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978-0-521-29571-0 - Tazlar: A Village in Hungary
C. M. Hann
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1 Introduction

Two Hungarian words are essential to the problematic of this book and must be introduced at the outset. Together they contain the key to the 'atypicality' of Tázlár, and unless the reader has some grasp of them at the beginning he will not appreciate the arguments in later chapters, which attempt to relate this atypicality back to the contemporary national context.

The first of these terms is 'the tanya problem'. The literal meaning of this phrase could be given as 'the problem of the isolated farm', but in Hungarian, even today, the phrase carries a heavy emotional and analytical load. For example, according to Erdei (1970, p. 3), 'If a family has no house in the village in addition to their tanya accommodation the connotation is clearly that of a rural slum.' Western travellers to Hungary in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created an image of the entire Great Plain as a wild and romantic *puszta* (steppe), and this image was officially maintained, largely for the benefit of the tourist trade, at least until the inter-war period. It was left to Hungarian novelists and sociographers in the first half of this century to describe the real 'tanya problem', particularly as it existed in the conditions created by the penetration of capitalism. Population growth and pressure upon the land led to the establishment of fully autonomous tanyas (units of production and consumption without any connection with larger nuclear settlements), sometimes in previously uninhabited regions. Tázlár provides a good illustration of this particular settlement phenomenon and of the full range of social problems posed by all types of scattered settlement.[1]

The second term with which the reader must familiarise himself is 'szakszövetkezet' (pronounced 'socksövetkezet'), which can be rendered as 'specialist cooperative'. The szakszövetkezet is a self-administering association of farmers, the sovereign authority of which is the general assembly of all the members. This assembly elects an executive committee and a full-time salaried chairman from amongst its members. Other full-time officers such as agronomists and accountants are responsible for managing the activities of the cooperative, both in the socialist sector (i.e. the land which is cultivated collectively) and in the dealings with individual members. In addition, there is a substantial number of manual workers employed at the machinery centre, and some members may work for the szakszövetkezet part-time or on a seasonal basis, although the majority of individual members devote their main energies to their personal farms.

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The reasons for the establishment of this unusual type of cooperative in Tázlár will become clear in Chapters 2 and 3. They have much to do with the importance of the tanya in the history of the community and the technical difficulties of collectivising in areas of scattered settlement: 'From a purely organisational point of view, scattered buildings suitable only for a few animals and their fodder . . . could not be considered for the purposes of collective farming' (Fekete, 1973, p. 23). However, the persistence of the szakszövetkezet in this area is also bound up with structural problems of post-collectivisation agriculture in Hungary. Its main feature is the scope which it affords to individual small-farming. The members of this association are not obliged to change their traditional pattern of farming and a majority has carried on farming traditional family farms. The evolution of the szakszövetkezet over the last two decades is a reflection of government policies towards the rest of the small-farm sector (primarily the members of full 'production co-operatives' who have rights to a household plot), and to some extent of the evolution of the economic system itself, especially since the introduction of the New Economic Mechanism in 1968. It has frequently been difficult to reconcile the practical need for the production of the small-farm sector with basic ideological commitments and, in the case of the szakszövetkezets, with a commitment to the eventual completion of collectivisation. The latter have flourished for some years now, despite the threat of imminent extinction. The reader should bear in mind that in Tázlár, while many private farmers were flourishing, poor performances in the small 'socialised sector' of the szakszövetkezet, and serious disturbances in the leadership, made uncertainty unusually acute in 1977. Many farmers were convinced that outside forces would put an end to individual farming on substantial family holdings by 1980 at the latest.

The concern of this book is to examine the changes which have occurred in this one particular community during the socialist period, and to show how various forms of pre-socialist socio-economic organisation have persisted, adapted to, and been accommodated in the socialist period. It analyses the way in which a traditional peasant economy has responded to the imposition of collectivisation, and also the effects which this collectivisation has had on social and cultural life. It is hoped that, while the community itself is not typical, some of the issues raised here can shed some general light on State socialist society. Occasionally these issues may be 'sensitive', in the minds of either Hungarian or Western readers. It may dismay many to realise the current reliance of Hungarian agriculture upon its small-farming sector and to accept that the government regulates its relationship with this sector primarily through the price mechanism and material incentives. However, I should make it clear that I do not argue that the small-farms constitute some kind of autonomous 'private sector'. In fact, I agree with the repeated claims of the authorities that most small-farms, including those of the szakszövetkezet community, should be considered as a more or less integrated component of modern socialist agriculture.

