

GENIUS LOCI

LASZLOVSZKY 60

edited by
Dóra Mérai
and

Ágnes Drosztmér, Kyra Lyublyanovics,
Judith Rasson, Zsuzsanna Papp Reed,
András Vadas, Csilla Zatykó



ARCHAEOLINGUA

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Monasteries along the Danube

BEATRIX F. ROMHÁNYI*

When speaking about monastic landscapes we usually think about hills and valleys, sometimes about the settlements in a region, but much less about rivers. The Danube, however, is an exception, it played an outstanding role in the spatial organization of the Carpathian Basin. It was always a major water highway connecting Western Europe with the Hungarian Kingdom and the Balkans; its fords were important junctions connecting the eastern Carpathian Basin with the western part. No wonder that many early centers were located along its banks from the earliest period of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary: the bishoprics of Győr, Esztergom, Vác and Kalocsa, as well as the central castles of Pozsony, Moson, Győr, Komárom, Esztergom, Visegrád, Buda, Pest, Tolna and Bodrog counties. On the lower section Belgrade and Keve (Kovin, RS) occur in the eleventh, Haram (Banatska Palanka, RS) in the early twelfth century.¹ However, perhaps surprisingly, none of the monasteries founded by King (Saint) Stephen I were on the Danube. Altogether, 26 ecclesiastic institutions were established along the Danube within the borders of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, from the mid-eleventh to the mid-thirteenth century, before the Mongol invasion; this number includes two exceptions, the Benedictine abbey of Szekszárd and the collegiate chapter of Titel, which are included because of their close connections with the Danube.²

At a first glance, this group of monasteries seems to follow the Hungarian trends; half of them were Benedictine (13), the rest were Orthodox, Cistercian, Premonstratensian, and Austin Canons, and there were also some early collegiate chapters. But a closer look reveals certain peculiarities.

First, there were no monasteries along the river until the mid-eleventh century. On the section between the border with Austria and Esztergom there were only two, rather late monasteries (i.e., founded around 1200), Lébény and Koppánmonostor (near Komárom), both private foundations. On the lower section of the river, after Stari Slankamen and Titel (RS), there were no monasteries at all. Furthermore, unlike other ecclesiastical and administrative centers, most of the monasteries followed the ancient Roman tradition: with the exceptions of Zebegény, Hájszentlőrinc (around Vaskút), Bátmonostor, Bodrogmonostor (Bački Monoštor, RS), and Titel, they were all on the right bank, i.e. on the territory of Roman Pannonia. If a monastery was not explicitly on the Transdanubian side, it was built on an island.

Second, the only Benedictine community around the royal seat of Esztergom was a nunnery, located on Prímás Island and first mentioned in 1073, not active either politically or economically. Benedictine monasticism was absent in the Pilis region until the late twelfth century, but there was an Orthodox monastery in Visegrád with a hermitage in the caves above Zebegény. Monks following the Benedictine rule settled first in the Cistercian abbey of Pilis—which is away from the river, and not discussed in this paper—and from the early thirteenth century in Visegrád, after the Orthodox monastery had been abandoned.

Third, the first Benedictine abbey at the river was built by King Saint Ladislaus in Bába as late as in 1093. Before him, his father founded the Szekszárd monastery in the same region and gave it many estates on the opposite side of the Danube. Between the end of the eleventh and the end of the twelfth century additional monasteries were established along the central section of the river, including at Ercsi, (Duna)Földvár, Madocsa, Bátmonostor, Bodrogmonostor (Benedictine) and

* MTA-DE Lendület “Hungary in Medieval Europe” Research Group

Pentele (today Dunaújváros, Orthodox). All these monasteries—and many others along the Danube—had rather restricted estates, sometimes even very small.³

Fourth, the number of royal foundations—including those founded by members of the royal family—was high. All the collegiate chapters and half of the monasteries were established by members of the royal family. Every second monastery along the river was still under royal patronage even around 1300. Furthermore, there were at least two monasteries, Bánmonostor (Banoštor, RS)⁴ and Ercsi, that were founded by the highest-ranking members of the political elite, namely, Ban Belos, the brother-in-law of King Béla II, and Palatine Thomas. The first one soon became the seat of the Srim bishop, losing its private character. The second came under royal patronage after the palatine's death and remained in the hand of the king till the end of the Middle Ages. Despite the royal patronage, the circumstances of the foundations are not well known; none of the foundation charters of these institutions have survived in the original.

