

The medieval social topography of Szeged

Zsolt Máté

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Abstract

As the name historical social topography implies it comprehends the ancient location and distribution of particular groups and layers of inhabitants in a settlement. It is important since ethnic, religious and occupational groups are able either to impose particular characters of settlement structure, or significantly influence their location and ground use. Several social data of a Christian tithe list made for the diocese of Bács in the year 1522, and a defter (i.e. a Turkish tax list) from 1546 were placed on the medieval map of Szeged previously reconstructed by the author – resulting in an extremely rich social topographic picture of a large medieval peasant market town. It can be observed that the well-heeled intelligentsia and the wealthy burgesses, – priests, judges, schoolmasters etc, and the craftsmen of privileged trades such as goldsmiths, and the vineyard owners – lived near the centres, mainly in the fortified Palánk or around the churches in Felsőváros and Alsóváros. It is obvious that those, whose trades were connected with agriculture or animal husbandry, lived on the outskirts, making use of good transportation and storage possibilities there. The fine manufacturers and the ones working with great value were clustering in certain areas, probably as a consequence of the guild system. The processed and mapped 411 data of 403 tax payers cover more than a quarter of the 1574 listed households.

Keywords

social · topography · medieval · market town · settlement

In the year 1985 I completed a research concerning the reconstruction of the medieval topography of the town of Szeged [10]. In its time Szeged was the largest town in all Hungary. Larger than Buda, the capital of the kingdom, and had almost 8000 inhabitants.¹ The main sources of my research were two sixteenth century tax lists. One of them was a Christian tithe list² made for the diocese of Bács in the year 1522,³ another was a defter – a Turkish tax list – from 1546 [1]5. As it is well known between the two dates middle Hungary and with it Szeged, was conquered by the Ottoman Turkish empire in 1541–42. Utilising the mathematical and topographical relation between the two lists – and using all other relevant graphical and written data available for Szeged – I created a likely layout map of Szeged and connected it with street names and other peculiar data of significant buildings, institutions etc.

At that time, I assumed that the main outcome of that research would be that several thousands of data of socio-economic history could be connected with their topographical site. In this way, in a postgraduate programme on monument preservation at the Technical University of Budapest I worked out an outline of historical social topography on my course “The value protection of historical settlements” [11]. Meanwhile I completed my former research on Szeged with the historical social topographical issues. At present I consider social topography a substantial part of the research on historical settlements.

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First of all it is necessary to define the features representing the population as a result of the settlement’s particular legal

¹ Fügedi 1981 pp. 396, States that Buda was larger. But in the defter (Turkish tax list) of Buda from the year 1541 the number of households (511) was only slightly more than 1/3 of that of Szeged’s (1493 in 1522 and 1203 in 1548), in Szeged I. – pp. 448, Vass 1979. pp. 31.

² tithe = tenth part of farm produce for the support of the Church

³ Reizner 1990. IV. pp. 97.–128.

Zsolt Máté

BME, 1113 Budapest, Ulászló u. 70., Hungary

e-mail: mate.zsolt@mail.datanet.hu

status or role. (Serfs, nobles, burgesses, tradesmen, craftsmen, alien settlers, etc.) E.g., it is worth mentioning that the medieval Hungarian market-town (Latin: *oppidum*) was not a real city (Latin: *civitas*) of full rights, it only replaced the city's role in certain respects. The inhabitants were serfs only in a broader sense according to their very legal status, but they had collective privileges in general. In effect, they were able to run their life like burgesses but they were obliged to redeem the socage⁴ jointly, not per capita and not in duty labour on the lands of a landlord as other serfs had to do. There were several grades of privileges. The landlord of a settlement might be a nobleman, the Church (bishop, monastery, cloister), or the Royal Chamber. Another special type of legal status with particular privileges worth mentioning was characterised by a special profession, e.g. as in a mining town.

After the legal status the next interesting feature is the regional role of a settlement, and finally the physical administrative and social structure.

