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On the Place Names of the Old Spiš County

Abstract

The old Spiš county was one of the northernmost counties of the medieval Hungarian kingdom, located right on the border of the Polish kingdom. In this paper, I give an overview of the place name system of this area. The organization of the county dates back to the beginning of the 13th century, and although archaeological findings indicate that some parts of the area had been inhabited earlier, our place-name data have only survived from that period. Between the 13th century and the end of the Middle Ages, Spiš was a multilingual area where Slavs, Hungarians and Germans lived side by side and together. Because of this linguistic diversity, place names were created in different languages, and some names have been loaned to other languages. The purpose of this paper is to briefly summarize the linguistic processes that have affected the formation and evolution of place names in the county. For this, I use the methods of etymology, toponym reconstruction and the analysis of toponym system. At the same time, I also pay attention to the characteristics of the sources that preserve the place-name data and try to consider the possibilities and limitations of linguistic-ethnic reconstruction.

Keywords

Spiš county, toponyms, linguistic-ethnic reconstruction, settlement names, medieval charters

1.

The old Spiš county – also known as Szepes or Zips county – was one of the northernmost counties of the medieval Hungarian kingdom, bordering the Polish kingdom.¹ The formation of the county dates back to the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th century. However, based on archeological findings, it can be said that certain parts of the area – mainly the valleys of the larger rivers – were inhabited even earlier (see, e.g., KMTL, pp. 636–637; Fekete Nagy, 1934, pp. 9–51; Lux, 1938; Kósa & Filep, 1978, p. 177; Kristó, 1988, pp. 393–395; Zsoldos, 2003; Homza, 2009; Soják, 2009). In some cases, the origin of place names can also be traced back to the period before the organization of the county. Nevertheless, the earliest available written place-name data are from the first decades of the 13th century. It was then that the first charters were written about this area (cf. Fekete Nagy, 1934, pp. 53–55; Kenyhercz, 2020, p. 84). These texts were related to land donations and legal issues concerning the region, and in these documents, vernacular place names and personal names were also included in the official Latin text (cf. Hoffmann et. al., 2017, p. 71). These onomastic data show that the medieval Spiš county had been a multilingual area since the 13th century, where mainly Slavic (mostly Slovak, but also Polish),² Hungarian, and German-speaking peoples lived side by side and together (cf. Kenyhercz, 2020, p. 92).³ Due to

¹ The territory of the former county today lies in northeastern Slovakia, with a very small area in southeastern Poland.

² By the 13th century, of course, we can no longer speak of Slavic in general, since the Proto-Slavic language had already disintegrated (cf. Kniezsa, 1942, p. 178; Poljakov, 2018, pp. 1588–1589). At that time, the territory of the county was inhabited mainly by Slovaks, but there was also a Polish-speaking population in the northern parts (cf. Fekete Nagy, 1934, pp. 244–252; Krajčovič, 1975, pp. 22–24). In this study, however, I mostly treat these two Slavic languages together, in contrast to the Hungarian and German languages. The main reason for this is that the morphological and naming features of these two Slavic languages were quite similar and are mostly well distinguished from Hungarian and German names. Furthermore, in some cases, it can be determined whether the given toponym is of Slovak or Polish origin, yet, in other cases, it is not possible, at least not possible based on linguistic criteria. For the sake of accuracy, in the footnotes, I will try to resolve these questions.

³ The exact ethnic proportions of the county's population cannot be determined from the available historical sources. Hungarian and Slavic historical and linguistic literature sometimes reflect quite different views on this. It must also be taken into account that in a multilingual environment, the weight of each language was also different (i.e. the communicative and

this linguistic diversity, place names were also created in different languages, and some of them were transferred to other languages. This paper gives an overview of a certain part of the toponymic system of this multilingual area.

The current research is based on a database that includes all the place names from the earliest period of the county, until the end of the so-called Anjou era, March 30, 1387. This period of time provides enough data for the research, that is, the number of charters is sufficient for linguistic investigation. Besides, the system of estates and settlements in the medieval Spiš county had been practically established by the end of that era. Today the dataset consists of the place names from 2,665 charters written before 1387.⁴ So I have 13,609 place name or place designation records from the original documents, as well as transcribed or copied charters. I plan to publish this dataset in the form of a historical etymological dictionary and an open-access database. Besides, relying on this dataset, I also intend to reconstruct the medieval linguistic-ethnic relations of Spiš county, for which purpose – in my opinion – place names serve as an excellent source if the appropriate methodology is applied. In this paper, I will also refer to these aspects of the name corpus.

2.

