

JOHN PAGET

Cave descriptions of an English nobleman who has become Hungarian

Kinga Székely

"I am deeply interested in the welfare of Hungary, and I have thought that one great means of promoting it would be to extend the knowledge of that country in the west of Europe, and more especially in England" – wrote Paget in the preface of his book on Hungary and Transylvania (*PAGET 1839*). By then, he certainly did not suspect, that in his whole life he would struggle for the flourishing of Transylvania, with diligent work when needed, with showing an example, with innovations, donations and even with arms in hand, when it needed defend.

His unique life moved the phantasy of several writer-contemporaries. His marriage was recorded by *Miklós Jósika* (1794–1865) and his heroic action in the war of independence were immortalized by *Mór Jókai* (1825–1904) in his book (*JÓKAI 1877, JÓSIKA 1844*).

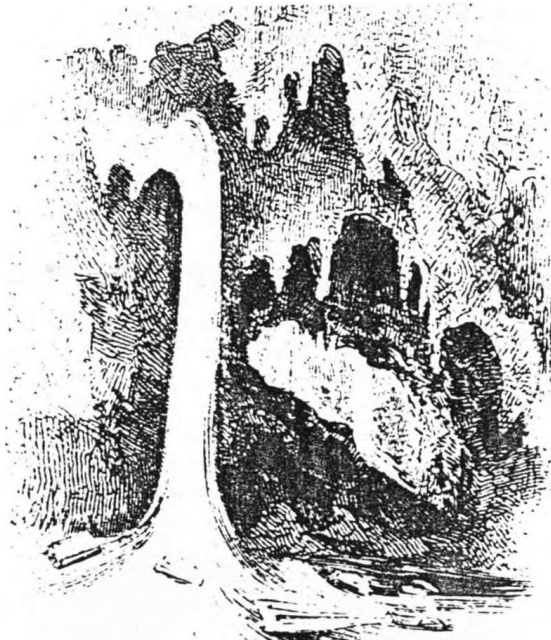
John Paget was born on 18th of April 1808 in Loughborough. Encyclopedias sometimes denote his birth place erroneously as Thorpe Satchwill, where his father, a famous industrialist settled down only later. He was the son of a well known Unitarian family of Norman origin; he studied in the Unitarian Manchester College in York, then in Dublin and Edinburgh as a medical student, where he got a diploma of medicine. He continued his studies in Paris taking courses in anatomy and physiology. He took part at an international competition with his work written on skin diseases. His book on physiology written together with his friend was published. However, he has never practised as a medical doctor.

After the death of his father his rich inheritance ensured him to be able to continue his study tour in Europe. He wanted to spend some years in Vienna, however instead of settling down he always travelled and instead of studying medicine he learned German and Italian. He travelled all over Belgium, Germany, Austria and then, he arrived to Italy.



In 1835 he got acquainted with *Mrs. Polixénia Bánffy, née Polixénia Wesselényi* – just getting divorced – and the wonderful, highly cultured, modern thinking lady impressed him so deeply, that his interest turned towards Hungary.

Paget, in the company of *George Hering*, a landscape painter and *Sandford*, a journalist visited the most important towns of Hungary since June till December of 1835. He paid visits to the sights, kept a close watch on political changes, and made friendship with the outstanding figures of the age. He made a tour on the Lower Danube with *István Széchenyi*, and spent a short time in Transylvania, too. At Christmas, when his friends returned to England, he travelled to Corfu together with *Lajos Batthyány*, then they roamed about Greece and Turkey. In August of 1836 he returned to Hungary, and together with his



"Ice Grotto of Deménfalva"

brother, he began his second tour in Hungary and Transylvania, that lasted until the autumn of 1837. That time he married Polixénia Wesselényi in Rome. First they settled down in Paris, then, after some months' stay in England, in December of 1839 they returned to Kolozsvár (Cluj).

