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Árpád Age Villages in Pest County.
Buildings, Settlement structure, Settlement forms

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Budapest, 2016
1. Aims, Sources, Processing Method

Traditionally the pottery, residential buildings, settlement structure and network analyzes stand in the limelight of settlement research. The dissertation deals with these issues on an archaeologically intensively researched study area, the Pest plain, lying in the central part of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom, with an outlook on the adjacent micro-regions (the Gödöllő Hillside and the Ócsa Landscape Protection Area). With data processing of the large scale excavations and field surveys conducted in Pest County in the past two decades a unique possibility opens to discuss the actual problems of Árpád Age settlement research. Settlement historical analyses from this period based on the data of large scale excavations has not been produced yet. The fundamental aim of my work is to create the image of Árpád Age villages relying on archaeological sources. However, this can only be obtained in several steps. The course of processing of the source material and the logical structure of the evaluation are both determined by the basic research. It is essential that first of all we evaluate the finds, the remains of the material culture to obtain a precise dating of the settlement structures. The interpretation of the observed phenomena, the understanding of the function of the features and of the relationships with each other allows a more detailed characterization of the settlement details. With the comparative analyses of Árpád Age settlements located close to each other and also chronologically overlapping we can understand the characteristics of one-time settlement forms.

Several major investments took place in Pest County in the past few decades, therefore the number of excavations we can involve is relatively high. Archaeological research affected mainly the villages of the Pest plain, but systematic research was conducted in the medieval power centre of Vác also. Regarding the number, the expansion and the intensity of the sites, the preventive excavations of the M0 motorway and bypass road 4 count among the largest archaeological projects of the past period in Hungary. 23 excavation sites of the period under discussion were explored here between 2001 and 2006, with more than 1000 features and more than 100 building structures. These sites supplied most of the archaeological source material for the dissertation. While on the M0 motorway the large excavation surfaces and the amount of pottery ensures new research potential, in the case of Vác the lucky finding circumstances (distinct cultural layers, superpositions) enable the limited use of the stratigraphic analysis, and thus the finer chronological evaluation.

For the modelling of settlement forms the mere excavation data would not have been sufficient. Archaeological topographical works in Vecsés and Ócsa not only yielded a new group of sources, but another perspective too: while the excavations contribute to the understanding of the inner structure of the settlements, field surveys reveal the settlement network itself. In the Ócsa Landscape Protection Area including large undeveloped surfaces rich in archaeological sites with the help of the exceptionally abundant charters and modern age maps we could successfully reconstruct the settlement network of the High and Late Middle Ages.
2. Results

2.1. Epochs and Turning-points in the Árpád Age Pottery Production of the Pest Plain

The pottery assemblages of the M0 motorway excavations and of the Vác Episcopal see, thanks to their quantity, constitute a representative sample in respect of the Árpád Age pottery production of the Pest plain. In order to seize the key moments of transformation and development in the pottery production, consistently applied criteria were needed in the evaluation of the manufacturing technique, rim forms, decorations and shape. Only by means of these basic examinations can we proceed to any kind of grouping of the pottery finds. Uniform morphological marks, rim forms or characteristic decorations appeared on several vessels of the sites from the same period, based on which we could define in our sample area the pottery types of smaller periods within the Árpád Age.

The analogue pottery products from different excavation sites raised the possibility and necessity of typological systematization. To create a pottery typo-chronology first of all the methodological principles needed to be clarified, because at the moment for the period under discussion doesn’t exist a standard approach. For the hierarchical partitioning of morphological and functional groups the material-sorting attempts on Early Medieval and ethnographical pottery assemblages served as models. The base category of each typo-chronological system is the type, which in my concept means a group of vessels spread on a confined area in a certain time period (in our case in the Árpád Age of the Pest plain) with consistently repeating, clear morphological marks. By tracking the changes in these pot-types we can embed the Árpád Age pottery of the Pest plain into a broader framework: the socio-economic processes ongoing in the Carpathian Basin.

