Personal names and society in medieval Hungarian cities and market-towns[*]
Gulyás László Szabolcs

Abstract

Personal names have significant importance in researching of medieval Hungarian society, mainly in researching of inhabitants living in villages and market-towns. Because of the lack of survived sources, it is widely accepted in Hungarian historical scholarship, that in the Middle Ages personal names of villains show us their real social status. We have managed to work out new statistical methods to investigate the medieval craftsmanship of villains living in market-towns, their origin and their previous living place.

Regarding craftsmanship, it is clear that it was a connection between being artisan, and being a member of the council in a settlement. Using this rule, it can be show, that during the fifteenth century, artisan names are truly adequate sources to examine the occupation of villains. In the second part of our lecture, by personal names created of place names we study the migration of two medieval Hungarian counties: Bács and Bodrog, and we are able to achieve punctual and detailed data for the mobilization of villains of this region.

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1. Using personal names for social researches in Hungarian historical sciences

Personal names are products of social development. They correctly show us the persistent change of society. Name offers us lot of information about the person and his collectivity, which sometimes can not be investigated by using other methods. Personal names denote the origin, individual features, and profession of people, as well as language and culture of their community.

As a consequence, personal names have very significant importance in researching of medieval Hungarian society, and mainly in researching of inhabitants living in villages and market-towns. As regards the mentioned social group, citizens of market-towns were of the same status as of villains, though possessed various communal privileges, for instance exemption from customs and taxes, self-government and to a certain extent they also had the privilege to elect their own judicial authorities. So basically, by their economical and social functions, these settlements were small cities, however their citizens legally were simple villains (the most important general publications examining medieval Hungarian market-towns are Mályusz, 1953; Bácskai, 1965; Bácskai, 1971).

Because of the lack of adequate survived sources, it is widely accepted in Hungarian historical scholarship that in the Middle Ages personal names of villains show us their real social status. Historians, who research this period regularly, use these names in their works and draw conclusions by them (for instance Kubinyi, 1972). Hungarian medievalists have already realized that this problem is one of the most important methodological questions in the field of medieval Hungarian social history. This recognition is testified by some important basic publications in this topic, which show us the used possible historical methods of examining personal names (Györffy, 1970; Székely, 1970; Kubinyi, 2003).

It is important to mention that among villains, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth Century, personal names had been in a continuous change (Melich, 1943; Fehértói, 1969*a*; Fehértói, 1969*b*; Bárczi, 1980). Names containing two or more name elements had appeared in a far higher number by the fourteenth Century than before, and about in the fifteenth Century they spread within wide limits. The new parts of a name structure were the distinctive name elements, which signed characteristics of a person, as for instance habits,

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appearance, nationality or occupation. In the beginning, they only occasionally joined to Christian names, but later this connection had become strong and more frequent. Next important change was about in the middle or in the end of the fifteenth Century, when these last names or surnames started to convert to real family names, and after that children used the same name as their fathers. However, the accurate time of its formation is indeterminable (Bárczi, 1956, 149; Mező, 1970, 35 and Hajdú, 2003, 324). Of course, these new type of names usually did not show us the real features of bearers, and so we have to be very careful in case of doing historical investigation by them.

In the later Middle Ages people's surnames had four characteristic forms, which can be used for such a social examination (for all categories of medieval surnames look Gulyás, 2009, 51-56). It is important to recognize that these names are exclusively known by written sources, and unfortunately we do not have enough data about their using in everyday spoken Hungarian language.

First of them, the basic category is when **surname was formed of fathers' name**. The earlier written version was the *filius word + fathers name* in Genitive structure (for instance *Mathias filius Stephani*). This group of names had been used from about the thirteenth to the early sixteenth century. In sources issued at the end of the Middle Ages we can find examples for this kind of names, which were written in Hungarian. There is a perfect data for this: for example *Georgius Bothfya* is equal to "Georgius filius Both". The *-fya* word means in Hungarian "the son of somebody".

