

Past and Present of Mezőkövesd

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Mezőkövesd is a town of 20,000 inhabitants, situated in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, Northern Hungary. It lies 130 km (80 miles) from the capital, 45 km (30 miles) from Miskolc and 20 km (12 miles) from Eger, on the Budapest – Miskolc rail line, and on M3.

Archaeological artifacts suggest that the settlement was formed before the Conquest of Hungary. The town is mentioned in a church document as early as 1275. In 1464 the town got a seal and privileges from King Matthias. (The copy of the coat of arms and of the document can be seen in the local museum.) In 1544 the town was occupied by the Turks. After the fall of the Turkish Empire only 22 tax-payers were registered, since two thirds of the residents were on the run. The town loses its privileges and will never be able to get them back again.





A reasonably quick recovery of the town shows the toughness of the town people and by the mid 18th century there are as many as 200 families recorded. From then the town is under the authority of Eger shire instead of Ónod. In 1848 there are 7823 catholics and 92 hebrews registered. This is also the time when the patriots withdrawn from the battle in Kápolna are fighting a winning battle in the outskirts of the town.

On January 27th, 1887, the town woke up for mourning. The market town was declared to a civil parish. In the heart of more than ten thousand locals the settlement never ceased to be a town. (And it was declared a town again in 1973)

The 'matyó' ethnological group



The 'matyó people' were one of the Hungarian ethnological groups formed late in historical terms, in the 18th-19th centuries. They comprise mainly the population of the large market town, Mezőkövesd, although local tradition also regards the population of two neighbouring villages, Tard and Szentistvan as matyó. The origin of the name 'matyó' is debated : it is also thought to have been a word, in folk use by the early 19th century, to

designate a group who became Catholic, during the Counter-Reformation, living in the midst of Calvinist population. There is a belief strongly held in local folk tradition that the name is a distorted and familiar form of the name Mátyás due to the fact that market town privileges were given to the town by King Matthias.

The traditional culture of Mezőkövesd is widely known: in particular the highly colourful embroidery and the folk costume. The matyó festive costume made colourful with free drawn embroidery is one of the most spectacular parts of Hungarian costume culture. Initially only the sheet ends were embroidered with plain red and blue thread. Then multi-coloured threads were used. The lads' wore special shirt with wide sleeves decorated with embroidery together with full gathered linen pantaloons and an embroidered apron (surc). The local style can be observed on the sheet ends with a 'shoe and bird' pattern drawn in freestyle. From the 1870s an entirely new influence appears on the sheets , using the embroidery technique of leather embroideries where dense motifs fill the available space. The first pieces of this type were done with plain red and blue thread later yellow appears as supplementary colour. The influence of leather

ornamentation in the composition strengthens and the typical motif elements are developed : 'matyó rose', ' heart rose', tulips, leaves, buds. This diversity of drawing was performed by the so called 'matyó writing women' whose instinctive style richly added up to the art they performed.



The multicoloured matyó embroidery begins to flourish in the 1860s, 1870s. The so called ' clean room' is introduced with its ornate devices, painted furniture, glazed pottery on walls, jugs, plates, and a very high and ornated bed of state. This was the living area for outward show in prosperous matyó families. Economic and political influences nourished an independent and original folk art to be developed. After 1948 when peasant farming was liquidated and the town was industrialized , folk art was effaced. Nowadays the renaissance of folk art is experienced. The biggest tradition keeper programme is the matyó wedding –a special occasion for outward show. You can take delight in the authentic costumes of the matyó wedding feast, watching the show danced on various occasions such as Easter to revive and preserve this colourful past tradition, to entertain old and young, locals and tourists.

“I have lived such a wonderful life, since I have always been surrounded by flowers” – said **Bori Kisjankó** (1876-1954) , a fragile, always cheerful ' matyó writing woman', who was inspired by the miraculous dreams she had. She is seen as the queen of matyó folk art, establishing a school for posterity and leaving them a rich and dear heritage. Bori Kisjankó became famous worldwide as the ' writing woman with hundred roses'. She was extremely talented in drawing roses, creating

fine artwork. The evidence of the great heritage she left for posterity is all the great artwork that are put on display at the National Embroidering Competitions that was named after her. The aim of the comeptition is to preserve the traditions of the folk costumes and embroidery. The country-wide embroidery competition and exhibition is arranged from 1963 by the Folk-Arts Secretariat of the Hungarian Cultural Institute and the Communal House of Mezőkövesd. In the beginning the event was organized annually, then in every other year and since 1988 in every third year.





