



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation of

Bencze Ünige

on

**On the Border: Monastic Landscapes of Medieval Transylvania
(Between the Eleventh and Sixteenth Centuries)**

will be held on

Wednesday, 18 March 2020, at 9:00 am

in the

Monument Building, Popper Room

Central European University (CEU)

Nádor u. 9, Budapest

Examination Committee

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The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection on the CEU e-learning site.
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SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Along the Middle Ages Hungary was home to a high number and variety of religious communities, male and female alike. However, some of them never settled in Transylvania (the eastern border region of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary) while others had very few houses. The dissertation focuses only on the religious orders of Western Christianity which were present in medieval Transylvania starting from their appearance until the dissolution of the monasteries (Benedictines, Cistercians, Premonstratensians, and Paulines), but does not include the analysis of mendicant orders or orthodox monasteries. A short discussion touches upon the topic of the nunneries as well. The Benedictines were the most widely supported religious community in the eleventh-twelfth century, and this was the period when some of the larger houses received extended landed estates. In medieval Transylvania the only Benedictine abbey to survive the Middle Ages was Kolozsmonostor. The Cistercians founded only one house in this region at Kerc. The abbey was dissolved at the end of the fifteenth century. The Premonstratensians settled in two places but their presence was ephemeral, they did not survive the Mongol invasion. Pauline houses were established in four places if the sources are correct, out of which two survived until the secularization. Two monasteries, Kolozsmonostor and Kerc were amongst the earliest and wealthiest documented landowners in Transylvania besides others, such as the king of Hungary, the Transylvanian bishop, castellans or local magnates. The monastery served the religious as well as the everyday needs of a community. It was a composition of sacred and profane space, with a monastic church, the dwelling and community spaces of the monks, and ancillary buildings (like barns, mills and agricultural buildings), which can perhaps be better understood as divided into an inner and an outer precinct, where various everyday activities would take place following the rule of each community. The monastery represented also the core of the outlying monastic properties, from where these were managed and where all incomes flowed in, it meant a constant interaction with the surrounding environment and communities. Monasteries were important landmarks in the landscape, a symbolic as well as a physical presence, where meditation, prayer and reading were combined with manual labor and everyday chores.

The aim of the dissertation is to draw attention to and to explore the nature of monastic landscapes of different monastic orders within the boundaries of medieval Transylvania. The purpose of this work is manifold, it looks into the reevaluation of the earlier studies, applies a new methodology with new sets of data and provides analysis of a wide area with case studies from the main regions of medieval Transylvania. Based on these features the dissertation builds up a fresh approach and analyzes how far Transylvania represents a unique area as the eastern border region of the Kingdom of Hungary in terms of monastic landscapes. In the same time, the inquiries focus on whether Transylvania as a historical region can be defined as an independent, unitary monastic region.

The analysis reaches beyond the church and the claustral buildings and uses all forms of evidence to understand the monastic landscape. To a limited extent it also aims to understand pre-monastic landscapes as well as the post-monastic period to investigate what effects did the dissolution of a monastery had on the region and how it changed the land use.

Thus, the present dissertation initiates in-depth case studies on the settling features of monastic orders in medieval Transylvania and analyzes their landscape shaping and land use activities through a holistic approach. The following questions constitute the basis for the research: When and how did the estates of various abbeys spread over Transylvania? What was their relationship with the surrounding neighbors? Can property clusters be recognized? If so, then what could influence the structure of monastic clusters? Can perhaps, preferences of certain types of lands by the monastic orders be recognized? How can the estates of a monastery be identified, and their boundaries pinpointed on the ground? What can still be recognized or found on the field? How did the monasteries use their lands? Can different monastic landscapes be identified based on the types of estates and land use of the abbeys? Are there differences among the orders in terms of land use and income?