Place names typically reflect the features of the natural environment of the area, its history, and social circumstances. This is also true for the place names of Spiš. For linguistic-ethnic reconstruction, natural names⁵ and settlement

social function of these languages was certainly different). In fact, this is a problem I am trying to address in this paper as well. The historical etymological dictionary of the place-name material of the old Spiš county, which I am compiling, and which will hopefully be completed soon, will try to give further information on this issue to provide a clearer picture.

⁴ For the data collection I mainly used high-resolution photocopies of the charters that are available online on the site of the Hungarian National Archives, see <https://archives.hungaricana.hu/hu/charters>

⁵ By the term “natural name”, I mean all the geographical names that refer to the natural environment (topographic names, hydronyms), as opposed to the names of artificial places, such as settlements and estates.

names serve as equally good sources. However, due to their diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, and consequently, to the difference in their linguistic features, their value as a source also differs in that respect (cf. Hoffmann et al., 2017, pp. 20–21, 126). This article focuses only on settlement names.

2.1.

The dataset for this paper contains a total of 299 names and name variants of 260 settlements or estates. The linguistic analysis of these settlement names shows that a large number of them are derived from personal names in the county. Among them, we find both one- and two-constituent names. We can distinguish three main name structures: 1) in some cases, the personal name became a settlement name without any formal changes (e.g., *Edelény*, *Páris*, *Szalók*, cf. FNEsz. 1, p. 406; 2, pp. 320, 517); 2) in other cases, settlement names were created with a name formant, such as the Hungarian *Ivánosi* (personal name *Ivános* ~ *János* + *-I*, cf. FNEsz. 2, p. 83) and *Tamási* (personal name *Tamás* + *-i*, cf. FNEsz. 2, p. 612), or Slavic *Hotkóc* (< place name *Hotkovce* ~ *Hotkovec* < personal name *Hotk* + *-ovec*, cf. FNEsz. 1, p. 612) and *Odorin* (personal name *Odor* + *-in*, cf. FNEsz. 2, p. 567);⁶ 3) among the two-constituent names, there are names created with Hungarian and German geographical common nouns, e.g., Hungarian *Farkasfalva* (personal name *Farkas* ‘wolf’ + *-falva* ‘village’, FNEsz. 1, p. 442), *Brumfölde* (personal name *Brum* + *-földe* ‘land’, cf. Fekete Nagy, 1934, pp. 111–112) and *Mátyásvágása* (personal name *Mátyás* + *-vágása* ‘settlement on a deforested area’, cf. Fekete Nagy, 1934, p. 240; FNEsz. 2, p. 568), or German *Kabusdorf* (personal name *Kabus* ~ *Kappus* + *-dorf* ‘village’, cf. FNEsz. 1, p. 684) and *Stephanishau* (personal name *Stephan* + *-hau* ‘settlement on a deforested area’, cf. Fekete Nagy, 1934, pp. 250–251). The problems of this category will be further specified.

⁶ These two names are assumed to have originated in the old Slovak language, cf. the quoted parts of the FNEsz. and Kniezsa, 1960, pp. 22–23.

2.2.

Another large group of old settlement names in Spiš comprises those that are either formed from natural names or lexemes referring to the natural environment. Since the separation of these two sub-categories is quite problematic, I consider them as part of a bigger category.

Due to its geographical features, smaller and larger rivers flow across the area of the old Spiš county, so the proportion of settlement names that can be traced back to river names is significant. Most of them became settlement names without formal changes from a one- or two-constituent hydronym metonymically, for example, *Bela*, *Poprad*, *Vidernik* were formed from a Slavic hydronym (cf. FNEsz. 1, p. 186; 2, pp. 363, 746),⁷ while *Mühlenbach* ('mill stream', cf. Melich, 1904, p. 17), *Rauschenbach* ('roaring stream', cf. FNEsz. 1, pp. 95–96) and *Bierbrunn* (< German *Birn* 'pear' + *Brunn* 'spring', cf. FNEsz. 2, p. 494) were derived from German hydronyms. There is a special sub-category among these names, including *Kasztrosinfő*, *Csevníkfő*, *Tarcafő* (cf. Šmilauer, 1932, pp. 396, 492; FNEsz. 2, pp. 459, 618) that were created from a Slavic – in these cases, presumably Slovak – hydronym combined with the Hungarian *fő* 'spring' lexical topoformant. And we may also mention here the name *Borkút* as well where the *kút* lexeme means 'spring' in the Hungarian language (cf. EWUng., p. 854). The problem with this category is that in a lot of cases, either the first attestation of the hydronym is much younger than that of the settlement name, or there is no written attestation at all. What is more, in the cases of identical settlement names and hydronyms, settlement names do not need to be considered as secondary in metonymical name giving, the hydronym can be secondary as well. Finally, if we would like to use these names for a linguistic-ethnic reconstruction, it is also worth bearing in mind that it is not necessarily the same community that gives the name to the watercourse and the settlement (Hoffmann et al., 2017, pp. 234–236).