1 The historical legal status

At the time of the rule of the Arpad dynasty (12th-14th century) Szeged – or at least the central part of it – was royal property. It is more than possible that certain detached parts of the town of insular structure had some degree of independent legal status. The union of independent communes is supposed to have taken place around 1469⁵. From 1436 it is known that the town was subject to the Royal Chamber.⁶ Szeged is mentioned unambiguously *civitas* in the diplomas of King Sigismund (1387-1437). In 1498 King Wladislaw II certified that Szeged obtained privileges on the model of Buda and Fehérvár from the late Kings Béla IV and Andreas III⁷, and he confirmed the royal free borough status of Szeged (*libera regia civitas*). This was finally codified in the 1515 year session of the Diet. Under Turkish rule Szeged was able to keep its rank, i.e., it became a *khas* town, (privileged town of the sultan). After Turkish rule, it succeeded to regain its royal free borough status only in 1715.⁸

Regional role

In the Middle Ages Szeged had a broad, nation-wide role. Its intellectual life developed well and renaissance culture connected it to the European ferment.⁹ The greatest consequence of the free status was free trade (exemption from duty). Its significance was enhanced by important vineyards and the cattle export of the town. In addition to a free market role, its nation-wide importance was underlined by the fact that the town was granted the exceptional privilege of a royal salt-depot as early as in 1222 by the Golden Bull of Hungary.

During the time considered by our research, – in the first half of the 16th century – this free town, the largest in the Hungarian Kingdom, with its country-wide and international importance – was, by its very character, a peasant, market-town with a developing bourgeois mentality. Though it had considerable intelligentsia and handcraftsmanship, its livelihood was based mainly on agriculture and animal husbandry on vast lands around the town. In addition, the wealthier citizens possessed vineyards in the south, mainly in Pétervárad and Kamanc.¹⁰

It is useful to realise that, nearly on every day of the week, the town was authorised to hold a market in one of the districts. The wine of Szeged got as far as Poland, the cattle to Italy and Vienna. The horse-market's good reputation was even more widespread, and the enormous stock of sheep was registered in 1522 in the tithe list. Besides, the trade in timber floating down the River Tisza and Maros¹¹ was important. The wood was used mainly for building construction and shipbuilding. In addition, there are data on craftsmen such as butchers, blacksmiths, harness-makers, stone-cutters, ropers (cord-makers), shoemakers, tailors etc.

Physical and administrative structure

Geomorphology and administration

The structure of the settlement was determined by its geomorphologic, hydrologic factors and regional connections. The town was composed of numerous islands connected by the main road leading from Nándorfehérvár (Beograd) to Buda. There is a lifelike description of it from 1433 in the diary of Knight Bertrandon de la Brocquiere.¹² In the north lay Felsőváros (Upper Town) consisting of six main islands, in the centre lay the royal castle with its fortified outskirts named Palánk. In front of the castle at a certain distance lay Középváros (Middle Town) settled at an unknown time. In the south, a large, detached island, formed Alsóváros (Lower Town).

As will be shown, on the one hand these parts of the town had different social characters, on the other hand the settlement was entirely homogeneous from ethnic and religious points of view. One hundred per cent of the inhabitants were Roman Catholic, and they were exclusively Hungarian from the evidence of the family names of the two lists.

The parochial and secular administrative arrangement were somewhat different. The town was divided into two parishes. Palánk and most likely Alsóváros belonged to St. Demetrius parish church, Felsőváros and probably Középváros belonged to St. George parish church. These facts can be inferred from documents dated 1332¹³ and 1458.¹⁴ As far the secular admin-

¹⁰ Reizner – IV pp. 96.

¹¹ Reizner – IV p. 95.

¹² Blazovic 1995. – pp. 72. (Hungarian Translation) = *Memoires de l'Institut National; Sciences morales et politiques* Paris, an XII.T.V. p. 122. (original French text)

¹³ Fejérpataki 1887. pp. 181.

¹⁴ Reizner IV – pp. 54. = Secret Archive of Szeged No 24.

⁴ soc(c)age = mandatory labour carried out for the landlord

⁵ Kristó 1988. pp. 424. = OL.Dl.17556 in Reizner 1990. IV. pp. 73.

⁶ Kristó 1988. pp. 425. = Reizner 1990. IV. pp. 36-37

⁷ Blazovic 1995. pp. 94 (in Hungarian), Reizner 1990. IV. pp. 88. (in Latine)

⁸ Péter 1981 pp. 18.

