From the Martyr's Mountain to the Hermit's Cave: Hagiography and the Sacralisation of the East-Central European Landscape, 11th-15th Centuries

Abstract:

The role of space, place, and landscape in the perception and function of a cult site is complicated and varied, however it is a necessary one if we want to understand the way in which medieval people — pilgrims, writers of hagiography, the Church — perceived of and interacted with this very important manifestation of medieval religiosity. In this study I identify those cult sites in medieval East-Central Europe that have a significant "natural" element, that is, holy wells, mountains, hills, or any such site that is largely defined by its relationship with nature, and secondly answer how and why these natural places became "sacred" while other natural sites and landscapes did not. Finally I analyse how medieval people interacted with and perceived these sites and what role these sacred landscapes played in the bigger picture of medieval religion in Central Europe. Analysis of the relevant hagiography related to a representative sample of cult sites in East Central Europe that feature prominent, even defining, geographical or natural features can help make significant revelations concerning this role. The sites considered in this study are: Skalka nad Váhom, a cave in modern-day Slovakia; Gellért Hill, which overlooks the Danube River in Buda, Hungary; Margaret Island, also located on the Danube in Budapest, Hungary; the Pool of St. Stanislaus, at the edge of Cracow, Poland just outside St. Michael's Church; and Jasna Góra, a mountain located in Częstochowa, Poland. All of these places possess associated foundation legends, saints' vitae, or miracle accounts dating from the eleventh to sixteenth centuries that, when considered together, illustrate some of the major trends in the sacralisation of landscape in medieval East-Central Europe.

Keywords: *Hungary, Poland, space, cult, sanctuaries.*