Besides referring to watercourses, a remarkable proportion of settlement names refer to other natural places. Among them, are names of German origin (e.g., *Wagendrüssel* 'wet canyon', cf. FNEsz. 2, p. 123; *Schönau* 'beautiful meadow, grove', cf. FNEsz. 1, p. 91; *Richwald* 'rich forest', cf. Melich, 1904, p. 5),

⁷ From a linguistic point of view, all three names might be of both Slovak and Polish origin, cf. the quoted parts of the FNEsz.

Slavic names (e.g., *Lucska* ‘small meadow’, cf. FNEsz. 2, p. 53; *Dolina* ‘valley, hole’, FNEsz. 1, p. 381),⁸ and we also find Hungarian names that can be categorized in this group (e.g., *Vereshegy* ‘red mountain’, cf. EWUng., pp. 542–543, 1654; *Hegy* ‘mountain’, EWUng., pp. 542–543; and probably *Erdőfalva* ‘forest + village’, FNEsz. 1, p. 423). These names almost exclusively appear in charters as settlement names, and we have no written data of the primary natural name. I believe that in the great majority of cases we do not even need to assume a proper name origin in this sub-category of settlement names.

The settlement names referring to vegetation cannot be separated from the previous two sub-categories. A case in point may be Slavic *Leszkovány* (‘grown with filbert’, cf. FNEsz. 2, p. 30), *Podprócs* (‘fern’, cf. FNEsz. 1, p. 654), *Olsavica* (‘place covered with alder wood’, cf. FNEsz. 2, p. 203),⁹ or Hungarian *Körtvényes* (< *körtvény* ‘pear, pear tree’, cf. FNEsz. 2, p. 568), *Somogy* (< *som* ‘dogberry, dogwood’, cf. FNEsz. 2, p. 569), *Nádasd* (< *nád* ‘reed’, cf. FNEsz. 2, pp. 568–569). Some of these are often not distinguishable from hydronyms and other natural names as the surrounding vegetation is also a typical motivation for such name types. In this case, the data offers no guidance to help determine the direction and the chronology of name giving.

2.3.

Besides the two major categories, the settlement names of personal name and natural names origin, other types of settlement names can be found in Spiš. Although the patrociny-based names have a different motivation, these names can still be connected to the group of settlement names of personal name origin. Within this category, the name of a saint used as a church title (patrociny) was utilized directly, without formal changes to denote an estate or settlement (e.g., *Szentlőrinc*, *Szentmargita*, *Szentpál*), but *Szentpéterfalva* (‘the village of St. Peter’), *Keresztúr* ~ *Sancte Crucis* (cf. FNEsz. 1, p. 720), or *Mindszent* ~ *Omnium Sanctorum* (cf. FNEsz. 2, p. 568) also belong to this group. As for

⁸ The name *Lucska* reflects the Slovak appellative *lúčka* (cf. Goótsóvá et al., 2014, p. 256), which in the Spiš dialect was *lučka*, with the shortening of long vowels (I owe this hint to my reviewer). The appellative background of the name *Dolina* might be both Slovak and Polish as well (cf. Šmilauer, 1970, p. 56).

⁹ All three names might be of Slovak origin, cf. the quoted parts of the FNEsz.

settlement names deriving from the name of the patron saint of its church, it can be said that their linguistic assessment is especially difficult because they occurred almost exclusively in Latin or Hungarian in the charters. We do not have any data for German and Slavic patrociny-based names in Spiš from the early decades. The only exception is the variant of the name of the settlement of *Keresztúr*, which can be found in the form *Kreuzerdorf* as well (cf., e.g., Df. 264140), reflecting its German linguistic background. It is obvious that the dominance of Latin and Hungarian forms can be explained by the church and its name usage (cf. Hoffmann et al., 2017, pp. 197–198). At the same time, in the case of *Szentpéterfalva*, the name was given by the family that ordered the establishment of the settlement (cf. Fekete Nagy, 1934, pp. 107–108).

2.4.

