

# WINE DISTRICTS, WINE REGIONS, VINEYARDS – THE CONSTRUCTION AND REPRESENTATION OF BORDERS IN THE HUNGARIAN WINE CULTURE

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**Abstract:** The article attempts to give an overview of how the different types of borders in Hungarian vine and wine culture can be manifested. In addition to the borders separating the different wine regions, there can also be borders within the individual vine-growing areas. The central purpose of the delimitation of a wine area is to establish a distinctive identity for the wines produced within it, and provide a means whereby the provenance of those wines can be guaranteed. The question and problem of drawing, strengthening and representing the borders can certainly throw light on new aspects of the grape and wine culture that can be regarded as related to the interests of vine-growing communities and to conflicts between them.

**Keywords:** Borders, wine, vineyard, wine regions, Hungary

Anyone who tries to find their bearings in today's world of wines will quickly notice that he or she constantly comes across different kinds of borders, basically intended to distinguish the wines from each other. Nowadays, in connection with the wine market that is being reshaped under the influence of globalisation, there is more and more discussion about the contrast between wines of the Old World and the New World and of the borderlines between them that can take various forms and at the same time represent a different philosophy of wine-making. Over the centuries the borderlines that separated and still separate the different wine regions from each other took shape in a special way. In the case of Hungary we can see that interest groups active in the areas and joined together in different communities are striving to divide up the wine-producing areas into smaller units. This can be explained in several different ways. In the majority of cases the drawing of borders is aimed at protecting the origin and quality, creating an individual image, and in this way at serving economic interests. However, within wine-producing countries there are not only borders that separate the different wine regions. They can also be found within wine-producing areas and their creation may serve various interests. They can express public administration purposes, but we must not forget, for example, the borders drawn to protect

crops that separate different units of protection and can be regarded as temporary because it is only prior to the harvest that they become visible.

The central purpose of the delimitation of a wine area is to establish a distinctive identity for the wines produced within it, and provide a means whereby the provenance of those wines can be guaranteed. It is based primarily upon the assumption that different environments give rise to wines of different character. Classification of various wine estates and vineyards is in general a recent phenomenon, dictated by the increasingly sophisticated wine market. At the heart of this legislation was the establishment of a specific area from which winegrowers were able to obtain higher prices for their wines compared with those produced elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

In our study we attempt to throw light on the connections between Hungarian grape and wine culture and the tracing and representation of different types of borders related to it. In the case of wine culture the borders can mark not only the areas of the wine districts and regions and the individual vineyards, but can also express differences between wine consumers who, belonging to different social strata, drink different types and kinds of wine. We are also interested in the creation of borders inside the wine regions, which has become very important in the last few years.

From our viewpoint the creation of the borders raises many interesting questions because they convey basic information about contradictions, different economic and market interests or even the representation of identity. Some of these borders can also be grasped visually with the help of a material aid. Others exist only symbolically and remain invisible for the outsider.

## CLASSIFICATION OF HUNGARIAN WINE REGIONS

Both the topographical and climatic conditions, as well as the soil in the greater part of the territory of historical Hungary are suitable for the cultivation of grapes. Various regions within the Carpathian Basin became *historical wine regions*, producing quality wine as a commodity. Over the centuries their size and number changed and was modified due to historical, public administration, political, economic, natural and ecological factors.<sup>2</sup> Beside the historical wine regions there are also *local grape-growing areas* generally serving to meet the growers' own needs. On the basis of the differing natural conditions, 19th–20th century geographical, historical and ethnological literature discussing viticulture and viniture in the Carpathian Basin often makes a sharp distinction between the wine regions in the *mountainous and hilly areas* and on the *sandy plains (Great Plain)*, regarding the growing areas, and the quality and reputation of the wines. The wines from the hilly regions are

<sup>1</sup> Since the classic antiquity, wines from certain regions tended to be called after the place of their production. In the 18th century the most well-known legal vineyard delimitation was introduced in the Douro valley of northern Portugal. The aim of this legislation was to obtain higher prices for wines produced in the specific area in the Upper Douro Valley. In the 19th century the most famous geographical delimitation emerged in France. The classification of the wines of the Médoc, and Lavalley's classification of the wines of the Cote d'Or dated back from 1855. The French taking a first step in 1905 towards the creation of a national system of wine control based on the delimitation of areas of origin. Numerous systems were also developed in Germany, notably the German wine law of 1930. UNWIN 1996: 276–283, 311–325.