Later (about in the fifteenth Century), the *filius* word disappeared, though the name structure remained in Genitive, for example in *Bartholomeus Stanislai*. The next step of this linguistic change was when the Genitive structure was also left as in the name of *Stephanus Mathe*. This type of surnames usually offers us usable information for determining family connections. In fortunate cases, we are able to make primitive family trees as well. Basically, when a specific family name appears again and again in our sources in single settlements, they probably connect to one family. Let us see some convincing data! Lot of family connections can be put together, for example in Újhely market-town: *Petow and his sons (1353) − Anthonius filius Petow (1362) − Matheus filius Petheu (1395) − Ladislaus filius Petheu (1391) − Michael filius Johannis filii Petheu (1391)*; *Ladislaus **Zaruas** (1386 and 1389) – Jacobus Zoruas (1414, 1426) – Simon Sarwas (1479)*; *Jacobus **Chok** (1457) – Paulus Chok (1477) – Nicolaus Chok (1509) – Benedictus Chok (1515)* and so on. In the mentioned cases, if we examine their relatives and possessions, we could see that citizens who hold the same family name were the members of one family in fact.

Another important type of surnames was when **it was taken shape of place names.** If a villain leaved his living place and moved to another settlement, the community of a new living place often gave him a name, which was made of the name of the previous settlement or the region where he resided before. This kind of surnames offers us the possibility of mapping the origin and mobility of villains. We are able to understand the moving of population between settlements and greater territories. Using these names we can achieve information about the attractiveness of a settlement as well. It also had some special type in our sources.

The most typical is when the name contains *de* preposition (*Michael de Zerencz, Michael de Zalaczka*). Another frequent variation, if the Hungarian *-i* (or in medieval Hungarian writing practice: *-y* or *-j*) formative connects to the end of the place name, but the Latin preposition remains: *Emericus de Saaray*. Later, the Latin *de* preposition also disappeared: *Andreas Lelezy*.

There is a special Hungarian form of these kinds of surnames. Last names formed with so called "pure place names" (Fehértói, 1973; Fehértói, 1975) do not contain any Latin prepositions or Hungarian formatives, just the name of the settlement, where its holder was from as in the name of *Matheus Bwda*. The idea, that the "pure place names" are an

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independent type of last names had resulted in heated discussions among Hungarian linguists (Kálmán, 1975, 454-456; Lévai, 1976; Ördög, 1982; Szabó, 1993, 286-287; etc.).

Sometimes **names show us the nationality of the holder**. If one came from another country or his native language was not the same as of the community, people gave us surname which signed his different ethnic situation. These names are usually used to determine the ethnic groups living for instance in a settlement or in a greater area. In medieval Hungary the most frequent surname of this kind was the *Tót*, which means "slav". Of course, we can also find data for other nations: *Mathias Thot*, *Thomas Sclavus* ("Slav"); *Lucasius dictus Zido* ("Jewish"); *Ladislaus Zaaz* ("Saxon"); *Albertus Olah* ("Rumenian"); *Michael Therek* ("Turkish"); *Ambrosius Nemeth* ("German") and so on.

The last types of surnames we must mention are **names created from artisan's denomination.** People who were craftsmen often owned surnames created of artisan names. In villages and market-towns craftsmen usually could not be found in a great number, because their population mostly dealt with agriculture. So this sort of surnames had real distinctive role in villains' everyday life. Scholars usually use these names in order to achieve information about the economical situation of a city or other settlement. In writing, artisan names were written in Hungarian or in Latin version. Latin artisan names had been used by the end of the Middle Ages, but from the fifteenth Century writers often wrote these in national language.

Let us see some instances in Hungarian and Latin version, and of course in English! *Mathias Kalmar*, *Jetlinus institor* ("merchant"); *Blasius Alch*, *Valentinus carpentarius* ("carpenter"); *Petrus Kadar*, *Kwnch doliator* ("cooper"); *Lucas Kowach*, *Sebastianus faber* ("smith"); *Gallus Myzarus*, *Dominicus carnifex*, *Nicolaus lanius* ("butcher"); *Matheus dictus Molnar*, *Demetrius molendinator* ("miller"); *Simon Zabo*, *Nicolaus sartor* ("sewer") etc.

