

*Structures in Medieval Space: An Overview**



In his recent volume, Gyula Kristó studies the possible spatial and landscape structures of medieval Hungary. His work can be divided into three main parts: medieval Hungary as an integrated system, the counties of the Hungarian Crown, and the territories of the kingdom. Only those elements are taken into account where there is an appropriate amount of information to draw conclusions.

Gyula Kristó quotes both Hungarian and foreign (e.g. Western European and Arabic) narrative sources, charter evidence and the late medieval map of Lazarus. Works of Hungarian historians and studies of researchers of other fields (e.g. geographers, ethnographers, linguists etc.) are used. Concerning the available source material of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom, certain problems arise, namely that in many cases one has to decide about medieval conditions on the basis of relatively little contemporary source material. While the medieval existence of certain units of a spatial network is well known, there is no or little contemporary evidence about other circumstances such as the extension. In other cases, spatial distribution is known but no conscious network development can be detected (e.g. tolls).

In the first chapter, while examining the existing geographical names of the medieval kingdom, Kristó concludes that most of these names reflect natural conditions of the given areas. Thus, their names were given predominantly by the local population following the natural landscape and its boundaries, and rarely after political figures or ethnic groups. This point is very important in the understanding of the perception of medieval landscape, for it suggests that in medieval times people had the geographical image of much larger areas than their own environment of a couple of villages.

The largest, second section of the book deals with the spatial structuring, the sum of spatial networks, overlapping each other, organised by different bodies of

* Gyula Kristó, *Tájszemlélet és térszervezés a középkori Magyarországon*. [The Idea of Landscape and Spatial Organisation in medieval Hungary] Szegedi Középkortörténeti Könyvtár 19. Szeged, 2003.

the top-hierarchy of late medieval Hungary. As a part of this second section, he presents many of such independent, spatial organisations, with their partly overlapping, partly independent boundaries. Legal, military, monetary and other jurisdictional spatial networks which helped governing the country as an integral unit are discussed. On the other hand, some other tendencies are discussed, which worked against integrity, temporary or long-lasting units of both medieval Hungary and the territories are mentioned which led towards disintegration and separation.

Concerning medieval spatial networks described in the book, the author organised the available information in three – in some cases in four – periods: the time of Saint Stephen, the mid-twelfth, the first half of the fourteenth century, and the turn of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries.

In some cases, the author uses contour-maps in his analysis. In the presentation of spatial distribution and networks, maps are of primary importance; however, in our case one has to face the problem that – due to the scarcity of available contemporary sources – in many cases it is not possible to produce adequate maps. This might be the reason why Kristó uses few maps in his current work. Notwithstanding the uncertainties concerning boundaries etc. research on historical geography remains to be done.

The last chapter deals with present ethnographic units of the Hungarian people. Debating the results and statements of other disciplines and discussing the possible medieval roots of present linguistic-ethnographic networks he stands against the conclusions drawn by some non-medievalists which date these structures back to medieval times without providing an appropriate background of medieval evidence to their statements.

ANDREA KISS