As attested in the written sources, the appearance of the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin, and later the conquering of their new homeland and finally the settling down took place from the end of the 9th century through the 10th century. In the lack of sufficient published material it is hard to reflect on the question, how these political events – likely to bring deep demographical and ethnical changes – appeared in the contemporary settlement structures. The archaeological heritage of the conquering Hungarians forms a well-defined horizon in the 10th century burials. However, the archaeological material of the contemporary settlements rarely contains elements which clearly highlight the exact time of birth, usage and abandonment of villages. At the moment we are still obliged to formulate our conclusions based on the ceramic material.

A part of the early Árpád Age sites of the M0 motorway surely existed in the 10th century. However, in the ceramic material of Maglód 1, Ecsér 6, Ecser 7, Vecsés 67 sites, though in a small proportion, crop up more archaic elements, which rather have their parallels in the 9th century. These can be particularly observed in the technology of production, the surface treatment techniques and mainly in the decorations. It is hard to answer, whether these archaic marks were the elements of the ceramic production of Hungarians, or rather reflect the pottery traditions of the 9th century local population. Relying on the possible analogies I think this latter conception to be more feasible. The cultural relations demonstrated in the material culture of the two centuries raise the issue of continuity. Biological, ethnical or linguistic
continuity cannot be proved on that basis, but in the form of an assumption we can state that a significant number of autochthonous populations inhabited the Pest plain and the terraces of the Danube in the 9th century, which may have been peacefully overlaid by the conquering Hungarians. The case of Vác is relevant in this respect, where a great proportion of the pottery assemblages can be dated before the conquest. The life of the 9th century settlement continued in the 10th century without any destruction, and in the thriving power centre King Saint Stephen established a bishopric at the beginning of the 11th century. There is no reason to doubt the partial continuity of the population here. The phenomenon warns us that the event of the Hungarian conquest did not bring a drastic change, a well-defined time-limit in our Early Medieval – Árpád Age settlement materials. There are yet no signs of a completely newly constituted 10th century settlement network.

Despite the archaic connections of the pottery assemblages defined in the dissertation as early Árpád Age their major part can be dated to the 10th century. This is indicated by the insignificant number of hand-made vessels, the lack of baking bells and plates and on the other hand the presence of pots with ribbed neck and pots burnt to reddish orange. Tall and stocky pot forms – as far as the fragmented material allows us to conclude – crop up as well. In the early Árpád Age I could not separate clear pot types. In fact, in this period we can only speak of basic vessel forms and accordingly globular forms, pots accentuated in shoulder or in belly and barrel-shaped pots could be discerned. The small pots could be ranked into the same basic forms. Only the pots burnt to reddish orange formed a real type, because in this group the unity of raw material, and of rim and vessel forms was consequently applied. Unfortunately, in the sample under investigation, the number of surely 11th century pottery assemblages was low. Therefore we could not detect sharp differences compared to the previous century. In fact, the similarities were more striking, especially the formal richness of the pots.

Besides emphasizing the dominance of pots, it is worth to mention the sporadic appearance of the pots with ribbed neck, which played an important role in the dating, and of the cauldrons, whose 10th century appearance seems very likely in Pest County.

The 12th century pottery production of the Pest plain has not taken a quantitative change. An increase in the quantity of finds can be explained by the increased number of dwelling structures, but the household ceramics of the individual buildings has not broadened spectacularly. A new kind of differentiation commenced on the other hand, which manifested in the growing importance of the cauldrons. In addition to the type imitating the form of the metal cauldrons, already in this period the first examples of the pot-like cauldrons appeared with a raw material burnt to white. It also shows, that in the simple household production small changes appeared. By this time appear and become characteristic on more settlements of the same period the first real representatives of pot-types, for example the pots with a double articulated rim, with wide mouth and pronounced shoulder and with parallel incised lines in their upper third. The consequently applied formal identity, the standardization points to a deeper specialization of the potters. In the 12th century, however, the raw material of the pots is mostly of local origin, that is, the users exploited the closest clay pits to their
settlements. In the 13th century already the pots of the same type are identical in their raw material too, which means a much more conscious and planned production.