Summarizing these facts, it can be said, that − as I think − we are really able to gain historical information by personal names, but we have to use well thought-out methods and should be very careful when we would like to realize anything by surnames. I have researched this topic for years, and managed to work out new statistical methods to investigate the medieval craftsmanship of villains living in market-towns, and origin (previous living place) of them.

2. New methods of researching medieval society, using surnames

2.1. Names and crafts

It is widely accepted in Hungarian historical scholarship that the personal names created from artisan's denominations go back to the real occupation (Szabó, 1954, 12; Szűcs, 1955, 93; Bácskai, 1965, 32-33; Székely, 1967, 206-210; Granasztói, 1972, 351-352; Kubinyi, 2003, 111). At the same time, there were historians who did not accept this method, like Erik Fügedi (Fügedi, 1957, 61 and 32).

This almost one-sided picture is due to the fact that we do not have adequate sources to investigate the situation of craftsmanship in medieval market-towns. We are in the need of economical registries for instance, which could show us the real number of craftsmen living in villages or market-towns, and so we are not able to examine their real role in the country society. However we do not know exactly if these names really denote the true occupation of the person or not, historians deduce again and again to artisanship by craft names.

In this topic, the most important question is whether the personal names, about the end of the fifteenth Century, turned into inheritable names or not. At the first case they did not testify the real profession of a person. Fathers inherited their family name to his sons, apart from the fact, that what was their profession. In this case, using them for such an examination

is an inadequate method. Of course, this is a basic problem, not only of the historians but linguists.

At the same time, there is some social regularity, which can help us to solve this hard question. Firstly, great part of artisans living in medieval cities or market-towns belonged to the higher social classes. It has lot of evidences in our sources (for example Granasztói, 1972, 397-398). Secondly, people who were the members of settlements magistrate were also the richest citizens in their living place. Accordingly, it can be said that craftsmen should have a great role in the city or market-town councils.

If we manage to find written sources in an adequate number, which contain lot of names, and also sign the members of the magistrate, we are able to investigate the connection between artisan names and the membership of the council, and maybe, we could answer the problem of the source value of these names. If citizens having artisan names have greater representation in the councils as other, we can say that they were really artisans.

There are a sufficient number of names in documents issued by Hungarian market-towns. These charters usually contain property contracts and testaments, and always report us about the members of the council.

I chose to investigate 140 charters from the fourteenth and fifteenth Century, which had been issued by councils of market towns located in North-east Hungary. Sources and results of this investigation have been already published in Hungary (Gulyás, 2007 and Gulyás, 2008). These market towns are Abaújszántó (4 charters), Gönc (1), Liszka (12), Mád (1), Patak (29), Szikszó (13), Tálya (10), Tarcal (1), Telkibánya (2), Tolcsva (6), and Újhely (53). I also used 8 other charters from this region, which were issued by mainly ecclesiastical institutions. They contain 1342 personal names of altogether 875 male townspeople, of which 695 are from the period after 1390.
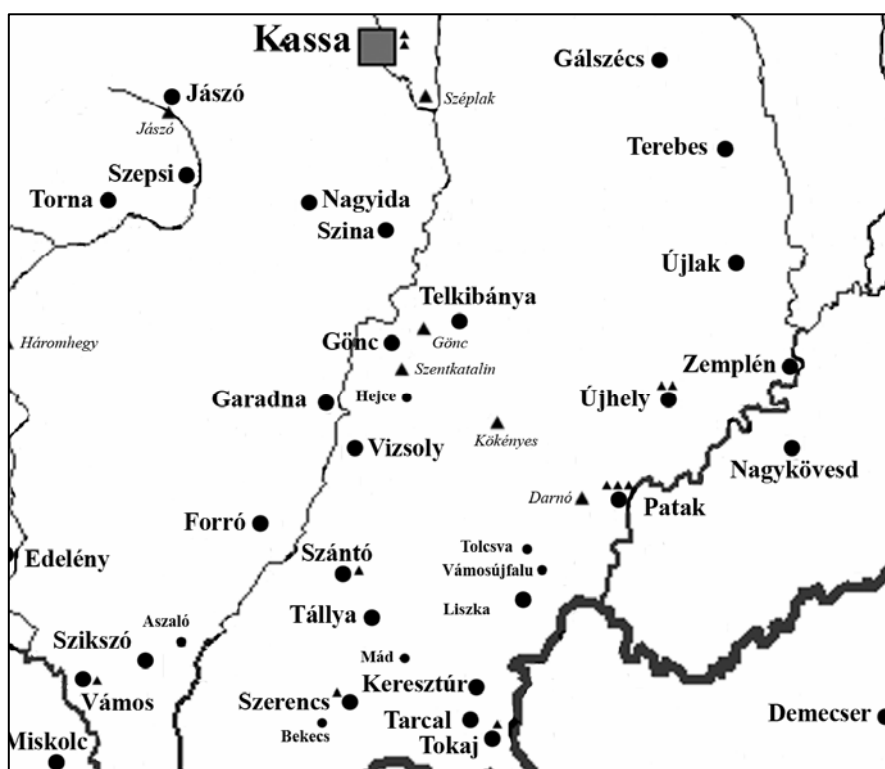