He had a castle of English style built at Aranyosgyéres (Cimpia Turzii) and introduced innovations in agriculture. He had machines brought from abroad and introduced crop rotation. He bought horses, cattle and sheep in England. Starting a serious wine culture, he produced excellent wines not only for their own consumption, but for selling, as well.

He worked not only on the development of agriculture, but in the field of culture, too. He founded an *English-Hungarian Friendship Society* in Kolozsvár, and organizing a reading circle he donated them 2,000 books and subscribed English reviews for them. On his initiatives teaching of English language was introduced in the Unitarian College of Kolozsvár.

Paget learned the Hungarian language and got naturalization from the 1847 parliament. In 1848 he took part in the war of independence and in the January of 1849 he participated in the heroic action of saving the inhabitants of Nagyenyed from the enemy. He sent continuous reports on the events of the war of independence to England. As a diplomatic mediator he tried to ask for the help of England to bring peace soon into being.

In spring after the fall of the war of independence he left for England, following his family. In 1852 they returned to Europe. First they settled down in Dresden,

then in Nizza, and after a longer travel in Italy, in June of 1855 they came back to Kolozsvár.

He had to start life afresh in the robbed, destroyed castle at Aranyosgyéres. After his studies in France he re-established the most developed agriculture. In 1878, at the World Fair in Paris he got the French Legion of Honour for his excellent wine. He published what he had learnt abroad and his own experiences in scientific reviews under the signature "János Paget, Transylvanian farmer". He founded the Transylvanian Cellar Circle, the Agricultural Circle, the Equestrian Circle and renewed the horse-races. For his results gained by his agricultural reforms he got the second class of the Order of the Iron Crown and with it he obtained the title "count".

The Unitarians of Transylvania owe a lot to Paget's activity, too. With the help of his former school-mates he could manage, that the English Unitarians helped the Transylvanian students with money and fellowships.

Paget's successful life was darkened by the tragedy of the early death of his both sons. Though he adopted one of the sons of his brother, he died without a natural heir on the 10th of April 1892. He was buried in the family crypt in the cemetery of Házsongárd in Kolozsvár – that is standing even today.



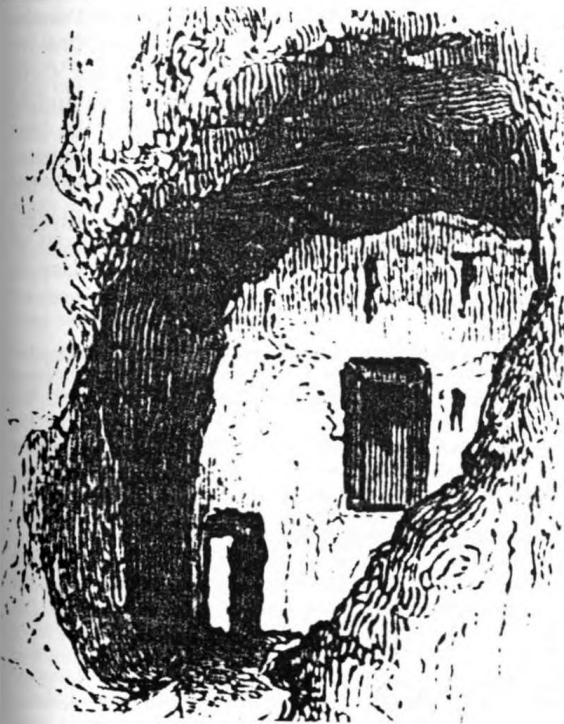
Title-page of Paget's book published in Germany

In 1839 while staying in Paris, on the request of his wife, he wrote his experiences he had gained in Hungary and Transylvania during his one and a half year's travel between 1835–37. The work on 1,100 pages in two volumes with 88 figures and a map was first published in London in 1839. It was edited three more times in London (1849, 1850, 1855), two times in America and also two times in Leipzig translated into German. "The well composed, richly illustrated book of elaborated style ... is of documentary value, and up to now it is the most beautiful and thorough work in English about Hungary and Transylvania 150 years ago". (MALLER 1985).