The pottery with a raw material burning to white (the white ware) is a characteristic product of the 13th century, and the Pest plain is the central part of its distribution area. In the 13th century this group of vessels, very consequent in its design, raw material and pot types, outweighs the former red and brown pots. Its quantity is also significant, the ceramic material of the sites is multiple of the former periods, reaching five or six times more in particular cases. The range of vessel types is broadened: the bottles and pot-like cauldrons become more frequent, the cups appear, and later the jugs and pitchers also. The white ware is actually made in pottery workshops, by craftsmen, whose primary source of income was the specialized production. The special raw material however, according to archaeometrical investigations is not of local origin; it may have reached the Pest plain through commerce. The pots burning to red or brown and also bearing characteristic marks – like the exemplars of the type with thickening rounded rim, with a shallow wavy line on their shoulder – could have also been made in specialized workshops. The identification of the 13th century workshop districts and the mapping of the production-distribution network will only be possible after the publication of new archaeological materials. The existence of the 12th century workshop districts cannot be proved at the moment. We can evaluate the 13th century pottery production as a transition towards a specialized handicraft, the products of which – like the 14th century grey pots thrown on a fast wheel – are unfortunately very few on our sample territory.

2.2. Árpád Age Pit-house Types in Pest County

The sunken dwelling structures of the Árpád Age – although many variants are documented on the excavations – were built according to the same principles. The ground plan of these buildings, their size and orientation, their stokers and the layout of the columns holding the roof structure went through a peculiar shift in this region in the 10th – 13th centuries. The scheme of the different building parts and the use of different technological solutions were not haphazard but rather consistent within certain shorter periods, that is the reason why it was possible to point out some major transformation tendencies. When classifying these farmhouses, the complex process of their formation and their changes cannot be understood only by investigating one single aspect (depth, stokers, location of the entrance, etc.). Relying on adequate amount of information, with the meticulous analysis of every single aspect – first of all considering the characteristics of the material, structure and form – we can develop a classification system which goes beyond the restricted viewpoints and results in a clear range of types in space and time.

On the territory of Pest County in the Árpád Age two pit house archetypes existed. The pit holes of the first type confirm a structure of pillars set along the middle axis of the sunken dwelling space. The shape of the pit is rather rectangular in the early Árpád Age, later more like oblong. In general, two pillars adjacent to the shorter sidewalls held the purlin, but sometimes the support was confirmed by a third pole dug into the middle of the house. The pitched roof in this case relied on the surface. In case of the second pit house type, apart from
the gable ends, one of the side-walls rises also above the surface, which is testified by the row of pit holes appearing along one of the longer sidewalls. These holes, by their size and depth were meant to bear a heavier structure, than a simple wood lagging. Both the size and height were larger than that of the previous type. Their floor, of course, still remained sunken into the ground.

In the beginning of the Árpád Age the first type was dominant in the central parts of the country. In the 12th century it was complemented to a greater extent with the second pit house type, also having sporadic antecedents in the early Árpád Age. From the middle of the Árpád Age the above described two architectural forms existed side by side in the region. The two ears-ridge-pole structure of the roof remained still in use, for instance at the sites with objects dating to the 12th – 13th centuries (Vecsés 36.), or even later, at the turn of the 13th – 14th centuries (Nagytarcsa, Millenium), but the more elaborate roof supporting solutions became characteristic. Although it is tempting to do so, the two house types cannot be ordered into a genetic development. The 13th century buildings cannot be classified because of the lack of consistently recurring, unified characteristics. Nevertheless, the houses of varied designs imply that this period cannot be characterised by the unification, but contrarily, it was marked by the introduction of new solutions, even within one settlement and also that by this time the classic pit house types became outdated. The mostly stagnant housing culture of the Árpád Age was put into motion by the socio-economic changes of the 13th – 14th centuries, and soon we can encounter numerous types of new houses, and then in the period of 18th – 20th centuries, examined by the ethnography, we can detect not only regional, but also micro-regional differences in the way of development of residential buildings.

