

# Fertő River

## A Low Water Level Signal or Something Else?\*

ANDREA KISS



'Fluvius' – definit or general hydrological term?

'Fluvius' – similarly to 'stagnum' and 'lacus' – was used in the Middle Ages as an attribute together with the proper name of Fertő (Lake Fertő/Neusiedlersee, today located at the borderline of Austria and Hungary). The name of Fertő was used not only for the above-mentioned lakes but also for several other water bodies. Thus, the expression 'fluvius Fertő', without its context, can refer to other waters in the country.<sup>1</sup> In our case, nevertheless, it seemed or believed that the term 'fluvius' was used in connection with the lake itself. As we will see later, the references to the word 'fluvius' were applied by researchers as an indicator of contemporary environmental conditions of the lake. Thus, they made direct connection between the application of the word and the actual water level.

The 'fluvius' problem and its possible connection to the actual water level had a quite large impact on the theories of scholars studying Lake Fertő: the problem has already appeared in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The idea that the lake sometimes became a river induced real debates and long disputes again from the 1860s.<sup>3</sup> Probably the most detailed and influential opinion about the problem was given by Imre Nagy who argued that in the Arpadian Period and at the beginning of the fourteenth century the lake was much narrower and smaller than today. The clearest "proof" of this "fact" was the frequent use of 'stagnum Ferteu' and 'fluvius

---

\* Being part of a more extensive analysis of medieval Hungarian written evidence on weather and climate, the present paper was supported by the EU FP6 project entitled *Millennium*.

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see, for example, I. Szamota and Gy. Zolnai, *Magyar oklevélszótár*. [Hungarian charter-dictionary], Budapest 1902–1906. 'Fertő' appears there as *stagnum*, *prata*, *aqua*, *terre paludose*, *locus aquosus*, *locus lutosus* (p. 242–243).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, J. Kis, *A Fertő tavának geographiai, historiai és természeti leírása 1797-ben*. [Description of the geographical, historical and natural conditions of Lake Fertő in 1797] Pest 1816.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, I. Nagy, "Sopron múltja," [Past of Sopron], *Századok* 8 (1883), 12–52. G. Thirring, "A Fertő és vidéke," [The Fertő and its surroundings] *Földrajzi Közlemények* 14 (1886), 469–508.

*Ferteu*.<sup>4</sup> By the first half of the twentieth century this latter opinion became widely accepted and dominant in the scholarly literature.<sup>5</sup>

Probably the most realistic theory, however, was published by a hydrologist, Zoltán Károlyi, in 1966.<sup>6</sup> Instead of searching for the theoretical connections between the water level and the '*fluvius*' charters, on the basis of the hydrological conditions of the lake basin he pointed to the only hydrologically possible place as the most presumable location of the '*fluvius*': to the ford at Pomogy (Pamhagen, today in Austria henceforth and Sarród, between the basin of Lake Fertő and the Hanság (Wasen - A) wetlands.<sup>7</sup> Although from a scholarly point of view this latter opinion, which takes hydrological and geomorphologic conditions into account, sounds more realistic, the late nineteenth-century "low water level theory" was and still is more widely known and quoted among scholars.<sup>8</sup> It is also interesting to mention that probably the most respected Austrian Fertő-specialist, Fritz Kopf did not touch the '*fluvius*'-problem at all, although he studied the past water level changes of the lake.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Fertő as a waterflow: the contemporary charter evidence*

The term '*fluvius Fertő*' appeared in much more cases than that of the Balaton. However, since this term was also applied as an indicator of the contemporary water level and general environmental conditions of Lake Fertő, it is worth surveying the 'river'-problem in a detailed way (see Table 1):

<sup>4</sup> Nagy, "Sopron múltja," 38.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, J. Bárdosi, "A magyar Fertő halászata," [The fishery of the Hungarian Fertő] Sopron 1993, 22; L. Varga, "Katasztrófák a Fertő tó életében" [Catastrophes in the life of Lake Fertő], *Állattani Közlemények* 28 (1931), 133-134; D. Élő, *Sarród monográfiája* [Monography of Sarród] Budapest 1938, 19-20.

