

Tokaji Wine Region (Hungary)

No 1063

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Tokaji Wine Region Cultural Landscape
<i>Location</i>	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Hungary
<i>Date</i>	27 December 2000

Justification by State Party

The present state of the Tokaji Wine Region reflects a unique land-use civilization that has existed for centuries, with its related cultural traditions. Centuries of experience in viticulture are based on the unique geographical, geological, geomorphological, hydrographic, and climatic conditions of the region.

The way of life and culture that this has produced are still managed in accordance with an ancient legal system at the present time. This exceptional cultural tradition has ensured that immigrants from many nations – Saxons, Swabians, Russians, Poles, Serbs, Romanians, Armenians, and Jews – have been able to live together in this region for centuries.

Criterion iii

The cultural landscape of the Tokaji Wine Region is an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement and land-use which is representative of a culture. The present character of the diverse and very attractive cultural landscape is the result of millennia-old land-use forms based on viticulture.

The region has been inhabited since the Middle Ages and the land-use patterns have remained unchanged. The land-use and the way of life of the multi-national inhabitants have always adapted to the varying natural conditions. The economic basis has always been viticulture and wine production.

From the cultural, historical, topographical, environmental, and ecological points of view the Tokaji Wine Region cultural landscape bears witness to a land-use tradition that has remained unchanged for centuries. This unchanged tradition of viticulture is demonstrated not only by the existing vineyards but also by the dwellings of the nominated area and its buffer zone. These display the special constructional forms and techniques of a civilization and culture in which the life styles of aristocracy and peasantry, wanderers and permanent residents, Hungarians and immigrant peoples have formed a unity which survives to the present day.

Criterion v

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*. In terms of paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, this is a *cultural landscape*.

History and Description

History

There is evidence of continuous human settlement in the Tokaj region from as early as the Neolithic period. However, it was the Magyar tribes who entered the area at the end of the 9th century who assigned special significance to the region, since they believed (with some justification) that it was the centre of the empire of Attila the Hun, with whom they closely identified themselves. It became a protected refuge for Hungarians in the centuries that followed in the face of pressure from invading Mongols and others.

It was an important commercial crossroads for Polish merchants travelling to the Balkans and elsewhere. Settlers were welcomed from as early as the 12th century, when Walloon and Italian immigrants were invited in by the Hungarian kings, joining the Germans who had been there since the beginning of the Hungarian kingdom.

In the 16th century the region came under Bohemian Hussite domination for a short period, but was reunited with the Hungarian kingdom by the last great Hungarian king, Hunyadi Matyas (Matthias Corvinus). During the Ottoman occupation of much of Hungary Tokaj remained unoccupied, but it was a dangerous frontier zone, exposed to frequent raids.

Vineyards had been established in Tokaj from at least as early as the 12th century: it is surmised that viticulture was introduced from further east, possibly by the Kabar tribe, who settled in the Carpathian region alongside the Hungarians in the 9th or 10th century. It was, however, during the Ottoman period that the Tokaji Aszu for which the region became world-famous was first produced. Legend has it that fears of Turkish raiders delayed the harvest in Lorantffy Mihaly's domain until the grapes had shrivelled and *Botrytis* infection had set in, creating the "noble rot" (*pourriture noble*). Nonetheless, the pastor Szepesi Laczko Mate made wine from them, presenting the result to the daughter of the overlord.

The wine of Tokaj was a major source of income for the Transylvanian Rakoczi dynasty, which assumed power in the early 17th century. It was a powerful element in the battle for Hungarian independence led by Rakoczi Ferenc II, who presented other European rulers such as Louis XIV of France with the wine and ensured its wider appreciation. When Rakoczi Ferenc II was finally defeated and driven into exile in 1717 his estates were taken over by the Habsburg emperors.

During the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire Tokaj enjoyed prosperity, thanks to the growing renown of its wine. By 1780 the population of the foothills of the Tokaji wine region was the most dense in the country, and greater than that of France or the more developed German states. People came into Tokaj from surrounding regions – from Slovakia, Ruthenia, and Macedonian Greeks. The last-named were largely wine merchants, and were for the most

part slowly replaced from the late 18th century onwards by Polish Jews, who assumed a decisive role in the Tokaj wine trade.

However, the 19th century saw a slow decline as the markets for Tokaj wine dwindled. This situation deteriorated further when the Tokaj vineyards were virtually wiped out by *Phylloxera* in the closing years of the 19th century. At the end of World War II the fortunes of the Tokaj wine region reached their lowest ebb: the Jewish community had been eliminated during the Holocaust and the Communist regime abolished private ownership by aristocratic and bourgeois families. The driving forces behind the success of the region disappeared at a stroke, and it was not until the political changes in Hungary in 1990 that the slow but steady rehabilitation of Tokaj viticulture and wine production began.