The dissertation is structured into six chapters. The **Introduction** contains the Aim and structure, the Methodology, the Evaluation and review of the sources and a Literature review. In the second chapter (**Monasteries in time and space**) the definition of medieval Transylvania is

discussed based on the local characteristics and differences within the Kingdom of Hungary. How is it different from the other historic regions of the Hungarian Kingdom? Why can it be analyzed separately? What factors define its uniqueness? Then, a short introduction and discussion follows on the history of the four orders, which constitute the subject of the dissertation, with special emphasis on their presence in Transylvania. Finally, an assessment of the research of the medieval monasteries is presented. The third chapter (**Kolozsmonostor abbey and monastic land use**) launches the case study and landscape analysis of the largest Benedictine abbey of Transylvania focusing on the land use of the abbey with highlighted case studies of selected study areas from Kolozs County, such as the monastic villages in the Kajántó valley and along the Nádas. In addition, a general discussion of all the monastic properties can be found grouped by historic counties, their location within the counties and connection to Kolozsmonostor. The chapter contains a literature review and a short history of the abbey pinpointing those events that affected the property structure and land use of the Benedictines. Chapter four (**Kerc Abbey and its lands**) zooms in on the only Cistercian abbey of medieval Transylvania as a detailed case study of the close environs of the monastic buildings as well as a discussion of the monastic properties. The chapter contains a review of the historic setting and literature with special attention to the issues connected to its foundation. The inner and outer precinct of Kerc could be reconstructed based on detailed field surveys this is also presented in detail. The fifth chapter looks into the topic of Pauline micro landscapes with a case study on the monastery in Marosszentkirály but looks into the sources of the other existing Pauline houses as well. Finally, the **Conclusions** discuss the results of the research and provide insight into further possibilities of investigation.

Medieval Transylvania was different from Western Europe in many ways. First of all, during the Middle Ages it was frequently a border area, a battle ground, and a transition zone. Some of the monastic orders were not too keen on settling in unsafe/unstable regions unless they were urged by the Pope or the order's missionary activity, or received substantial support from the king. Even though the sources are silent the missionary activity has to be highlighted since it was presumably present in the early phase of monastic foundations such as Kolozsmonostor or Kerc and it was most certainly present in the activity of the mendicants. Second, it was a buffer zone

between western and eastern Christianity, the western culture and the new migrating populations coming from the east and the south, who sometimes settled in Hungary (like the Cumans and the Romanians/Vlachs) or those who just swept through the territory (Mongols, Ottoman Turks). As the eastern border region of the Kingdom of Hungary, it was mainly colonized by communities, who were employed by the kings as border guards, and in exchange for a variety of privileges and exemptions owed military service. These communities brought their own culture and different needs with them, which had to be secured by the king. Thus, already from the outset the inhabitants of Transylvania enjoyed different privileges in different regions. Besides these populations, the kings and the church owned extensive lands, where again different rules and sets of privileges were in effect. From this point of view, the following territories can be highlighted (with differing privileges): the counties (vármegye), the districts, and the seats. Transylvania was appealing also for the Holy See, as it has been observed by Ş. Turcuş. Throughout the Middle Ages the Popes tried to extend their influence to certain areas of Transylvania and they successfully managed to acquire landed estates, the incomes of which entitled the Holy See. Innocent III was the most successful in this respect. One such territory was the Barcaság, the land received by the Teutonic knights, which even after their expulsion remained under the authority of the Holy See or at least the Holy See kept its claim to the tax and did not recognize Andrew II's action of expulsion of the Teutonic knights.

The results indicate that the monastic property structures evolved separately and particularly for each abbey based on the endowments, local circumstances, and social relations. The land use patterns influenced greatly the stability and survival of the abbeys. In some cases, like for Kolozsmonostor or Kerc the central property blocks developed by the fourteenth century and provided constant income for the communities. Although Kolozsmonostor lost a significant part of its distant lands to lay landowners, its main properties (some of which were extensive) remained in the abbey's possession until its dissolution. Kerc also managed to keep and to develop the monastic villages around the abbey.

In the case of the Pauline monasteries cash income was higher while apparently they owned less landed property than Kolozsmonostor or Kerc. However, Szentkirály received a large number

of land donations but their extent is not known thus, it cannot be compared to the Benedictine or Cistercian lands. What is sure is that the Paulines were the most involved in lease agreements, as it is nicely outlined by the high number of mills and mill places. Concerning the land donations, the Paulines received the highest number of small, scattered lands in several villages (usually land plot with or without houses), so they did not really own entire villages (with few exceptions, see Unoka, Toldalag) like the Benedictines or Cistercians. The Paulines in Szentkirály received so many donations in *Zekelfalva* that at least half of the village ended up in their possession, so they too managed to form a stable base close to the monastic buildings.

