

THESES OF PHD DISSERTATION

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HISTORY AND TOPOGRAPHY OF THE LATE MEDIEVAL VISEGRÁD TOWN



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Theses

Aim, sources, methods of Dissertation

Scientific research of medieval Town History of Hungary is approached from different aspects. The view of the early 20th century research based on the 15th century juristical history writer István Werbőczy, who stated that only those settlements were towns, which owned civil rights and privileges. This view has changed a lot, new methods and approaches and wide range studies proved that over legal character of a town its central function and role is a very – perhaps more – important factor to define what the town is. Visegrád had a special role among Hungarian towns. It cannot be listed to “traditional” categories, it was a residential town. Approach and research of Visegrád fits to the problem of the capital – residential town – residence topic. Visegrád belonged to the central region of the medieval Hungary, the so-called Medium Regni that included the four residential royal towns of the Hungarian Kingdom: Székesfehérvár, Esztergom, Buda, Visegrád.

The present dissertation examines the history and topography of Visegrád town from the era of the early preurban settlement so from the mid 13th century through the 14th century, the era of residential and capital town of Hungary up to the end of the period, to the mid 16th century, the era of average rural town. The method of the research is an interdisciplinary, comparative analysis of written and archaeological sources. The dissertation is the first attempt to collect all the presently known written and archaeological data. The written sources include mostly charters of sales of town lands and houses from 1280 to 1541. The medieval archive of Visegrád had lost, only 18 pieces of charters edited by the town council survived. I attempted to collect all data and charters referring to the town history, its citizens, churches, topography. Most of the charters survived in noble families' archives that are now preserved in the National Archives of Hungary. Archaeological data as another source of acknowledgement include all published and unpublished town excavations and their documentation that have been carried out since the 1950's. Maps of 18th century of Visegrád are also part of source of investigation. During my work I had a one year long scholarship in Italy where I completed my archival and bibliographical collection of sources referring to Visegrád (documents preserved in foreign archives or bibliography concerning the theme of medieval towns), mostly in Florence, Rome and Modena. As a result of presently known sources of Visegrád, we could make an analysis mostly on history of urban institution and topography of Visegrád. Social and economical evaluation of Visegrád will be modest due to lack of relevant sources. At the same time comparative analysis of written and archaeological sources that refers to topography, churches, house typology, etc. produces highly important and new results.

Method of the dissertation is inductive, so the base of investigation is the “pure” source and its detailed data that conduct to coherent and complex evaluation, in case of less information to reconstructional ideas. The dissertation is made of three parts: a monography, a historical and archaeological database, and illustrations. The database includes 61 charters referring to Visegrád town history, a reconstruction of land register with a list of all citizens, and an archaeological topography collection of all known find-spots and remains.

Results

1. Foundation and location of the preurban settlement

The castle on the Visegrád hill was built before 1259, then a preurban settlement was formed under the castle at the riverside of the river Danube. It was the origin the late medieval Visegrád town. Visegrád had been inhabited before, on the territory of the late medieval settlement some late Avar burials were found; in the Sibik-hill, to the north of the town territory a small village of the Arpadian era took place near the St. Andrew benedictine monastery. The small Arpadian village disappeared by the end of the 13th century. The late medieval Visegrád town (and its previous settlement) had no contact with the earlier remains.

The preurban settlement was very probably a founded settlement. Its first mention in charter was the 1285 year when King Ladislaw IV gave 'field (*terra*) Morus' to the people who lived under the castle. The foundation of Maros village probably happened after Visegrád, therefore Maros's German name in charters was Neustadt, "new town", that may have been new compared with Visegrád. Among Visegrád's first inhabitants there were German and Hungarian "hospites" who came surely from Buda, and from elsewhere, German ethnic groups in and out of statal borders. We have no exact data on the extension of the preurban settlement. According to present data of excavations the zone of the later royal palace was inhabited in the 13th century, as was the present towncentre as well. We have no data in the northern part, of the Salamontorony Street yet, there have been no real excavations in this zone yet.