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Unlike some sociologists critical of State socialist societies, I also believe that changes in ownership relations are far from superficial, and, even in the szakszövetkezet community, the ownership of land has been displaced as the basic criterion of social status. At the same time, I find it useful to consider the persistence of elements of a 'peasant mode of production' within the small-farm sector and, despite ideology and despite some empirical evidence for the equalisation of rural and urban incomes in Hungary in recent years, to reconsider at the end of the book the question of continuing disparities between town and countryside and the emotive issue of 'exploitation'.

The community which is the subject of this book is known as Tázlár. For a period after 1907 it was called Prónayfalva (Prónay's village), having taken the name of a well-known politician and noble, who had no connection with the settlement, but from whom the local administration of the time hoped for patronage and financial assistance. The lord was apparently willing for the community to bear his name, but less forthcoming with material aid. The original name was restored in 1947. Confusion reigns today only in the heads of certain outside employees at the council offices, who puzzle about the location of Prónayfalva, the recorded birthplace of the majority of the population of Tázlár today.

The community name is not the only name which has changed over the years. The streets in the centre have acquired official names in the socialist period, but many of the older people have not learned them and regularly use the old forms. Certain buildings too have changed their function, but have retained their popular designation. When a new *bisztró* (bar), including an expresso coffee section and providing meal services, replaced the former *kocsma* (inn) in the early 1970s, the new name took a long time to stick, and many of those for whom there has been no change of function still tend to prefer the term '*kocsma*'.

Moreover, the people themselves have changed their names. One occasionally hears the boast in Tázlár that this is a pure Hungarian community in an ethnically very mixed district. Kiskőrös was populated by Slovaks in the early eighteenth century and Tázlár's immediate neighbour, Soltvadkert, was settled by *Sváb* Germans shortly afterwards. In fact, many of the early settlers in Tázlár came from these two older communities. Both these and others later changed foreign-sounding family names to similar-sounding Hungarian forms, for patriotic reasons. Thus Plametz became Pusztafi. Fogl became Földi or Földvári, and Haskó became Hadfi, to give but a few examples of family names common in Tázlár today. Immigration into Tázlár continued until after the First World War, when a number of families from Transylvania arrived in the community. They had possibly the best claim of all the settlers to a pure Hungarian ethnicity.

At any rate, the name Tázlár is indubitably more ancient. The first reference to a settlement of this name dates from 1429 (Károly, 1904

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p. 603), and it is likely that there was a well-developed network of small villages in this area in the later period of Kun settlement. The Kuns or Cumanians were a nomadic eastern-Turkish people who arrived in several waves in the Carpathian Basin and were settled by medieval Hungarian kings principally in the region between the Rivers Danube and Tisza. The names of Tázlár and those of its immediate neighbours Bócsa, Bodoglár and Kötöny are all of Kun-Turkish origin (Rásonyi, 1958).

Nothing is known of the medieval settlement. According to a legend widely repeated today, but with scant archaeological support, the original settlement was on a slightly raised area, about 1 kilometre from the village centre, known as Church Hill. Stones found here are said to have been used in the construction of modern tanyas in the 1870s. Almost the entire Danube-Tisza interfluve was abandoned following the Turkish invasion and their decisive victory over the Christian armies at Mohács in 1526. Thus the lands of Tázlár were uninhabited for some three centuries in all, although this did not imply that they were not used, nor that their ownership was not important and subject to occasional legal wrangling. The social structure of Turkish-controlled Hungary was highly complex. While in some areas villagers paid taxes to both the Turk and to the nominal Hungarian landlord, elsewhere the emergence of large and substantially autonomous agrarian towns undermined feudalism. The latter tendency was stronger in the Danube-Tisza interfluve. In the middle of the seventeenth century Tázlár was rented for pasture by the citizens of Szeged, to the south-east (Borovsky, 1910). Later, at the very end of the Turkish occupation, a peasant from Kiskunhalas lost his life after venturing beyond the town boundaries into Tázlár. (Nagy Szeder, 1926, Document 52.)

The expulsion of the Turks began a new epoch in the eighteenth century, characterised by the general reimposition of feudal controls, a Second Feudalism which sent the country into a developmental process in many ways the reverse of that under way in western Europe. The reconstituted enclaves of Kun settlement, including the most southerly on the interfluve, the Kiskunság, are partial exceptions to this process. They retained their anomalous status in the Hungarian state until the middle of the nineteenth century. But the new Kiskunság had no connection with the original Kun settlers, and Kiskunhalas for example was repopulated in the main by Hungarians from south Transdanubia. Furthermore, the geographical correspondence with the old Kun territory was imperfect. Tázlár was excluded, and linked instead, together with five other uninhabited properties, all described as *pusztas*, to the new settlement of Kiskőrös, which was granted by the monarchy to the Wattay family in gratitude for political and military services rendered (Sarlay, 1934). This family then populated the settlement with poor peasants from Slovakia in 1718 (Tepliczky, 1880).