The books published at the different places and times are different only in form, their texts are unchanged. The German language version was edited without illustrations.

Cave descriptions

Paget gives detailed descriptions of several caves in his book. On the course of his travels with the permission and help of the *Kubinyi family* he visited the "Ice Grotto of Deménfalva" (Demänovská ľadová jaskyňa). Difficulties of the road leading to the cave made a great impression on him; he gave a full account of it. Besides rendering a detailed report of the cave he tries to find an explanation of how the ice formations came into being, and what the origin of legends



The Little Balika Castle in the Torda Canyon



Balika Castle Cave in the Torda Canyon

about the bones found in the cave is. He writes as follows:

"The entrance, not more than three feet high, opens into a high passage, which descends rather suddenly for several hundred feet, and leads into the first cavern, the roof and floor of which are beset with stalactites and stalagmites, though not of any great size. From thence, we descended by a broken and very rotten ladder into a larger cavern, out of which a low archway conducted us to the great curiosity of Deménfalva, the ice grotto. In the centre of this grotto, which is rather small, rises a column of beautifully clear ice, about seven feet high, on which the water falls as it drops from the ceiling, and immediately freezes. The floor is one mass of thick ice. Still lower in the same direction is a much larger chamber, where an ice pillar of several feet in thickness reaches from the roof to the floor. It is formed of small irregularly rounded crystals of ice, of about the size of drops of water, which reflected most brilliantly the light of our torches as it fell on them.

It is the presence of the ice in this cavern, and the various shapes it puts on, which imparts to Deménfalva its peculiar interest and beauty. We have already seen it forming the slender column and the stately pillar; a little further on it presents in wonderful exactness, the beautiful appearance of a frozen waterfall; in one place it hangs in such graceful and delicate folds, that the statuary might borrow it as the beau idéal of his drapery; while in another it mocks the elaborate fretwork of the Gothic roof. It was singular to observe the apparent uncertainty as to whether ice or solid limestone should result from the water which trickled through the roof; in one instance, where the roof of the cavern was covered with hard limestone stalactites, the floor was composed of icy stalagmites. It seemed as though the one or the other was indifferently formed. To what this circumstance is owing, – in what respect Deménfalva differs from other caves where limestone deposits take place, but where there is no ice formed, I cannot say. Ice is also found in an old mine at Herregrund, as well as in one or two other caverns in Hungary..."



Vargyas Valley with the entrance of Homoródalmás Cave (Transylvania)

"As far as I am aware, no satisfactory explanation has been given of this phenomenon. At Demenfalva there was no perceptible draught of air which our lights, if not our feelings, would have indicated; nor, as far as I could judge (my thermometer was broken), was it at all colder here than in Adelsberg or Aggtelek. The stratum, — a compact limestone, — is the same in all those caverns I have seen, and the quantity of moisture differs but little.

After sketching the second ice grotto, we passed onward into a long cavern with a Gothic arched roof, containing a number of stalactite pillars of beautiful forms. The floor was here no longer of stone or ice, but covered with a very fine dry lime dust. Two more caverns of great size, and so high, that the feeble light of our torches lost itself in seeking their limits, led us to a narrow passage where the bottom was covered with a soft white mud, common in such places, and called by the Germans, *berg milch* (mountain milk), and which soon became so deep that it was impossible to proceed further. We returned by the same road, which I should think was about a mile long, having occupied two hours in the cavern.

As for the bones which some travellers speak of as being strewed over the floor of this cave, and from which the peasants have given it the name of the "Dragon's Hole", we could find no traces of them; and I am inclined to agree with those who think the broken stalactites have been mistaken by the ignorant for bones, and thus given rise to the fiction."

