

Irem kertje. Pécs története a hódoltság korában 1526–1686 [Garden of Irem. History of Pécs in the Ottoman era 1526–1686]. (Seria historiae dioecesis Quinqueecclesiensis 6) By Szabolcs Varga. Pécs: Pécsi Püspöki Hittudományi Főiskola–Pécs Történeti Alapítvány, 2009. 220 pp.

Books on the history of single towns or villages in Hungary have proliferated in the last twenty years. Szabolcs Varga's monograph on the history of Pécs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, published as part of the Pécs European City of Culture 2010 program, stands out among these. It is structured around five main subjects. He examines how the city became a defensive fort and the role it played in the border defense systems first of Hungary and then of the Ottoman Empire. This leads in to a discussion of the changes in its internal administration and ethnic composition. The author also convincingly demonstrates how Pécs retained its old regional economic role in the sixteenth century, making a credible argument that there were more complex causes of Pécs's seventeenth-century economic decline than the financial difficulties of the Ottoman Empire. Varga then gives an exposition of how Pécs became one of the regional centers of Islamic culture, leaving a substantial architectural and cultural heritage. His coverage of the city's Catholic institutions also substantiates the apparently paradoxical finding that Pécs managed to remain a prominent center of Catholicism in the occupied territory throughout the period.

The two years following the fall of Buda in 1541 brought a fundamental change in the life of Pécs. It became the main South Transdanubian outpost of the Kingdom of Hungary, but the state of its fortifications and its geographical position made the city very difficult to defend and incapable of withstanding a sustained siege. A further hindrance to the organization of the city's defenses was its status as a feudal possession. Even though its strategic role was such that there were forces stationed there belonging to the bishop, the captain-general of the border defenses and the landed nobles, all of them were incapable of replacing their losses. On the other side, the Ottoman Empire set up the Mohács sanjak no later than the beginning of 1542, and its leader, Kasim bey, was charged with the duty of steadily extending the occupied area of Transdanubia, which he did with great success. Overall, then, it is not surprising that Pécs, despite its large garrison, surrendered some time before the fall of Siklós, and not later than 5 July 1543.

Now under Ottoman control, the city was, by order of the Sultan, made the center of the Mohács sanjak (the Pécs sanjak only being set up in 1570),

to be led—apparently with due heed to the opinion of the inhabitants—by its conqueror, Kasim bey. Pécs had a large garrison at that time, and for a while it retained its military significance as the most important South Transdanubian outpost of the occupied territory. Its place in the Hungarian border defense system was taken over by Szigetvár, to where the surviving officer corps of Baranya County moved. The fall of the latter in 1566, and of Kanizsa in 1600, also had consequences for the history of Pécs. Varga correctly highlights the Ottoman military doctrine that forts not in the direct front line were of lesser significance, so that their garrisons were reduced to the minimum necessary. This process is evident in Pécs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From being a “solitary fortress,” the military and civil center of South Transdanubia, it increasingly became part of the hinterland, and its garrison shrank accordingly. The fortifications, weak and difficult to defend at the outset, were left as they were until an attempt was made to reinforce them in the 1680s. That is why it was only lack of satisfactory artillery that prevented the forces led by Miklós Zrínyi and Wolfgang Julius von Hohenlohe from taking the episcopal castle in January 1664. In autumn 1686, when Margrave Louis of Baden led his column to Pécs, he waited for the arrival of the siege guns, and on 21 October, after two days of intensive bombardment, the garrison had no choice but to surrender the castle unconditionally. The author leads the reader through all of the stations between these two termini, as the city transformed from episcopal seat to key defensive fort to strategically-secondary sanjak.

In the late medieval period, Pécs belonged to the estate of the bishop and chapter, and was legally classified as a market town (*oppidum*). During the Ottoman era, the city was one of those Hungarian towns (the others being Szeged, Buda, Szolnok, Székesfehérvár and Gyula) in which, as the author points out, the incoming Muslim and south Slav populations lived in a peculiar coexistence with a substantial native population. Muslim judicial institutions had a much more prominent role there than in the militarily almost worthless market towns of the Great Plain, and the office of the Kadı operated throughout the period. There was also a customs officer, chief architect and town administrator in Pécs. The author claims that this may have been a factor behind the immigration by Balkan craftspeople and traders, whose affairs were looked after by the Kadı ex officio. For a long time, the Hungarian inhabitants of the city retained their own government, at least in religious affairs, if with varying powers as conditions changed. It was headed by a magistrate, whose rights were conferred by the community. He was assisted by a mayor, whose legal status was uncertain, and

the council. The powers of the Hungarian self-government did not expand in the seventeenth century, and the position of the local Christian community further declined. For that period, as the author points out, there are no records of the town's autonomy, and Turkish officials took every decision and administrative action in Pécs. The only remaining channel whereby citizens could pursue their interests was bribery, a practice sharply at odds with European legal philosophy, and one which lent the city a peculiarly Balkan nature. It would be interesting to find out further details on the special coexistence of Christian and Muslim culture in Pécs, and possibly to compare it with other towns of mixed culture in the Balkans, the Iberian peninsula or elsewhere, but Varga only makes brief references to the principal phenomena. These include the gradual displacement of the Hungarian inhabitants from the walled city to the surrounding villages or the Malomszeg district. Varga also mentions that, in 1622, the Jesuit monk Máté Vodopia was evicted from the house he had built beside the Church of All Saints by the neighboring Turks, because they thought he had done so to mock them. The book twice covers interdenominational conflicts among the Hungarians in Pécs. The first was generated by the arrival of Unitarians in the second half of the sixteenth century and the second when the Jesuits came in the early seventeenth century. Varga stresses, however, that difference in the available sources means that the conditions prevailing in Pécs society during the Ottoman era are much more difficult to study than those in the late medieval period.