1. The most important settlements and ecclesiestical institutions in the examined region.

In this period from 1390 to 1526 the proportion of people having personal names created from artisan names is about 12 %, 82 persons. It can be concluded that townspeople having

artisan names were represented in councils in a greater proportion than within the entire population. While it was only 40 % of an ordinary townspeople that obtained council offices, it was almost 50 % in the case of those having personal names of craft denomination origins. This is an important result, because as I mentioned scholarship has already proved that craftsmen were generally wealthier than ordinary townspeople, and thus they were more frequently able to acquire council positions. On the grounds of this it seems that they were craftsmen in fact.

Another important conclusion is that this difference was continuously decreasing during the fifteenth Century (look at the table 2). At the end of the Middle Ages townspeople addressed by artisan names were represented in the council in a lesser proportion than the average. It is related to a basic linguistic change. By the beginning of the sixteenth Century, artisan names in the most cases had turned into inheritable surnames and did not give any clue to the occupation in fact.

To sum up, craftsmanship was in a way connected with council membership. It can be observed that an artisan had better chances to become council member than an everyday towndweller, so people having artisan names probably were craftsmen during the fifteenth Century.
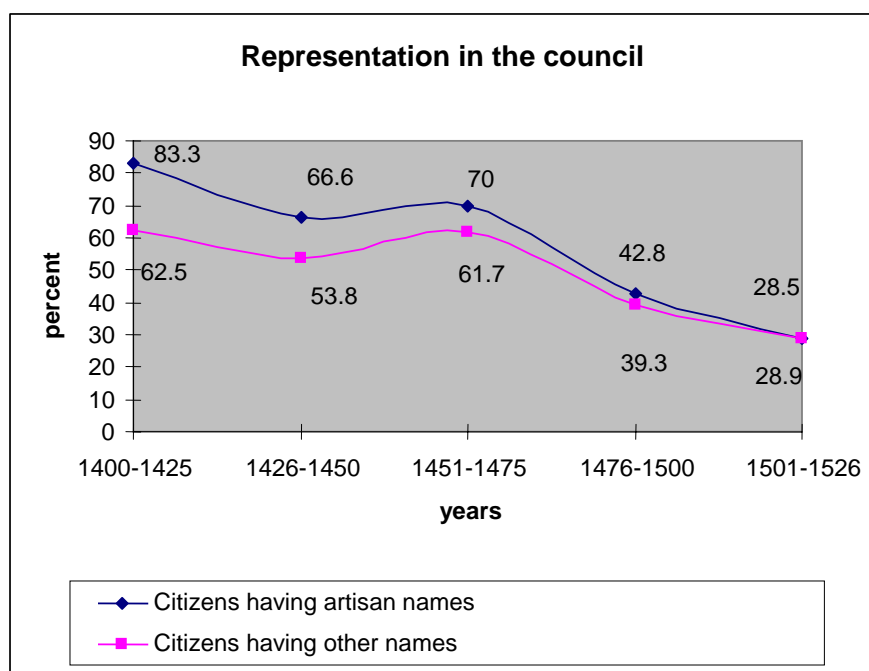
2. Representation in the market-town magistrates.