The old matyó embroidery is revived in the works of András Kovács (+2007) and his son Szabolcs Kovács, the sons of the most excellent master joiner dynasty of Mezőkövesd. He takes on the matyó tradition on his modern consumer goods such as chairs, drawers, cupboards and wardrobes. Many of them are shipped overseas.

Tourism guide

The town square resumed its former name, which was **Saint**

László. (Saint Ladislaus – King of Hungary). The '**Great Church**' can be found here, which is a monument of the 18th. century. One of the chapels is the survived sanctuary of the 15th. century church of ribbed vault. On the wall a fresco depicting a pilgrimage can be seen by István Takács. The parish house is a historic building, built also in the 17th. century, its main attraction is the crown room. It is not a room, it is rather a cell. On 19 th March, 1806, The Holy Crown – having escaped from Munkács – arrived in a ten – horse- carriage and was rested for a night under this roof.





The new **Sacred Heart Church** was consecrated on 13th October, 2001, for which Mezőkövesd people had had to wait almost eight decades. The modern , twin-towered church and parish buildings of the Heart of Jesus parish were designed by Attila Rátkai and his wife Róza Kiss. The decorative murals are the works of the Mezőkövesd born young artist, István Köteles. An organ museum is planned to be open in the old church building. The new church, together with the neighbouring Millennium Memorial Park and Kavicsos Lake are a popular venue for town events.

At the entrance of **Matyó Museum**, the bust of Bori Kisjankó welcomes the visitors as some hostess from the past. The former Crown Hotel houses the museum where the colourful past of the Matyó people, their stories and folk costumes are on display. The Great Hall houses an authentically furnished matyó home with some typical folk costumes. Photographs and explanatory captions help the visitor to understand the history of the matyó embroidery, original documents tell the town history and photos showing the folk costume of the matyó villages are on display. The museum was opened in 2005.





The Town Gallery is located on the other side of the square, facing the Community House and the Matyó Museum. The visitors receive a 'higher' reception here than at the entrance of the Matyó Museum, since Matyás Hunyadi – the town's former benefactor king – meets the visitors in the small park in front of the building.

The gallery shows the world famous matyó embroidery, its two main types: the essentially red coloured old shapes and the popular colourful type that started at the turn of the century. It illustrates the mainly cross-woven style of Tard and the colourful embroidery specific to Szentistván. The building houses the School Museum and permanent exhibitions such as the exhibition of the works donated by the emigrated artists István Takács and József Dala.





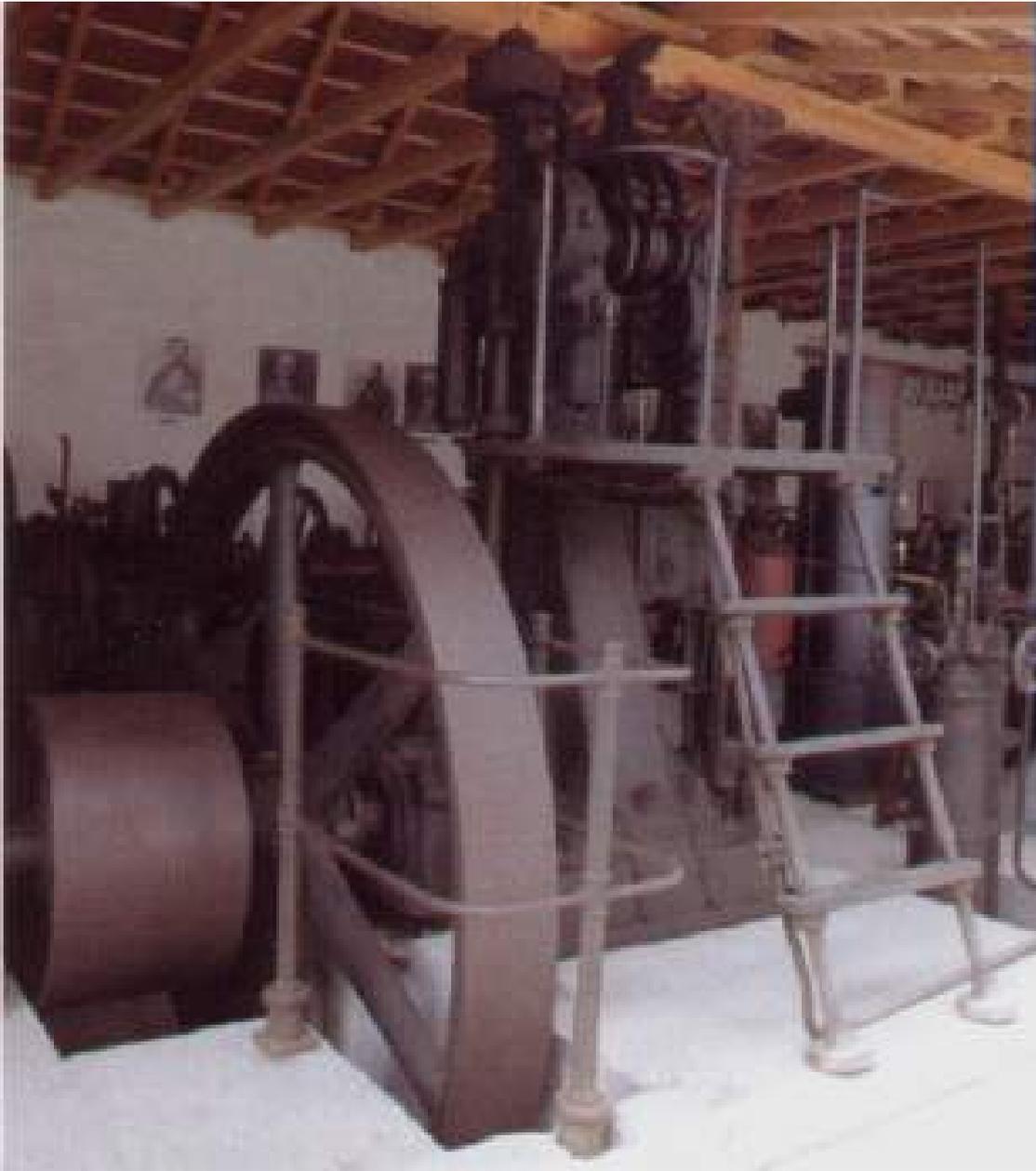
The effective influence of the matyó folk art is even more convincingly pictured by the life work of artist József Dala (1901-1985). A stranger, he came from Transdanubia, as a high school art teacher. But throughout his long life he remained addicted to matyó life.