Fifth, several of these institutions were involved in the salt trade; the salt incomes of the collegiate chapters of Dömös, Óbuda, and Titel, as well as of the abbeys of Szigetmonostor, Ercsi, Szekszárd, and Pétervárad (Petrovaradin, RS) are documented in charters and in the Oath of Bereg.⁵ Other cases can be seen through indirect evidence. A royal salt depot existed in Pozsony. A salt road crossed the Danube between Pentele and Madocsa. At Báta and Bodrogmonostor there were important fords where salt may have been shipped as well.⁶ The main ford of the Káliz Road was between Báta and Bátmonostor, while Bodrog served the road leading from Aachen to Constantinople. One branch of the latter road crossed the Danube again at Bánmonostor and led to Classical Sirmium (Szávaszentdemeter). Furthermore, near Harta, a road leading to the ford was called *Meneswth* (stud-road).⁷

Having said all this, the question is whether it was by chance or by intention that the monasteries appeared at certain sites. Since the foundation of a monastery is a significant investment, site selection was certainly not random. In fact, the evolution of a monastic network is one of the indicators of regional development.⁸ In this case,

it was the infrastructure of trade that was to be developed; monasteries which received incomes (tolls, salt) rather than estates were interested in maintaining the roads and the fords and they may also have served for storage and living quarters. The network was mainly established by the rulers, who were later joined by “private investors,” i. e., by members of the lay political elite. The uneven distribution of the monasteries along the river suggests that they were less involved in the traffic on the river itself. The task of helping trade and communication lay on the abbeys and partly on the chapters, while the canons participated in the pastoral care of the people living around central places.

The whole system began to be established in the second half of the eleventh century. After the foundations of his uncle and his father, King Saint Ladislaus took the first decisive steps. He not only founded the abbey of Báta, but also supported many other earlier monasteries with new donations, mainly with tolls. Among others he gave the monastery of Visegrád and the collegiate chapter of Óbuda toll incomes on the Danube.⁹ Apparently, his and his successors' aim was to support trade towards the east. Besides salt, horses and cattle raised on the Great Hungarian Plain could also be sold and long-distance trade (along the Silk Road, to the Levant) played a role as well. The crossing points of the commercial route leading to the south were similarly secured by church institutions (Bánmonostor, Dombó [Rakovac, RS], Pétervárad, Aranylábúhács [near Petrovaradin, RS], Titel). Details of the process remain shadowy, but the results can be traced in both written and archaeological evidence. The immigration of Muslims and Jews,¹⁰ the laws of Saint Ladislaus and King Coloman concerning them,¹¹ the massive influx of Friesach deniers,¹² even the debasement of Hungarian silver coins in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are connected to the intensification of trade. Written evidence refers to the trade in salt and horses from around 1100, the tariff for cattle is first documented in the early thirteenth century.¹³ The monasteries fulfilled their task in this system until the mid-thirteenth century, ended not by the Mongol invasion, but by the Fourth Lateran Council. It aimed to abolish the *Eigenkirche* system¹⁴ and prescribed that church institutions be real proprietors of the estates, with all pertinences and incomes, of which they had,

until then, been trustees. This resulted in the transformation of the monastic network along the Danube. However, although the monasteries played a different role in the late Middle Ages, most of them were still under royal patronage indicating the importance of trade along and across the river.