2. Urban institutions, urban society

The first charter edited by the Visegrád town comes from 1356 but the activity of the town council, according to the seal usage dates back much earlier. The town council was formed by 13 members, one judge/major, twelve jurymen, plus one town-clerk; they used one seal on their charters. At the 1360's the town seal changed, probably due to a royal donation the town received a red, more potential one. The judge could hold his office more than one year, probably he was re-elected by citizens. The judge was as German, as Hungarian, but we know some more Germans. The town council was also set up by Germans and Hungarians, even by Italians, but it was slightly dominated by German citizens. The function of the council, according to the form, the type and the theme of town edited charters, was similar to privileged Hungarian towns. In the 14th century the town was divided into Hungarian and German quarters, but the town council was one and only, so was the parish church; the town was not separated by right or by ethnically – perhaps by territorially. Both quarters were inhabited by Germans, Hungarians and Italian citizens, and Hungarian noblemen as well. In the period of the existence of the quarters, the jurymen could have represented the quarter where they kept houses. We can suppose that the origins of the two quarters date back to the preurban settlement era, as different ethnical *hospites* settled down separately what was preserved by the existence of later quarters, however, by the 14th century the quarters had no real significance yet.

Due to lack of sources we know little of the town's society and economy. On town "industry" we have indirect sources. From 1330's to 1410's sixteen nominations of different branches of crafts are listed, we know plus three branches from workshop excavations. All these sources demonstrate that the most important consumer was the royal court. The most data remained on tailors, shop-keepers (*apothecarius*), masons, some of the metal "industry" (smiths and goldsmiths); they were mixed nationalities: Germans, Hungarian, Italians. There were no guilds in the town, some craftsmen (and their workshops) formed groups but they seemed to have personal relations, instead of professional. Visegrád's economic advantage was due to the presence of the royal court and

to the river Danube as a commercial “road” but the town had no real international commercial contact, so the leading social stratum did not develop into a real bourgeoisie class interwoven with the big landowner noblemen that could have developed the town as well. Visegrád did not follow the structural change of Hungarian towns, could not utilize her privileges. It always remained a small town with a narrow commercial zone that had an intensive and prosperous life while the royal court was at present.

Numerous noblemen, who took part in the political governing and judicial life of the country, moved to Visegrád in the early 14th century following the monarch. They bought and built houses in town that worked as dwelling-houses, as offices, archives. Due to this double role (living and working function) the houses formed special groups. The institution of the Angevin period, the “familiarity” had a special influence on formation of groups of houses. The “familiaris”, the office-holder servant of a nobleman worked and lived with his noble who often bore the office of great judges, so the houses of a nobleman and his servants formed groups. The groups of noblemen’ houses were based on familiarity, merely due to personal relations and contacts, there was no continuity between houses and offices. The houses were concerned as rather dwelling houses that were inherited by descendants not by the succeeding office-holder. Data on first noblemen’ houses came from the 1330’s; arrangement of the first noble houses did not show concentration around the royal curia / castle. The structure of town lands and houses had been stabled by the mid 14th century.

3. Problems of charter of privileges

There has been no preserved charter that guaranteed privileges for the town. However, the town must have had a charter like that as similar privileged towns. In different legal cases, litigations the Visegrád citizens always referred to the town privileges, in 1497 the judge declared that privileges of Visegrád were older than that of Buda town. Maros received her privilege charter in 1324, that could have been very similar to Visegrád’s situation. Comparing the Maros charter with Visegrád contoll-sources we can state that Visegrád had the 1. right for exemption of *descensus*; 2. right for the judicial immunity, the town belonged to the monarch’s authority of jurisdiction; 3. right for free inhabiting, possessing, giving testimony of citizens; 4. right for free election of judge and parson; 5. right for exemption of parish church; 6. right for free wood chopping for construction in Pilis hills; 7. right for duty-free commerce. Due to the similarity with the privilege of Maros we can assume that Visegrád owned a privileges charter that could be donated around 1323–1324 by the monarch.

4. Location of Hungarian and German quarter. Reconstruction.

The town of Visegrád was divided into Hungarian and German quarters that were mentioned from the 1330’s to the 1370’s. The main street connected the Hungarian and German quarters, so both were situated at the riverside. The Hungarian quarter could have been located in the southern area which is now the centre. If this be the case, the German quarter must have been more to the north of the Hungarian, since further down south no traces of settlement have been unearthed. So it seems probable that the palace area or, more north (the present Salamontorony Street) gave place to the German quarter. The parish church stood in the Hungarian quarter at the hillside with several lands around, in its western side. It is probable that the partly excavated church under Fő Street 71–75 can be identified by the parish church while the church of the Széchenyi Street by the St. Ladislaw cloister. Both churches were surrounded by noblemen and craftsmen houses, mints, and one royal house (the

camera). Identification of churches could be determined undoubtedly by a total-surface excavation campaign. In the Hungarian town there was the place of shop-keepers and tailors where the main road formed a curve or a small square. In case of a square we suppose it was the market of town.