Saying farewell to Saint László Square, you are heading for the most ancient and authentic part of the matyó capital. The structure of the settlement and some of the buildings have authentically preserved the constructive spirit of the matyó people, the harmony of structure and form, the old way of life, the atmosphere of the area. The picturesque 'Hadas' with the small plots of land, crooked streets and lanes is a typical rural borough.

In the heart of the district, there is a '**Dance Barn**' and many well-preserved cottages. A memorial room is furnished in the house of the great folk artist, Bori Kisjankó, who died in

1954. Her house turned into a museum and is a tourist attraction. It is not only an architectural masterpiece but an authentic document for the old and poor peasant life.

In the '**Hadas**' district a typical village atmosphere welcomes the visitor, where potters, weavers, lace-making workshop, hand-painted kitchen and room furniture, embroidery works can be seen. The ancient air may still preserve the warmth of the old family life of the community. Hadas is also used as an activity and leisure centre. In the houses visitors are introduced into the mysteries of how to make a doll, how to weave and spin, how to paint the furniture, how to embroider, or you can try your hand in pottery and glass-grinding.





The collection of the Agricultural Machine Museum of Mezőkövesd at 32, Eötvös Street, is world-famous and is well known for its unique collection with hundreds of exhibits of tractors, steamengines, horse-gins, water-wheels from water mills and turbines from the last century. There are also threshing-machines, grinders, hemp breakers, food-cutters, water pumps, horse-drawn agricultural machines and means of transport. There is an important collection containing the work of blacksmiths. Additional to the exhibiton there is an old peasant shed preserving the old way of peasant farming. The museum was founded by János Hajdú Ráfis.

The ' Zsóry '

About 3 kms from Mezőkövesd, just in the outskirts of the town, there is a holiday resort with a thermal bath area in its centre. Many Hungarians and foreigners know and enjoy the famous Zsóry thermal bath, which is open both in winter and summer and is worth a visit. Its thermal water is applied successfully both in the treatment of locomotive disorder and women's problems (water therapy and drinking cure) and in the after-treatment of injuries and orthopaedic operations. There are open-air and indoor medical pools and wave pools in the garden park, waiting to serve their guests.

The thermal water was discovered in 1939 on the land of a local gentry called Lajos Zsóry, that's where the name comes from. People were searching for oil, but the result was one of the most effective healing water of Hungary. Instead of oil, 72 degrees Celsius hot water erupted from the wells almost 800 meters below which was declared as curative water by the Department of Health. The thermal water contains – among others- calcium, magnesium and sulphide, and cures rheumatic and vascular diseases. Regarding to this curative power, Zsóry belongs to the most valuable baths in Hungary.





