

**SPELEOLOGICAL DATA IN "THE DESCRIPTION
OF THE LAND OF THE SZÉKELYS"
BY BALÁZS ORBÁN**

**SPELEOLOŠKI PODATKI V "OPISU DEŽELE
SZÉKELYS" BALÁZSA ORBÁNA**

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Izveleček

UDK 551.44(439):929 Balázs O.

István Dénes: Speleološki podatki v "Opisu dežele Székelys" Balázsa Orbána

Balázs Orbán, "Veliki Székely", je bil popotnik, pisatelj in politik. 1864 - 1868 je prepotoval pet "széks" (okrožij) dežele Székelys (Transilvanija, Romunija) in 1868 - 1873 objavil v šestih knjigah "Opis dežele Székelys z arheološkega, naravoslovnega in etnografskega vidika". V tem opisu in še v enem kasnejšem omenja preko 50 speleoloških objektov v apnencu in drugih kamninah. Jame opisuje, dodaja svoja geološka in hidrografska zapažanja, omenja arheološke najdbe in pripovedi v zvezi z njimi. Ilustracije v opisu so gravure, vendar narejene po avtorjevih fotografijah, kar ga uvršča med pionirje tamkajšnje fotografije. Tako štejemo Balázsa Orbána med odlične predhodnike raziskovalcev jam v Transilvaniji.

Ključne besede: zgodovina speleologije, Balázs Orbán, Transilvanija, Romunija.

Abstract

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István Dénes: Speleological data in "The description of the land of the Székelys" by Balázs Orbán

Balázs Orbán, "The Great Székely" was a traveller, writer and politician. In 1864 - 1868 he travelled through the five "Széks" (districts) of the land of the Székelys (Transylvania, Romania) and in 1868 - 1873 he published "The description of the land of the Székelys from the point of view of archaeology, natural history and folk history" in 6 volumes. In this and in one later description he mentioned over 50 caves in limestone and other rocks. He published cave descriptions, geological and hydrological observations, archaeological findings and the legends connected to the caves. Illustrations in his description are engravings based upon the author's own photographs. So he was between the pioneers of the Transylvania photography.

Key words: history of speleology, Balázs Orbán, Transylvania, Romania.

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Balázs Orbán was a traveller, writer and politician. He travelled through the five "Széks (districts) of the land of the Székelys (Transylvania, Romania), between 1864-1868.

During this journey he made scientific and archival research, took notes and photographs and made sketches. Between 1868-1873 he published "The Description of the Land of the Székelys from the point of view of archaeology, natural history and folk history", a work in 6 volumes (Orbán, 1868-1873). Later in 1889 he published "Torda, the town and its Surroundings". (Orbán, 1889).

In all these works the author mentioned or described 33 caves and 3 potholes in limestone, 2 caves in travertine, 2 caves in andesite, 3 caves in andesite agglomerates and 3 artificial defensive caves in conglomerates. He also described 3 karst springs.

During his activity Transylvanian caves researching had just started. Fridvaldszky, Nedeczky, Benkő and Kleinkauf had just mentioned or briefly described the most famous caves (Dénes, 1992). The first important cave research was made by István Fekete, a surveyor in Udvarhely district. In 1835 he explored the cave of Homoródalmás and made a plan of it. This plan was the first to be made in Transylvania and his work was published in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) in 1836 (Dénes, 1990). Shortly before Balázs Orbán's research journey, between 1858-1862, Adolf Schmidl explored the caves of Bihar mountains (Dénes, 1992).

First of all Balázs Orbán's researches were concentrated in the following branches: history and archaeology, folk history and geography. In his geographical description, beside landscape description, demography, economical geography and geology, he showed great interest in cave researching which was scarcely known in Transylvania. He was not an expert in geography but during his travells abroad he learned a lot.