⁹ Bálint 1975

Parishes – Ecclesiastic Institutions

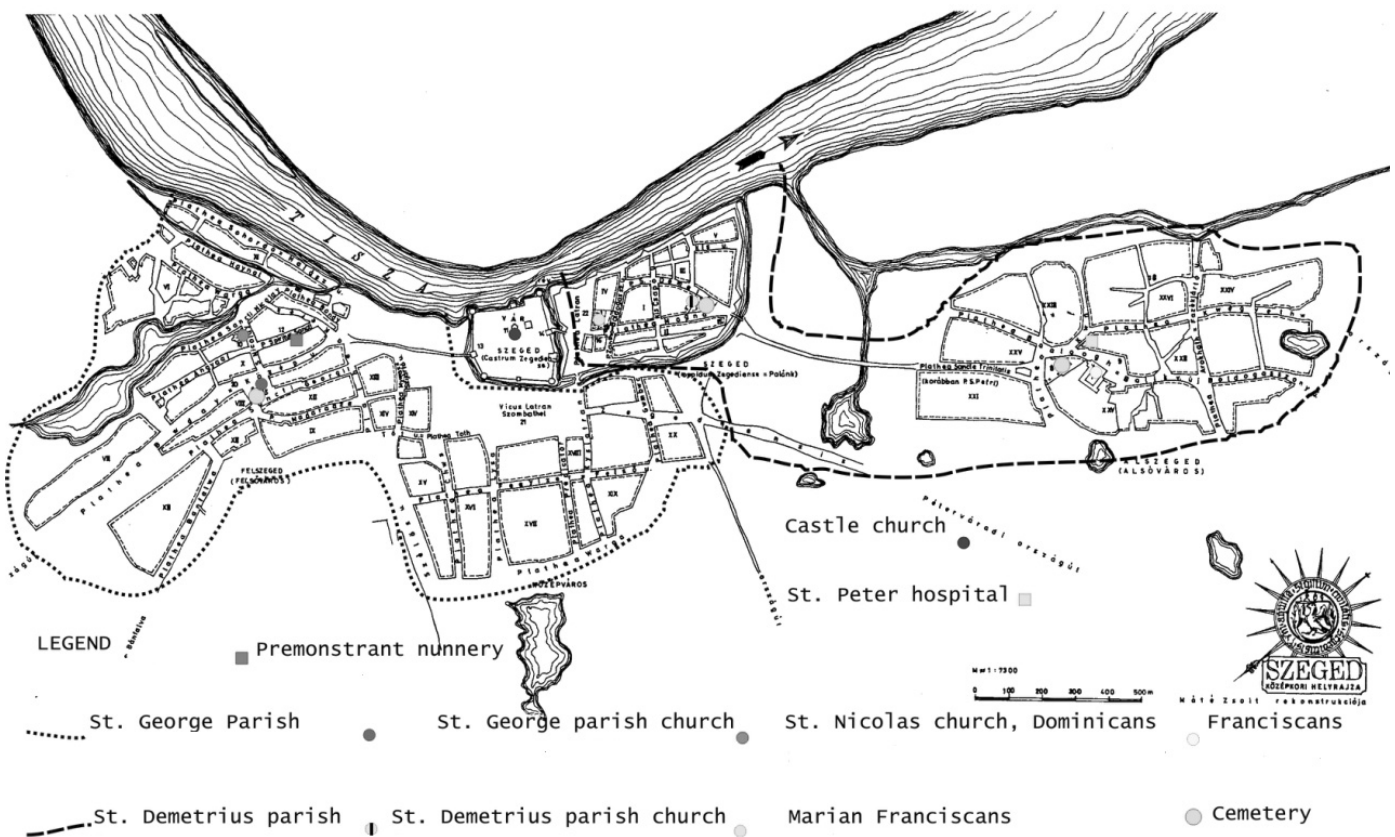


Fig. 1. Parishes – Ecclesiastic Institutions

istration the Castle was in the possession of the King, Palánk, Felsőváros and Alsóváros, as was mentioned above, had been independent communities, unified at the end of the 15th century.

Ecclesiastic institutions

Five churches of the town, two parish churches, two churches of two orders of mendicant friars (Franciscans and Dominicans), and the Castle Church can be placed on the map.¹⁵ They are still standing or their location is archeologically known. The identification of the Castle Church can be expected from the excavations started last year (1999). The location of Blessed Virgin church of Marian Franciscans in Palánk can be placed almost exactly. The location of the convents of the mendicant orders can be identified in the vicinity of their churches, the Dominican convent in Felsőváros, the Franciscan in Alsóváros, and a convent of the Minorites in the Palánk. The Holy Spirit nunnery of Premonstrant nuns can only be located with approximate accuracy. Among the hospitals the site of the St. Peter hospital in Alsóváros is known, but there is insufficient information to put the St. Elisabeth hospital on the map. Probably a hospital of St. Demetrius church existed in Palánk and a hospital of St. John's Knights existed in Alsóváros, but their co-ordinates are

completely unknown.