2.2. Names and migration

Surnames created on place names is another important group of personal names to investigate the medieval society. The main question is the same as in the previous case. Whether this type of surnames are adequate data to examine the migration of medieval villains or not? In spite of this uncertainty, historians repeatedly use these family names in their studies (Maksay, 1960; Benda, 1970; Gecsényi, 1976, 214-215 and so on).

To solve this problem, firstly we should find a group of sources, which have lot of names of this sort. Luckily, we have a tithe register from the end of the Middle Ages, which covers huge amount of personal names from market-towns and villages. This record, what was written in the year of 1522 contains townsmen names from three medieval Hungarian counties: Csongrád, Bács and Bodrog (this source was published by Szabó, 1954).

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These counties have an interesting feature: they are located in southern Hungary, in the vicinity of the frontier. Because by the early sixteenth Century the Ottoman Empire regularly attacked the territory of the southern part of Hungarian Kingdom, mainly Valkó, Szerém and Pozsega districts, which were located south from our counties, population living in them started to leave this area and moved to north. This process is well known in Hungarian historical studies (Engel, 2000). Accordingly, as it can be realized by our corpus, mainly in Bács and Bodrog counties there were lot of immigrants from the borderland, who were able to find new living place there. So, our source is an excellent object of such an investigation.

My main aim was to determine the proportion of people having surnames created of place names, and surnames which show us the nationality of the holder (Gulyás, 2010). Ethnically, population of the frontier was mainly Slavonic, accurately Serbian and Croatian, so actually, great part of immigrants was not Hungarian and they often had surnames formed of ethnical denomination as well. This group contains the *Rác* ("Serbian"), *Horvát* ("Croatian") and *Tót* ("Slavonic") family names.

Connecting to Bács district, the tithe registry includes altogether 2047 names. The number of names created of place names and ethnical names are altogether 423, approximately 20 %. This proportion in Bodrog county is almost the same. There the tithe register contains 1215 names, and the number of personal names connecting to migration is 218 (about 18 %). Because in Hungary at the end of the Middle Ages this value is generally about 13-14 %, it is a very important fact (Gulyás, 2009, 57). It can be said that this high amount is thanks to the intensive immigration in this region. So as I see, these surnames really show us the colonization of inhabitants living in those counties.