<sup>6</sup> Z. Károlyi, "A Fertő és Hanság vízügyi kérdéseinek mai állása," [Present stage of the hydrological questions of the Fertő-Hanság] in K. Stelczer, ed. *Beszámoló a Vízgazdálkodási Tudományos Kutató Intézet 1964. évi munkájából*, Budapest 1966, 170-187.

<sup>7</sup> Károlyi, "A Fertő és Hanság," 179-180.

<sup>8</sup> "We can find descriptions and reports already at some eleventh-century historians (*sic!*) who once called the Fertő as 'the Swamp of Moson' (*sic!*) and in other case as '*Fluvius Ferten.*' (*sic!*) This latter name was probably born in case of a very low water-level at the ford of Rust and Illmic", quotation from Z. Kováts and E. Kozmáné Tóth, eds. *A Fertő-tó természeti adottságai / Naturverhältnisse des Neusiedlersees*, Budapest 1985, 16.

<sup>9</sup> F. Kopf, "Wasserwirtschaftliche Probleme des Neusiedlersees und des Seewinkels," *Österreichische Wasserwirtschaft* 15 (1963), 192.

No.	Date of issue	Issued by	Donated to	Content	Referred place-name	Critical issue
1	May, 1318 (transcription: No. 4, 11 and 12)	king (Charles I)	Nicolaus and Mike, noblemen of Keych <sup>10</sup> (neighbouring village)	prohibition (against the neighbouring nobleman)	Vitézfölde (Apetlon-A)	UB 3: 109; <sup>11</sup> Nagy (based on No. 12; see also No. 11) 1: 81-82
2	16 September, 1318	king (Charles I)	Grange of Mönchhof	privilege, donation	Neunaigen (Mönchhof-A)	UB 3: 114
3	28 September, 1318	chapter of Győr	Heiligenkreuz (Mönchhof)	transcription, authorisation	See No. 2	UB 3: 117
4	January, 1324 (No. 1 transcribed)	king (Charles I)	Thomas, nobleman of Keych	corroboration	Vitézfölde	UB 3: 167
5	May, 1324 (with reference to an earlier royal charter)	chapter of Győr	Mönchhof	reambulation	Potfalu (Potersdorf-A)	UB 3: 175
6	June, 1330 (transcriptions: No. 7, 8)	king (Charles I)	royal town of Sopron	privilege, donation	Sopron	UB 4: 261
7	March, 1338 (No. 6 transcribed)	king (Charles I)	royal town of Sopron	privilege, donation	Sopron	UB 4: 245; Nagy 1: 141
8	April, 1339 (No. 6 transcribed)	king (Charles I)	royal town of Sopron	privilege, donation	Sopron	UB 4: 261; Házi 1: 73

<sup>10</sup> The village later deserted, today Götsch (a lake kept the name of the village), in Austria (Prov. Burgenland). For more details, see *Allgemeine Landestopographie des Burgenlandes*, Eisenstadt 1954, Vol. 1: 197.

<sup>11</sup> I. Lindeck-Pozza, et al., *Urkundenbuch des Burgenlandes und der angrenzenden Gebiete der Komitate Wieselburg, Ödenburg und Eisenburg*, 5 vols., Vienna 1955-2003, (henceforth: UB).

9	July, 1346	chapter of Esztergom	Paulus de Nagymarton and his relatives	landed property division	Pomogy (Pamhagen-A)	UB 5: 140; Nagy 1: 187
10	May, 1360	king's secret chancellor	Johannes and Nikolaus, sons of Kemen de Jak	landed property exchange <sup>12</sup>	Urkony <sup>13</sup>	Nagy 1: 325
11	June, 1410 (No. 4 transcribed)	Palatine (Nicolaus de Gara)	king (Sigismund)	dispute over property rights	Vitézfölde	DI.87832 <sup>14</sup>
12	Aug, 1410 (No. 4 transcribed)	chapter of Buda <sup>15</sup>	Master Jakab	transcription, authorisation	Vitézfölde	DI.1917 <sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> It was mentioned together with such other settlements as Győró, Ligvánd, Lózs and Urkony - all were located in Sopron County.