Centres

The very centres of the settlement were formed by churches neighboured by the houses of notabilities. The judge in Palánk and Felsőváros, László Szilágyi, – a prominent nobleman belonging to the royal family – in Palánk and Alsóváros, and the Sanjak-bey – in the Turkish period – near the Castle had their residences next to the churches.

The churches and cloisters were also centres of culture and civilisation. The priests and clerks also had their homes in the vicinity. The clerks – the Hungarian term “deák” for this means scholar – were in reality scribes or learned people performing juridically important tasks.

In the main, these are the facts which were known in general of the social layout of Szeged. The reconstructed medieval topography of the town first published in 1985¹⁶ connects the names of the relevant tax lists to a map composed of street blocks with the approximate number of houses and the deduced order and direction of the listing. That is to say, with a little exaggeration, all data that can be read in the lists can be put on the map within certain limits of accuracy.

¹⁵ Máté 1989 – detailed pp.15.-20. Map after pp. 56.

¹⁶ Máté 1985 – pp. 101.

At this stage, it is now interesting to see what information can be gleaned from the two, more than four hundred year old collection of papers.

Market squares

In my earlier study I was able to identify four market squares mentioned in royal diplomas: In 1431, King Sigismund gave authorization to hold a weekly market on Thursdays in Felsőváros, near the Dominican church, probably at the site later named “forensa” (market)¹⁷. In 1459, King Matthias did so on Wednesdays in Alsóváros, at the convent of Blessed Virgin, and in 1499 King Wladislaw II confirmed a former license for weekly markets on Saturdays and allowed a country-wide market from Thursdays to Saturdays, in front of and next to the Castle (Vicus Szombathel, Platheia Latran).¹⁸

Social Structure

Manufacturing and occupations

Examining the family names of the tithe list from the year 1522, Szűcs Jenő¹⁹ gathered a list of 259 craftsmen in 41 kinds of manufacturing, however I think his conclusions have to be revised. The first part of the 16th century was the time when family names became more or less fixed in Hungary. The researcher is right in claiming that the many trade names used as family names allows the conclusion that all these trades were carried on in the town. But in that period it no longer follows in general that one having a family name meaning a trade also practised that same trade.

The tithe list is written in Latin. The family names in it meaning a trade are either in Latin or Hungarian. It can reasonably be supposed that in case of Latin names the name refers to the trade of its holder at that time. For, if the trade of a person was a more evident mark than his family name, the census-taker recorded that into the list in Latin, since it was the working language of the list. If a person used a trade name as family name, the person being Hungarian, his name was also in Hungarian, and naturally the name was entered into the list without translating it. So in the tithe list the language may have a distinguishing role. E.g, it seems certain that the name Lapidica (Lat.=stone-cutter) is not a family name. On the one hand, we find its Hungarian version (Köves, Kőtörő) in the Turkish list as family name, on the other hand, we do not find the Latin Lapidica in the same list. Furthermore Stephanus Ziygyartho (H.=harness maker) and Andreas Corrigiator (Lat.=harness maker) are found in the tithe list almost side by side. We cannot be far from the truth by supposing that Stephanus was a harness maker only in name, while Andreas was a harness maker in fact – and this circumstance might

be important enough to record in Latin in a tax-list.

Without going very deeply into details here, I suggest that in this way I was able to select those inhabitants whose trade was correctly identified in the lists. In the tithe list it is quite exceptional that somebody's family name and profession are mentioned together. It happens more likely in the defter. In case of priests, judges, schoolmasters and noblemen, the relevant attributes can be considered social status rather than profession. The defter is more systematic in distinguishing the family name and trade name.

Using the described methodology one is able to put on a map those tax-payers of both lists whose profession can be known. The following professional groups can be distinguished from the lists: The intelligentsia can be divided into two groups, one containing the priests and the other, the intellectual occupations such as, scribes, judge, nobleman, schoolmaster, teacher, doctor (?). The trades can also be divided into two groups. In the first belong the distinguished and well positioned masters or artists like goldsmith, painter, musician (lute-player, trumpeter), and in the second, the simpler craftsmen such as stone-cutter, furrier, armourer or sword-cutler, blacksmith, harness maker, fisher, ferryman, bell-ringer.

