watertown or the Archbishop's Town, inhabited by the people of the archbishop, was situated below the castle.
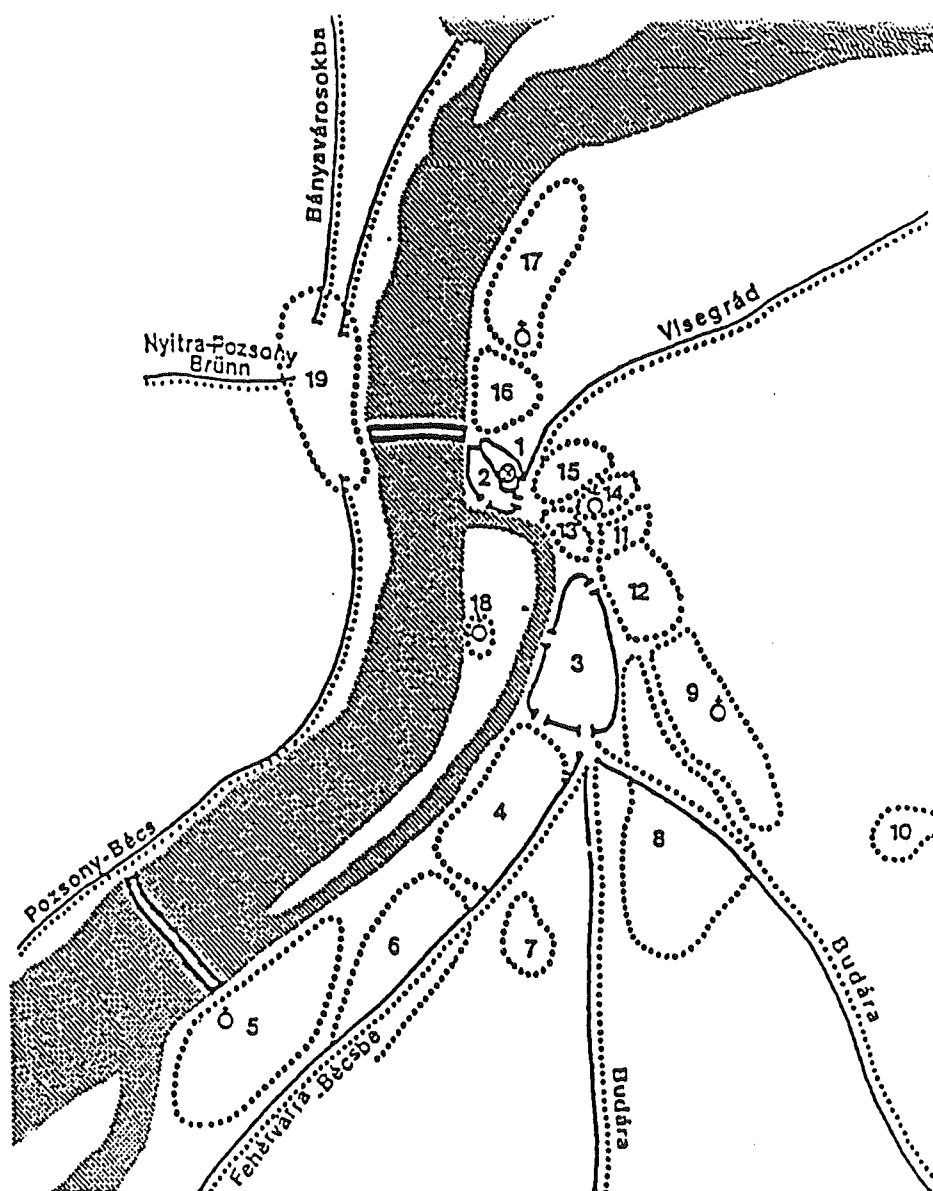