Appendix

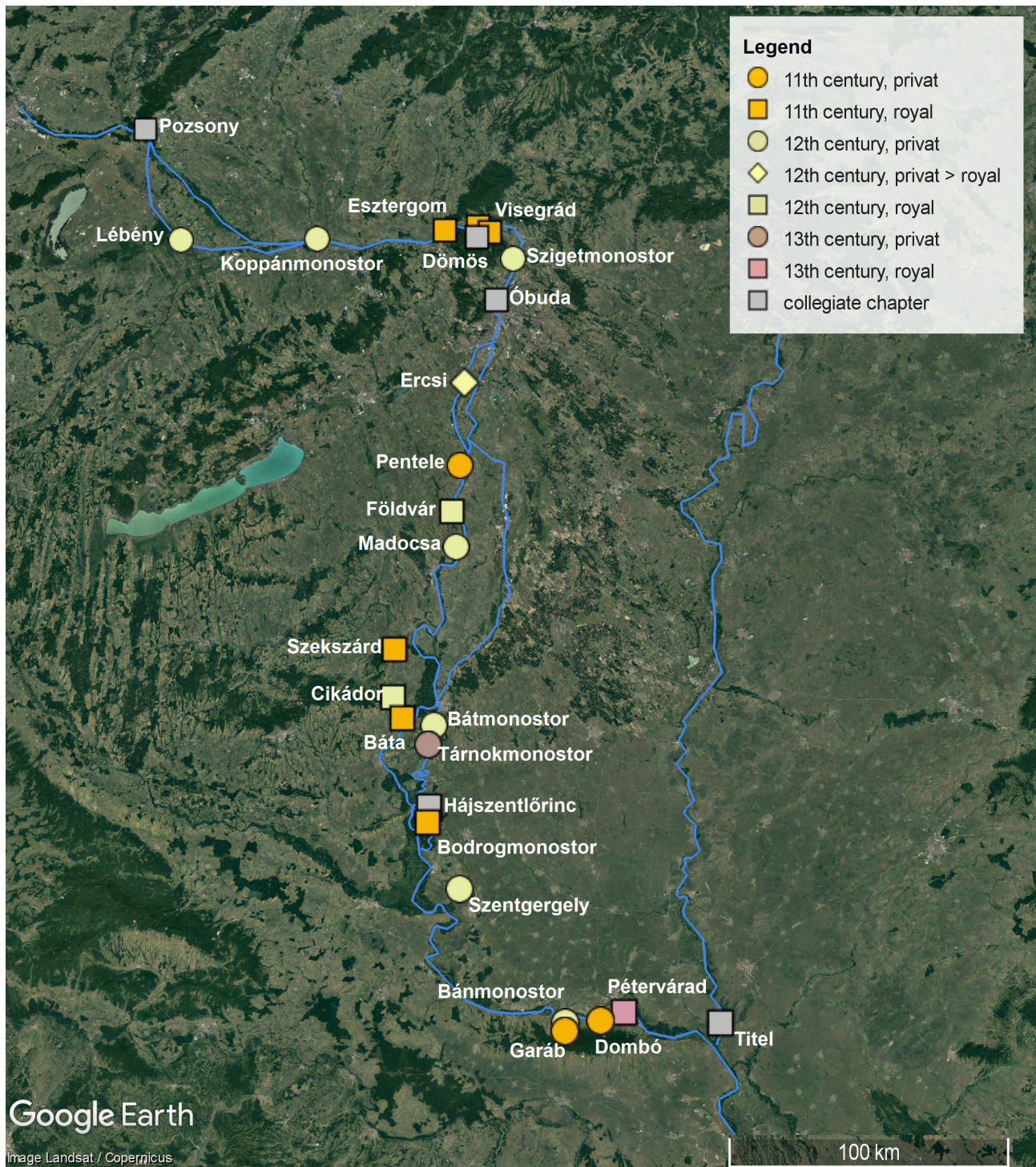
Óbuda	Collegiate chapter	1041 before	royal	St Peter
Visegrád	Orthodox	1060 before	royal	St Andrew
Zebegény	Orthodox?	1060 before	royal?	St Michael
Szekszárd	Benedictine	1063 before	royal	Holy Savior
Esztergom	Benedictine nuns	1073 before	royal	Holy Virgin
Báta	Benedictine	1093	royal	St Michael
Titel (RS)	Collegiate chapter	1095	royal (d)	Holy Wisdom
Pentele	Orthodox	1100 (1238) before	kindred	St Pantaleon
Bodrogmonostor	Benedictine	1100 before	royal?	St Peter & Paul
Dömös	Collegiate chapter	1107 around	royal (d)	St Margaret
Földvár	Benedictine	1141 before	royal	St Peter
Madocsa	Benedictine	1145 around	kindred	St Nicolas
Dombó	Benedictine	1150 before	kindred	St George
Bánmonostor	Benedictine	1163 before	ban	St Stephen PM
Hájszentlőrinc	Collegiate chapter	1184 before	royal (q)	St Lawrence
Ercsi	Benedictine	1186 before	palatine	St Nicolas
Bátmonostor	Benedictine	1192–1198	kindred	unknown
Lébény	Benedictine	1200 around	kindred	St James
Szigetmonostor	Benedictine	1200 around	kindred	Holy Savior
Koppánmonostor	Benedictine	1200 before	kindred	Holy Virgin
Szentmármező	Cistercian	1204 before	kindred	Holy Virgin
Pozsony	Collegiate chapter	1209 before	royal	Holy Savior
Szentábrahám	Austin Canons	1211 before	royal?	St Abraham
Péternárad	Cistercian	1234	royal (d)	Holy Virgin
Margitsziget	Premonstratensian	1235 before	royal	St Michael
Szalánkemén	Premonstratensian	1241 before	royal?	St Peter