Finally, some names cannot be included in the above-mentioned categories. Some of them can be traced back to an occupational name (e.g., *Daróc* ‘hunter’, cf. FNESz. 1, p. 356); the marketplace character of a place is also manifested in settlement names (e.g., *Késmárk* ~ *Forum Caseorum* ‘cheese fair’, cf. FNESz. 1, p. 723) or the names show a relation to other settlement names (e.g., *Kisrépács* – *kis* ‘small’, *Újszalók* – *új* ‘new’). We can also refer to the name *Aranyas* that includes the lexeme *arany* meaning ‘gold’ (cf. Fekete Nagy, 1934, p. 167). Since this name was never mentioned in connection with gold mining, it should be interpreted as a reference to a form of taxation. And here we can note the names with uncertain or debatable origin too (e.g., *Relyó*).

3.

Considering the proportions of the different name categories, 50% of the names belong to the first category, that is the settlement names formed from personal names. Settlement names deriving from natural names make up 31% of all settlement names, while patrociny-based names represent 7%; the remaining 12% are classed as ‘other’.

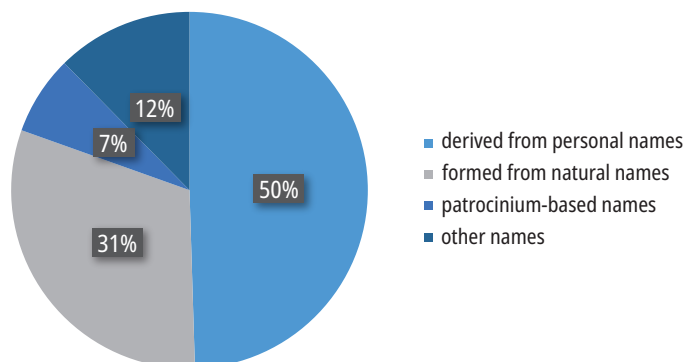


Figure 1. The main categories of settlement names in Spiš county (13th–14th century)

Source: own work.

The high proportion of settlement names derived from personal names is striking, but this phenomenon is not entirely unexpected. In the Carpathian Basin, this was a common settlement name type (cf. Hoffmann et al., 2017, pp. 26, 132–162). The remarkably high proportion of this name type is related to how the old Spiš county was established and how the estate system and the settlement network developed. This kind of name giving was dominant in the case of certain types of settlements, such as the villages of the so-called tenlanded nobles or Spiš lancers (established by a specific group of nobles, see Fekete Nagy, 1934, pp. 253–301), and also in the case of the settlements formed by deforestation, although in lesser numbers (cf. Körmeny, 1974). And the model of these names presumably affected further name giving and the name model in general.

Another fact that is worth emphasizing is that among the settlement names formed from a personal name we rarely find any with a German or Slavic origin (only 10% of the names found in the charters). This ratio is nearly reversed in the case of names related to the natural environment; in this group the number of settlement names of Hungarian origin is much lower (only 17% of the names listed here). This can be traced back to differences in the toponymic systems of the different languages. But the difference in the proportions still seems large enough to suggest other underlying reasons. In what follows, I will try to explain only the remarkably high ratio of the Hungarian names in the category of settlement names derived from personal names and how this name category can be used in the linguistic-ethnic reconstruction.

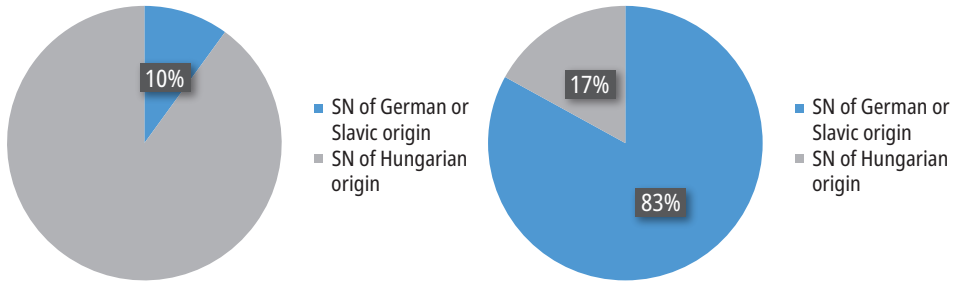


Figure 2. Left: Settlement names derived from personal names. Right: Settlement names formed from natural names

Source: own work.

4.

As part of the linguistic-ethnic reconstruction, we need to explore the circumstances of name giving. First and foremost, we have to reconstruct the original form of the name and determine the language of the name givers.