Travelling from Kassa to Tokaj on the 10th of September 1835 — according to his notes in the visitors' book — he visited the *Baradla Cave*. He writes about it as follows:

"Our horses' heads were now turned towards Aggtelek, a small village about twenty miles off, and remarkable for possessing one of the largest caverns in the world. Torches we had already

provided, and guides were soon found to accompany us; for, unlike Demenfalva, Aggtelek is well known, and is often visited by foreigners as well as by Hungarians. It is not necessary to give a minute account of what has already been often described. The cavern is formed in a lime-stone rock, like all others we know of, and extends to a great distance under ground. It is said to communicate with two small caverns, which open at ten miles' distance from Aggtelek. In the vastness of its halls, the huge proportions of its columns, and the mysterious windings of its long passages, Aggtelek is superior to anything of the kind I have seen. In some places, too, it is of exquisite beauty. While H — was making a sketch of the *Tanz Saal* (Ball-room), where in summer the peasants sometimes hold their fêtes, the guides conducted me to an offset from the great cavern, called the Garden of Paradise. For a full quarter of an hour we crept on our hands and knees; sometimes wading through the small brook which makes its way out by this passage, sometimes sliding back over the slimy rocks, and sometimes squeezing through narrow crevices where there was scarcely room for the human body to pass. At last we once more stood upright; we had reached the Garden, and well does it deserve the name of Paradise; for anything more beautiful than the thousand fantastic forms — trees, fruits, waterfalls, serpents, — into which the stalactitic pillars have formed themselves, it is impossible to conceive.

As far as I can guess, we followed the great cavern for not less than two or three miles, and during the whole of our route we were presented with a constant succession of beauties, to all of which the imaginations of the peasants have appropriated names and likenesses. The guides could speak only a very few words of German, but among them were "*Deutsche Hosen*;" and they did not fail to apply them with a look of most sovereign contempt to a curious formation of the stone which imitated with sufficient accuracy a pair of kniebreeches, — in the opinion of every true Magyar, the most ridiculous and despicable covering for humanity ever invented."

When describing his travel on the Lower Danube he mentions two caves between Moldova and Orsova; one near the Babakay Rock, the *St. George Cave* (Gaura cu Muscă) opening at half-way of the height of the mountain — he relates the legend about the cave according to which St. George killed the dragon here. The corpse of the dragon is still to be found in the cave it emits "winged creatures" that cause plague. He tells that the *Veterani Cave* opening in front of the Kazan pass played a very importance place in fights against the Turks.

"As we walked along the new road, our attention was directed to a cave about one hundred yards above the Danube, celebrated in the history of the Turkish wars. It appears that in 1692, the Austrian General Veterani sent three hundred men under the command of Captain D'Arman to hold this caverns against the Turks, whose communications on the Danube were in consequence almost cut off, for the position of the cave gave its little garrison the complete command of the passage of the river, which is exceedingly narrow here. The Pasha of Belgrade, roused by the injury this handful of men inflicted on the Turks, sent an overwhelming force against them; but their position, defended with the greatest bravery, was proof against all attacks, except, alas! that of hunger, which obliged them to capitulate after a siege of forty-five days. Again in 1788, was this little fortress employed against the Moslems. Major Stein held it for twenty-one days, with a still smaller number of troops than before. Some remains of slight outworks are still left before the entrance of the cave. The interior is about one hundred feet long by seventy broad, and

has some natural divisions, to which tradition still attaches names and destinations; as the officers' quarters, the powder magazine, and the provision depôt."

In the description of the Torda Canyon he gives accounts of *the caves of Bay luk* (Balika-vára, Bay cavity, Castle of Balika) and the one opening opposite to it.

When Paget together with Miklós Wesselényi spent some days in Szentpál he visited the *Homoródmás Cave*. He realized with surprise that the inhabitants of the village – the most flourishing one in Transylvania according to his opinion – are filled with superstitious fear of the cave. They protect themselves from the spirit of the cave causing plague by hanging rags on the trees.

His cave descriptions proves that he knew the account of *FEKETE (1836)* made of the cave, for he looked for the precious stones mentioned in it, and the map given in it helped his orientation in the cave.

"The mouth of the great cavern is at a considerable height above the bottom of the valley, and can only be reached by means of wooden steps, which some former visitors have had made for the purpose. It is half closed by a thick wall, now partly broken, but which has evidently been built as a defence from enemies..."