The property relations

The tax lists deliver us a great deal of information regarding property relations. The largest part of the inhabitants paid the same amount tax. Two exceptionally poor persons were exempted from paying. The majority of the households did not possess more than enough for their own living. In the year 1522 the official limit of that was 60 Hungarian Denars of income per year per family. And its tenth, 6 Denars was the minimum charge, the basic tax, – the so called money of Christianity. (Lat.= pecunia christianitis). Six Denars equalled the tithe to be paid after one iugerum (acre) of land.²⁰ The person possessing not more than this amount of land had to pay the tax in money. It is worth mentioning that each citizen (plot-owner) equally had the right to cultivate one iugerum of land, from the common lands of the town.

The person whose possession overstepped this amount had to pay the tax in his relevant product, either in wheat, hay, wine or sheep. 142 farmers paid after their wheat fields or hayfields. The tax of the majority did not exceed the minimum charge by much. But 20 persons of them were significant farmers paying at least three times more than the basic tax. In the year 1522, 130

²⁰ Reizner III. – pp.22. in 1 year 1 acre (Lat. iugerum) land produced 1 shock of wheat (Lat. crux) plus 10 wheat-sheafs (Lat. manipulus), i.e., 8 cubulus (=cca 540 kg=1200 lb)

Period measures in: Bogdán 1987.

Land – 1 iugerum (Lat.) = cca 1 acre, cca 4300 m²

Wheat 1 capetia (Lat., abbr.: cap) = 5 crux (shock)

1 crux (Lat., abbr.: cc) = 15 manipulus (sheaf)

manipulus (Lat., abbr.: M)

1 cubulus (Lat.) = cca 150 lb = cca 68 kg

¹⁷ Mappa ichonographica...civitatis Szegediensis...De annis 1776-1777. Anton Balla (Szeged, Museum)

¹⁸ Máté 1989 – pp.22. = Reizner IV.-pp.31, 55-56, 89. The Hungarian name Szombat means Saturday, the name Szombathel refers to the fact that market is held there on Saturdays.

¹⁹ Bálint 1959 – p. 26, 156 (Note No 47)

