



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation of

MÁRIA VARGHA

on

**THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CHRISTIANISATION OF THE RURAL
COUNTRYSIDE OF MEDIEVAL HUNGARY**

will be held on

Wednesday, 18 December 2019, at 14:00

in the

**Monument Building, Senate Room
Central European University (CEU)
Budapest, Nádor u. 9**

Examination committee

Chair: Miklós Takács (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Pázmány Péter Catholic University)

Members: József Laszlovszky, supervisor (Department of Medieval Studies, CEU)
Katalin Szende (Department of Medieval Studies, CEU)
Beatrix Romhányi (Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary)

External readers:

Anders Andrén (Stockholm University), present

Stefan Eichert (Natural History Museum Vienna), not present

The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection on the CEU e-learning site.
Should you wish to access it, please contact Csilla Dobos (dobos@ceu.edu)

Summary of the Doctoral Dissertation

In this dissertation, I study the development of the process of Christianisation and the development of the network of local churches in rural Medieval Hungary, based on archaeological remains. Despite that, the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Hungary were of major importance regarding the foundation of the state, and with it, the formation of (secular and ecclesiastic) power structures, sources about this period are rather scarce, primarily written evidence. Opposite to that, archaeology can provide a large amount of data. In the framework of the present study, I have compiled a database of rural local churches, field cemeteries, and ecclesiastical and secular power centres (bishoprics, monasteries and castles), altogether nine hundred and sixty-three sites dated to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, implemented them in a geographical information system, and analysed their relation to each other, resulting in a sequence of twenty-four maps. An analysis with such an extensive database, especially from the point of view of the early development of the rural church network is something that has not been conducted yet. Since the problem of Christianisation is an interdisciplinary issue, which has been discussed much by historians, it was inevitable to discuss its problems and compare the results of my analysis of the existing historical theories. With that, a unique narrative of the process became available, based on a phenomenon, the development of the rural local church network, which almost does not appear in historical sources, and on a source material that otherwise was not in the focus of research.

In Chapter II, I have demonstrated during the discussion of these problems, the – otherwise scarce - historical sources had a too excessive impact on the interpretation of the archaeological material, especially when considering that the majority of that, including the rural churches and cemeteries, appear the least in such context. This historical argumentation manifested mostly in the ambiguous dating, and controversial interpretation of field and transitional cemeteries, and the emergence of the local, rural church network, including, of course, the contentious issue of pagan-Christian transition, and the (semi-) nomadic lifestyle. Considering the disputes around the historical sources, I concluded that the investigation of the question should be in a broader spectrum, using Big Archaeological Data in order to escape the projection of historical ideas on the analysis of the archaeological material and contextualise it within the framework of the contemporary ecclesiastical and secular power centres.

In Chapter III, following the problem-oriented historiography, wrapped around the sources and methods that are used in the present work, it is essential to discuss the disputes in the light of the methodology and interdisciplinary approach of the present

thesis, as Christianisation was in high focus of the researchers of multiple disciplines, and therefore its results are somewhat scattered and often controversial.

In Chapter IV, based on the analysis of the archaeological material, I have demonstrated that in the context of the eleventh century the spatial distribution of secular and ecclesiastical power centres – castles, monasteries and bishoprics display a complementary system. Castles were creating a peripheral, defensive line, supplemented by monasteries in the middle range, and the positioning of the bishoprics closest to the inner areas. Enhancing this with the investigation of the rural churches to the places of central power, it became visible that opposed to the general expectation, early churches ‘avoid’ the immediate surroundings of the castles, and seldom occur together with monasteries or bishoprics. Presupposing that such centres served as centres of Christianisation, this is a rather remarkable result. The results of my analysis have exposed an even distribution of churches, with a little more density in the areas lacking ecclesiastical and secular power centres, and a smaller density of field cemeteries around those. With this, my investigation has confirmed that the ecclesiastical institutions belonging to them most probably had pastoral functions over the neighbourhood. Secondly, I have demonstrated that the even distribution of rural churches, including areas lacking central power centres speak of a well-designed act of building up political power, and together with it the state religion on the lowest level.

Examining the relations of early churches and field cemeteries, with special regard to transitional cemetery types, also applying Thiessen polygon catchment areas I have found out, that the distribution of the field cemeteries often can be found along the edges of the catchment areas of the churches. Concerning transitional cemeteries, I have demonstrated that it is no different in chronological or spatial distribution of transitional Type 1, and Type 2 cemeteries. Therefore, it seems like that regardless of the regulations of church law on the positioning of churches and ‘pagan’ burials, and also the endless debates that research was conducted on the ‘Gellértegyháza-type’ cemeteries, the exact positioning of the field cemetery and the church is irrelevant, although the direct building on a field cemetery proved to be more common. It also has to be noted, that the frequency of occurrence was equal in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as well, which first and foremost points out that it was probably regarded as common practice; and secondly, it might be connected to wooden churches, and their archaeologically mostly undetectable character. This provides further considerations on the quantitative difference between the eleventh and twelfth-century rural church network as well.

