

## BOOK REVIEW: HOLLOW-WAYS, PUSZTAS, AND HIDING RECESSES. STUDIES ON THE LANDSCAPE HISTORY OF SOUTH TRANSDANUBIA BETWEEN THE 16TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

JÓZSEF LASZLOVSZKY

Hungarian Archaeology Vol. 10 (2021), Issue 1, pp. 60–62.

*The research of the material culture and artefacts of the 16th to the 18th century is a liminal area. Today, it increasingly involves archaeology, but ethnographic research also tries to reach back to this period. There are already plenty of written and pictorial sources available for the research of these centuries, that is, both historical science and art history discuss many aspects of what we normally refer to as the Early Modern Period. Still, there are only few works that truly cross the boundaries of disciplines and discuss a set of questions in a multidisciplinary way, adopting various approaches. Landscape history is such a research topic in every respect, and concerning the period, we must emphasise the significance of two disciplines, archaeology and ethnography (historical ethnography). These are two related fields of study. However, one approaches the present from the ancient past, whereas the other explores the life, objects, and customs of former generations, looking back from the present. The boundaries between the disciplines are becoming more and more blurred, which is increasingly true of these two areas as well, especially in terms of the Early Modern Period. Both disciplines and the specific approaches they use are meant to research the past. This, of course, includes the study of historical (written) sources, which, however, has traditionally belonged to the field of historical science. Because of these general research questions, it is important to emphasise that Gábor Máté and András K. Németh have written a volume of studies that is completely unique in terms of both its topic and research methods. The volume comprising eight studies co-authored by an ethnographer and an archaeologist-historian, present highly interesting examples of landscape history in the context of a region of Hungary, continuing the best traditions of their fields of study.*

This work is not without precedents. We can refer to many examples of the connection between ethnography and archaeology in Hungary. János Banner studied the buildings of vernacular architecture of his own time



*Horhosok, puszták, búvólikak. Tájtörténeti tanulmányok a 16–18. századi Dél-Dunántúlról,*  
by András K. Németh – Gábor Máté  
[Hollow-ways, pusztas, and hiding recesses. Studies on the landscape history of South Transdanubia between the 16th and 18th centuries].  
Studia Ethnologica Hungarica XX.  
Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2020.  
238 pp. ISBN 9789634147268

in order to understand the prehistoric dwelling-houses of the Great Hungarian Plain better. He could see buildings erected with similar technology that were still in everyday use in the landscape of Békés County. József Csalog was a researcher of prehistory as well as the supervisor of an excavation that brought to light a rural settlement destroyed in the Ottoman period. He, therefore, nearly overstepped the chronological boundaries of traditional archaeological research. The same can be said about the joint research of Kálmán Szabó, ethnographer, and László Papp, archaeologist, that revealed the world of medieval settlements in the Great Hungarian Plain to their readers. Furthermore, we should not forget about the concept of the archaeological ethnography set up by Gyula László either, which allowed him to elucidate the life of the Conquering Hungarian people. Further examples are the exploration of vernacular pottery-making or vernacular architecture and interior design, as demonstrated by two renowned ethnographers, Mária Kresz and Klára K. Csilléry, raising important methodological and historical questions for the researchers of archaeology in Hungary. Their work had several distinguished followers, such as Orsolya Lajkó, who recently passed away at a young age. However, this review is not meant to list all these antecedents of research history.

The work of the archaeologist and ethnographer who co-authored the present volume is linked by their common interest in landscape history. This approach to landscape has been present in Hungarian ethnographic research for a very long time, and the trend called landscape archaeology is, at the same time, one of the most important new fields in modern archaeology. Their work is focused on historical and cultural issues that have raised the interest of Hungarian researchers for a long time, whether they are archaeologists, or historians, or ethnographers. The two authors have already published a number of studies and articles discussing various questions of landscape history and landscape use, but the present volume presents an entirely new picture going far beyond these, using different scientific approaches and a wide variety of source types. Recently, landscape archaeology has yielded significant results in Hungary. It studies human interventions that took place in the past, the interrelationship between landscape and man, by analysing data that can be “read” from the landscape and interpreting landscape features observed with various methods. This approach can be very well complemented and contrasted with the results of ethnographic research, which utilises the same documents (e.g. perambulations, property disputes) as the archaeologists or historians of the Middle Ages. Additionally, it uses the testimonies of data submitters and locals recollecting the past in the identification and interpretation of the given features of the landscape.

A part of the volume leads us into the world of medieval roads, mill sites, and destroyed settlements based on carefully selected examples and case studies. András K. Németh has previously presented the most detailed picture of medieval churches in Tolna County ever. This work directed his attention to the fact that with the help of field walks and charter evidence, one can discover such elements of medieval daily life that left – sometimes barely noticeable – traces in the landscape. The bed changes of the streams bordering settlements, and the peculiar shapes of riverbeds related to the individual sites allowed him to reconstruct in his currently published study with the help of modern maps and medieval charters where mills may have stood within the catchment area of the Kapos river and Völgységi stream in the Middle Ages. The mills were also the centres of contemporary daily life. At the same time, they reflect the process of technological development. It is also worth investigating the patterns discernible in the selection of their locations, as these may explain the continuity of mill sites over centuries. The aspects of site selection may have also been important for other features, which are difficult to find today. Very good knowledge of the landscape or meticulous survey is necessary, for example, for the discovery of small hiding recesses which, during the turbulent periods of the Middle Ages or the Ottoman Period, were used from time to time as a refuge by the local villagers when they had to run and hide. The volume devotes a separate study to these landscape features, on which very little research has been done so far. A similar “reading” of the medieval landscape motivated the authors to demonstrate the representative examples of medieval roads and bridges in the area in chapters dedicated to medieval roads in Tolna County and the research of the road network from the aspects of ethnography and settlement history. Sometimes an archaeological excavation, on other occasions a story behind an interesting placename provides new information about the examples presented.

The chapters written by Gábor Máté partly lead the reader to another era, the modern period, but they show just as intriguingly and illustratively how the landscape affected people's lives and how the inhabitants of the villages in the studied area changed their environment. The transformation of forests, the clearings in South Transdanubia meant a lot of human struggle and work for the medieval and early modern population of the Mecsek Hills. Without them, we cannot understand the traditional culture of peasants, or the agriculture and farming that developed in the area. The study on the landscape historical traces of medieval and early modern farming in the Mecsek reveals that forests and animal husbandry were connected from many aspects. The rich source material of former legal cases or the regular perambulations gives a glimpse into a world many elements of which have already disappeared from this region of Hungary.

The volume attests not only to the common interest of an archaeologist and an ethnographer but also to their joint work. The common approach of the two authors is an excellent example of how to write scientific work based on several small pieces of data using novel scientific methods as well as relying on old sources, which can equally attract the attention of those interested in history and those who wish to learn more about the landscape. This book on landscape history, based on accurate scientific observations but presented in a way that is comprehensible and enjoyable to a wider readership, depicts a world the traces of which are now difficult to discover. At the same time, this volume also highlights how manifold and fascinating features have been created by the interaction of landscape and man throughout the centuries. This book can fill a significant gap in research as it redefines the possibilities of collaboration between archaeology and ethnography. It may draw on the significant achievements of previous generations of the two disciplines, but, at the same time, opens up a new way of investigating periods and issues that – staying with the topic of the volume – are on the boundary. All this is true for the applied methods, the studied periods, and, most of all, the processing of the topics mentioned here. The present volume is an example of the cooperation of two professionals, as well as several disciplines, which is very rare in Hungarian book publishing these days.