MEDIEVAL CHURCH PLACES IN FEJÉR COUNTY

Máté Stibrányi

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**Theme and objective of the dissertation:**

In the dissertation I collected available information on the medieval church places of Fejér County, Hungary and made spatial analysis of these sites to investigate the options for understanding the medieval settlement pattern.

In 1966 Lajos Nagy had been the first to publish a paper listing these – mostly ruined – churches, which was programmatic from my work’s point of view. In his opinion: *“the listing and localisation of the demolished villages, as well as ruined churches (…) is a rather important task for the research of the county’s medieval history…”*¹ While Lajos Nagy collected 46 church places, nearly 50 years later I was able to collect data from 230 churches, and I expect this number to go higher up with the integration of additional field surveys in the future. These numbers show the potential of this research aspect for medieval settlement patterns studies because of these only 109 is known from medieval written sources. So investigating written sources only would necessarily mean to have an incomplete view on medieval settlement pattern.

Creating this list had been one of my primary goal in my dissertation. I think it is important for heritage reasons mostly; as I see, these sites are under a constant and ever increasing danger, identification and listing are our only chances to prevent destruction.

However, the starting point for my investigation was not an enquiry for churches, but an analysis of the medieval settlement pattern int he area. I find these medieval church places a really useful phenomena for settlement pattern reasons; these are important „indicators” even in their demolished status. Basically these are traces of the local focal place in the settlement pattern.

During the research my leading principle was to be able to investigate the settlement pattern elements on a network level. I do not think to find a unified integrating force behind the regularities and similarities observed with archaeological sites, but I see it as a most effective and adequate answer based on the subsistence, the environment and the given technology. If we investigate this pattern in a unified way, we can learn much more of its dinamics than examining individual sites with much greater detail.

Church places are really useful „indicators” to define the basic units of this pattern. The essential assumption of my dissertation is that if we are able to define these church places in the landscape, then we are able to recognise the nodes around which the network was organised.

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¹ NAGY 1966, 173.
I draw the boundaries of the research in the current borders of Fejér County, this is approximately the same as the medieval county’s Transdanubian part – which had been separated from the Solt part by the late Middle Ages. The current area of the county is 4368 km².

**Structure of the dissertation:**

The dissertation is divided in two volumes: the treatise is in the first, the register of churches and the maps showing the locations is in the second. The treatise has been split into nine chapters; after the introduction I outlined the geographical boundaries and conditions of the research area in the second chapter, as well as publishing the research history of the medieval churches of the rural part of Fejér County and the method of collecting sources I used. I also covered the field identification experiences of church places I came across during fieldwork in this chapter.

In the third chapter I investigated the role of church places in medieval settlement patterns. I also examined the data of the churches built in an early period (11-12th century), as well as the data on the papal decimal lists and decimal districts (cultelli). County Fejér belonged to the Diocese of Veszprém in the Middle Ages, its territory was within the scope of three archdeanery (of Buda, Fehérvár and Veszprém). Examining the references in the papal decimal lists it turned out that the number of churches mentioned in it is far below the national average, without Fehérvár there are only 34 parishes mentioned in a rather uneven distribution.

In the following two chapters I tried to approach the connections between the settlement pattern and church places: examining the road network (connections) and the medieval settlement boundaries (delineations).

Accordingly in the fourth chapter I examined the past road network, collecting every available sources of medieval roads in Fejér County and drawing the hypothetical routes of these. By and large the correlation of the medieval church places and the road network could the established, because the former are showing the nodes of medieval colonisation or local focal places where the regional routes are converging.

In the fifth chapter I examined the information of the spatial distribution and disposition of church places regarding medieval settlement boundaries. In doing so it turned out that in present-day landscape we can find much more data to the medieval borders as was thought before. I think modern settlement borders are in fact valuable sources for
the investigation of medieval borders, the significance of these could only be understood and analysed based from the position of the medieval settlements. I also investigated the possibility of reconstruct (modelling) the medieval settlement pattern with GIS methods. The first volume concludes with a summary, a list of abbreviations and figures as well as a bibliography.

The second volume consists the register with information of 230 church places within the boundaries of present-day Fejér County. The churches of medieval Fehérvár and its suburbs is not included in the register.

I sorted the church places based on present-day administrative units, as I showed it in the first part of every entry. The second part is the original name of the church place where it is known, or the name of the site, where it is not. I sorted the available data on the churches into four points for clarification and separability:

1. Written medieval sources of the church.
2. Early modern and modern written sources and observations of the church.
3. Archaeological investigation associated with the church.
4. My observations on the church and summary of data.