Furthermore, I have pointed out the serious problem of the frequent tendency of research to judge the character of the cemetery based solely on some grave finds, and classify them

as field cemetery or maybe even ‘pagan’, even if the finds cannot be associated with pagan beliefs. However, the clustering of transitional cemetery types cannot be associated with any specific, ‘pagan’ areas of the Kingdom. I have also demonstrated that contrary to earlier theories, transitional cemeteries cannot be connected to the underdeveloped ecclesiastical system.

With the similar analysis of the twelfth century I demonstrated, that the general distribution of the rural churches did not change significantly; some expansion can be observed on the northeast, and a little more extensive one in Transylvania. However, the largest difference is the density of the churches, which can partially be connected to the taphonomically more favourable conditions – more lasting building materials. Perhaps the opposite can be suggested in intensively researched areas with a relatively low count of churches, such as Tolna county, where a more dominant presence of wooden churches can be presupposed.

With the overall evaluation of the spatial analysis of the twelfth-century material, I have concluded that the density of the churches, especially the even character of the church network (disregarding the area of southeastern Transdanubia, and the extra density of the more researched areas) demonstrates a stable local church network in the twelfth century. Those areas where the density is connected to more intensive research shows the gravity of taphonomic loss in case of well research areas that still appear to have a rather loose ecclesiastical network (such as Fejér, which belonging to the *Medium Regni* was supposedly had a denser church network), or Tolna and Somogy, where the sporadic appearance of churches raises the possibility a perhaps more general, and more prolonged presence of wooden architecture.

In Chapter V I have examined the impact of the royal curia network on local churches, examining what historical sources tell about the process. I have demonstrated that the process of Christianisation is clear that it should not be understood as conversion, definitely not In the level of the individual, especially at the beginning of the process. The mass conversion of the population, and the establishment of the church network, including the local churches of the rural population, centrally initiated by the secular power, is the actual an act of Christianisation; a centrally administered, top-down directed political act, that, at least in the beginning, had very little to do with the faith of the individual.

Conclusions. Based on the comparison of the archaeological data in the present work, the following conclusions should be drawn on the process of Christianisation of the rural population, thus, the development of the rural local church network. Firstly, the dynamics between the central, secular and ecclesiastical power and the local church network confirms the idea of the centrally administered Christianisation. The even pattern

of the appearance of local churches and their absence near the ecclesiastical and secular power centres show a pattern that is not consistent with local, down-to-top development. The even appearance of churches in all habited areas of the kingdom, however, could not have been established without the support of the central administration. The bishoprics, monasteries and secular power centres could have administered this, and where their appearance is scarce, such as in the area of the Great Hungarian Plain, the local church development was most probably aided by the network of royal churches in the framework of the royal curia system. Considering what a hostile environment it would have been for isolated, small rural churches and their priests, it is clear that without the involvement of the central administration, the spatially faraway secular and ecclesiastical power centres could not have been established an even church network among the rural population. Furthermore, without the involvement of the local churches, bishoprics would not have been efficient enough in the actual conversion process of the population, which was crucial in stabilising the political state – as it is clearly visible by the pagan uprisings in the middle of the eleventh century. The discrepancy that Koszta was proposing between the two halves of the country cannot be observed on the level of the local church network, nor can any difference noted on the area of the mentioned ‘giant’ counties. Moreover, bringing in the twelfth-century churches, it is visible that the church network in the area of Újvár, Csongrád and Bihar did not change significantly in its extent, only in density. In case of Újvár, the scarce appearance of churches is apparent even in the material of the twelfth century. Therefore, based on the archaeological material, the development of the local church network in the rural areas seems to be a rather unified process in all habited areas in the kingdom, which, considering that the regulations of such churches and people was attempted from the very beginning, it is perhaps not as surprising. Principally, since the Christianisation itself – the mass conversion of people and the development of the higher level of the ecclesiastical system - would have been inefficient in the long run without the work of the local churches, the actual conversion of the people and thus their adaptation to the new ruling system.

Nonetheless, I do not suggest that it was a rapid process. The relations of field cemeteries The density of local churches from that period nearby ecclesiastical and secular power centres also suggest that their involvement in the Christianisation and conversion has ended, and were continued only by the local churches, the forming parish network.

Curriculum Vitae

Employment

Research Fellow

2016- University of Vienna, Department of History, Digital Humanities

Education

2013– *PhD in Medieval Studies*, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

2012–2013 *M.A. in Medieval Studies*, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

2009–2012 *M.A. in Archaeology (Specialized in Early Medieval/Migration Period and Medieval-Post Medieval Archaeology)*, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

2006–2009 *B.A. in Archaeology (Specialized in Early Medieval/Migration Period and Medieval-Post Medieval Archaeology)*, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

Fellowships

2016 DAAD Co-operative research grant for research groups, CEU cooperation with FOVOG, Technische Universität Dresden. Theme: Communication and Knowledge Transfer in Medieval Monastic Networks.