<sup>13</sup> Deserted medieval village partly at the southern edge and partly in the ford between the Hanság and Lake Fertő. To its exact location, see: A. Kiss and I. Paszternák, "Hol volt Urkony? Történeti földrajzi és régészeti adalékok egy középkori falu topográfiájához," [Where was Urkony located? Historical geographical and archeological data on the topography of a deserted medieval village] *Soproni Szemle* 52:4 (2000), 402-419.

<sup>14</sup> E. Mályusz, I. Borsa, *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár* [Chartulary of the Sigismund period] Vols. 1-9, Budapest 1951-2004, 2: 378. - with reference to DI.83060. This latter charter, however, refers to a certain Moch possession in Hontvár County, and as such, has nothing to do with our present discussion. In my opinion, our reference charter must be DI.87832 instead of DI.83060. In the original charter of DI.87832, issued in June 1410, the following text is included: "*in eadem Wytezfelde quinquaginta Jugera in se continente et exceptis tribus locis piscature in fluvii seu lacu feyertho in ipsa possessione Wytezfelde aparte orientali existentibus.*" In spite of this UB 3: 109-110. suggests the reading "Flyertho."

<sup>15</sup> According to UB 3: 109, it was issued by the chapter of Vasvár. On the other hand, the chapter of Buda is mentioned in the original text (DI.1917), to which I. Nagy, *Vármegye története. Oklevéltár.* [A history of Sopron County. Chartulary] 2 vols. Sopron 1889, 1: 82. also refers.

<sup>16</sup> UB 3: 109. referring to the original charter: DI.1917. Here, my reading is the following: "... *poss Vjtezfelde vocate in Comitatu Soproniensis Iuxta fluuium ferthev ... terra seu possessio vjtezfelde vocata in Comitatu Soproniensis inter possessionem keijch et Tard iuxta fluuium ferthev existens ... exceptis tribus locis pjscature in fluuio seu loco fertew in ... possessione vjtezfelde aparte orientali existentibus....*"

13	July, 1416	chapter of Posega	Ilko, daughter of Johannes de Chorna	donation	Chyl (Rust-A)	R-Z 1: 150 <sup>17</sup>
14	Oct, 1418 (only in transcription - see No. 15)	<i>vicecomites</i> and noble judges of Rábaköz region	Franciscus de Asszonfalva and Gregorius de Osth	inquiry ordered	Széplak	DI.86274; Mályusz-Borsa 6: 590
15	Nov, 1418 (No. 14 transcribed)	<i>vicecomites</i> and noble judges of Rábaköz region	Franciscus de Asszonyfalva and Gregorius de Osth	inquiry held: proved complain	Széplak	DI.86274; Mályusz and Borsa 6: 616
16	March, 1435	king (Sigismund)	Paulus and Vilhelmus de Frakno	corroboration	Pomogy	Nagy 2: 230
17	1520	(stewart)	(Kanizsai-family)	inventory: incomes	Domain of Sárvár and Kapuvár	DI.37179: 3, 4
18	1521	(stewart)	(Kanizsai-family)	inventory: incomes	Domain of Sárvár and Kapuvár	DI.37179: 50, 51
19	1522	(stewart)	(Kanizsai-family)	inventory: incomes	Domain of Sárvár and Kapuvár	DI.26231: 13, 30

<sup>17</sup> B. Radványzsky and L. Závodszy, *A Héderváry-család oklevéltára*. [Chartulary of the Héderváry family] Budapest 1909, Vol. 1. See also, Mályusz-Borsa, *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár*, 5: 563.