Fig. 2. Esztergom county in middle ages: 1. Royal and archiepiscopal castle; 2. The Watertown; 3. The Royal Town; 4. Szentpál; 5. Szentkirály; 6. Szentistván; 7. Szentlázár; 8. Kovácsi; 9. Újfalu; 10. Fenyérd; 11. Örmény; 12. Szentana; 13. Héviz; 14. Szenttamás; 15. Libád; 16. Petény; 17. Szentgyörgy; 18. Sziget; 19. Kakat (by *Horváth 1991*).
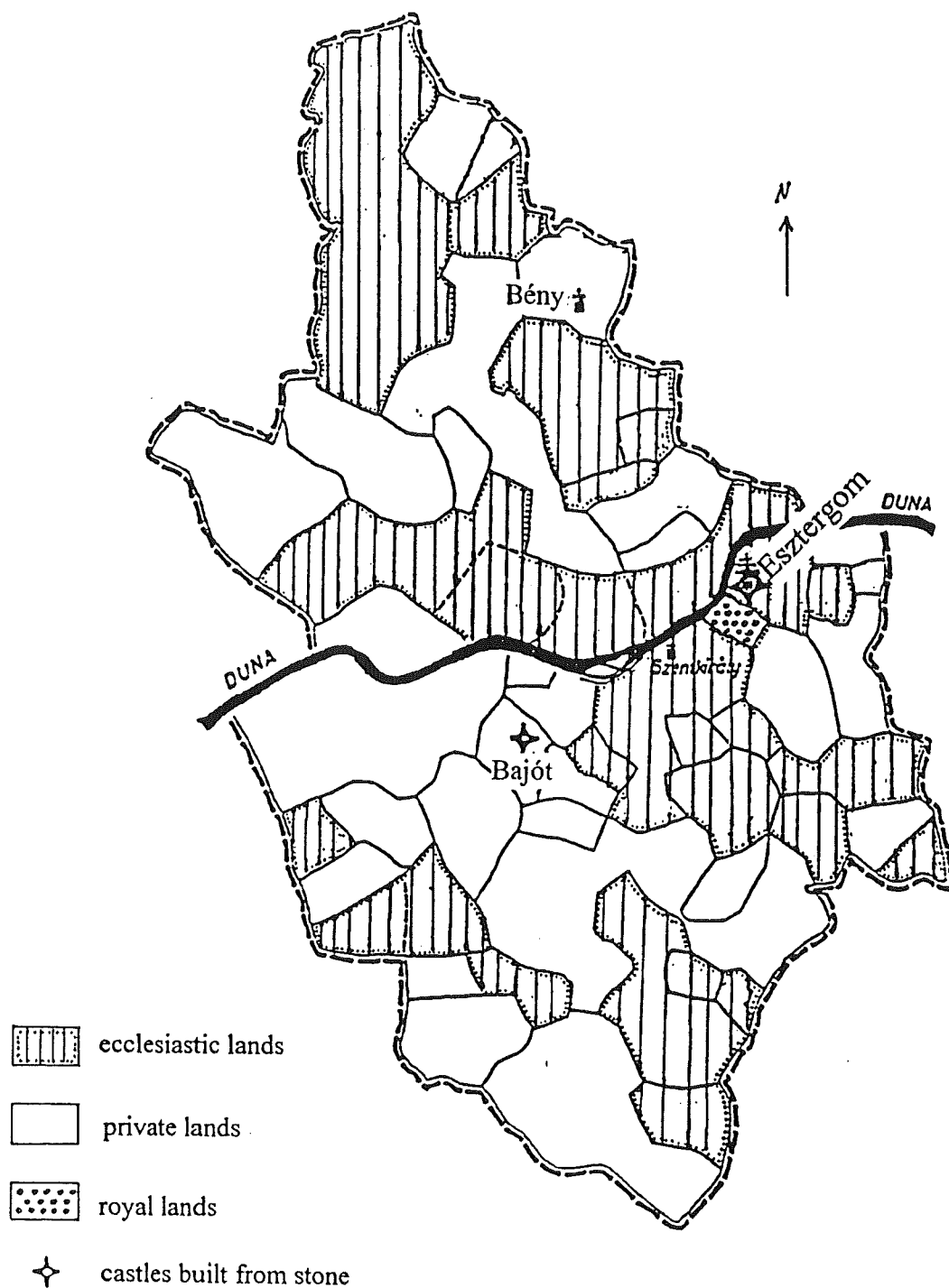
Fig. 3. Landowning system in Esztergom county at the end of the 13th century (by *Györffy 1987*).