In the course of the eighteenth century the Wattay serfs travelled out regularly to Tázlár for summer grazing. The noble family lived in Pomáz,

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north of Buda, and its archives record in detail the rents paid from its many widely-distributed possessions. They also show that an inn was established, probably at the crossroads of the Soltvadkert-Szeged and the Kecskemét-Kiskunhalas roads, the same intersection which still marks the centre of the community today. The consumption of spirit (*pálinka*) was high here during the summer months, when it was proportionately low in Kiskőrös; in winter, when the animals were kept in the town, the pattern was reversed. During this period Tázlár developed the same outlaw traditions as did neighbouring regions of the Kiskunság. These flourished until well into the nineteenth century, when, according to some, the famous outlaw Sándor Rózsa sought refuge here for a time after his escape from gaol in Szeged. A case of violent assault and robbery on the 'Tázlár *puszta*' which rendered a local man incapable of work for some months is recorded in Kiskőrös in 1807, in terms which suggest that the event was far from unusual.[2]

A few years after this, the Wattay property began to fragment. This process intensified as the century proceeded, and is very typical of the fate of large sections of the Hungarian nobility of the period (Mályusz, 1924). Tázlár was separated from Kiskőrös and the more northerly of the six *pusztas*. It was linked instead, both administratively and ecclesiastically, to Soltvadkert, and, according to the ecclesiastical records, permanent settlements began in 1822, probably from Soltvadkert. The annual population counts throughout the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century show very considerable fluctuations in Tázlár, and a maximum population density of less than one person per square mile (2.6 square kilometres). Permanent settlement here in 1881 was still very limited in extent, in contrast to the developed nuclear community of Soltvadkert.

The modern age began with heavy waves of settlement in the 1870s and coincided with the tragic decades of the 'tanya movement' in Hungary. By this time the *puszta* had been divided between several large landowners, but the name Tázlár still designated an area far larger than that of the present community. It included the whole of Bócsa and Harkakötöny, plus fragments of other neighbouring communities, making a total territory of over 100 square miles (260 square kilometres) (Galgóczy, 1876). In 1872, an independent local administration over this territory was formed, on principles which were not fundamentally altered for a further three-quarters of a century (see Chapter 5 below). A former manor house was used temporarily as a school in Upper Tázlár. It was converted into a church in the first decade of the twentieth century, after the construction of a new schoolhouse, the single classroom of which is still in use today. Tázlár was separated from Bócsa and new council offices were built in what is now the village centre, still sometimes referred to as 'Lower Tázlár'.

Despite these changes and the growth of organised religion and education, the tanya world was growing very rapidly during these years, with minimal administrative interference. The individualist spirit of frontier pioneers replaced the bonds and social control of a cohesive community.[3]

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Population growth is shown in Table 1. The process of parcellisation attracted the poorer strata, and especially the landless, from surrounding black-soil regions, including large numbers from beyond the Tisza. However, by the 1930s in Tázlár also there was a significant proportion without land. The diaries and records of the Catholic Church for the inter-war period reveal considerable poverty, and susceptibility to disease and to alcoholism in certain sections of the population. Yet the census data of 1935 (Table 2) are open to a rather different interpretation. Compared to other Hungarian communities at this time, Tázlár has a high proportion of peasants with plots over 5 *hold* (2.8 hectares) and, even allowing for the poor quality of much of this land, one might presume the existence of a large, mainly self-sufficient 'middle peasantry'. In some respects the farm production of this peasantry, notably in animal-breeding, compares favourably with production levels in the community today.

Table 1 Total population 1880–1978

1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1941	1949	1960	1970	1978
392	515	876	2,268	2,447	3,103	3,147	3,408	2,994	2,466	2,121

Note: Figures prior to 1910 are official estimates from the totals which then included Bócsa and other territories. The figure for 1978 was obtained at the Tázlár council offices and is the official figure on 31 May.

Table 2 Land ownership 1935

	(area in *hold*)								
	Less than 1		1–5	5–50	50–100	100–500	500+	Total
	without ploughland	with ploughland						
No. of farms	27	61	279	507	55	26	4	959

1 *hold* = 0.58 hectares (5,755 square metres)

The aim of this book is to examine the changes in the community that have taken place in the socialist period. However, to understand these one must begin from the ambiguous achievement of the pre-socialist society and the compatibility of extremes of inequality and poverty with an apparently 'open', private peasant economy, tanya-based and subject to no effective community control, in which certain families were highly mobile and indeed very prosperous.