Out of the presently known '*fluvius Fertő*' occurrences sixteen are to be found in charters while three others appear in late medieval inventories. Ten (No. 1-10) were issued in the fourteenth, six in the fifteenth (No. 11-16) and three in the early sixteenth centuries (No. 17). However, out of the ten fourteenth-century charters, two are simple transcriptions (No. 3 and 8) while in case of the other two - beyond the simple transcription - Fertő river is also mentioned in the main text (No. 4 and 7). Out of the six fifteenth-century charters, three are transcriptions (No. 11, 12 and 15, but the last one is a transcript of a fifteenth-century charter) and three are originals where '*fluvius*' name was directly used (No. 13, 14, 16). Additionally, the three sixteenth-century inventories are also contemporary. These proportions are important, because there is a clear evidence that both in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Fertő river appeared as an original, contemporary ("alive") term and not merely as a simple transcription. Thus, on the basis of dates, '*fluvius Fertő*' was an actively used term in the fourteenth, fifteenth as well as in the early sixteenth centuries.

### *Spatial distribution of local names*

Studying the geographical distribution of the villages to which charters primarily refer, the proportions become even more interesting. Seven charters still refer directly to the area around and in the ford between Lake Fertő and the Hanság wetlands (No. 1, 4, 9-12, 16), but No. 11 and 12 are simple transcriptions. Additionally, we also have to count here with No. 14 and 15 (though 15 is mere a transcription of 14), since the village of Széplak is located not far from the ford, either (the neighboring village, Sarród, is already located at the ford). However, it is much more difficult to find any connection between the rest of the referred settlements, apart from the fact that all landowners (or those who ordered the charter) lived in the Fertő-area or possessed lands which were directly located at the shoreline of Lake Fertő.

Out of these extant eight occurrences, three early fourteenth-century charters refer to Sopron (No. 6-8); actually, to a certain *tributum* of the Fertő river, possessed by Sopron.<sup>18</sup> Another three is connected to the Cistercian grange of

<sup>18</sup> The '*tributum Fertő*'-problem is especially complicated because it seems that there was not only one such "tax", but different '*tributum Fertő*' was levied, for example, in the village of Meggyes (e.g., in 1311, cf. Nagy, *Sopron vármegye*, 1: 73; 1352: Nagy, *Sopron vármegye*, 1: 237, etc.), at the western shoreline, close to Sopron, some other *tributum* was mentioned in Széplak (1335: Nagy, *Sopron vármegye*, 1: 132: "*tributum ... in pratis Ferteu*"), and at Sarród (1420: Nagy, *Sopron vármegye*, 2: 48: „*cum tributo aque seu lacu Fertew vocati*" - at the ford) all connected to the lake. See also: J. Belitzky, *Sopron vármegye története. [History of Sopron county]* Budapest 1938, 1: 640-641.

To the lake *tributum*, mentioned in general, see for example: Nagy, *Sopron vármegye*, 1: 241 (1353): "*medieta tributi Fertew*" J. Házi, ed. *Sopron szabad királyi város története. Oklevelek. [A history of the royal exempt town of Sopron. Diplomatarium]* 2 ser. Sopron 1921-1943, Ser. 1, Vol. 3: 342 (1451): "*tributum nostrum de lacu Ferthe*;" Házi, *Sopron*, 1/4: 242 (1457): "*ut sibi ex parte tributi Fferthew fecistis*;" Házi, *Sopron*, 1/5: 108 (1277/1317/1464): "*Ad hec volumus (Ladislaus IV), quod medietatem tributi Ferthew, quam*

Mönchhof/Barátudvar (Mönchhof-A) and its possession (No. 2, 3, 5), Pátfalva (Podersdorf-A), located at the eastern shoreline of the lake – dated approximately to the same period. In the sixteenth-century inventories of Kapuvár domain (No. 17-19) the incomes of the river were mentioned either without any localization (though clearly belonging to the lake) or together with the name of a fisher from Hegykő, a settlement located at the southern shoreline of Lake Fertő. However, we have no information whether the mentioned person paid for the fishing rights of a particular area of the ford (which was and still is one of the richest areas in fish at Fertő),<sup>19</sup> or he paid for fishing in other places or in the whole lake.