Description

The nominated area lies in the north-eastern corner of Hungary, in the area of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, the chief town of which is Miskolc.

The eastern part of this area is situated on the Szerencsi hills, which consist of ridges orientated roughly north–south and averaging 250m above MSL. More than 80% of the surface is Sarmatian rhyolite tuff, containing zeolite, kaolin, hydroquartzite, and bentonite. At the foot of the hills, lying to the south-south-east of the Tokaj mountain, there is 150m deposit of gravel, sand, alluvial sediment (warp), and freshwater burden. The upper layers consist of brown soil developed on clay and the lower are characterized by fertile chernozem with patches of lime.

The core of the Tokaj hill, which constitutes the southern peak of the Zemplén mountains, is made up of andesite, rhyolite, and rhyolitic tuff, its slopes covered with loess up to 250m in depth. The average height of the slope ranges exposed to the south-east, north, and west-north-west directions is 514m above MSL. More than 80% of the surface is exposed to soil erosion, which attains 1–3cm annually.

Bodrogköz is located between the wave band of the Bodrog and Tisza rivers, below the slope ranges; it is a flat area 95–128 above MSL. Its soil is largely chernozem, with some marsh soil.

The higher areas lie in a moderately wet zone and the lower in a moderately hot and dry zone. Sunshine averages 1900–2000 hours annually (summer 750–790 hours, winter 200 hours). During the vegetation season the average temperature is 16.3–16.9°C; the temperature does not fall below freezing between 14 April and 14 October. The average annual rainfall is 600–620mm, 370–390mm of which falls during the growing season. This climate makes it possible to grow cultivated plants that require a warmer climate and this, coupled with the soil quality and aspects of the slopes, make Tokaj perfect for cultivating grapes.

The settlement system and forms of the Tokaji Wine Region are dictated by the morphological and hydrographic features of the area. There are two main axes of settlement, one the river Bodrog and the other the Szerencs stream and the river Hernád at the western edge.

There is a chain of settlements along the right bank of the Bodrog as it meanders at the foot of the Zemplén mountain range. Other settlements are to be found in the valleys of the streams that feed into the Bodrog, which in its turn joins the

Tisza at Tokaj, an ancient crossing point of the main river. The Szerencs opens wide into the Takta and has settlements on both banks.

The very name “Tokaj” is derived from a Armenian word meaning “grape,” which came into the Hungarian language as early as the 10th century, thus giving a date for the creation of the settlement. It is also evidence that viticulture was already being practised here at that time.

The built heritage of the region is symbolic of its history and its socio-economic structure. There are to be found medieval Roman Catholic churches (one in each settlement), 18th–19th century Orthodox churches, and Jewish synagogues, princely and aristocratic castles and mansions, and more humble houses, wine stores, and workshops. Evidence of early settlement is the 12th century Romanesque church at Bodrogalszi (in the buffer zone). There are ruined 14th century castles at Tokaj and Tallya in the nominated area and Monok, Sarospatak, and Szerencs in the buffer zone. Noble mansions from the 18th and 19th centuries are to be found at Tarcal and in the buffer zone.

The most characteristic structures in Tokaj are the wine cellars: that of King Kalman in Tarcal is known to have been in existence as early as 1110. There are two basic types of cellar in Tokaj: the vaulted and the excavated. The former was essentially an open space below a residential building, excavated before the house was built and accessed from the porch. The grapes were processed in a room at the rear of the house, immediately above the cellar.

The excavated cellars were not connected directly with the residential buildings. All that is visible on the surface is a stone entrance structure with a latticed wooden or steel gate. Cellars carved into the volcanic tuff did not require reinforcement by vaulting. Some 80–85% of the cellars in Tokaj were made in this way.

Of especial interest are the multi-level labyrinthine cellars with unsystematic floors plans in which wine was stored and matured in casks made from sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*), the dominant oak species in this region. These were created over long periods, often centuries, by linking neighbouring cellars horizontally and vertically. They are to be found in the commercial centres of the foothills of the region, in Erdobénye, Mad, Tallya, and the town of Tokaj.

The most famous example is the cellar network in the Ungvári district of Satoraljaújhely, the result of interconnecting no fewer than 27 cellars at different levels. It can receive 13,000 casks of the 20,000 hectolitre Gönc and Szerednye type in its 50,000m² floor space. The excellent microclimate of the cellars (9–11°C, 85–95% relative humidity, supplemented by the velvety grey-black mould *Gladosporium cellare*) is ensured by fifteen deep ventilation shafts and a series of smaller shafts connecting the individual cellars. Records suggest that its origins go back as far as the 13th century. Its importance grew during the 16th century Ottoman invasion, when the value of the Tokaj wines increased when the South Hungarian wine-producing region of Szeremseg underwent a major decline.