Market squares

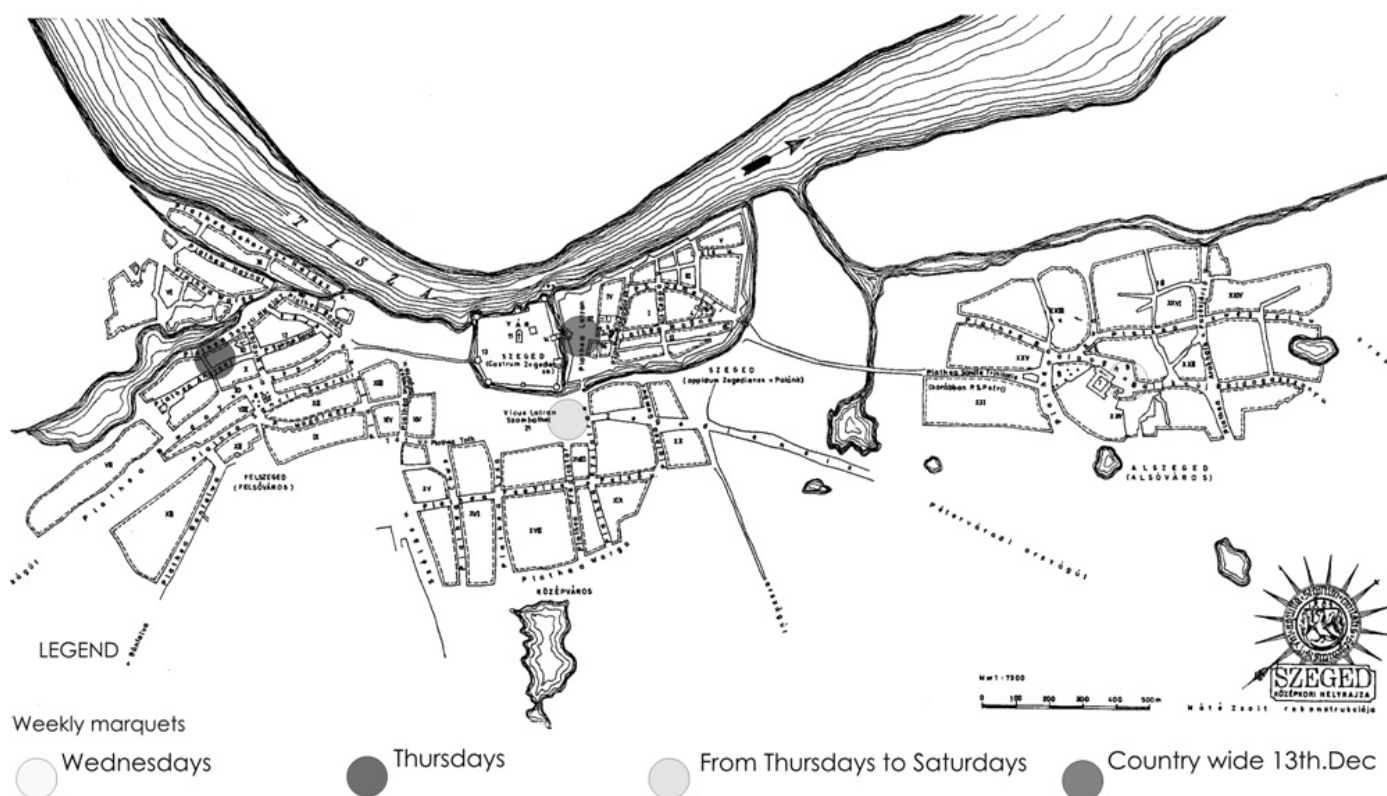


Fig. 2. Market Squares

farmers paid after their flocks of sheep. In 1548 only 70 sheep farmers were registered. In the list of the 1522 year we do not find the size of flocks. But from the defter is known that those 70 sheep-farmers recorded in the Turkish list owned 25,000 sheep altogether. And 30 of these farmers can be considered relatively wealthy (big farmers), each having at least 300 sheep, i.e. three times greater a possession as the one referred to in the basic tax.

Examining the way of listing Kulcsár Péter²¹ found that flock-owners lived mostly in the outskirts. My analysis proved the same. But Kulcsár's conclusion has to be completed by the statement that it was that not the placement of flocks that demanded the peripheral localisation. It is clear that the flocks were sent out to the grasslands surrounding the town in all four seasons. – Rather, the storing and processing of wool and the making of cheese were more suitably carried out on peripheral urban plots. But the especially wealthy farmers certainly did not live there.

The group of vineyard owners can be regarded as especially distinguished. Owning a vineyard must have been an indisputable sign of wealth in that time. In 1522 there were 77 vineyard owners recorded in the town. Most of them lived in Palánk, in the fortified core of the civil town.

Disregarding the priests who were exempted from paying the

²¹ Kulcsár 1984 – referred work

tithe, and so they were not registered in the Christian tax list, in the year 1522 we found 15 people belonging to the intelligentsia. In 1548, 29 intellectuals were recorded by the Turks. 15 priests were among them.

As far as the trades are concerned, we tried to place the data of both lists on the map. The data are sporadic. For the reasons unknown to us, with some consistency, different trades are mentioned in each list. Probably from a taxation point of view, the scribes were told to record certain professions. The considerations of Turks and Christians were unlike in this respect. Consequently the use of the data from both lists does not seem to involve the risk that a single item could be counted twice. Only in case of a schoolmaster is there a probable risk of such double use.

As far as property relations are concerned the tithe list of 1522 is more significant than the Turkish defter. So the former was followed in the mapping. Only in case of sheep-farmers is there an alternative possibility offered by the defter, since it shows even the size of flocks. From that list those 30 big farmers are placed on the map who owned more than 300 sheep, at least three times larger property than that of an average citizen. With the help of the defter the same philosophy was also followed in case of sheep-farmers that were obvious from tithe list in case of agricultural farmers. To avoid the double use of the same date, in