5. Morphology and topography. Structure of houses, lands, houses

Visegrád's medieval relief was different from the present situation. The surface from the hillside slopes towards the river Danube, but the level difference was more significant than today. We find buildings at the hillside as well as at the low riverside. Inundation level of the river Danube was lower than today.

The line of the main road was north–west, the town can be described as a one-street settlement with smaller streets branching off the main road. We know two towers from charters, three from excavations. There were two gates for sure, one on a land as an entrance gate, the other was the town gate of the German quarter. The location of the town gate is unknown. We have no data on existence of town wall, the gate of the German quarter presumes connecting town walls that is confirmed by a 16th century engraving that represented walls and fence around a ruined territory. (The engraving was made after the Turkish wars.) Town wall has not been excavated yet.

As regards the size of one land, we have only one data from 1380. The size of a certain land was about 70–100 × 35–50 m. The main element of the land was the dwelling-house (*curia, domus, palatium, hospitio*). It was large (30×15, 30×10, 20×15, 20×10 m), totally built of stone, with several rooms and cellar and first floor. To the curia some other, smaller buildings belonged that were probably used by servants or “familiares”. Excavated houses of 15×8, 10×8 m dimension can be identified with them. The present town-centre was densely populated in the Middle Ages while the zone of the riverside was sparse. The buildings had several periods, in the mid 14th century large, solid, stone buildings with first floor and/or cellar were built replacing previous small wooden houses. The large stone houses, that were probably inhabited by noblemen, were re-inhabited by citizens and craftsmen after the mid 15th century, some of the houses were restructured into specialized workshops of handicrafts. We can assume there were 100–150 houses in Visegrád town.

6. Town and royal court

The castle and town were both residences of the monarch and its court. Exact data on the beginnings of the construction of the royal palace placed in town is not known. Yet before, according to certain charters and chronicle, the monarch kept his residence in the castle at the beginning of the Angevin era, but he maintained houses (*curia*) in the town as well, that were equal elements of the town as noblemen' or craftsmen' houses. We do not know the locality of the early royal town curia. It is possible that the zone of the later royal palace gave place to the early curia: archaeological research displays data on a very high qualified, luxurious stone building, remains of a semi-finished church and remains of a mint here. On the other hand we know a *camera curie regalis* in the Hungarian quarter, near the St. Ladislaus cloister, so in a different spot than the large stone building. It is possible that the term *camera* had different meanings: a royal quarter and a royal mint. In this case both locales could have belonged to the court at the same or different time.

7. Residential town

To conclude, Visegrád in the 14th century was a royal residential town while the capital was Buda. By the fact that the court moved to Buda in the first decades of the 15th century Visegrád lost its residential town-role but remained always (particularly by the royal palace) one of the important residences of the king. In order to clear the definition and function of the town, to range it among urban terminology and town typology we should adopt the method of procedure of scoring settlements and towns by different aspects and functions. This method was elaborated by professor András Kubinyi, following the German geographical scientist, Christaller. As a result we can establish that in the 14th century Visegrád belonged to the group of second-class towns but from diplomatic and governing aspect it was not only a royal residence but the capital, the second city after Buda, as a famous 1381 charter suggested. In the 15th century the role of Visegrád changed, the town declined and without the governing royal offices it belonged to the group of fourth-class towns, an average small rural town. It maintained privileges and institutions during to the very end of the period but was not so developed town as the commercial ones. The role of Visegrád is expressed by the dinamism of its different eras during the examined 300 year period. So, due to the existence of a luxurious royal palace in town, to the privileges of the Angevin kings, the town always remained a royal town in the period, with changing role and influence on the royal and statal politics, but Visegrád can be nominated as a residential town in the whole late Middle Ages.

Candidate's publication list referring to the theme of the Dissertation:

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