<sup>2</sup> ÉGETŐ 2001: 529.

described as being of excellent quality, full-bodied and rich in aroma, and those from the Great Plain as light table wines.

A wine region could be named for an important grape- and wine-producing settlement (e.g. Tokaj, Eger), or a larger geographical area (e.g. *Érmellék*, *Szerémség*), or the county or public administration unit (e.g. *Zala*, *Tolna*).<sup>3</sup> A typical geographical name referring to a wine region is *Hegyalja*, which is now identified with the Tokaj vine-growing region, while earlier it was used to designate a number of areas (e.g. *Aradi-*, *Pozsonyi-*, *Baranyai-*, *Erdélyi-Hegyalja*).<sup>4</sup>

The first and for a long while the only wine region in Hungary with a precisely defined area was Tokaj-Hegyalja.<sup>5</sup> The royal ordinance of 1737 declared that wine originating from the settlements named was equal in value to Tokaj and could therefore be sold in barrels marked with the same stamp.<sup>6</sup>

In the first half of the 18th century Mátyás Bél undertook the first systematic mapping of the wine regions in the Carpathian Basin. He wrote descriptions of a total of 6 wine regions in Northern Hungary (Tokaj, Sopron, Kőszeg, Buda, Szentgyörgy, Miskolc).<sup>7</sup> In 1832–33 Ferenc Schams published a work in German (*Ungarns Weinbau...*) identifying 14 wine regions, and also classifying them by quality. His classification does not include the territory of Transylvania, but he discusses Croatia as a separate unit. He discusses most of the wine regions on the basis of the counties and others are defined by the borders and vicinity of larger grape-growing free royal towns or market towns. Within individual counties he describes only the renowned wine-producing settlements and areas (e.g. within Zala County the area beside Lake Balaton), and within the larger counties he identifies larger sub-areas, each characterised by the name of a prominent settlement (e.g. 8 within Pest County).<sup>8</sup> The agricultural statistics published by Károly Galgóczi in 1855 divide Hungarian wines and wine regions into four major groups on the basis of their national or local or small regional significance. Within the group of “nationally renowned and most outstanding wines and wine regions” – taking into account further quality differences – he makes a distinction between the regions producing aszú wine, quality red wines and table wines.

<sup>3</sup> ÉGETŐ 2001: 529–530.

<sup>4</sup> ÉGETŐ 2001: 529–530.

<sup>5</sup> The wine region situating in northeast Hungary nowadays comprises 5800 hectares vineyards and 28 settlements, including Tokaj, which has given its name to the area as a whole. Two villages (Kistoronya, Szőlőskő) were ceded to Czechoslovakia after the First World War which resulted many conflicts. Slovakia is making ceaseless attempts to expand the Tokaj appellation in its territory far beyond. The volcanic origins of the soils and the presence of volcanic debris (known as tuff) results in a high level of trace elements, giving many wines a high degree of minerality. The Bodrog and Tisza rivers create specific climatic conditions which allow the local grape varieties (Furmint, Hárslevelű etc.) to concentrate their sugar content in the fall, either as a result of Botrytis cinerea or by allowing the grapes to dry out on the vine. Wines have been made using aszú (dry or shrunken) grapes since the second half of the 16th century. We cannot be certain that the botrytis fungus was also recognized as early as the late 16th century, rather than the traditional attribution to the mid-17th century. By the 18th century sweet wines from the region had been introduced to the French and Russian court. ROHÁLY – MÉSZÁROS – LAMBERT-GÓCS 2006: 699–700. ; DOMINÉ 2004: 702.

<sup>6</sup> BALASSA 1991: 18.

<sup>7</sup> ÉGETŐ 1993: 17.

<sup>8</sup> SCHAMS 1832–33.