3) The Royal Town, inhabited by the most affluent city dwellers of Esztergom whose language belonged to the family of latin languages, such as French, Italian, Vallonian. They were mostly engaged in long distance trade or finer crafts such as goldsmith's trade. This was the centre of royal minting in Hungary throughout the Árpád period.

At the time of the foundation of the Hungarian state, the complete territory of the city was owned by the monarch but its ownership was gradually taken over by the church over the course of the 12th and 13th centuries. Some further suburbs of different legal status belonged to the above mentioned three distinctive parts of the city. Their names were retained in records.

The territory of the county belonged to the family estates of the Árpáds at the time of the foundation of the Hungarian state. King Stephen mainly used it for the upkeep of the court offices of the kingdom. There were six estates of the castle in the county, as well as the courts of the queens and the princes together with the royal churches which also had other estates here. The servants of the Royal household lived in 24 villages. They worked as vineyardists, cup-bearers, apiarists, hunters, oat producers, cooks, silk makers, falconers, boatmen, grooms, field-guards, etc., or smiths whose names were retained in village names, including the names of minters, or dog-keepers as, for example, implied in the name of the village of "Peszér".

The donation of royal estates began with the foundation of the Hungarian state by King Stephen. This process was carried on by nearly all subsequent monarch until the disruption of the royal court system with the descent of the Árpád dynasty in 1301. Consequently, the evolvement of private estates in the county was influenced by Stephen's example. The first recipient of a substantial donation was Hont who was a military leader to Prince Géza and King Stephen. He was given land for 25 ploughs and workers at Csenke, on the left bank of the Danube. Later, his son, Bény received land at Bény village, on the bank of the Garam, thereby becoming the founder of the local Hont-Pázmány family estates. His successors founded a family monastery in the centre of Bény. The Básztély familyline probably received its estate in the southern part of the county at the same time. Apart from these families several other owners held estates of varying size here. Among them we can find the lines of Ákos and Rosd of Pest County, Báncsa of Bars County, Szente-Mágócs of Szatmár County, Bár-Kalán of Csongraád County, Katapán and Igmánd of Komárom County. They must have received their donations in return for their court services so that they could sustain themselves and their retinue in the course of their longer stays in Esztergom.

The acquisition of estates by the Latin inhabitants of the city around Esztergom began before the Mongol invasion of 1241. However, the largest lands were acquired by the Archbishopric and Chapter of Eszter-
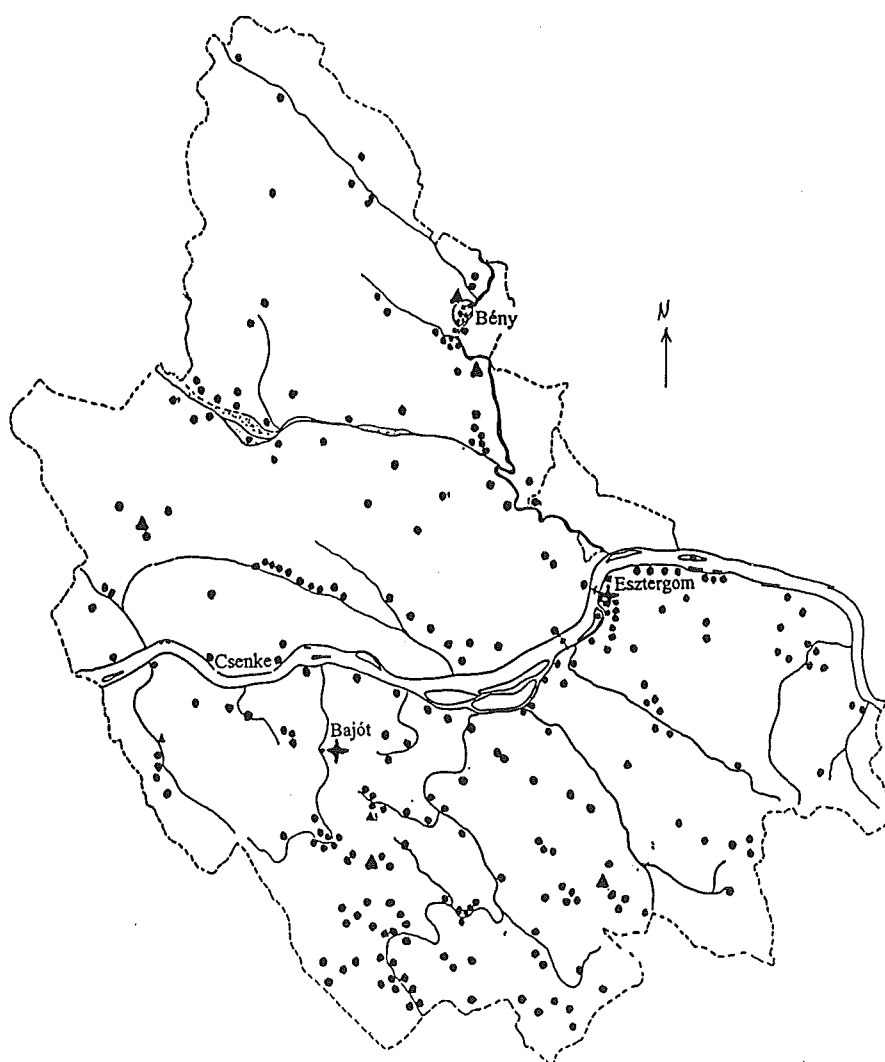