"The entrance to the cavern, which we had now gained, is a vast hall covered with a noble arched roof, and opening on every side to dark passages, which lead into the interior of the mountain. After we had carefully studied a plan of the cavern, lighted our torches, and arranged the order of the procession, the little grocer of Udvarhely, – no peasant guide could be found to undertake it, – put himself at our head and led the way. In faith it was no easy matter to choose the right road, for there were so many openings, and it was so very easy to lose the direction in such a position, that it required all the little grocer's memory and experience to keep us from straying. By the road we took, the cavern seemed to penetrate the mountain to about the distance of an English mile, sometimes in the form of large chambers, sometimes of narrow passages, through which one can scarcely creep. Some of these chambers are high, and ornamented with small stalactites. In one a large mass of rock corrugated like a huge wart, hangs from the roof to within a yard of the floor without touching it. The only difficulty we experienced, except that of finding our way, was in passing a wet bog – if a mass of soft lime, of about the consistence of mortar can be so called – which extended for some twenty yards' distance."

To visit the *Büdös Cave of Torja* came up against a difficulty: people in Kézdivásárhely (Tirgu Secuiese), situated only as far as 10 miles, knew merely that it opens among the Torja (Turia) mountains. Arriving to the spot, however, he stated:

"...the Büdös springs are a very fashionable bathing-place, – at least among the peasants. They come here in summer, build a hut of branches, line it with straw, and stocking it plentifully with provisions, remain here for a month or six weeks at a time. Without waiting to look further at the springs, we hastened to the cave.

In the face of a rock of magnesian limestone, there was an opening large enough to contain about a dozen persons, the floor of which slanted inwards and downwards from the mouth. A few years ago this cave was much larger, but a great portion of it was destroyed by an earthquake. About the sides of the lower part



Bucecs Mountain (Mas. Bucegi) with the entrance of Kolostor (Monastery) Cave (drawings by G. Hering)

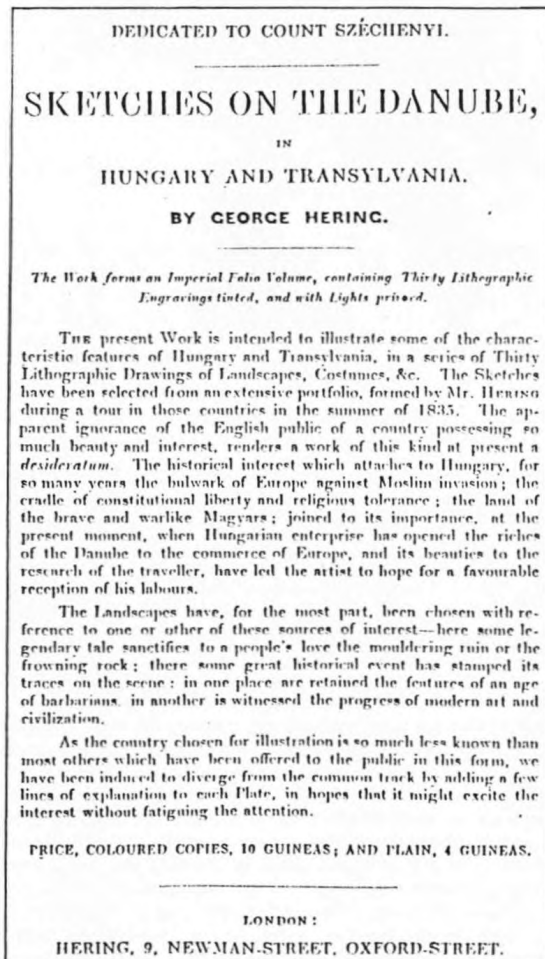
there was a thin yellow incrustation, which we found to be sulphur deposited from the gases which issue from crevices in the rock. As we got further into the cave we felt a sensation of tingling warmth, unlike anything I ever felt before, creeping as it were up the body, higher and higher in proportion as we descended lower. This extraordinary phenomenon is owing to the concentrated state of the carbonic acid gas (mixed with a very small proportion of sulphuretted hydrogen), which issues from an air-spring in the lower part of the cave, and fills it to a level with the mouth, whence it flows out as regular as water would do. The temperature was not higher in one part of the cave than in another, for in moving the hand from the upper part to the lower not the slightest difference could be at first perceived; but in a few seconds, as soon as the acid had power to penetrate the skin, the tingling warmth was felt. We descended till the gas reached the chin, when we could raise it in the hand to the lips and distantly perceive its sour taste. It is commonly supposed that the diluted carbonic acid gas produces death by entering the lungs and excluding all other air, but here it was impossible to respire it; the irritation produced on the glottis contracted it convulsively, and death would therefore occur almost immediately from strangulation. If any of it got into the eyes and nose, it made them smart severely. The peasants ascertain how far they can go with safety by striking their flints, and stopping when they no longer give sparks."