In his viticultural statistics published in 1875 Károly Keleti distinguishes 25 wine regions in the territory of Hungary, 6 in Transylvania, and a further 6 in Croatia–Slavonia amounting to a total of 37 wine regions for the whole of the Hungarian empire. The 25 wine regions in Hungary are located in four main groups or viticultural regions: to the East and West of the Danube, and the East and West of the Tisza. The classification largely follows the public administration or county borders but in cases extends beyond them: the grape-growing areas of several counties and their settlements form a single wine region (e.g. the wine region of Vas County with the North-western part of Zala County). The publication also contains two maps: one on the vine-growing areas of Hungary and the other showing the distribution according to the colour of the wine produced.<sup>9</sup> Keleti's statistics were used to make the first official classification of wine regions in 1880, and in 1884 a viticultural map of Hungary and a viticultural register.<sup>10</sup> The second official classification was made on the basis of the 1893 Wine Act and defined 22 wine regions. This classification was more independent of the county divisions and applied a system of criteria for the classification of wine regions based on production and historical traditions; only settlements producing quality wine were classified in the given historical wine region.<sup>11</sup> Apart from minor modifications, this classification remained valid right up to the first world war. The change in classifications in the late 19th century was also related to the destruction caused by *Phylloxera* that resulted in changes in the growing areas, extent and importance of individual wine regions.

As a consequence of the redrawing of the borders by the Treaty of Trianon (1920), around 2/3 of Hungary's vine-growing territories remained within the new state borders while close to 2/3 of the total population, the majority of the wine consumers, remained in the separated territories. The Trianon borders also cut across what had formerly been single wine regions, for example a number of settlements belonging to the Tokaj wine region went to what was then Czechoslovakia and the vine-growing areas of the Ruszt–Sopron–Pozsony wine region were split along the borders of Hungary, Austria and Czechoslovakia.<sup>12</sup> The new classification identifying 17 wine regions within the new borders of Hungary officially came into force in 1924.

With the modification of the state borders, that is, with the return of part of the territories lost after the First World War, the number of wine regions also changed. In the early 1940s there were 21 recognised wine regions, of which four (*Bereg, Érmellék, Szerednye, Erdély-Marosmente*) had returned to the system of Hungarian vine and wine economy together with the previously lost territories.

A substantial further modification was made after the Second World War, in 1959 when the official regulation identified 14 wine regions and a number of areas called *places producing good wine*.<sup>13</sup> From the 1970s a new change could be observed in the structure of the Hungarian wine regions: their number increased. It rose in 1977 from 14 to 15, then in 1983 to 16.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> KELETI 1875.

<sup>10</sup> HANTAL KFT. 2003.

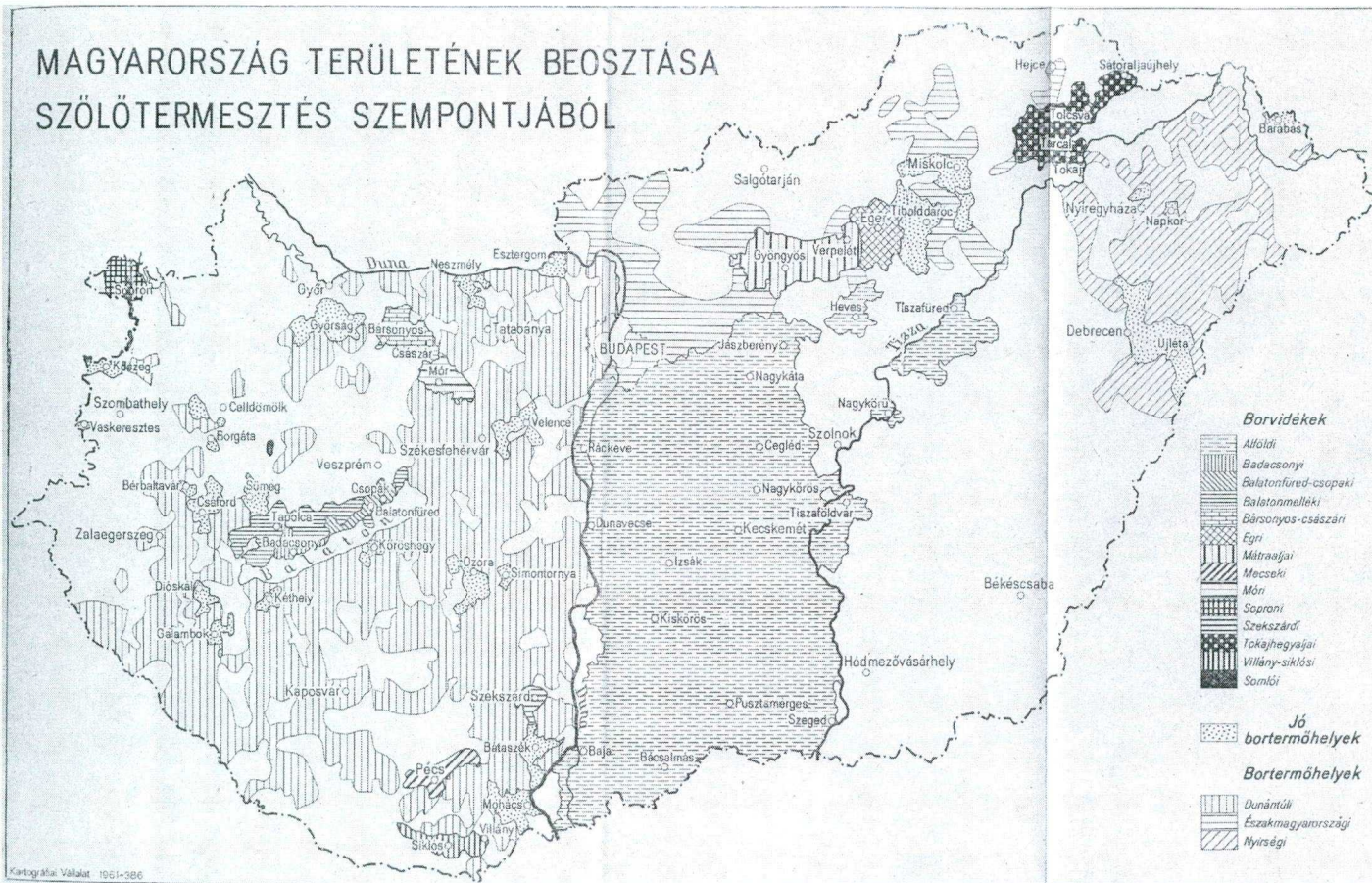
<sup>11</sup> A FÖLDMIVELÉSÜGYI M. KIR. MINISTER KIADVÁNYAI [Publications of the Hungarian Royal Minister for Agriculture] 1898.