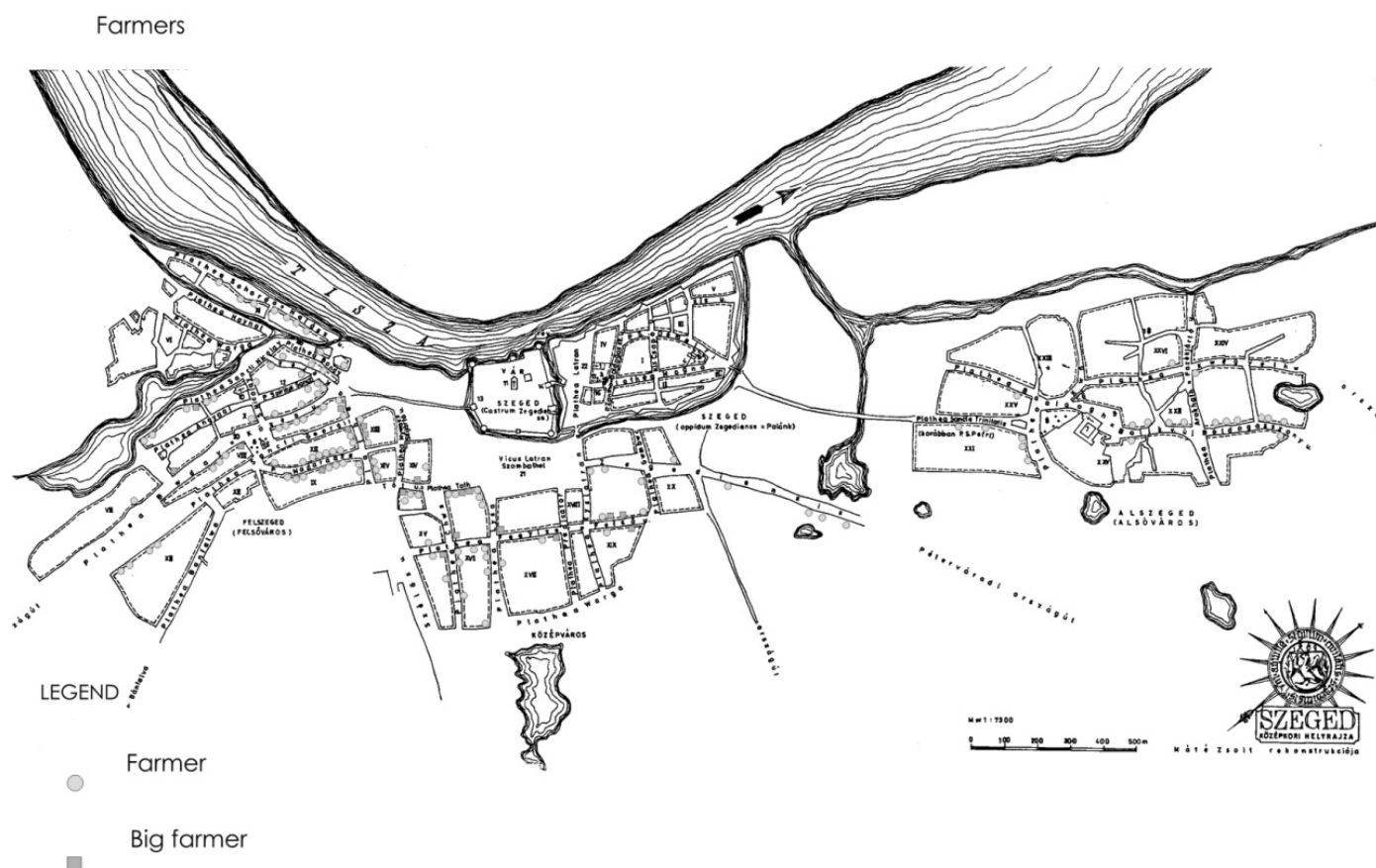


Fig. 3. Farmers

mapping, the relevant sheep owners were omitted from the tithe list next to the assumed locations of those big sheep-farmers.

Summary

Placing on the map all data mentioned above results in an extremely rich social topographic picture of a large medieval peasant market town. Of course the place of the signs on the map can only be considered of approximate character with no precise co-ordinates. It can occur occasionally that even the two sides of a street are inverted, but this fact cannot destroy the picture. In his quoted work Kulcsár Péter showed from the tithe list that the social standing of the inhabitants in a street shows symmetry,²² i.e. the inhabitants facing each other on two sides of a street usually belonged to the same social stratum.