Beside this we can draw other crucial conclusions from this data. If we locate the settlements on the map, which appear in personal names, we are able to determine the intensity of migration and connections between specific counties and regions.
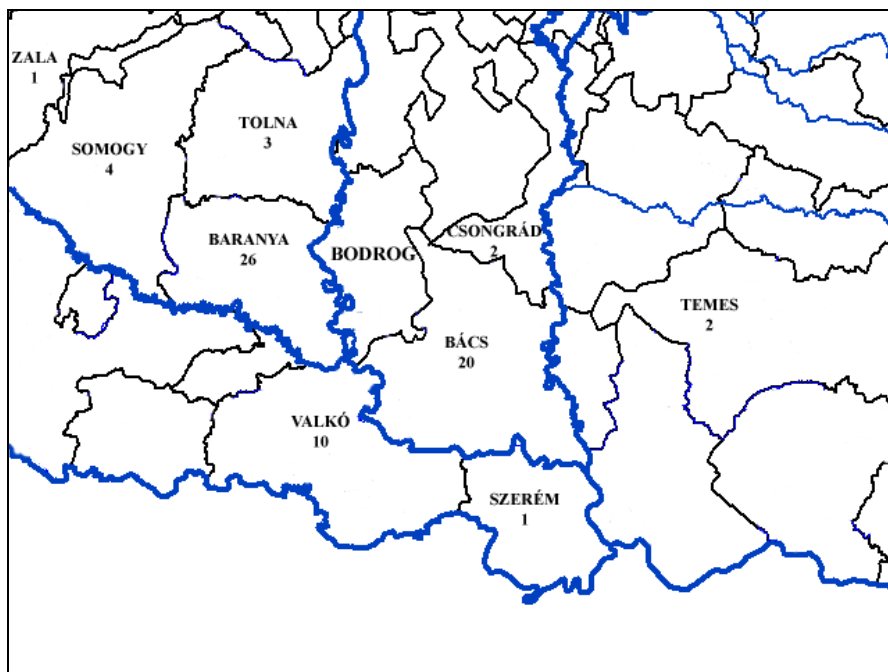
3. Original living place of villains who moved in Bodrog county.
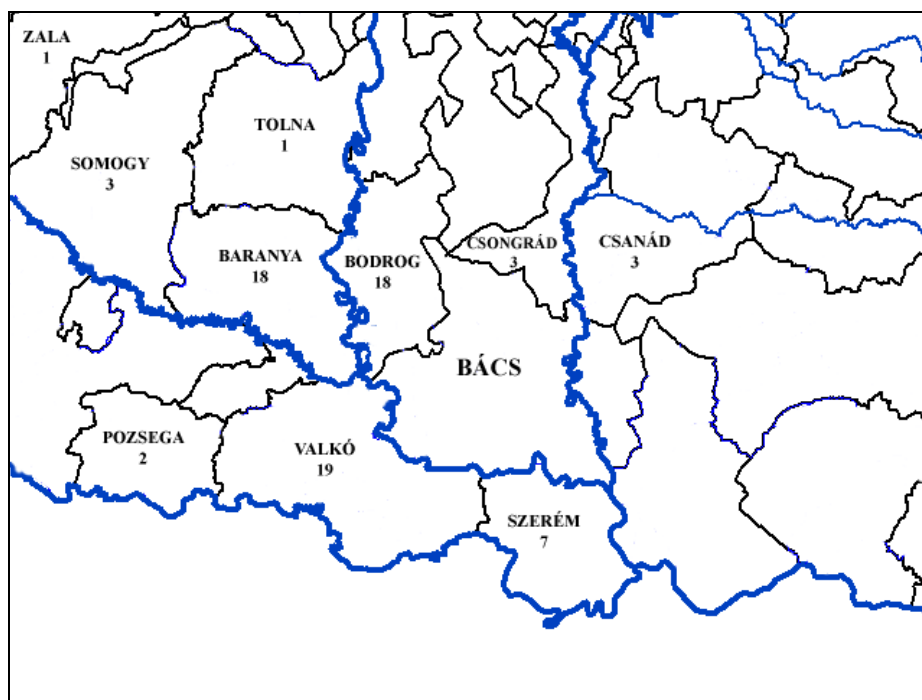
4. Original living place of villains who moved in Bács county.