The pit house enjoyed such popularity because it could be simply and – with modern phrasing – cost-effectively constructed. There were social groups which did not claim, or could not afford the more complex constructions, and even by the end of the Árpád Age preferred the building-model made in the frame of home industry. At the same time, other groups, particularly those living in the vicinity of the centres of power, produced a series of stone and wooden buildings. The technology of more elaborate structures was obviously known: multi-cellular houses with varied wall structure built above the surface, as well as sunken houses, with earthen walls lined with boards were present already in the first half of the Árpád Age. A gradual development of technologies cannot be proved. The carpentering, the manufacturing of wooden products and their various combinations with other natural materials were already known since the Neolithic; the layout of the buildings in a given period and region, besides the geographical conditions, was determined basically by the social position of the builders and their economical possibilities. The pit houses, of course, cannot be linked directly to one single layer of the society, except for the elite anyone could subsist in them. Therefore it isn’t appropriate to denominate it as the architecture of the common people. However, because of the limited available data, we cannot assess the ratio of the inhabitants living in structures built upon the surface or living in sunken dwelling houses.
2.3. Árpád Age Settlement Structures

Key elements of the settlement structure were in the Árpád Age the residential buildings and the joint establishments with economic function, the traces of which were preserved as various pits. In the reconstruction of settlement structures the subterranean parts of the one-time buildings are practically the only reliable data at the moment. Due to the frequent construction, destruction and relocation of these short life-span buildings, the morphology of the settlements was in a continuous transformation during the centuries of the Árpád Age. The change in the region under discussion pointed to the more and more stable settlements. As the most important tendencies in this process we can mention that the single houses were slowly integrated into groups and the dispersed settlement traces gave their place over to concentrated structures.

The greater part of the single dwelling structures, the isolated farmsteads had no continuity after the 10th century, and only rarely, for example in the case of the Vecsés 67 site they formed the core of a later settlement, the village known by the name of Holm in the written sources. This village even by the middle of the Árpád Age was just a set of loose housing groups. The whole residential area, with taking into account the data of field surveys, did not exceed the 2 kilometres in diameter, and the houses, like cells, made up a larger unit. These traces have not carried the marks of the later villages in the classical sense, such as the stable, consistent subdivision, as the internal image of the settlements became regulated only after the appearance of the plot system. Even if there are some examples, in the period under discussion, the random regularity seems more probable, than the planned layout. On the excavations we could not find agglomeration zones with numerous houses of the same age. The number of residential structures established in close proximity and probably used in the same time was up to 4-5 per site, so I am compelled to evaluate the larger settlement units, the groups of sites as a village. The group of households belonging to the same village, which were continuously moving and could be located hundreds of metres from each other, can be defined with the analysis of the one-time geographical conditions, water facilities, the age, spread and intensity of the finds on the surface and the position of the possible parish church.

The Árpád Age economy can be characterized with the soil shifting cultivation, the society with mobility, the dwelling structures with frequent renewal and the settlement forms with morphological diversity. On our excavations we could not record the traces of destructions; people changed their residences primarily due to the specific economic and social system. The geographical or environmental possibilities and the individual preferences could result in temporary rows or groups of houses, which could split up in a short time, to appear elsewhere in another formation. The village was not limited to a single agglomeration zone, but extended to the distant parts of the possession, dotted with secluded dwelling structures.

In the Árpád Age there was an open possibility for expansion within the village boundaries. The cultivation of new lands or the transformation of the landscape was an elemental interest of the peasant society undergoing a significant demographic growth, and resulted in the establishment of many new colonies. Major possessions were divided up, which also favoured the creation of new settlement germs, while the originally extended border of the village was
split into several small units. Smaller bodies of possession, economic structures were not necessarily inhabited, and most of them withered early, or merged with another.

The apparent uncontrolled proliferation of Árpád Age settlements in fact reflects a settlement structure subjected to agricultural production, which had not yet evolved to a regulated system, and the quick depletion of arable lands necessarily brought the change of fields and migration of settlements. The moving of the lightweight structures was adjusted to the location of the cultivated lands. In addition to this the livestock kept in the proximity of residential buildings resulted also in a rather diffuse settlement structure.