At the end of the second volume I placed the maps to identify the sites.

**Results of the dissertation:**

As I mentioned earlier, one of the primary results of the dissertation was creating a list of the church places of Fejér County. During the work over six years I was able to identify the exact location of 122 church-places; in an additional 108 cases I could not associate it with location during fieldwork, however, this number includes places which were certainly destroyed and places which could not be identified (e.g. built-in or forested areas).

I was able to make several statements analysing the role of church places in medieval settlement pattern in Fejér County.

1. **At least three-quarter of the late medieval villages in Fejér County possessed churches, and the church place could be interpreted as local focal place.**

   Analysing data on two smaller areas and comparing every known medieval village-names and church places indicates that 85-90% of the villages had a church. It is considered a fairly high number, at least in the view of the generally
accepted 50%. I have some reservations about this proportion to some extent, but I think that at least 75% of the late medieval villages had a church.

The hierarchy of medieval central places had been defined by András Kubinyi in a general way, he raised seven categories based on the criteria he made. I think there is another, „eighth” category placed under these categories, which had been the most direct hierarchical unit, the basic level of the medieval village and its vicinity. For this could be a useful and practical „indicator” to determine whether the settlement had a church. I think the medieval settlements that had a church was definitely part of this „eighth” level.

2. At least 16% of the medieval churches in Fejér County was founded in the 11-12th century, and we can expect this rate to be higher with further archaeological investigations.

Based on the criteria established by Gábor Kiss, I determined the number of early, 11-12th century churches in the rural part of Fejér County. Currently I can identify 38 churches as such based on the evaluation (16,4%). I find it meaningful that from the 43 archaeological investigations carried out in the county in 19 cases data on such early church had been identified.

3. Medieval church places and road network are closely connected, the former shows the nodes of medieval colonisation as local focal places, where regional roads converged.

During the investigation of the medieval road network I collected every sources of roads in Fejér County, sketching out their hypothetical routes. In doing so I distinguished provincial and regional routes. I proved with many case studies that these routes can be identified using on the medieval church places as control points, in most cases even the remains of those can be observed in the landscape. It was verifiable that the routes shown in the First Ordnance Survey, made in 1784, were in most cases in a strong relation with medieval routes, the demonstration of this sameness was possible placing the church places on the map.

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2 SZABÓ 1969, 186.
4. Present-day village boundaries are valuable sources for medieval village boundaries, strongly connected with those, we could understand and analyse these informations using on the situation of medieval villages.

In my chapter on the medieval boundaries, I examined the spatial dispersion and distribution of the church places to see what information could be gained from those. I was able to prove it with case studies there is a strong connection between the borders how we see them today and the boundaries of the medieval villages. We can find much more data in present-day landscape on the medieval borders as I thought before the study. Of course this does not mean that we can put an equation mark between the medieval and present-day borders, but a significant portion of the boundaries are of medieval origin. I find this connection very strong, in my opinion every village in Fejér County has medieval elements in its border.

5. Medieval village boundaries can be modelled approximately with GIS analysis using the church places (as local focal places).

I also examined the potential to reconstruct (modelling) the settlement pattern, so what are the results obtained from a reconstruction using only the church places, disregarding written sources. I used Xtent analysis for this. Based on the thus created delimitation the average extent of the medieval villages is 20.5 km².

6. The churches standing on medieval – and present-day – boundaries are early churches, preserving a former (preceding the late Middle Ages) settlement pattern as special remnants.

During the settlement pattern reconstruction beforehand I thought the most significant problem was going to be the separation of the the simultaneously used churches with the ones that had been ruined by the late Middle Ages, since it is reasonable to think that the latter had lesser role in the settlement pattern. But detailed study showed that the churches of prediums – usually described as ruined even in late medieval chapters – could also be inserted into the settlement pattern. However, during the investigation I was able to find churches which did not have any role in the settlement network in the late Middle Ages, moreover
these were standing on the boundaries of medieval villages, the perambulations are going through those. In every such cases in Fejér County these churches are all founded in an early period (like Pentelemonostora). We can find such churches along the boundary all over Hungary, but a nationwide investigation goes beyond the framework of this dissertation. In my opinion these churches standing on boundary is valuable sources of an early settlement pattern and deserve a detailed study.
Publications on the subject of the dissertation:


