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CHANGING CULTURES

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CHANGING CULTURES

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C. M. HANN

*Department of Social Anthropology
University of Cambridge*

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Preface

Before I went to live in Tázlar in Autumn 1976 I spent a year in Budapest, learning Hungarian and about Hungary. Because of its unusual Turkish origin, the very name of Tázlar rang strange to my Budapest friends. The community belongs to a world far removed from that of Hungary's sophisticated capital, a world unfamiliar to any urban Hungarians. Despite the work of sociologists and ethnographers, and the burgeoning of a literary sociography in the last decade, the reality of the Hungarian countryside in communities such as that of Tázlar remains insufficiently understood inside Hungary. Although this book is naturally intended to help fill a very large gap in Western perceptions of socialist rural society, it is also hoped that some of its points would not be too harshly received if read by those capable of acting and improving upon present conditions in Hungary.

I first visited Tázlar in May 1976. Further short visits then preceded ten months of continuous residence, from October 1976 to August 1977, after which I returned for a fortnight in the summer of 1978, and for further brief stays thereafter. The ethnographic present of the book refers to the first half of 1977, except where specific indications to the contrary are given.

The choice of Tázlar as a community to study was far from fortuitous. In spring 1976 I walked around a number of villages in the concentrated szakszövetkezet zone administered from the town of Kiskőrös. I decided to study this particular village when, while seeking some basic statistical data on Tázlar at the main administrative offices in Kiskőrös, a number of officials expressed to me their unanimous distaste for that community, and suggested that any other village in the district would be more suitable for study and analysis. They would have far preferred me to undertake the study of a more 'model' community. Tázlar is not a model community; on the contrary, it is characterised by the persistence of elements of pre-socialist socio-economic organisation into the socialist period. It was for this very reason, and for the opportunity it presented of studying the ways in which a traditional peasant society had adapted to socialism, that I chose to study it. It is therefore obviously questionable how representative Tázlar is of Hungary as a whole. However, I did not set out to describe a 'typical' community, but rather, during both the fieldwork and the ensuing writing, to describe and to analyse a contemporary Hungarian

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rural community not only unfamiliar to the West but also largely unknown and ignored in Hungary itself.

The book is based primarily upon traditional, though perhaps unusually 'passive' participant observation. Non-academic Hungarian friends, unfamiliar with Western fieldwork practice, tended to think of my work as a '*felmérés*', which usually implies a quantitative survey, and, certainly, I did attempt to use the statistics available, as well as collecting some of my own. By and large, I was assisted in this by the local administration, both at the *szakszövetkezet* and at the council offices. However, not all of the arguments and conclusions of this book can be defended with statistics. Some judgements are explicitly subjective, and these are obviously open to question.

The data quoted to illustrate patterns in the nation as a whole, for comparison with *Tázlár*, are generally taken from the Hungarian Pocket Statistical Handbook for 1977. Otherwise, with the exception of the figures which I obtained myself in the community (see note to Chapter 4), statistics are taken from diverse, accessible publications of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. In general, I have avoided cluttering the text with references which are neither indispensable to the specialist nor of much value to the average English reader.

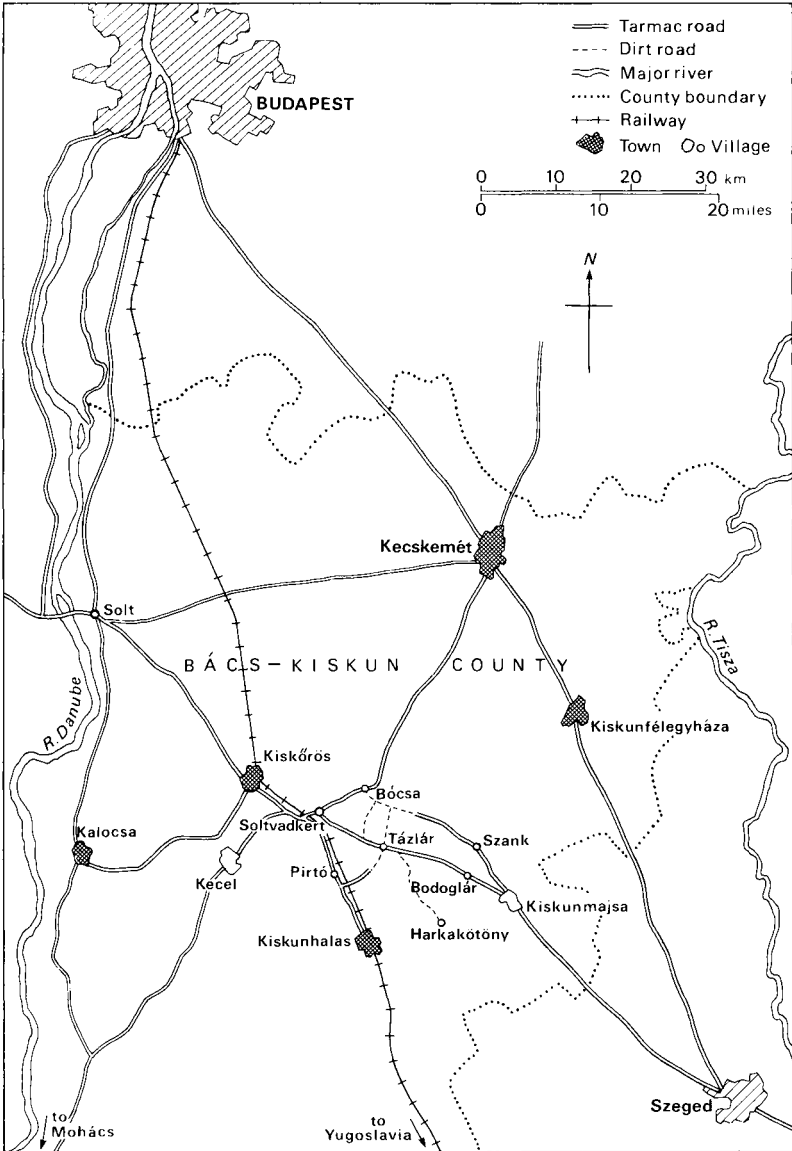
A minimal number of Hungarian words are used and explanations of those used more than once are provided in the glossary. Some of the proper names are fictitious and those of the individuals have been written in the English manner, with the Christian name first. The conversion of Hungarian currency presents a greater problem. The official rate of around 35 forints (abbreviated to fts) to a pound is now only some two-thirds of the rate which prevailed in the early 1970s; the effects of inflation in Hungary have been partly alleviated by the continued large subsidies on basic goods such as foodstuffs and public transport. To give some indication of costs, average monthly wage packets at the time of the fieldwork were approaching 3,000 forints; the price of a new Soviet-made *Zsiguli*, although it had remained fixed since the car was introduced in the early 1970s, was 80,000 forints. Other prices, including housing, and increasingly foodstuffs as well, have been continually rising in recent years.