<sup>12</sup> ÉGETŐ 2001: 531.

<sup>13</sup> ÉGETŐ 1992: 342.

<sup>14</sup> KADÁR 1998: 7.

# MAGYARORSZÁG TERÜLETÉNEK BEOSZTÁSA SZŐLŐTERMESZTÉS SZEMPONTJÁBÓL



Act CXXI of 1997 made considerable changes in the territory of the earlier wine regions. An especially large change occurred in the Kunság wine area that replaced the Kiskunság wine region, now comprising not only the wine-producing settlements of Bács-Kiskun County but also places in Pest County belonging to the vine-growing area of the Great Plain, wine-producing settlements in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County, and even the vineyards on sandy soil around the town of Heves.<sup>15</sup>

The number and extent of Hungarian wine regions changed in a distinctive way in the course of the 20th century. Similarly to the classification of 1893, there are 22 wine districts in the present territory of Hungary, due principally to the division into smaller units of the vine-growing areas remaining within the present borders. The Great Plain wine region covering largely the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers, has now been divided into three smaller wine areas, the Csongrád, the Hajós-Baja and the Kunság areas.

The basic unit in the definition of growing places in Hungary is thus the wine region which has similar climatic, topographical and soil endowments in the administrative area of a number of settlements, vineyards with a characteristic selection of varieties and methods of cultivation and distinctive wine-producing traditions, and where wines of a distinctive character are produced. To be classified in a wine district, a settlement must have at least 7% of its agricultural land registered as a vine-growing area or a wine store dealing with traditional wine-making.<sup>16</sup>

These classifications too, aimed to draw the borders of the wine regions not mainly in line with the public administration borders but on the basis of similar natural and historical conditions, varieties grown and production and processing practices. Fifteen of them are in Transdanubia, that is the area south and west from river Danube. The other seven situated east from it in the Hungarian Plain and in the northern part of the country.