It is clear that the great number of people who left the borderland and moved in our two counties is the result of the Ottoman attacks. As we see, migration was intensive between Baranya, Bács and Bodrog districts as well.
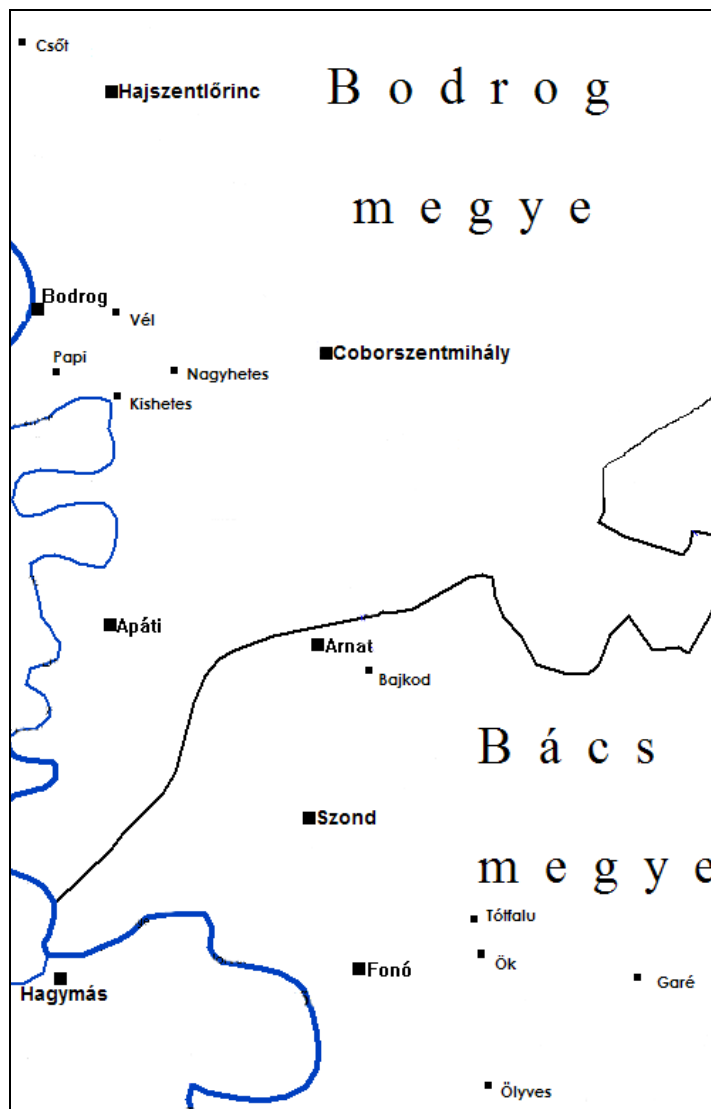
I would like to mention some characteristic feature related to the basic problems of colonization. For instance, if we measure distance between former and the new living places, we can determine the average degree of villains' mobility. Using this method, data show us that a villain usually moved in a 20 or 30 km round. Of course special factors can modify this practice. In case of war for example this distance could be more significant.

Secondly, Bodrog and Bács counties from west and south are bordered by the Danube river. It seems logical situation and our data also confirm us that most of personal names, which formed of place names and originated from the other side of the Danube, are found in settlements located nearby important ferries and fords. Where there was not such a crossing possibility, migration and settling probably were not very significant.

We also have another interesting and special group of surnames. However they are created of place names, at first sight their existing seems totally illogical. There is a region near the Danube (look at the map on table 5), where personal names were sometimes formed of place names where inhabitants lived *that time*. This feature is not totally unknown in Hungarian linguistics, but it seems very rare (Fülöp, 1989 and Fülöp, 1990, 22, 64).

These settlements and surnames are: Ök − *Ewky*, Bajkod − *Baykody,* Báncsa − *Banchy*, Ölyves − *Elwesy*, Garé − *Garey*, Boziás − *Bozosy* and *Bozay*, Tótfalu − *Totfalwy*, Vél − *Vely*, Csőt − *Cheothi*, Papi − *Papi*, Hetés − *Hethesj*, *Hethesi*.

As I see, the reason of this interesting phenomenon is that immigrants had moved to this territory in such a great number that villains living there tried to distinguish themselves from new inhabitants. This supposition seems true, because the number of names containing place names is high enough in this area.

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5. Spreading of personal names created of the name of villains' present living place.

To shortly sum up my train of thought, personal names have an important and real source value in researching medieval society. Using carefully and thought-out processes, we can achieve new information about social background of medieval towndwellers, and we could know their economical status and ethnic situation. Names give us the solution of using them in social history researches, but we need some new impulse and methods in this field. This challenge should be owned not by linguists, but historians as well.

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Gulyás László Szabolcs
University of Debrecen
Hungary
gulyaslsz@freemail.hu