(Institutions being active after 1300 are highlighted in bold script)

Order	before 1100	before 1200	before 1241	Sum	Changed order	Abandoned	in 1300	Royal patronage in 1300
Benedictine	4	9		13	2	3	10	6
Cistercian			2	2		1	2	2
Premonstratensian			2	2		1	1	1
Austin Canons			1	1		1	0	0
Orthodox	3			3	2	1	0	0
Collegiate chapter	2	3		5			5	5
Sum	9	12	5	26	3	7	18	14

Founder	before 1100	before 1200	before 1241	Sum
royal	7	2	2	11
royal family	1	2	1	4
royal official		2		2
kindred	1	6	1	8
unknown			1	1
Sum	9	12	5	26

Patron saints	before 1100	before 1200	before 1241	Sum	royal	royal family	royal official	kindred	unknown
Holy Savior	1	2		3	2			1	
Holy Virgin	1	1	2	4	1	1		2	
Holy Wisdom	1			1		1			
St Abraham			1	1	1				
St Andrew	1			1	1				
St George		1		1				1	
St James		1		1				1	
St Lawrence		1		1		1			
St Margaret		1		1		1			
St Michael	2		1	3	3				
St Nicolas		2		2			1	1	
St Pantaleon	1			1				1	
St Peter	1	1	1	3	2				1
St Peter & Paul	1			1	1				
St Stephen PM		1		1			1		
unknown		1		1				1	
Sum	9	12	6	26	12	4	2	8	1



► Fig. 1. Monasteries along the River Danube, 1000-1240 (created by B. Romhányi)