It can be observed that the well-heeled intelligentsia and the wealthy burgesses, – priests, judges, schoolmasters etc, and the craftsmen of privileged trades such as goldsmiths, and the vineyard owners – lived near the centres, mainly in the fortified Palánk or around the churches in Felsőváros and Alsóváros. It is obvious that those, whose trades were connected with agri-

²² Kulcsár 1984 – referred work: The representatives of the well-heeled layers are found first in the row of the names in a street, they are followed by poorer or peripheral characters at the half of the row and then the rich people are follow again.

culture or animal husbandry, lived on the outskirts, making use of good transportation and storage possibilities there. The fine manufacturers and the ones working with great value were clustering in certain areas, probably in consequence of the guild system. The processed and mapped 411 data of 403 tax payers cover more than a quarter of the 1574 listed households. After all this, we now we have a good picture of a spatial social distribution of the inhabitants of a medieval Hungarian market town. This picture is better than we ever have had, and the method of producing it is unprecedented.

The conclusions to be drawn from the street names are not to be analysed here; such an analysis is saved for another paper. On the one hand, a solid result is not expected from such an analysis, and on the other hand, this topic has already a large literature.²³

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²³ See the works of Bálint Sándor, Péter László, Vass Előd and others.

Vineyard owners

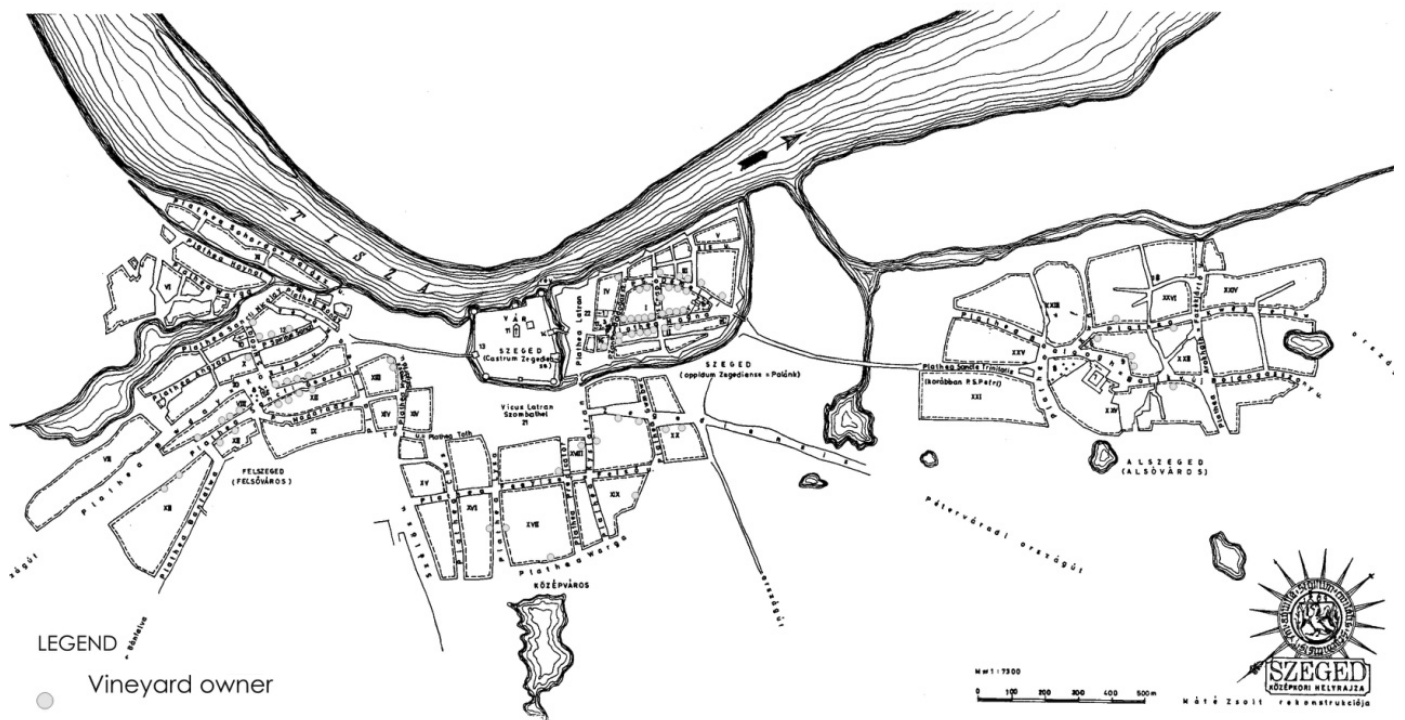


Fig. 4. Vineyard owners

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