The wine routes serving the purposes of wine tourism (hospitality, wine tasting, events), and presenting the local characteristics of the grape and wine culture also represent special ways of marking space. In Hungary the first wine route was marked in Villány–Siklós in 1994 based on the French model. There are now around 30 wine routes in the country. Some of the wine routes also cross the borders of wine regions and operate within the frame of a major wine region.<sup>17</sup> Another new phenomenon is that, thanks to the rearrangement of the Schengen borders, the borders between the wine regions of different countries are also becoming permeable. A good example of this is the Murania Tourism Zone that has been functioning since 2007, linking the South-western part of Hungary (Zala County) and the North-east region of Slovenia (Mura region), and also includes a separate wine tourism programme.<sup>18</sup> It is possible from 2000 for those wine regions which have similar natural conditions or wine-making traditions to form wine districts. In the past few years 8 *wine districts*, each grouping several wine regions were formed in Hungary mainly for the purpose of interest protection and marketing. In 2002 the Csongrád, the Hajós-Baja and the Kunsági wine regions decided to develop the Danube Wine District which resulted new type of borders separating one wine district from the others.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> KADÁR 1998: 7.

<sup>16</sup> SZILÁGYI 2008: 320.

<sup>17</sup> BENCE 2007: 16–19.

<sup>18</sup> BENCE 2007: 189–192.

<sup>19</sup> Special issue of Dunabor magazine 2008. November.

## BORDERS WITHIN HUNGARIAN WINE REGIONS

A number of factors can justify and lead to the emergence of borders within a given wine region. The simplest form of internal articulation based on topography is when the vineyards on rows of parallel hills divided by valleys, or the vineyards in higher areas outside market towns on the Great Plain are identified by separate names. Such larger areas of vines were generally separated from the neighbouring forest, grazing land or fields by some kind of fence (*gyepű*).<sup>20</sup> This could be formed naturally with thorny bushes, or it could be made artificially: by digging a ditch. There were one or more entrances that could be opened or closed in the fence (*hegykapu*), where people could enter only with the authorisation of the vine guard. In this way fences of this kind not only separated but also protected the vineyards from some of the animals that caused damages or from people with ill intent. The fence was owned jointly by the community of vineyard owners (*hegyközség*) and its regular care and maintenance was the duty of the wine-growers. In order to avoid disputes over land borders the individual owners also strove to mark clearly the borders of their own vine land: e.g. with stones, stakes or a ditch that could also serve to channel rainwater. From the mid-20th century the fences gradually disappeared, mainly as a result of the change of ownership structure caused by collectivisation and the dissolution of the communities of vineyard owners.<sup>21</sup>

The topographical articulation and the advantage of cultivating holdings as a single unit justified the definition of certain territorial units within the vine-growing areas. Most of these also served as local units of measurement for vine land. The amount of land that a vineyard worker could hoe in a day (*kapás*) was a unit of measurement that differed from one wine region to another depending mainly on the soil conditions. Such units of cultivation (*pászta*) were often separated by footpaths.<sup>22</sup> After the Phylloxera plague in the late 19th century these units of approximately the same size were generally planted with a single grape variety. In the 20th century rows of fruit trees were often planted along the edges or separated plots of vines of varying size.

A special form of articulation and the drawing of borders within the wine district is related to the guarding of the vineyards. The area supervised by the vine guard hired by the growers, mainly when the grapes were ripening, was generally no larger than the area he could cover in a day. In a number of wine regions in Transylvania it is still a general practice among vine guards to erect border signs (*csóva*) made from branches, hay or weeds and a long stake at the edges of the territory they guard.<sup>23</sup> The guard's poles (*csőszpózna*) used in settlements of the Mór wine region (Northern Transdanubia) were similar, but they were generally decorated at the top with ribbons and a wreath of flowers; researchers associate this practice with the German-speaking inhabitants who settled here in the 17th–18th centuries.<sup>24</sup> An example from the South of the Great Plain: if the vine guard did not find a grower on his plot when he was making his daily round, he drew an S or a figure 8 in the sand to show that he had been there, that is, that he had visited and inspected the territory

<sup>20</sup> BALASSA 1991: 71–75.

<sup>21</sup> BALASSA 1991: 68–71.; ÉGETŐ 2001: 539–540.

<sup>22</sup> ÉGETŐ 2001: 541–542.

<sup>23</sup> MÓD 2007: 100–101.