Last but not least, the biggest “mystery” comes with the early fifteenth-century appearance of Rust ‘*iuxta fluvium fertu*’, since this settlement is located at the western shoreline of the lake (No. 13). Out of the nineteen data, this is the only charter evidence which connects the Fertő river with the Illmic-Rust area where several late nineteenth-century researchers located the ‘*fluvius*’. Mönchhof, Podersdorf and Rust were all located at the shoreline of the lake or their possessions extended to the shoreline. Thus, in the last cases the name ‘*fluvius*’ in itself could only refer to the whole lake; on the basis of the available information, however, no specific area can be determined.

As we can see, merely on the basis of the location of the toponyms no clear conclusion can be drawn. Nevertheless, it seems that around half of the charters refer to the close surroundings of the ford between the lake and the wetland area.

#### *People, authorities and the main reasons of issuing charter evidence*

It is also important to know to what extent were the people who demanded or issued the charters could be aware of the local environmental conditions. In case of the noblemen of Keych (No. 1 and 4) it is quite clear that they – living at the actual spot (in the neighboring village) – had clear information about the exact conditions, especially because they even specified the three fishing places in the ‘river’ itself. It is also quite obvious that the authors of the early sixteenth-century inventories had to be well-aware of the place they were writing about. However, what can we do with the other cases? The picture is quite clear: with the

---

*Bela, avus noster, et Stephanus, pater noster, ..., pro reparacione et conservacione turrium... concesserant;* Házi, *Sopron*, 1/6: 148 (1496): “*semper et antiquo lacu sive stagnum Fewrthew nuncupatum, cum media pars illius lacus sive tributum eiusdem, ... libere et secure piscari habuerint,...*”; Házi, *Sopron*, 1/7: 387 (1530): “*ob solucionem annuam tributum Fertew, vulgo reciale nuncupatum.*”

In German documents, presumably the same ‘*tributum Fertő*’ appears under the name of ‘*seemaut*’. See, for example: Házi, *Sopron*, 1/3: 33; the *urbarium* of Kismarton/Eisenstadt (1515: DL.258610) – for more ‘*Seemaut*’ reference, see Note 6.

<sup>19</sup> See for example: 1356: Nagy, *Sopron vármegye*, 1: 257, 1558: Nagy, *Sopron vármegye*, 2: 640: “*... necnon vadi in fine eiusdem possessionis Sarrod super stagnum Ferthew versus possessionem Pamagh tendentis, piscaturarumque eiusdem stagni Ferthew ad eandem porcionem pertinencium...*”

Note the ‘*vadium*’ which indirectly refers to a road crossing the wetlands from the north to the south.

exception of King Sigismund of Hungary (1387–1437), all the others who ordered or asked for the charters to be issued were not only landowners in the close vicinity of the lake, either in Sopron or in Moson counties, but in most cases the centre of their possessions were located in these two counties, not far from the lake. So, those who asked for the charters presumably came from the area and they therefore had to know it well enough not to make a big mistake with basic topographic names.

It is a rather interesting point that almost one third of all the charters (seven) were issued by the king and two others by his close “colleagues,” namely the palatine and the secret chancellor. The fact that those who asked for these charters went that far and found it important to have the highest legislation in their problem shows the general significance of their problems – or that of the reference area.

In the two cases of four charters (No. 3, 5, 14, 15) local authorities (chapter of Győr, *vicecomites* and local noble judges) issued the documents to record local affairs. In both cases a local survey was needed. Thus, while in half of the cases the highest authorities issued the charters which fact shows a special importance of either the actual legal problems, persons (who asked for the charter) or the geographical location, there are examples for local debates where local legal bodies issued the documents referring to Fertő river, after making a local survey to give a correct proof about the exact circumstances of the actual legal case.