The collected data outlines that various monastic landscapes co-existed which together formed a distinct monastic region in Transylvania with a particular development for each large abbey. As the maps illustrate, the earliest Benedictine communities were concentrated in northwestern Transylvania, in the royal counties and the situation remained the same after the Mongol invasion, with the change that only Kolozsmonostor survived. The easternmost male Cistercian abbey in Europe was royally founded in Kerc, in southern Transylvania (in Fogaras Land) in the early thirteenth century, while the Pauline monasteries lined up along the Upper Maros River and its close environment in the fourteenth century. Chronologically, in very general terms, the first were the Benedictines in northwestern Transylvania, then the Cistercians in southern Transylvania, and lastly the Paulines in the middle, along the Maros River. It seems that all three religious communities (Benedictines, Cistercians, and Paulines) settled and maintained their presence in three distinct parts of medieval Transylvania. All monasteries were situated on smaller hilltops close to significant roads or trade routes, larger towns or market towns as well as rivers. However, at the same time, one might interpret medieval Transylvania as a particular region within the Hungarian Kingdom, where the monastic orders adjusted to the local characteristics and privileged communities and formed their property clusters close to the abbey buildings. Thus, the small number of monastic houses (in contrast to the higher number of mendicants) can be regarded a characteristic feature of medieval Transylvania. Perhaps it would bring new results if a similar analysis of the mendicants would be added to the monastic orders.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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2012 (Sept.-Dec.) *University of Reading, United Kingdom*
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THESIS-RELATED PUBLICATIONS

2019 “Tájhasználat a kolozsmonostori bencés apátság Kajántó-völgyi birtokain,” *Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Múzeum érem- és régiségtárából. Új sorozat X-XI* (XX-XXI) 2015-2016 (2019): 101-118 (co-authored with Oana Toda).

2018 “The Abbey of Meszes: New Insights on the Site Location,” in *Genius Loci. Laszlovszky 60*, ed. Dóra Mérai et. al. (Budapest: Archaeolingua, 2018), 68-71.

2015 “Reconstructing a medieval landscape: the case of Cârța,” in *Monastic Life, Art and Technology, in 11th and 16th centuries*, ed. Ileana Burnichioiu (Alba Iulia: Mega, 2015), 29-44.

2015 “A medieval Pauline monastic landscape in the Szekler Land,” *Transsylvania Nostra 52/2* (2015): 10-17.

2013 “The monastery of Cârța: Between the Cistercian Ideal and Local Realities,” *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Historia 58* (2013/December): 17-30.

2012 “Das Zisterzienserkloster Kerz: Neue Betrachtungen zu Gründung, dynastischen Verbindungen und Zisterzienserideal,” *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde* **35/2** (2012): 121-133.

DELIVERED CONFERENCE PAPERS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

- 2018: Oct** “The heritage beyond the sites: spatial structures and landscape features of the monastic properties from Chinteni and *Máriatelke* (Cluj County).” **Interethnic Relations in Transylvania**: Sibiu (with Oana Toda).
- 2018: Sept** “Similarities and/or differences of a Benedictine and a Cistercian abbey from medieval Transylvania as reflected in the landscape.” **Landscape Archaeology Conference**: Newcastle.
- 2017: Nov** “Tájhasználat a kolozsmonostori bencés apátság Kajántó-völgyi birtokain.” **Történeti Táj – Tájregészeti Eredmények és perspektívák a magyarországi tájrégészeti kutatásban**: Budapest
- 2017: June** “Retracing medieval land use and landscape elements on the estates of the Benedictine Abbey of Cluj-Mănăştur (Romania).” **De Re Monastica VI**: Rome
- 2015: Sept** “Cistercian ‘ideal’ and local realities: the example of Cârța (Kerz, Kerc) Abbey.” **Contexts, Media and Techniques of monastic communication**: Dresden
- 2014: Oct** “Reconstructing a monastic landscape: the case of Cârța (Kerz, Kerc) Abbey.” **International Conference on Monastic Life, Art and Technology in the 11th and 16th centuries**: Alba Iulia
- 2011: July** “Urban social strata taken into monastic space.” **International Medieval Congress**: Leeds
- 2010: Oct** “Urban development and Franciscan convent at Marosvásárhely/Târgu Mureș: Aspects of Material Culture.” **Centers of Power and Spiritual Life in the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern Period: Mendicant orders in the context of urban development and royal patronage**: Budapest (CEU)