2015 DAAD Forschungsstipendien für Doktoranden und Nachwuchswissenschaftler, 10 month research fellowship at the University of Göttingen

Main Conferences and Talks

2019 Apr Distant Reading of Large-Scale Archaeological Data – A Spatial Approach on the Christianisation of Medieval Hungary. MERC Postgraduate & Early Career Conference on Medieval Archaeology, Pula

- 2019 Sep** Tibor Ákos Rácz, Mária Vargha Enduring Memory - Changing Landscape around the 1000 in Hungary. *Ruralia XIII* Conference “Seasonal Settlement in the Medieval and Early Modern Countryside” Stirling
- 2018 July** “Desacred Memory: A Medieval Crime Unveiled - Disturbed Burials of Monks from the Cistercian Grange of Pomáz-Nagykovácsi.” Burials and Memory in Context: From Disturbed Graves to Burial Monuments. International Medieval Congress 2018, Leeds
- 2018 Dec** “Dealing with Large-Scale Archaeological Data. Spatial Analysis on the Christianisation of the Rural Countryside of Medieval Hungary” EADH 2018: Data in Digital Humanities, Galway
- 2017 Sep** “The Christianisation of Medieval Hungary. The Transformation of the Countryside”. *RURALIA XII* “Transitions and Transformation in the Medieval and Early Modern Countryside” Kilkenny
- 2016 August** “Christianisation of the rural countryside of medieval Hungary: An archaeological-spatial approach” Medieval Social Archaeology Network - Second workshop: Medieval Religion and Archaeology, Visby
- “Traces of Byzantine Fashion in Hungary in the High Middle Ages” 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade
- 2015 Sep** “Medieval Deviant Burials in Rural Environment. Ritual, the lack of ritual, or just another kind of it?” *RURALIA XI*. “Religious places, cults and rituals in medieval rural environment”, Clervaux
- 2014 Sep** “Challenges and Approaches in Analysing and Dating 12-13th Century Churchyard Cemeteries and Burials. The Case Study of the Cemetery of Kána Village.” 20th meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists 10-14 September, Istanbul
- 2014 Sep** Kühtreiber, Thomas, Vargha, Mária. “Treasures of the ‘Lower Ten Thousand’? Hoards with Coins and Iron Objects”. Internationale Tagung der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Mittelalterarchäologie 2014 „Wert(e)wandel. Objekt und kulturelle Praxis in Mittelalter und Neuzeit“ 22. – 26. September, Mistelbach

Selected Publications

Articles

2018 Thomas Kühtreiber – Mária Vargha. Treasures of the “Lower Ten Thousand”? Hoards of Iron Objects. In: *Genius loci - Laszlovszky 60*. Eds. Dóra Mérai et al. Budapest: Archaeolingua, 2018, pp. 273-279.

The Impact of Castles on the Development of the Local Church System in Hungary in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries. In: *Medieval Networks in East Central Europe: Commerce, Contacts, Communication*. Eds. Balázs Nagy, Felicitas Schmieder, András Vadas. New York: Routledge, 2018, pp 139-151.

‘Swords drunk with the blood of the slain’ Traces of Destruction. The Archaeological Remains of the Mongol Invasion of Hungary. – *Acta Archaeologica Carpathica* LII (2017), pp. 235-258.

2017 ‘Deviant’ Burials in Rural Environment in the High Middle Ages Ritual, the lack of ritual, or just another kind of it? *RURALIA XI. Religion, Cults & Rituals In The Medieval Rural Environment*. Eds.: Christiane Bis-Worch & Claudia Theune, Sidestone press, 2017, pp. 271-280.

2015 Gondolatok három, királyalakot mintázó veretről. [Thoughts about Three Mounts Depicting the King] - *Fiatal Középkoros Régészek VI. Konferenciájának Tanulmánykötete - Study Volume of the 6th Conference of Young Medieval Archaeologists*, ed. K. Pokrovenszky, Cs. Szöllősy. Szent István Király Múzeum: Székesfehérvár, 159-168.

2014 Medieval Bird Shaped Brooches - *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU 20 (2014)*: 71-80.

Terei György - Vargha Mária: Madár alakú bronzcsat az Árpád-kori Kána faluból. [Medieval Bird-Shaped Brooch from the Arpadian Age Kána Village] *Budapest Régiségei* XLVI. (2013): 151-166.

Monograph

2015 Hoards, Grave Goods, Jewellery. Objects in hoards and in burial contexts during the Mongol invasion of Central-Eastern Europe. *Archaeolingua Central European Archaeological Heritage Series*, Archaeopress: Oxford