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Tázlár is situated on low-lying sandy soils in the centre of the Danube-Tisza interfluve, about 80 miles (130 kilometres) south-east of Budapest. The sand is characteristic of large areas of the interfluve, although in recent decades the notorious shifting sands (*futó homok*) have been brought under effective control by planned forestation. In Tázlár the problem has always been most acute in the fourth zone, which borders Kötöny and Bodoglár. This has always been the most sparsely populated area, and was forested on a large scale in an early phase of resettlement by the absentee landlord, Earl Vigyázó, after whom the entire forest is still popularly named. The settlers of the 1870s were all exhorted to plant trees in order to restrict the movement of the sand (Galgóczy, 1876).

Despite the very low average value of agricultural land, there is a considerable variety of soil types. The territory is now divided administratively into four zones which are roughly equal in size and which meet in the village centre (see map 2). The first resettlers occupied what is generally regarded as the best black earth, to the west and north-west of the village centre in the first and second zones. The third zone, to the east and north-east, like the fourth, is of lower average quality than the first two, especially as one moves away from the village centre in the direction of Szank, the so-called ‘Szank corner’. Most of the land in this zone has been taken over by the Kiskőrös State Farm. Apart from a small area of forest, two successful large-scale vineyards were established in this zone by the State Farm in the 1960s. This success highlights a factor which applies equally to private peasant farming. The pioneers learned over time that it was possible to carry on certain types of agriculture on apparently unattractive soils, and that careful manuring would improve results significantly in all but the most hopeless areas of shifting sand. Only in recent years have scientific soil analyses preceded the execution of costly investments. The large-scale vineyards now planned by the szakszövetkezet for the early 1980s should not fail in the same way as earlier szakszövetkezet projects of the 1960s.

Detailed climatic information has to be taken from data for Harkakötöny, Soltvadkert and Kecskemét. There is an annual average of 2,051 hours of sunshine, and 25 inches (635 millimetres) of rain (14 (355 millimetres) of which fall between April and September). Cloudbursts are very common during the summer, and May and June are the wettest months of the year. The average temperature in July is 21.9°C., in January –1.8°C. (with a January record minimum of –32.2°C. and record maximum of 17°C.). The people of Tázlár feel that their winters have become milder in recent years, and certainly the quantity and duration of snow cover appears to have diminished. The essential climatic uncertainties of great relevance for agricultural production have, however, persisted. The first frost on average occurs on 20 October, but frost has been known as early as September. Similarly, the 50-year average for the last spring frost is 10 April, but frosts have been known to occur late in May. Hailstorms in spring or early summer have frequently destroyed an entire year’s grape

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production, while the wind, which moves the sands, is also a recurring hazard which often makes work in the fields impossible.

The main branches of agriculture have not changed fundamentally since resettlement. The production profile of most farms was initially decisively influenced by the conditions of tanya settlement and the isolation of Tázlár from outside markets, even after the opening of the railway at Soltvadkert in 1882. Grain was not produced for sale on these soils, but animal-breeding continued on larger properties with the old extensive methods. Later, following intensive parcellisation, the local council administered a public pasture which afforded even smaller farmers at least summer-grazing rights. The census of 1895 records a total of 3,265 head of Hungarian cattle on the territory then administered from Tázlár. By 1935, on a territory reduced by more than half, this number had fallen to 1,463, and a much larger area was devoted to intensive crop production, especially to maize. However, fruit and wine production was probably of greater marketability from the outset, and was given by many families as the main reason for their migration to Tázlár. The Danube-Tisza interfluve is not one of the great traditional wine-producing regions of Hungary, but because of the incidence of phylloxera in those regions, grape cultivation spread rapidly in the decades of heavy resettlement in Tázlár. Thus fruit and wine production also established itself in both the ideal and the actual composition of peasant farm output. Richer farmers, able to produce their own wine, found this a highly marketable commodity in the inter-war period; but even poorer settlers, those unable to keep large animals, still had an area of vines for their own consumption and, perhaps through some exchange with richer farmers, found many opportunities to satisfy their consumer demands in wine also.