He was an accurate observer. The collected data are accurate, the descriptions are detailed. For all what he saw and experienced he tried to give explanations according to the scientific knowledge of his age. Where he was not to able to manage this, he draw the attention of scientists to that ob-

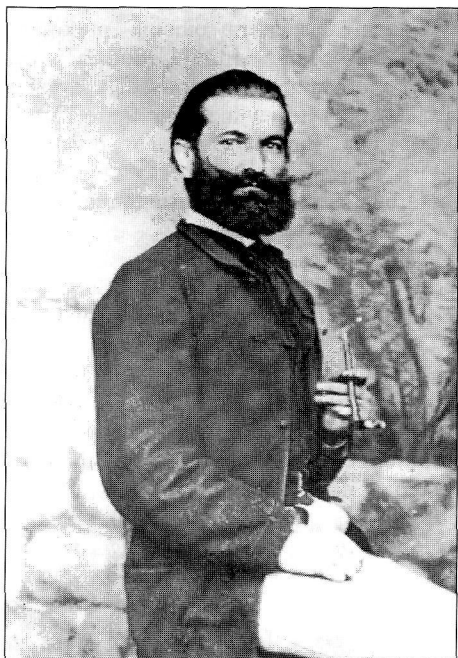


Fig 1: Balázs Orbán (1829 - 1890).

ject or phenomenon. He published wonderful landscape descriptions, allowing us to learn about the surroundings of the caves, the name of the places, the routes of access and historical data. He told us about the size of the caves, gave descriptions, geological and hydrologic observations, archaeological findings and the legends connected with the caves.

The cave descriptions are very interesting and he always wrote with great enthusiasm about dripstone formations. The hanging dripstones he called stalactites. Perhaps for the first time in Hungarian speleological literature he used expressions like caving and rope ladder.

Balázs Orbán recognized the importance of photography, a technique which had been just introduced in Transylvania at that time. The photo fixes the reality, but drawings can be inexact. Considering this fact he bought photographic equipment. Taking all this equipment with him, he took a lot of photos and they are important for us for we can see landscapes from last century "Székely Land". We are lucky because a great proportion of these photos has been preserved. The printing technology of that age could not reproduce them, so in his works we see only engravings.

The description of Vargyas-gorge (Cheile Virghisului) and its caves which was near his native land, is detailed; the names of the places, sights and curiosities are presented in romantic style. From his observations he explained the origins of the gorge: the waters of Vargyas river had to struggle to pass through the high limestone mountain. Then we learn about the historical data, the legends of these places and then the description of the Homoródalmás Cave (Pestera Merești) follows. The explanation of the origins of the cave is wrong. He denies the fact that the waters of the river could create it because it is on a higher level than the waters of the river. He thought that the cave was the result of karst springs work. We also learn about the big bat colony and guano deposits from the cave. To his description he attached the cave plan made by Fekete. As we read this work we learn about the Lócsűr (Hors-Cave), Ugron-lyuk (Ugron-Cave) and Kőcsűr (a natural stone bridge). Already he knew about the sinkhole in

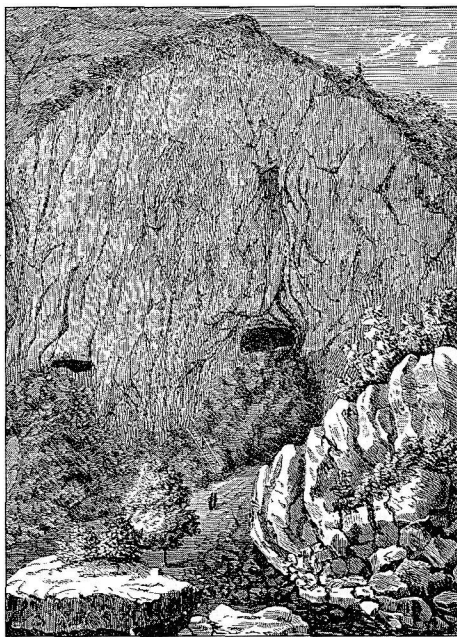


Fig. 2: *The entrance of the Homoródalmás Cave.*

which the waters were disappearing and about their underground route. The river rises at Vízkelet, a big karst spring which is situated at the south end of the gorge. Carrying his photographic equipment he took four photos. Two of them represent the entrance of the cave.

He also took three photos in the Olt-pass (Defileul Oltului) from Alsórákos (Racosul de Jos). Here he described three caves of which the most detailed was the Tolvajos Cave (Robber-Cave). At Olthéviz (Hoghiz) he described a cave in travertine and took a photo of the surroundings of the travertine hill.

In Barcaság (Barca-district, Tara Barsei), he noticed four caves and gave a short description of Ialomita Cave in Bucsecs (Bucegi) mountain.