I am grateful to the Social Science Research Council and the administrators of the Anglo-Hungarian Cultural Exchange Programme for financial support; to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, for a travel grant in 1978; and to my supervisors Tibor Bodrogi and Mihály Sárkány in Budapest, and Jack Goody in Cambridge. I wish to thank Nigel Swain and Sándor Dúl, now the Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party cell in *Tázlár*, and my many friends in that community. Thanks also go to Claude Rosenfeld and to 'Ocsi', for developing most of the photographs.

October 1978

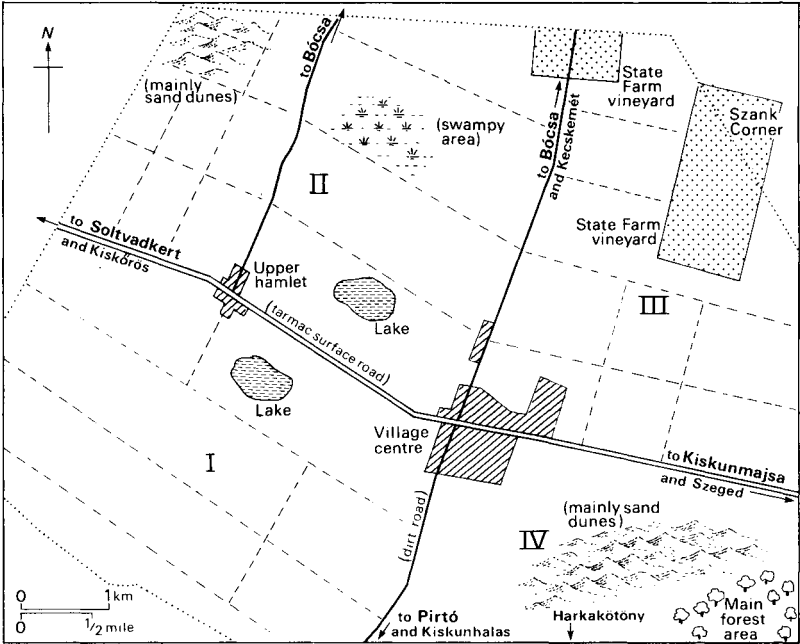
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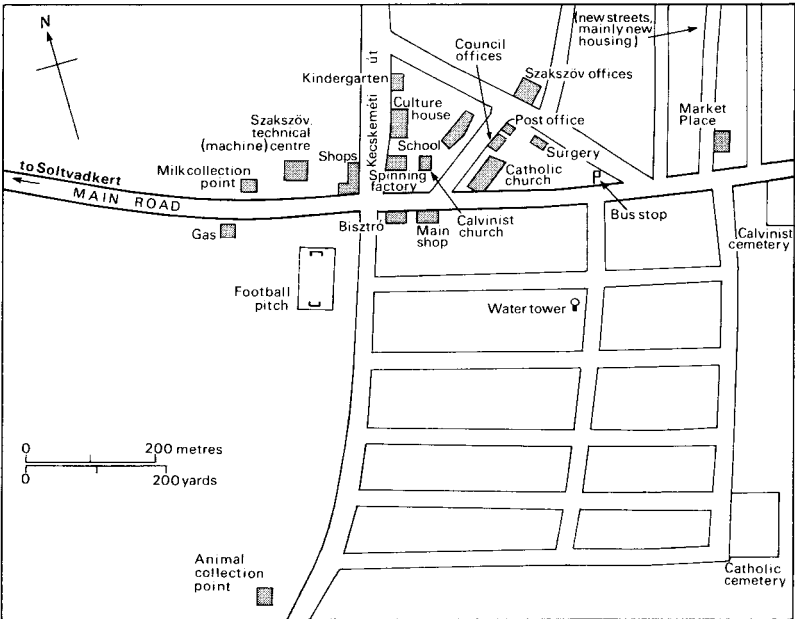


Map 1 Regional communications

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Map 2 The village zones



Map 3 The centre of the village