Map 1 shows the position of Tázlár and its regional communications. The only tarmac road runs from north-west to south-east and is traversed twice daily in each direction by the long-distance bus. Almost all other bus services link the community to the west, to the rich community of Soltvadkert (population presently around 8,500), and to the towns of Kiskőrös (population 15,000) and Kiskunhalas (population 28,000) on working-days only. However, there are no buses in this direction after six o'clock and on Sunday there is only the long-distance bus, which leaves soon after four. Hence public transport, and in particular access to the railway station at Soltvadkert 6 miles (10 kilometres) away, still leaves much to be desired, and contributes to the importance of private means of conveyance.

It is obvious from Map 1 that to go from Tázlár to Kiskunhalas via Soltvadkert is a somewhat circuitous route. However, the earth road which provides a more direct link is frequently quite unsuitable for motor transport, and the same is true of the earth road which joins Tázlár to Bócsa, in the direction of Kecskemét. Many Tázlár people allege that the condition of these roads is connected with the presence in the vicinity

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of Soviet and Hungarian military bases, and the shooting ranges at Bócsa and Kötöny. Certain sections of the entire earth road grid established over the community during tanya parcellisation are regularly rendered impassable by long convoys of military vehicles. These generally travel at night, and soldiers are not often seen in the village centre.

Bócsa, Pirtó, Bodoglár and Harkakötöny are neighbouring 'tanya centres', the first two roughly comparable in size and settlement pattern to Tázlár, the latter less developed and administratively subordinate to Kiskunmajsa and Kiskunhalas respectively. Tázlár people commute to both of these towns (commonly abbreviated as Majsa and Halas), but there are no formal administrative links. Instead, Tázlár remains, as it was in the eighteenth century, the south-eastern extremity of a district administered from Kiskőrös. There is no longer an elected district council, but Kiskőrös contains nevertheless a large Party-State apparatus which, as will be examined in this book, plays a very important role in events in Tázlár. The town, famous as the birthplace of the great revolutionary poet Sándor Petőfi, also contains a court-house and a large surgery; it has grown rapidly since its promotion to the rank of town in 1972, but still lacks a substantial industrial base and as a market centre it attracts from Tázlár only those dependent upon public transport. For the marketing of their own produce and for exceptional consumer needs, in addition to the local Thursday market in Tázlár itself, the twice-weekly market in Soltvadkert is sufficient.

1. The local market

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For other needs, the fashion is increasingly to take longer trips, either to Szeged or to the county-town of Bács-Kiskun county, Kecskemét. The latter also exercises considerable direct administrative control over Tázlár, and local officials must travel here almost as often as they are called to Kiskőrös. Tázlár men work in all these towns and in the capital itself. Those young people who study beyond the compulsory eight-grade 'general school' in the village are even more widely spread.

Ecclesiastically, Tázlár falls into the Catholic diocese of Kalocsa, in a district formerly based on the larger village of Kecel. Episcopal visits are rare nowadays and no longer demand a mounted guard of welcome at the community boundary (which point is still marked, however, by a large wooden crucifix at the side of the road). Kalocsa is also the centre of the dairy enterprise to which Tázlár's daily milk output is sold.

The internal communications and landscape of Tázlár are quickly described. Upper Tázlár (*a felső telep*), about 2 kilometres nearer Soltvadkert, and the site of the earliest manor houses and of the first church and school, was the original tanya-centre. Even today there is some new house-building here, because some tanya-dwellers of the vicinity prefer to move here than to build in the village centre. All the buses stop in Upper Tázlár, and there is a shop and a private grinder. The population of the hamlet is around 130, their houses border the main road and two small side-streets, and the average age of the inhabitants is somewhat higher than the average in the village.

The regular plan of the main village (Map 3) was laid down in the first decade of the century, yet in the 1970s a few of the house-plots in these old streets were still awaiting their first dwelling, and were temporarily functioning as gardens. The final street on the eastern side, north of the main road, is old and distinctive. Its small, identical houses were constructed in the 1930s specifically for poorer families with many children, one of a range of direct relief measures taken by the State in the years after the depression. The street is still known by the nickname bestowed at the time of construction and also retains a little of its past in the character of its inhabitants today. The last street on the other side of the main road has an utterly different character, having been more recently built up by richer farmers moving in from tanyas. Most new housing is scheduled for the area north of the main road. The allocation of all building plots is now carefully controlled by the council. Its latest long-term development plan for the community has designated a large marshy area within the inner village (*belterület*) for landscaping as a park. The road which leads in the direction of Kecskemét and is officially named the *Kecskeméti út* has been built up so as to link it to the most proximate tanya row, which it now incorporates as part of the inner village.

Tanyas are not randomly scattered over the land, but are in general found at regular intervals along an earth road, sometimes still bearing exact witness to the original scheme of parcellisation. Some have profited from specific natural features and built beside one of the two large shallow lakes,

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