Probably the most important key to answer the Fertő-river question is, however, why all these charters were written and how much their descriptions are connected to specific lands, waters as well as other features of the area. The answer is not obvious, since there is only one charter, with perambulation of boundaries, in which the ‘river’ can only mean the (eastern shoreline of the) lake at Podersdorf (No. 5). In most other cases the river-name is applied to locate certain settlements (“*iuxta/prope fluvium fertu*” – see No. 1–4, 9–16) or fishing places (No. 1). Except for the case of Rust (No. 13), all the ‘*iuxta/prope fluvium ferteu*’ mentionings are connected to settlements at the above-mentioned ford (No. 1–4, 9–12, 14–16). The rest of the cases refer to the half of the ‘*tributum*’, tax in the Fertő river (No. 6–8): a donation asked by the citizens of Sopron and donated by the king. Additionally, the early sixteenth-century ‘*Inventarium super fluvium ferthev*’ sounds to have a somewhat similar meaning of the river – since the rights (and the whole area) indeed belonged to the powerful Kanizsai family.

#### *Lake or river? The testimony of other contemporary charters*

Thus, with the exception of the reambulation of Podersdorf and the case of Rust, all the ‘*iuxta fluvium fertu*’ settlements were located around the ford. In other cases of Sopron and the *inventaria* no direct evidence is given in the source concerning location, but – as a possible option – there is a good chance that it was also geographically connected to the ford. In the late eighteenth century for example, in contemporary maps or eighteenth–nineteenth century written



evidence,<sup>20</sup> certain water flows existed in the above-mentioned area, between Pomogy and Sarród.

What do other circumstances tell us about the question?

Most of the above-mentioned settlements possess other charters as well in which they are mentioned as villages located simply at Fertő or at 'lacus', 'stagnum' Fertő.<sup>21</sup> The same is true for 'tributum fertew' which exact meaning, as we could already see, has not been properly analyzed and explained yet. Moreover, in the case of charter No. 16, Pomogy village is located as 'Pomagħ iuxta lacum seu fluvium ferthew,' thus, among the reference charters in one case (and its transcriptions) the term 'fluvius' is used as a synonym of 'lacus'.<sup>22</sup> The Fertő river of the 1520–1522-inventories – in their time – are also without parallel: in all the other remaining late fifteenth-early sixteenth-century *urbaria* and *inventaria* (as well as charters of the same time), if it mentioned at all, Fertő is either alone in its single form or with 'lacus', but never appears with 'fluvius' again.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g. MOL S80 No. 4/2; First Military Survey, Coll. V. Sec. 10 (1784), etc.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Rust: Nagy 2: 307 (1441): "Rwsth penes lacum Fertew;" Urkony: UB 5: 63 (1344): "Eghasawrkon ... iuxta lacum Fertew existentis;" Nagy, *Sopron vármegye*, 2: 99 (1425): "Urkon iuxta stagnum Fertew." Some of the neighbouring villages of the same period: Nagy, *Sopron vármegye*, 1: 647 (1411): "penes lacum Ferthew, que terra Lamperti vocitaretur;" Nagy, *Sopron vármegye*, 1: 618 (1410): "Bala iuxta lacum Ferthew" (at the ford); UB 4: 246 (1338-referring to Sásony/Widen am see - A): "Nouo Predio domini regis et iuxta lacum Fertheu"; Nagy 2: 48 (1420): "de possessione seu terra ipsorum Sarod vocata ... iuxta lacum Fertew vocatum," etc.

<sup>22</sup> Since repetition, the application of words with approximately the same meaning (*dedimus, donavimus et contulimus*), was widely accepted in medieval charters, there is also a possibility that here we encounter the same situation. In legal sense, there is no fundamental difference between such water bodies as rivers or lakes. It is interesting to mention that the *Tripartitum*, the thematic collection of the early sixteenth-century Hungarian customary law (first published in 1517) – referring to water – never uses the word 'lacus', but frequently mentions *aqua*, or *aquarum decursibus*, sometimes also *piscina*, *piscatura* and only once *fluvius*. See S. Kolosvári and K. Óvári, eds., *Magyar Törvénytár. Werbőczy István Hármaskönyve. Corpus Iuris Hungarici. Decretum Tripartitum*, Budapest 1897, Pars 1, Tituli 24, 85, 87, 133; Pars 2, Titulus 14.