He explained the functioning of the intermittent karst spring of Fort-yogóhegy (Gespreng berg) in Brassó (Brasov).

He gave a detailed description of three andesite caves full of vulcanic gas at Búdös Hill (Stinking Hill) near Bálványos resort in Háromszék district.

From Csík district he mentioned the pothole on Likas mountain and the ice cave in travertine at Borszék (Borsec) resort.

Aranyos district is rich in karstic areas. From this region he described four caves situated at Székelykő mountain at Torockó (Trascau) and seven caves at Kőköz-gorge (Cheile Aiudului). From these descriptions we learn about the



Fig. 4: The entrance of the Homoródalmás Cave (photo by Balázs Orbán).

position and size of these caves, about the dripstone formations, archaeological finds and historical data. On top of the Gesteg hill he observed a lot of "crater like hollows ordered in lines" which are in fact a line of dolines. He took a photo of the Székelykő mountain, too.

Among the caves of the Torda-gorge (Cheile Turzii) he described the Balika Caves which were fortified caves. In this part of his work we find the first description of a cave accident. It took place on 13th August 1780 when Kis János a chimney sweeper from Torda (Turda) looking for the "Treasure of Darius" remained stuck in a pothole. The rescuers could not pull him out with ropes and after 7 days of terrible suffering he died.

Orbán also told us about the



Fig. 3: The plan of the Homoródalmás Cave.



Fig. 5: The Túr Gorge with the entrance of the Malom (Mill) Cave.

caves from the Tur-gorge (Cheile Turului) in which there were prehistoric settlements. He saw the entrances of a lot of caves situated at high level in the rock walls. Also he took a few photos in Torda- and Tur-gorges.

Through his works the author let us know a lot of valuable data about the caves of Transylvania and fixes a situation which we can not find today. By now the dripstone formations and the fortification walls have been destroyed and the archaeological finds have been lost.

Studying all his works we believe that Balázs Orbán was one of the excellent forerunners of cave researching in Transylvania. From 1931 as a memorial by posterity the biggest cave in the Land of the Székelys, the Homoródalmás Cave, was named after the "Great Székely" Balázs Orbán Cave.

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Povzetek

Balázs Orbán, "Veliki Székely", je bil popotnik, pisatelj in politik. 1864 - 1868 je prepotoval pet "széks" (okrožij) dežele Székelys (Transilvanija, Romunija). Na tem potovanju je preučeval naravo in arhivo, zapisoval, fotografiral in skiciral. 1868 - 1873 v šestih knjigah objavil "Opis dežele Székelys z arheološkega, naravoslovnega in etnografskega vidika". Kasneje (1889) je objavil še delo "Torda, mesto in njegova okolica". V teh delih omenja preko 33 jam in 3 brezen v apnencu, 2 jami v lehnjaku, 2 v andezitu, 3 jame v andezitnem konglomeratu in 3 umetne jame obrambne narave v konglomeratu. Vključuje tudi 3 kraške izvire.

Balázs se je osredotočil predvsem na zgodovino in arheologijo, etnografijo in geografijo. Njegovi geografski opisi vsebujejo poleg opisov pokrajine tudi

demografske, ekonomsko-geografske in geološke podatke. Posebno zanimanje je kazal za raziskovanje jam, kar je bilo takrat v Transilvaniji zelo redko. Zbrani podatki so točni in opisi podrobni. Vse, kar je videl in doživel, je želel razložiti ustrezno nivoju znanosti v njegovem času. Njegovi pokrajinski opisi so čudoviti, za nas so posebej pomembni opisi okolice jam, topografska imena, dostopi do jam in zgodovinski podatki o njih. Jame opisuje, dodaja svoja geološka in hidrografska zapažanja, omenja arheološke najdbe in pripovedi v zvezi z jamami.

Balázs Orbán je spoznal pomen fotografije, tehnike, ki je bila v njegovem času ravno vpeljevana v Transilvanijo. Nabavil si je fotografsko opremo in napravil celo vrsto posnetkov dežele Székelys. na srečo je večina njegovih posnetkov ohranjena. Ker takratna tiskarska tehnika ni mogla reproducirati fotografij, ilustrira svoje opise z gravurami. Balázsa Orbána tako štejem med odlične predhodnike raziskovalcev jam v Transilvaniji.