Fig. 4. Archaeological sites in Esztergom county, Árpádian Age (11th-13th centuries).

gom. They owned lands in 12-12 villages each in the county the majority of which was in the northern part of the county. Their separation from a material point of view took place in 1156 when Archbishop Martirius donated the tithes of 70 other villages in other counties for the sustenance of the canons. Apart from lands, the archbishopric acquired some other sources of income from the kings. The salt excises of Kakat and Nána were granted by Géza II in 1157, some part of the market excise of the city by Béla III in 1188, the royal palace by King Imre in 1198. The tithe of wines in the mountains around Esztergom was granted in 1206 and the excises levied at the ferries of Kakat and Szentkirály were acquired from Andrew II in 1215.

The most remarkable period of development of the royal centre coincides with the reign of Béla III (1172-1196) who had been brought up in the Imperial Court of Byzantium. Throughout his reign he lived in Esztergom and was very keen on having a lavish court which would emulate the royal courts of Western Europe.
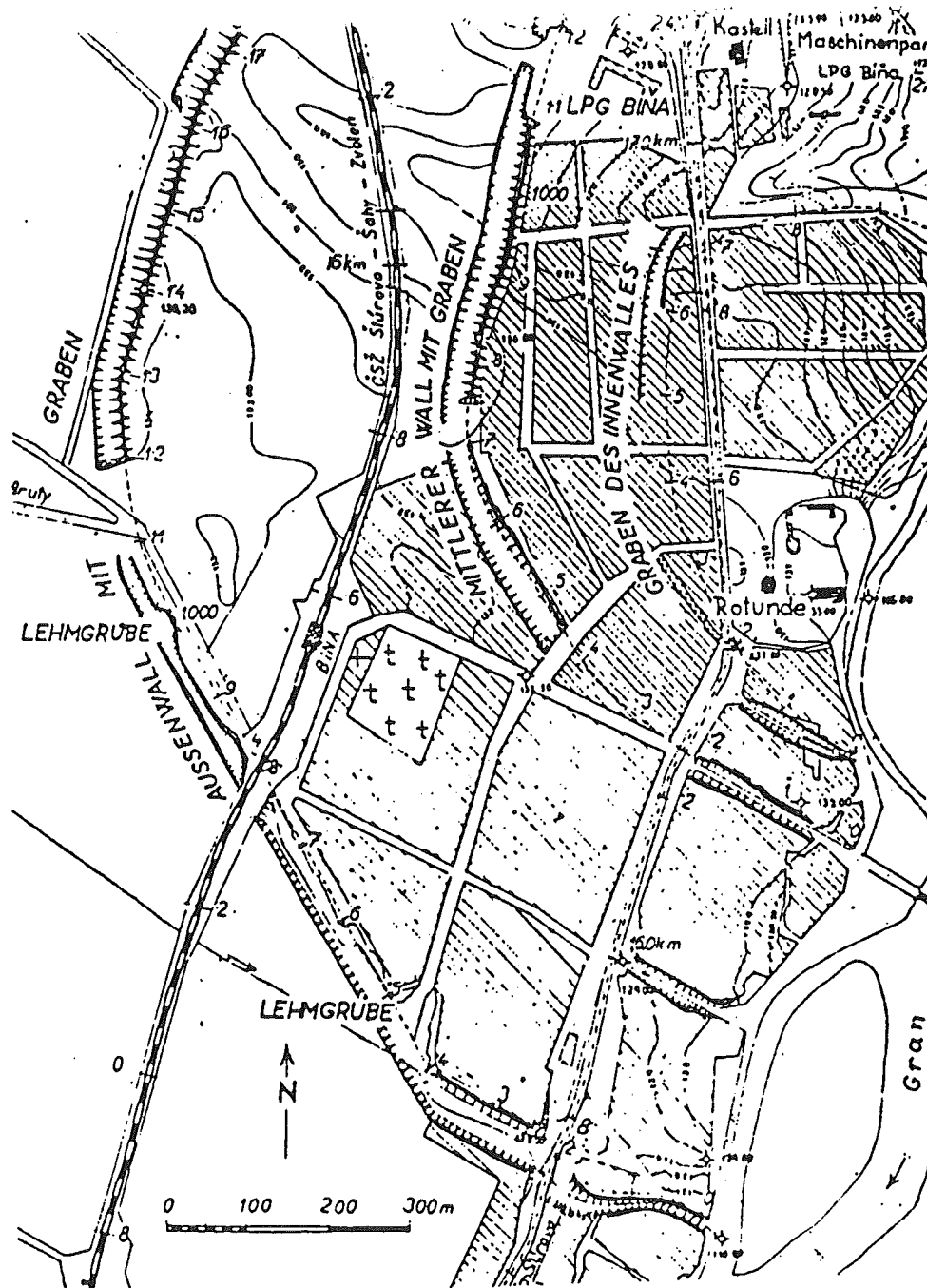
Fig. 5. Fortification in Bény (Bíňa) (by *Habovštiak 1966b*).