Notes

- ¹ György Györffy, *Az Árpád-kori Magyarország történeti földrajza* vol. III [Historical geography of Arpadian-age Hungary] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987), 317–318, 487–488 (henceforth ÁMTF).
- ² The estates of the Szekszárd Abbey were almost exclusively across the Danube, in the Solt szék, while Titel was at the point where the other major river of the Carpathian Basin, the Tisza, joined the Danube. The Premonstratensian provostry of Gédermonostora, was mentioned only once at the end of the thirteenth century and there is no reason to suppose it existed before 1241. The monasteries of Tárnokmonostor (before 1251) and Aranylábúbács (before 1267) were left out for the same reason. For data about the monasteries see: Beatrix F. Romhányi, *Kolostorok és társaskáptalanok a középkori Magyarországon* [Monasteries and collegiate chapters in medieval Hungary] (Budapest: Pytheas, 2000), passim.
- ³ See Imre Takács, ed., *Paradisum plantavit. Bencés monostorok a középkori Magyarországon* [Benedictine monasteries in medieval Hungary] (Pannonhalma: Pannonhalmi Főapátság, 2001), passim; Levente Hervay F. OCist., *Repertorium historicum ordinis cisterciensis in Hungaria* (Roma: Editiones Cistercienses, 1984), 133–140.
- ⁴ Before the foundation of Bánmonostor there was already a Benedictine abbey, Garáb, only 5 km from the ford. It even survived until the late Middle Ages, while Bánmonostor was first given to the Canons Regular of the Hebron Valley and later the buildings became the seat of the newly established bishopric of Srim.
- ⁵ Beatrix F. Romhányi, “A beregi egyezmény és a magyarországi sókereskedelem az Árpád-korban” [The oath of Bereg and salt trade in Hungary in the Arpadian-Age], in *Magyar Gazdaságtörténeti Évkönyv 2016: Válság – Kereskedelem*, eds. György Kövér, Ágnes Pogány and Boglárka Weisz (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont – Hajnal István Alapítvány, 2016), 265–302.
- ⁶ The Cistercian abbey of Cikádor/Székudvar (referring to a salt depot) was near Báta; another Székudvar, first mentioned as *Soluhan*, was in Zaránd County. For the salt trade in the Árpád age see: Beatrix F. Romhányi, “Salt Mining and Trade in Hungary before the Mongol Invasion,” in *The Economy of Medieval Hungary*, ed. József Laszlovszky, Balázs Nagy, Péter Szabó, and András Vadas (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 182–204.
- ⁷ ÁMTF vol. II, 339.
- ⁸ For similar regional development in the same period, see Beatrix F. Romhányi, “Kolostorhálózat, területfejlesztés, régiók a Borostyán-út mentén” [Monastic network and regional development: Regions along the Amber Road], *Soproni Szemle* 72 (2018): 119–146, esp. 123–131.
- ⁹ ÁMTF vol. III, 661–662, 705–706.
- ¹⁰ Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom. Jews, Muslims and Pagans in Medieval Hungary, c. 1000 – c. 1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- ¹¹ The first articles about Jews and Muslims appear in the laws of Saint Ladislaus (art. 10 and 26 about Jews; art. 9 about Muslims). King Coloman was the first to regulate horse trade (art. 76). Levente Závodszy, *A Szent István, Szent László és Kálmán korabeli törvények és zsinati határozatok* [Laws and synodal decrees from the time of King Saint Stephen, Saint Ladislaus and Coloman] (Budapest: Stephaneum, 1904).
- ¹² György V. Székely, “Megjegyzések a késő Árpád-kori éremleletek keltezéséhez” [About the dating of coin findings from the late Arpadian-age], in *A numizmatika és a társtudományok*, ed. Ádám Nagy (Szeged and Budapest: Móra Ferenc Múzeum and Magyar Numizmatikai Társ., 1994), 115–124, with the earlier literature.
- ¹³ About salt, see Georgius Györffy, ed., *Diplomata Hungariae Antiquissima. I. 1000–1131*. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992), 247–249, 255, and Boglárka Weisz, *A királyketteje és az ispán harmada. Vámok és vámszedés Magyarországon a középkor első felében* [The two-parts of the king and the third of the count. Tolls and toll-collecting in Hungary in the first half of the Middle Ages] (Budapest: MTA TTI, 2013), 348; about cattle, see page 447. About horses see footnote 11.
- ¹⁴ J. Alberigo, J. A. Dossetti, P. P. Joannou, C. Leonardi, P. Prodi, and H. Jedin, *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*. Eds. (Paderborn–München–Wien–Zürich, 1973), 254–255 (canons 44 and 45).