<sup>23</sup> Beyond the charter evidence collected in Kiss 1999, we are in the fortunate position that the Fertő-area is probably one of the richest in preserved *inventaria* and *urbaria* in Hungary. Thus, inventories preserved for example from 1492: "piscaverint...super lacum" (Dl. 36992) – referring to the domain of Sárvár where *ferthew* in its simple form is mentioned; then the application of the term 'Seemaut' of 1500/1510 (also with reference to the content of the 1526-*urbarium* of Forchtenstein, and whole reference to the *Seemaut* content of the similarly unpublished *urbarium* of Eisenstadt, 1510) in L. Prickler, *Das älteste Urbar der Grafschaft Forchtenstein von 1500/1510*, Eisenstadt 1998, 9, 116; "proventus ferthew introitus", „Introitus census lacij (or lakw) ferthew", „pecunie ferthew introitus" in 1520, 1521 and 1522 (Dl. 26222) – exactly in the same time as our references inventories mentioning "fluvius fertew" – referring to the domain of Sárvár; "Registrum ... super lacum ferthew" (1523: Dl. 26264 – domain of Sárvár); 'Seemaut' references of 1515 (Dl. 258610: 144, 232 – domain of Eisenstadt).

Thus, checking the Fertő river charters, one would suggest a relatively clear solution of the Fertő river problem. Since almost all the villages specified by the 'iuxta' term are located exactly at or near the ford, and even the *tributum* on Fertő river would be understandable if it refers to the ford which was an important fishing area and the best place for crossing the wetland from all directions,<sup>24</sup> one would presume that the *fluvius* is an exact geographical location: the ford between Lake Fertő and the connected wetlands of the Hanság.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, in the light of other circumstances, such as the application and meaning of the term 'tributum Fertő' in a quite clear way, namely as a fishing right, together with the fact that most of our reference settlements were, in other charters, located at 'lacus' or 'stagnum Fertő', the above-mentioned conclusion becomes less evident.

Why all these questions are important to study in such a detailed way?

Among others, probably the most important reason is to understand the medieval meaning of 'fluvius' in its context; whether or not it was such a clear and 'determining' term which may provide us with information precise enough that even the contemporary water level of the Fertő could be detected. Even if there is a possibility that the river meant the ford between the Fertő and the Hanság, the relatively large number of reference charters do not provide clear evidence – thus, the river could mean the whole lake as well. On the basis of all the counted data, therefore, we can state that the 'fluvius Fertő'-charters clearly do not support the idea of low water level conditions.

---

It is worth noting that still several other late medieval *urbaria*, referring to the same area can be found in Austrian private collections, especially in the castle of Forchtenstein (related to domains Forchtenstein and Eisenstadt) and probably also in the Cistercian complex of Heiligenkreuz, where chances for access are still rather limited. For the reference of some of these *urbaria*, see Prickler 1998, XXX–XXXI. As we could see earlier, Prickler quotes or refers to the contents of many of these *urbaria* (e.g., the *urbaria* of Forchtenstein, 1526 and Eisenstadt, 1510) in his valuable book.

<sup>24</sup> In the high and later middle ages, we have to count with the usage and existence of the road leading from the north (Danube) towards the south, at the eastern shoreline of the lake through Nezsider, Védeny, Pátfalú, Ilmic, Valla and Pomogy. Although compared to the main market and military roads of the country it had only secondary importance, still it was far more significant than other roads of local interest in the area. Crossing the ford at Sarród, it led into another important market route of east-west direction, located at the southern shoreline of the lake. See *Allgemeine Landestopographie* 1954, 39. There is a possibility that a charter issued in 1420 (Nagy, *Sopron vármegye*, 2: 48) already refers to the tax (*tributum Fertő*) paid for crossing the ford (similar to several sixteenth–seventeenth-century *Urbaria* of the area where the case is properly described) at Sarród. Nevertheless, since the meaning of this *tributum* can as well refer to the fishing rights, at the moment we cannot draw any adequate conclusions.