There is also a campsite, a hotel and many guesthouses.

- 50 x 30 metre pool, water temperature is 30-33 degrees Celsius
- 50 x 20 wave pool, water temperature is 24 degrees Celsius
- 64 meter internal diameter circular pool, water is 24 degrees Celsius
- 7 x 12 meter spa pool, 37 degrees Celsius
- shared indoor pool with weight bath, winterized for medical purposes, water temperature is 36-38-40 degrees Celsius.
- 26 degrees swimming pool

Medical Services:

- mud mask
- spa and massage

- underwater jet massage
- weight- and tub bath

The total area of the spa is 116 000 square meter. A Rheuma Hospital was built in the Zsóry which is available for 156 and equipped with modern medical and diagnostic equipment.

A certain ‘ Genius loci...’

Thousands of helpful and dutiful intellectuals have left the alma mater of **Saint László Grammar School** since 1911. Local historians have been keeping records of the spirituality that has been accumulated within the walls through the years: chorus of national fame, beaded boquet, amateur theatre. The Grammar School which was expanded with a Vocational School in the meantime, today is well known nationwide. Its sectors are financial , manager assistant-secretaries and clerks.

The **István Széchenyi Vocational Training School** is also famous, where technical information specialists, computer software operators, garment technicians, clothing manufacturers, ladies’ clothing manufacturers, drivers and maintenance men, mechanics, agricultural mechanists, fitters, turners, carpenters are trained.





The town operates four elementary schools. The School of Music offers faculties of solfege, piano, guitar, brass-, wood-, string-, or percussion instruments, and singing. The Town is also well equipped with sport facilities, all schools have a gymnasium and outdoor sporting facilities. The Sports Hall is suitable for organizing indoor competitions. As for outdoor activities there is a football pitch, an athletic track, a handball court, and plastic pitches. A boxing gym is also available for sport lovers.

The town's cultural institutions span a wide scale. The Community House houses many diverse artistic and cultural activities. The Matyó Folklore Society operates in the Dance Barn, and organizes colourful programmes such as the Matyó Band show and other delightful events.

Mezőkövesd has had a monthly paper since 1987 (for decades, until 1944, there used to be even two weeklies) – and today, every two weeks, it is also published with the old title: Mezőkövesd Paper. The Matyóföld annual has been published every year for three decades now, on Mezőkövesd's local history, its folklore and literature. Concerning the size of the settlement and the content of the annual, this

intellectual enterprize is a nationally unique one. The richly illustrated 800 pages of Mezőkövesd Monography was published in 1976. The second volume of the monography, covering the period since 1953, was published on the 25th anniversary of the declaration of the town, titled 'Studies on Mezőkövesd' written by Iván Kápolnai and Sándor Szlovák.

The natural and economic features of the area

Mezőkövesd and its immediate area is one of the priority areas of the Mátra- Bükk resort, which currently has the following roles in tourism:

- the area of the matyó folk art and culture
- international health resort
- the south gate of the Bükk hills
- the organizing center of the Bükkalja settlements
- airfield
- geographical and transport junction, and commercial center.

The area is located at bottom of the Bükk hills, where the Great Plains and the North Hills meet, by national roads and railway line, half way between the Lake Tisza and the Mátra Bükk resort. A recently constructed highway transport has favoured the area logistically.



The settlement has long been industrialized (eg. furniture, wood, machinery) but agriculture has always played an important part , which has improved significantly in recent decades. The transition began after the local businesses also proved to be viable. The number of registered private entrepreneurs multiplies in 1990, and also many merged ventures are active.



The growth of both the private entrepreneurs and merged ventures had a positive impact on employment. Smaller businesses are more adaptable to the needs of the population. The trade has also changed recently, national retail chains appeared, therefore catering and supply are getting more colourful and rich. New shopping centers were built such as Lidl, Tesco and the recently opened Spar (2008).

The town's utility system is currently being built. Electricity and cable drinking water encompass the entire town area, the drainage system is completed on the east and west part. The drainage channel has the length of 28,5 km. Mezőkövesd urban network is more than 100 kilometers, of which more than 90% is paved. The pavement has the length of 103 kilometers, and there is a five-kilometer-cycle path in the town. As the result of the developments over the past 10-15 years, Mezőkövesd has become a settlement that has almost all the human and technical infrastructure systems provided.

This description is mainly based on the publication by Gyula Kiss. For more information see the collection of the local Town Library.