However, substatial damage was caused to the city in the course of the Mongol invasion in 1241. The royal town was burnt down and its inhabitants were killed. Yet the invaders failed to capture the castle which was successfully defended by Comes Simon who was of Aragonian origin. King Béla IV rewarded him with lands for his success in Bajót and Pél. Apart from the royal castle of Esztergom the only castle built from stone was erected at Bajót.

After the Mongol invasion Béla IV transferred the royal seat from Esztergom to Buda and the royal palace irrevocably went over to the ownership of the Archbishop of Esztergom. In the light of Györffy's researches landownership in the County of Esztergom at the end of the 13th century was the following: (Fig. 3)

The largest estates were owned by the Archbishop and Chapter of Esztergom as well as by some other monastic orders. Then some renowned families and the lesser nobility owned substatial lands. The king only retained the city and the immediate territories around Esztergom.

After this review let us inspect the map of archeological findings in the county dating from the time of the Árpád dynasty. (Fig. 4)

There are 47 villages in the territory of the former county today. On the basis of contemporary records we have evidence of the existence of 128 settlements, including Esztergom and its suburbs, in the age of the Árpáds. We can assume there are on average at least 2 villages of the Árpád era hidden around each present day settlement. If we look at the map, we can see that there existed considerably larger numbers of settlements at the time. Consequently, the contemporary network of settlements was denser than today. In the course of the explorations in the terrain we were able to identify 64 settlements, which mostly survived the Mongol invasion of 1242 but were destroyed in the Turkish wars in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The inhabitants of the county sufferred relatively less in the course of the Mongol invasion than those of Esztergom, because the advance of Mongol troops was quite rapid. They had enough time to withdraw to the mountains. The process of depopulation can be observed on territories lying close to the banks of the Danube. The depopulation of 6 villages known by their names can be associated with the Mongol invasion. The names of the villages concerned are the following: Örmény, Vicsap, Gyilok, Kölked, Vadas, Macsala. However, the majority of the villages were devastated to such an extent during the Turkish wars that they could never be revived. For this reason, a considerable amount of Hungarian medieval treasures can only be explored with the help of archeology.