While the Árpád Age system of agricultural production resulted in mobile communities and exceptionally diverse, but basically scattered settlement forms with specific dynamics, in the 13th – 14th centuries a number of complex factors pointed to the emergence of stable villages with a regular plot system. Among the most important factors we can mention the social changes (the emergence of the legally unified peasant class) and the technical innovations of the agriculture (the introduction of the heavy plough and of the three-field crop rotation system). With the appearance of the plots and the permanent location of the households the streets and rows of houses became dominant elements of the settlement image and by this time the building materials became more resistant as well. Parallel to the development of agricultural technology another important process took place in the 13th century: the number of the churches increased and the network of the stable settlements was complemented with the network of parishes. The church has become the central building of the regular villages. The structural change and spatial rearrangement of the settlements of Vecsés, Üllő and Dabas reflect the general validity of these transformation processes. In contrast to the early Árpád Age houses and groups of houses scattered unevenly on large surfaces, the settlements of the 13th – 14th centuries are much smaller, but concerning their finds they are more intensive. The archaeological features are multilayered. The process of centralization was also accelerated by the ever deeper handicraft specialization and market production. The villages gained more and more definite outline with the growth of population, the conquering of new lands suited for habitation, the fixation of the village boundaries and in some cases with the construction of parish churches. On the language of archaeology: in the groups of sites dated to the Árpád Age the centres of future, stable villages – characterized by intensive habitation, groups of houses – started to crystallize in the 12th, and mainly in the 13th centuries.

A closer examination of the terminology of the elements of medieval settlements warns us to use with care the terms loaded with historical, economical and demographical meanings when evaluating our excavations. The archaeological research must adopt a terminology, which describes the archaeological features. Compared to the triple classification of the former research, I presume two basic categories to be plausible in the distinction of Árpád Age settlement forms: the first is the village (falu), the other is the small settlement (kistelep) for which I apply the designation of isolated farmstead (tanya) instead of the szállás, describing mainly the settlement forms of nomads.

While the focus of research increasingly shifted to the problem of small farms, the archaeological definition of the Árpád Age village has not received enough attention. Our
word of Finno-Ugric origin for the village (falu) according to the linguistic research meant from the beginning settlement, i.e. a structure including a set of contemporaneous households. This community already in the 10th century might not have been organized on kinship, and after the state foundation the legal and economical aspects clearly became determinative in the formation of new communities. Årpád Age legislation does not contain any indication to the single houses, farmsteads, and doesn’t mention the legally non-existent town either. Apart from the rare clusters of pre-urban and power centres the village included all forms of settlements of the Árpád Age. Thus, in a period when there were no towns, we cannot define the village as small settlement with scant population and without urban rights. In the Late Middle Ages, thanks to the structural transformations, we can detach the residential zone from the arable lands, pasture, forests and the name village refers more and more to the densely populated inner zone. Earlier, in the Árpád Age the zones with residential function were much more mixed up with the economical zones where the mainly agricultural work took place. So, we can estimate the extension of a village to the boundaries of another one. The most characteristic activity of the late medieval villages was the agricultural production conducted by the legally unified peasantry. The population of the Árpád Age village however included a very broad spectrum of the society, elements with varied profession and financial position, from people specialized in military activities to providers of different services. The main activity was agricultural production, but the self-sustaining communities produced all other necessary goods also. The criterion for Árpád Age village thus cannot be the agricultural profile, and neither the existence of the church, as the number of these started to increase just at the end of the period. The minimal number of the households could be an objective index, if the excavations could properly ensure this data. If we take into account the hints of written sources or examples from abroad, we need at least 5-6 simultaneously functioning households.

How can we define from the archaeological point of view the settlement units of the Árpád Age? A farmstead is the location of individual habitation. The criterion for its separation could be basically the considerable distance from other settlements and self-management. The village is the habitation of a community, a set of households, which are linked to each other on a stable economic, legal or social basis. This definition allows us to consider both dispersed and concentrated structures as village, and indicates the higher hierarchical position relative to the farmstead. It is difficult to find the border-line between the village and farmstead, or to delimit a unit which could be an independent settlement. Árpád Age villages consisted actually of groups of farmsteads, but while the households were built repeatedly, and withered and moved continuously, the temporal and spatial extent of the village itself was much more stable, even centuries-lasting. Árpád Age legislation obviously considered the sole households as parts of the greater unit, the village. Therefore it is necessary, that the definition of the village integrated also the scattered settlement traces.
3. The Candidate’s List of Publications on the Topic of the Dissertation