<sup>24</sup> LUKÁCS 1990: 311–313.

entrusted to him. It was important, especially in the vineyards on the plains, for the guard to have a clear view of the whole area from a height. In the vicinity of Szeged, for example, a ladder-like pole several metres high (*látófa*) was erected for this purpose.<sup>25</sup>

The vine hill crosses or statues of the patron saints of grapes were generally erected at the entrance to the territory, at its external or internal borders or crossroads. They may also stand at the highest point of the vine hill visible from afar, just like the chapels used for shelter during storms. The immediate vicinity of these small structures can be regarded as a sacral space.

One of the best examples of the representation and reinforcement of borders formed on the basis of various considerations within a wine district is provided by Tokaj-Hegyalja, one of the most important vine-growing areas in Hungary since the 16th century. Behind this we find the specialty wines that over the centuries have represented substantial market value and given rise to the wine trade.

In Mád practically all of the settlement's most famous vineyards (*dűlők*), such as the *Király* and the *Kővágó*, were already in existence by the late 1500s and early 1600s. It can also be observed that a distinction was made between the different areas on the same hillsides, reflected in the names (e.g. *Kis-*, *Nagy-Felső-* and *Alsóveres*). By the early 17th century the *dűlő* had become the basic unit of vine-growing, determined in cases by the geographical location, while in other cases greater emphasis was placed on the history of the site.<sup>26</sup>

In his book on the life of the people of Hungary published around 1730, Mátyás Bél (1684–1749) devoted a separate chapter to vine-growing in Tokaj, in which he also classified the vineyards. He grouped the vine-growing areas into three types: first, second and third class.<sup>27</sup> In 1867 the *Album of Tokaj-Hegyalja* was published with a classification based on the system elaborated by Antal Szirmay in 1798.

The distinction between the different vineyard areas was not only the result of different natural environments but also reflected ownership relations because ownership at times also extended beyond the natural borders.<sup>28</sup> The growing plantations on the hillsides merged or divided into separate vineyards. Their borders often changed over the centuries. The Mád *Királyok* vineyard provides one of the best examples of this because the different vine-growing areas were merged during the socialist period, ending the distinctions applied earlier (*Kis-*, *Nagy-*, *Alsó-*, *Felső-Király*).<sup>29</sup> Privatisation raised the question of borders between the vineyards in a striking way: the new wineries established after 1989 came into possession of a number of historical vineyards but at the same time took their name from one of the famous estates (e.g. *Hétszöllő*, *Disznókő*, etc.). As a result the names of vineyards and holdings became blurred because individual wineries owned other vineyards in addition to the one from which they took their name.

Attention in Tokaj-Hegyalja is once again focused on the classification and creation of a hierarchy of vineyards within the wine district, with special emphasis on quality wine-making. The *Tokaj Wine-makers' Association* formed in 2006 is attempting to carry out

<sup>25</sup> BÖRCSÖK 1974: 480;

<sup>26</sup> ALKONYI 2004: 137.

<sup>27</sup> ALKONYI 2004: 143–145.

<sup>28</sup> ALKONYI 2004: 135.

<sup>29</sup> ALKONYI 2004: 203.



this work. It is their conviction that the classification of the vineyards expresses the picture formed of their natural environment by the vine-growing and wine-making communities, which is naturally also shaped by the constantly changing consumption habits.

The association wishes to operate the system of “*appellation contrôlée*” with a reinterpretation of the historical classifications of vineyards. Their aim is to classify a growing area only if wine with controlled designation of origin has already been made from there on one occasion, or an attempt has been made to do so. If a grower wishes to produce such wine for the first time from a growing area, the borders of the area are defined at the first vineyard inspection. The members of the association then examine the right to use the name of the growing area, whether it can be identified with a historical vineyard, and then decide on the classification. The symbol used by the association can also be associated with borders because it includes two dates (1641, 1737)<sup>30</sup> that can be regarded as important stages in defining the limits of the wine district.