From an archeological point of view, Esztergom can be regarded as the most explored territory of the county. However, it is not possible for me to go into details this time. I would only like to mention the most important excavations carried out in the territory of the county.

Among the devastated settlements, the most extensive excavations have been carried out in Csenke, Slovakia, where a section of a settlement consisting of 94 houses and their appurtenaces have been revealed from the 9th and 12th centuries (Hanuliak - Kuzma - Šalkovský 1993). The other village which has extensively been explored in Slovakia is Bény where the earliest remnants of the settlement date back to the 9th century. The threefold ramparts surrounding the village (Fig. 5), the largest of its kind in the Carpathian Basin, are assumed by Slovak researchers to have been built during the reign of King Stephen and it can be associated with the pagan revolt of 997 (Habovštiak 1966a, 439-486; 1966b).

Significant explorations have been carried out around Esztergom in the territory of Hungary at the following sites:

- the Island of Helemba, where the summer residence of archbishops as well as the church of Hemba village has been explored (Kovalovszki 1989, 77-115);
- Szentgyörgymezô where houses dating back to the Árpád Age were explored (Lázár 1989, 43-50);
- Zsidód, where I explored the church and some parts of the settlement (Molnár 1990, 85-88);
- Abony, more precisely Szentkirály, where the church of Abony and the crusaders' three nave cathedral has been excavated (Némethy 1896, 33-54; Horváth 1979, 185-189);
- Kovácsi, where the parish church of the minters and some parts of a 10th century settlement have been explored (Zolnay 1965, 148-162).

If we try to conjur up contemporary life, including the artistic and cultural treasures established in the city and in the neighbouring villages with the help of the above mentioned information, we shall be able to revive the archeological-historical importance of the City of Esztergom as well as of its surroundings where the Hungarian middle ages actually began.[1]

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1   For translation of the text thanks to dr. György Kurucz.

Esztergom war die Haupstadt Ungarns in der Arpadenzeit (im 11.-13. Jahrhunderte), die auf dem Donauufer in der Kereuzung der Kontinental- und Wasserwege gebaut wurde. Hier waren die Königs- und Religionszentren, das Komitatsitz und das Zentrum des wirchaftlichen Lebens in der verhandelten Periode sich gestaltet. Im Komitat, welches rund Burg Esztergom organisiert wurde, deswegen die Grundbesitze unter gesellschaftlichen Schichten dieser Zeit geteilt wurden.

Der Beitrag zeigtuus auf der Karte die Dörfer der Dienstleute, welche aus den Diplomen bekannt sind und gehörte zu der königlichen Burge. Auf der Karte kann man sehen auch solche zugrunde gegangenen Siedlungen, welche später, nicht wiederaufgebaut wurden und welche von der Verfasserin auf Terrain entdeckt und identifiziert haben. Die Autorin skizzierte, wie die königliche Grunbesitze stufenweise für die kirchlichen Organisationen und Privatpersonen begütert wunder und sie verfolgte diese Änderungen bis das Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts, bis Erlöschung der Árpaden.

HABITATS À L'ENTOUR D'ESZTERGOM, RÉSIDENCE ROYALE
ET LEUR SYSTÈME DE PROPRIÉTÉ FONCIÈRE À L'ÉPOQUE ARPADIENNE

A l'époque de la dynastie des Árpáds (XIe-XIIIe siècles), la ville d'Esztergom, située au carrefour des routes et des voies fluviales au bord du Danube, était à la fois résidence royale et ecclésiastique, chef-lieu d'un comitat de même nom, et centre de la vie économique. En conséquence, dans le comitat organisé autour du château d'Esztergom, les propriétés foncières se sont réparties entre plusieurs groupes sociaux.

Les domaines royaux étaient successivement donnés en fief aux propriétaires ecclésiastiques et laïques. Ce processus est observables dans cette région jusqu'à la fin du XIIIe siècle, fin de la dynastie des Árpáds. L'auteur fait une enquête sur ce système et l'organisation des peuples serviles appartenant au château royal. Les sites - vestiges des villages désertés, dépeuplés définitivement - découverts au cours de ses recherches topographiques sont analysés également.

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