There is another important cellar complex of this type in the historic district of Sarospatak, 14m beneath the park of the Rakoczi castle. It is c 2000m in length and includes two chambers for wine tasting, the larger accommodating eighty people, the smaller fourteen. It is known to have been in existence from the time the castle was built in 1534–41 by Péter Perényi; the last major extensions date from 1776–91.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The cultural landscape of the Tokaj Wine Region is protected under the provisions of Law No LIII of 1996 on Nature Protection. It defines the concept of a National Park (with provision for buffer zones) and regulates activities that are permissible within their boundaries. It also takes account of the man-made heritage (built heritage) with National Parks. Under the terms of Law No XCIII of 1995 all National Park land formerly owned by cooperatives has been nationalized.

So far as the built environment is concerned, this is also regulated by Law No XXI of 1996 on Regional Planning and Zoning, Law No LIV of 1997 on Historic Monument Protection, Law No CXL of 1997 on the Protection of Cultural Assets and Museum-type Institutions, Public Library Services, and Public Education, and Law No LXXVIII of 1997 on the Formation and Protection of the Built Environment.

Law No CXXI of 1997 on Grape Cultivation and Wine Management regulates the planting, cultivation, and grubbing of grape-vines, production, storage and the release to the market of grape must, wine, and wine distillates. The Tokaji Wine Region is designated, and hence given legal protection, as a “close wine region.” This designation is accorded to those areas the products of which are worthy of special protection and for which special rules for the cultivation of grapes and the production, treatment, and distribution of the wine are laid down.

Management

Ownership of the properties that make up the 132.555km² of the nominated area is varied: private individuals, local authorities, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, and the state (forests, the vineyards of Tokaj Kereskedohaz, and monuments in Mad and Sarospatak).

The total area of the nominated area and the buffer zone is identical with that of the Tokaji Wine Region, as defined in Law No CXXI of 1997. The nominated area covers properties within the administrative areas of the following nine settlements: Tokaj, Bodrogkeresztur, Bodrogkiszalud, Mad, Mezőzombor, Ratka, Szegi, Tarcál, and Tallya, plus the wine cellars in Satoralajhely and Sarospatak. The buffer zone, which covers 748.797km², includes 27 municipalities. It should be noted that 22 of these were covered by the 1737 designation of the Tokaj wine region; the others were either added after the *Phylloxera* crisis or formed by the creation of new local authorities.

There is a management plan that has been recently put into operation for the Tokaj vineyard landscape. This may be judged to be in conformity with the requirements of the *Operational Guidelines*. In effect, it coordinates the implementation of the comprehensive set of laws listed in the previous section. In order to ensure the effective preservation of the historic environment and heritage, they impose strict controls over the management of all the properties, and the plans at different levels of administration.

Wine production is monitored and controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture as part of the Certificate of Origin procedure; nature conservation areas are regulated by the Authority for Nature Conservation, part of the National Ministry of Environmental Protection, through the Bukki National Park Directorate; and historic monuments are the responsibility of

the Historic Monument Protection Directorate of the National Historic Monuments Protection Authority. For historic monuments financial support is available to owners through local authorities, with professional support provided by the Historic Monument Restoration Centre of the National Historic Monuments Protection Authority.

There is a National Land Use Plan which defines the spatial structure within the entire country. There are Regional Structural Plans for individual regions: that for Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County has recently been completed and is in the process of being implemented. At the third-tier level local administrations are obliged by Law No CXV of 1999 to update their town plans and implement appropriate by-laws in conformity with the provisions of regional plans: the current round will be completed by the end of 2003.

Funding for projects arising from these measures is available from the central state budget, the central state environmental budget, and foreign sources (eg the European Union). The state-owned historic monuments are funded directly by the state. Local governments are required under the terms of Law No LIV of 1997 on Historic Monument Protection to ensure the protection, maintenance, and appropriate use of designated monuments that they own, and finance is available from central government for approved projects.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The political history of the Tokaj region has been somewhat turbulent in recent decades. However, the land-use has remained substantially the same for many centuries. The area has not suffered any damage from intensive cultivation of crops other than that of grapes or from industry. Since the rehabilitation of the Tokaj wine-producing economy since 1990 the status and future of the entire landscape has been assured by the provisions of Law No LIII of 1996 on Nature Protection, the objectives of which are to protect the values of the landscape and its natural systems. Law No CXXI of 1997 on Grape Cultivation and Wine Management has ensured the protection and maintenance of traditional methods of viticulture and wine production.