New types of borders has emerged in the wine region in the last few years, because it became the part of the World Heritage. The territory protected by the UNESCO was divided into two parts, the core area and the buffer zone.<sup>31</sup> The first one involves the most important vineyards of the wine region, the administrative territory of Tokaj, Bodrogkeresztúr, Bodrogkisfalud, Mád, Mezőzombor, Rátka, Szegi, Tarcál and Tállya.<sup>32</sup> The introduction of cultural landscapes into the application of the World Heritage Convention was the first step to link cultural and natural heritage. The traditional vineyard landscapes are located into territories with a long human presence using the natural conditions such as relief, soil and climate etc. They illustrate a considerable human invention with the construction of terraces and creation of other systems of transport and drainage.<sup>33</sup>

Tokaj-Hegyalja was not the only one of the 22 wine districts in Hungary where strengthening the borders separating the different vineyards has played or is playing an important role. In Villány–Siklós wine region<sup>34</sup> too, remarkable efforts are being made to define the vineyards, that is, the geographical origin of the wine, represented in visual form on the wine labels. Perhaps the most famous vineyard in this wine district is the *Kopár*,<sup>35</sup> on the southern flanks of *Szársomlyó* between Villány and Nagyharsány. This is Hungary’s warmest vine-growing area where the grapes receive the greatest total heat.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> In 1641 the representatives of 10 market towns and three villages from Hegyalja and 5 free royal cities from northeast Hungary met and established the regulation for the cultivation of grapes and stated the wages and the unified procedures for harvest and taxation. Zelenák 2002: 29–33.

<sup>31</sup> The participants of the meeting organized in 2001 emphasised the importance of the coherent delimitation of vineyard cultural landscapes based on geographical units and historical territories. If the core area does not fully match the coherent unit, it must be covered by the bufferzone. Recommendations of the World Heritage Thematic Expert Meeting on Vineyard Cultural Landscapes.

<sup>32</sup> DÉKÁNY–TÉCSI 2010.

<sup>33</sup> RÖSSLER 2001: 9–14.

<sup>34</sup> This is the southernmost wine area in Hungary which is situated on the terraced southern and eastern slopes of Villány mountains. It protects the vineyards from cold northern influences resulting in a special sub-mediterranean climate. The effective growing area under vines is 1450 hectares, including 655 hectares planted with white grapes and 730 hectares devoted to red production. The whites are mostly grown in the Siklós part of the region. ROHÁLY – MÉSZÁROS 2006: 735.

<sup>35</sup> The name refers to the black limestone debris directly above the vines. ROHÁLY – MÉSZÁROS – NAGY-MAROSSY 2003: 202.

<sup>36</sup> BOTOS 2005b. 29.

In our study we have attempted to give an overview of how the different types of borders in Hungarian vine and wine culture can be manifested. In addition to the borders separating the different wine districts, there can also be borders within the individual vine-growing districts, the origins of which can be explained in various ways. The question and problem of drawing, strengthening and representing the borders can certainly throw light on new aspects of the grape and wine culture that can be regarded as related to the interests of vine-growing communities and to conflicts between them.