<sup>25</sup> Since the rivers and streams flowing into Lake Fertő and the western Hanság wetlands had consequently the same names throughout the medieval period, it is not very likely that the 'fluvius' would have been any of them. Moreover, non of the 'iuxta' place-names were located at these rivers or streams.

*Other than a river? Detecting medieval water level of the Fertő*

After all descriptions the question could be raised whether or not there are other, more reliable indicators in the medieval written pieces of evidence which may provide us with contemporary evidence concerning the actual water level conditions of the lake. One of such possibilities is connected to the frequently used hydrological term of the 'fok'. This Hungarian word in medieval and early modern, modern terminology usually refers to a short water-flow which links two water bodies with each other: one is usually a 'living' water body, in most cases a river, less frequently a lake with its low-plain inundation area located over the banks of the river (or lake).<sup>26</sup>

Lake Fertő also had at least one *fok*, documented in the 1430s. This *fok* led the water from the Fertő towards its low-lying inundation area, presumably separated by a row of sand dunes. In this inundation area there was at least one fishpond which gained large interest in the 1430s and as such, relatively detailed information is available on its actual state and the way of its utilization in 1434 and 1435.<sup>27</sup> The periodic (fish)pond of the Csitvándi family located in the inundation area of the Fertő at its northeastern shorelines nearby the village of Csitvánd (today deserted close to Gols in Austria), entirely depended on the water level conditions of the Lake: in case of low water level, the pond dried up while high water level brought back the water – in this case the basin functioned as a fishpond again.<sup>28</sup> In a charter, issued in connection with a legal procedure, it is clearly stated that in 1434 there was not only enough water in the (fish)pond, but the fish was taken away from the pond which suggests a period (at least some months) of higher water level conditions of Lake Fertő.

*Fertő as a River – An overview*

The earlier, but partly still recent scholarly literature connected the term 'Fertő river' to the low waterlevel of the lake. On the other hand, a hydrologist, Zoltán Károlyi pointed to a definite geographical location, namely the ford of the Lake and the Hanság wetlands as the only possible place of the Fertő river. Thus, in order to decide over the water level-river question, the aim of the present paper was to collect the available evidence referring to the 'River.'

Being mainly local landowners and/or authorities among the interested parties, based on their origin, the people involved in the legal processes were usually well-aware of the geographical conditions of the area the charters

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g. B. Andrásfalvy, "A Sárköz és környező Duna menti területek ősi ártéri gazdálkodása és vízhasználata a szabályozás előtt," [Early floodplain management and water exploitation in the Sárköz and neighbouring areas along the Danube] *Vízügyi Történelmi Füzetek* 6 (1973): 74 p.; Z. Fodor, *Az ártéri gazdálkodás fokai a Tisza mentén*. [The fok-s of floodplain management along the Tisza river] I. Magyar Földrajzi Konferencia, Tanulmánykötet CD-ROM, Szeged 2001, 1–10. For the medieval meanings, see e.g. A. Kiss, F. Piti, "A fertői fok," [The 'fok' of Fertő] *Soproni Szemle* 59:2 (2005), 166–168.

<sup>27</sup> Df.278003.

<sup>28</sup> Kiss-Piti, "A fertői fok," 172–178.

referred to. As far as the geographical distribution is concerned, out of the nineteen cases nine could be directly connected to the above-mentioned ford, while others were either not clearly specified (three) or connected to other settlements along the shoreline of the Lake (in seven cases). Thus, while a clear connection can be detected in the geographical location of the majority of Fertő river mentionings, the existence of other Fertő-river charters suggests that this terminology cannot be automatically connected to the ford, and in the latter cases the 'river' might as well meant the whole lake itself.

At the same time when the 'river' term was used, the Fertő also appeared in charters as a lake or a stagnant body of water and thus, the term cannot be directly connected to the low water levels of the Lake. As such, the 'river' term is not in any sense the signal of the actual low water level of the Fertő. Another, more reliable indicator of the water level can be the case when in the mid-1430s the lake extended to its inundation area and filled up the temporary fishpond of Csitvánd which suggests higher water level conditions of the lake for an unknown period of time.