Late medieval Pécs dominated the South Transdanubian economy and was its main beneficiary. Its goldsmiths, tanners and tailors even received orders from the royal court. King Wladislaw II allowed Bulgarian Gypsies to move to the town to make weapons, musket balls and other military equipment. Major contributions to the citizens' prosperity came from the viniculture and milling industry, both benefiting from the natural features of the area. These combined with the geographical situation of the city and the purchasing power of the populous episcopal seat to make Pécs the commercial center of South Transdanubia. Varga highlights the city's retention of its leading economic role in the region during the Ottoman occupation, despite the flight, in 1543, of the city's wealthy burghers (most of them German) to parts of the country considered safer, or abroad. The opportunities presented by the profitable cattle trade and the healthy local demand attracted both merchants and craftspeople. In consequence, a large south Slav population moved in from the Balkans, and not only as soldiers. Although—stresses Varga—the incomers were unable to play a major role in commerce, and always remained economically dependent on the conquered population, they contributed

by bringing new trades to Pécs to replace those which had declined. Alongside them came Ragusan and Jewish merchants with interests in long-distance trade, and the Gypsies, known as *Kipti*. Pécs's economic decline started with the ravages of the Long War and the detrimental effects of Ottoman "economic policy," and was worsened by economic trends in seventeenth-century Europe which reduced the demand for hitherto-profitable cattle.

Varga shows that the customs and way of life of the incomers played an important part in the administration of the town and in changes to the urban landscape and spatial structure, giving rise to a special European culture interspersed with Balkan features. Late medieval Pécs had a much more urban appearance than most *oppida*. We know from Miklós Oláh's notes that in addition to St Peter's Cathedral in the episcopal castle, the town was adorned by many churches, the palace which Bishop György Szatmári erected in Tettye, and friaries and convents belonging to the Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, Dominican nuns and Augustines. Their locations were dominated the townscape and street layout. To serve Pécs's new function, there was military construction work (such as the conversion of churches to gunpowder stores or warehouses) and the erection of new religious and welfare buildings to serve everyday needs (mosques, minarets, madrases, monasteries), which were also, in several cases, built on the sites of Christian predecessors. The incomers were generous in supporting these, but spent little on the houses, which were left to steadily deteriorate. This is how Pécs came to have a richer Ottoman architectural heritage than almost any other Hungarian town. To make a living, the newcomers built rows of little shops and kiosks tacked together out of wood, reeds and mud, making a further impression on the streetscape.

Varga also discusses changes in spatial structure that accompanied changes to the townscape during the Ottoman era. European and Ottoman towns had a fundamentally different structure. In the former, the community was arranged by streets, while the representatives of the new regime usually divided the town into districts, called *mahalles*, arranged on the basis of denominations, each with a religious building complex at its center. The old and new spatial structures for a long time coexisted, as is very clear from their names. The street layout of the city did not fundamentally change during the Ottoman era, although the way of life of incomers from the Ottoman Empire probably made Pécs better resemble the center of some Balkan province than its medieval self. The Hungarian population, gradually displaced from the city, lived in the Malomszeg district to the east and north-east, where they set up what they needed for their

community life. This suburb, which might be regarded as the “industrial area” of Pécs, was not solely inhabited by Hungarians. Turks—some of them quite wealthy—and southern Slavs converted to Islam also appeared there. This led to a change in the face of the Tettye area.

It was not only in architecture that Pécs bore the marks of Islamic culture. The Mevlev monastery there had a strong cultural influence, and there were more people who could speak Persian in south-eastern Transdanubia than elsewhere in the occupied territory. Standing out among the sons of the city are the historian Ibrahim Pecsevi and the less well-known Jafer Ilyani, an outstanding representative of distinctive Ottoman prose.

Although the city lost much of its autonomy, its former population fled or was displaced to Malomszeg, and its spatial structure also transformed, the late medieval traditions lived on, and it did not lose its cultural significance. Citing recent research, the author stresses that the city might be regarded as one of the centers of Catholicism in the occupied territory. Despite the rapid spread of the Reformation, Pécs was not lost to Rome. It received constant reinforcements through the settlement of Catholic Bosnians, and the arrival of the Jesuits in the early seventeenth century gave new momentum to the process. It is also important to mention that many members of reformed denominations also lived in Pécs, and Unitarian evangelists migrating from Transylvania also found refuge there. This confessional diversity made the city at the foot of the Mecsek Hills one of the centers of education in the occupied territory and furnished it with a prominent role in the preservation of the Hungarian population’s identity in the region.

Overall, Varga does not regard the history of Pécs during the Ottoman era as a process of decline. The city retained its regional significance and, in the course of time, built up a substantial architectural and cultural heritage. A related question, the threat of Balkanization, gives pause for thought. Had the wars of reconquest started only a decade later, Hungary could have gone the same way as Bosnia. Szabolcs Varga has attempted to systematize and explain existing knowledge, and has successfully accomplished his objective. His book will serve as a sound base for future research in a wider context, determining the place of Pécs in the urban structure of the occupied territory and Hungary as a whole, and will also be used as a case study in the stimulating issue of Muslim-Christian coexistence.

*Translated by Alan Campbell.*

Zoltán Bagi