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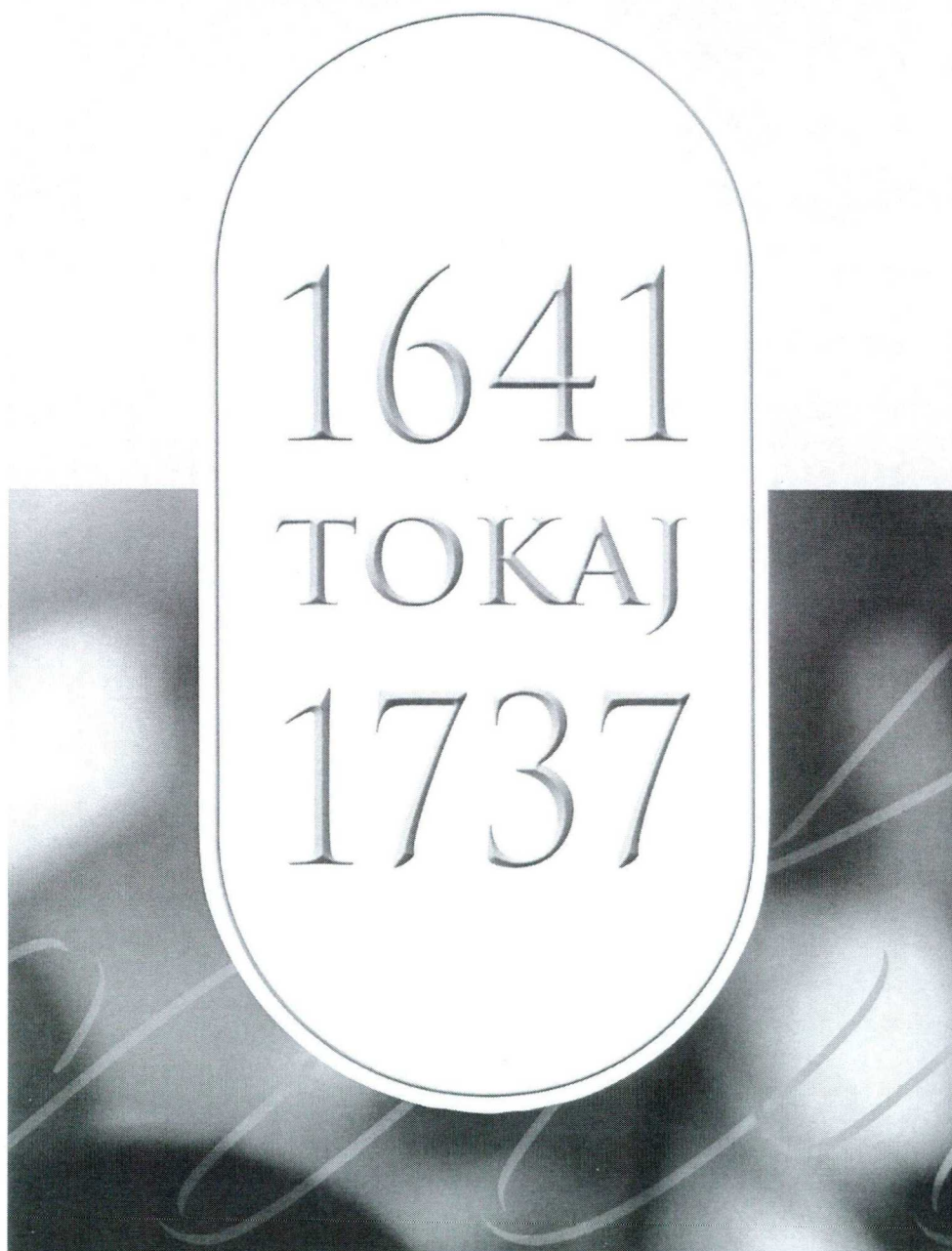
Terrace walls in Somló wine region (photo by András Simon, Somló hill, Western Hungary, 2008)



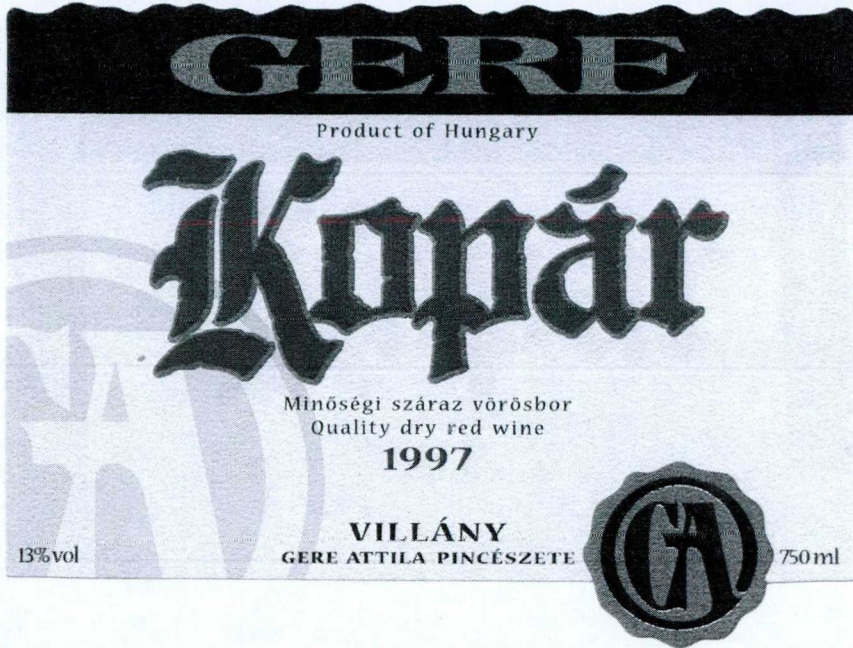
Border sign in the vineyard (photo by László Mód, Magyarlapád, Transylvania, 2003)



Border sign in the vineyard (photo by László Mód, Magyarlapád, Transylvania, 2003)



The symbol used by Tokaj Wine-maker's Association



The name of the vineyard 'Kopár' on the label of Gere Winery