Minerals extraction has been a traditional activity in this region since prehistoric times. No mining or quarrying sites are included in the nominated area, but this is carried out in parts of the buffer zone. Law No XLVIII of 1993 on Mining regulates extraction and emissions: its implementation is monitored by the Mining and the Environmental Protection Inspectorates. Further control is exercised through the National Park and Water Management Directorates.

Authenticity

More important than authenticity in the case of cultural landscapes such as the Tokaj region is integrity. The area covered by the nomination is of considerable antiquity, and there is evidence that many of the nominated vineyards have been cultivated for more than a millennium. The establishment of the settlements connected with them also dates from that period, and as a result there have been few, if any, fundamental changes to the landscape of the region.

So far as authenticity is concerned, frequent military incursions have resulted over the centuries in the destruction and rebuilding or reconstruction of a substantial proportion of the historic buildings. However, scrupulous respect for

international standards in conservation and restoration, in conformity with the Venice Charter, over the past half-century have ensured that the level of authenticity in the surviving historic buildings fully conforms with the requirements of the *Operational Guidelines*. The historic settlements have also conserved their basic urban layouts.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the property in October 2001. There was also a visit to the region during the Expert Meeting on Vineyard Landscapes in July 2001.

Qualities

Wine has been produced in the Tokaji region and vineyards have been worked here on the same locations for more than 1100 years. The resulting landscape, with its towns and villages serving the production of the famous Tokaji Aszu wines, has not changed in its overall appearance throughout that period.

Comparative analysis

Tokaji Aszu is in many ways unique as a sweet wine produced from grapes that are not harvested until they have become shrivelled and attacked by the *Botrytis* mould, resulting in the so-called “noble rot” (*pourriture noble*). It is, however, as a cultural landscape that the region is proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List, not for the quality of its products. Until a worldwide thematic study of vineyard landscapes has been carried out, therefore, it is impossible to evaluate this nomination in World Heritage terms. However, the following observations may be taken into account.

It is asserted in the nomination dossier that Tokaji was “the first closed wine region in the world (1737).” According to F Bianchi de Aguiar, former President of the International Vine and Wine Organization, the earliest designation was that of Chianti (Italy) in 1716; that of Alto Douro (Portugal) took place in 1756, though this was the first case when standards were laid down.

The nomination dossier refers to the fact that Tokaj is the site where the Miocene fossil vine (*Vitis tokajensis*) has been identified; it is also described as the “habitat of the primary vine (*Vitis sylvestris*).” Whilst these statements are not disputed, they have not been put forward as indicating that this region was a birthplace of wine production; indeed, the central Asian connections of the Hungarian and Kabar peoples would appear to argue against this hypothesis.

The use of cellars for maturing wines in barrels is common in central Europe. However, those of Tokaj are exceptional in terms of their size and antiquity.

The multi-ethnic nature of the population of the Tokaji wine region is somewhat unusual so far as major wine-producing regions in Europe is concerned. These are for the most part jealously operated and developed by well established indigenous groups. The role of the Greek and Jewish merchants is perhaps paralleled by the role of English merchants and shippers in the Bordelais (France) and the Alto Douro (Portugal).

It should not be overlooked that two designated Tokaj areas were designated before 1918 in what is now Slovakia. These should be taken into account in any further nominations as forming part of what is a coherent region now divided by more recent national boundaries.

ICOMOS comments and recommendations for future action

On a point of detail, the ICOMOS expert mission suggested that the number of historic wine cellars might be enlarged by the addition of the Wine Museum in Tolcsva, which contains bottles dating back to the 17th century, and the two privately owned small cellars in Hercegut, which are very typical of the region. The latter should only be included if their immediate environments are improved by the removal of unsightly cables and dumps of construction debris.

ICOMOS also wishes to draw the attention of the State Party to a potential problem relating to the main road (No 37) which runs through the nominated area. It is well designed and does not obtrude upon the landscape. However, if there will be pressure to upgrade this road in the coming years, as seen likely, the State Party will have to exercise extreme care so as to avoid on the one hand damaging the scenic values of the nominated area and on the other severely impacting other vineyards in the buffer zone.

With regard to the buffer zone, ICOMOS is concerned to note that the boundary of the nominated area and that of the buffer zone coincide along a short stretch of the Tisza river between near Zalkod and Tokaj. It is suggested that the boundary of the buffer zone should be extended by 1–2km along this stretch, so as to preserve the visual protection of the nominated area.

ICOMOS Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii and v*:

Criterion iii The Tokaji wine region represents a distinct viticultural tradition that has existed for at least a thousand years and which has survived intact up to the present.

Criterion v The entire landscape of the Tokaji wine region, including both vineyards and long-established settlements, vividly illustrates the specialized form of traditional land-use that it represents.

ICOMOS, April 2002