In my opinion one of the biggest problems concerning the settlement names of personal name origin is the interpretation of the written data. In the early charters, it was typical that these kinds of names were translated into Latin as a whole or in part (cf. Hoffmann, 2004, pp. 31–37, 2007, pp. 43–52). The Latin *villa* + personal name structures are especially problematic in this respect. See, for example, the early data of *Ábrahámfalva*, today Abrahámovce, Kežmarok District, Slovakia:

1286/1299: *villa Abraha(m)* (Dl. 38876); 1318: *villa Abraham* (Dl. 39643); 1321: *de villa Abram* (Df. 263048); 1323: *de villa Abrahe* (Dl. 13472); 1326: *villa Habrahe* (Dl. 26739); 1327: *villa Abraham* (Dl. 40497); 1336>1336: *de villa Habraee* (Dl. 68828); 1337: *de villa Abraam* (Dl. 40751); 1341: *villa Abram* (Df. 243747).

Until the second part of the 14th century, this name always appeared as *villa Abraham* or similar in the Latin texts of the charters. It was typical in the case of settlement names with personal name origin. So how can we interpret this

kind of data? In certain cases – especially during the lifetime of the owner of the settlement and in the following decades – we might assume that behind these *villa* + personal name structures we cannot find real settlement names but only descriptive genitive constructions. This means that the *villa Abraham* structure could be interpreted as ‘a village owned by Abraham’. However, examining these data, we can also suppose a settlement name, but it is unclear what vernacular form could be reconstructed in a multilingual area like Spiš in the Middle Ages. In theory, the interpretation of the Hungarian *Ábrahám* or *Ábrahámfalva*, the German *Abrahamsdorf*, and even the Slavic *Abrahamovce* is reasonable. In some cases, other linguistic or extralinguistic information helps us to decide, but generally, we do not have any clues.

What makes this even more complicated is that in the later part of the 14th century and even in the 15th century, when this *villa* + personal name structure was gradually replaced by vernacular name forms in the charters, there is still no data on the German or Slavic versions of such names (settlement names formed from personal names) to be found, except for the Hungarian variant with the ending *-falva*. Let us look at the later data of *Ábrahámfalva*:

1339: *de Abraamfolua* (Dl. 40815); 1367: *de Abraamfalua* (Dl. 60314); 1383/1383: *de Abramfalua* (Dl. 13487); 1384: *Abraamfalua* (Dl. 60414); 1385: *de Abranfalua* (Df. 272318); 1385: *de Abrachamfalwa* (Dl. 60422); 1385/1386: *de Abranfalua* (Dl. 83412); 1385/1385: *de Abramfalua* (Df. 243848).

The lack of German and Slavic versions of settlement names derived from personal names seems strange considering the high proportion of settlement names derived from natural names of Slavic and German origin (cf. Figure 2). So, we can assume that the Slavic and German community was a significant name-giving and name-using community in Spiš in the 14th century as well. What can we say, then, about this issue?

In theory, the personal name + *-falva* structure also has multiple interpretations, as has the structure *villa* + personal name. Naturally they can reflect the only real vernacular place name usage, but they might as well be assessed as official Hungarian written name forms without any wider local name usage that replaced the former official Latinized forms. The uncertainty is linked to the fact that in the medieval Hungarian Kingdom the Hungarian language had the highest prestige, much higher than Slavic languages or German. And it was common – maybe typical as well – that in a multilingual area,

the charters contained only or mainly the Hungarian name variant, even if in the local usage the other versions might be more well known. At the current stage of my research, I do not want to and cannot take a stand on this question. It is obvious that the linguistic reality was more complex at that time. We cannot exclude the possibility that these personal name + *-falva* structures were mostly in use. But we cannot reconstruct the circumstances of the name usage: who the name users were, when they used this form – whether only in formal situations or in informal ones as well, whether these forms were only written or also spoken, and so on. Besides, contrary to the lack of data, we cannot neglect the possibility that the name variants of other languages with lower prestige were also in use. But since we do not have written data, we know nothing certain about the existence, usage or form of the German and Slavic name variants (cf. Hoffmann, 2004, 2007, p. 91; Marek, 2015).

5.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to discuss the issue more thoroughly in this paper, but I would like to emphasize that the role of the charter writing norm simply cannot be ignored in linguistic-ethnic reconstruction. Its possible distorting effect should be neither underestimated nor overestimated. We have to find the balance between the two extremes. To move forward on these issues, it is first necessary to identify the practice of charter writing connected to linguistic prestige as deeply as possible, both for the different time periods and for the different centers where the charters were written. This kind of research, of course, is not simple from the aspect of methodology due to many uncertainties and the threat of circular reasoning. But I think and I hope that a very detailed philological exploration together with the application of the right methodology will take us closer to the solution of these problems.

Acknowledgements

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