Travelling in Bucsecs Mountain (Mas. Bucegi) he visited a hermit cave where he was astonished by the life of people living there (Kolostor or Monastery Cave, P. de la Schitul Ialomije).

"In the interior, under the arched vault of the cavern, we found a small Greek chapel, and two other low buildings of wood, containing cells for seven or eight hermits."

Cave pictures

At last, we have to remember *George Hering*, a painter, who made the illustrations of Paget's book. Paget writes about it: "As I have always felt that written descriptions of the physical characteristics of a country and people convey, after all, but imperfect notions of them, I thought myself very fortunate when Mr. Hering agreed to accompany me for the purpose of illustrating whatever might be distinctive, or curious, or beautiful."



*G. Hering's sketchbook reviewed
by J. Paget in his book (1839)*

The following cave descriptions of Paget are illustrated by pictures: Demeňfalva Ice Cave, two caves of the Torda Canyon, the Stinking Cave of Torja (Torjai Bűdös-barlang), the Homoródalmás Cave and two pictures of the Bucsecs Kolostor or Monastery Cave. It is strange that there is no picture given to the description of the Baradla, however the text says that Hering made sketches of the "Tanz Saal". Paget gives the explanation of it in the preface of his book: "On my return to England, circumstances occurred which rendered it so doubtful when I should be enabled to complete my work that, anxious that Mr. Hering should have an opportunity to make known his talents, and willing in any way to spread an acquaintance with Hungary among the English, I placed the sketch-book at his disposal, and requested him to make use of it in any way he saw fit. The result has been the beautiful volume of "Sketches on the Danube, in Hungary and Transylvania." (HERING 1838; PAGET 1839).

Paget wrote the explanations to the pictures in the album published in two versions, one in black and white, the other in hand coloured form containing 30 engravings (546x363 mm) of *Thomas Fairland*. The author dedicated his work to *István Széchenyi*. The XVIIth picture of the series titled "The Cavern of Aggtelek" represents the "Tanz Saal" missing from the book of Paget.

Unfortunately, the route of the travels of Paget can not be shown on map. Most parts of his accurately written diaries has been lost, and the descriptions in his book are not in chronological order, and we know that he visited the same place several times, so descriptions of the same place can belong to different experiences.

At last, we have to mention, that in spite of the fact that in his book he described and gave pictures of all the important caves of Hungary – except for two caves – only the "Aggtelek Cavern" and the "Cavern of Demeňfalva" are signed on the coloured map appended to the book.

Kinga Székely
Budapest
Füst Milán u. 12
H-1039
HUNGARY

REFERENCES

- FEKETE I. (1836): Homoród-Almás barlang – *Kolozsvár*
HERING, G. (1838): Sketches on the Danube, in Hungary and Transylvania – *London*
JÓKAI M. (1877): Egy az Isten – *Budapest*
JÓSIKA M. (1844): Az élet útjai – *Pest*
KOVÁCS I. (1893): Paget János esq. életirata – *Kolozsvár, Keresztény Magvető 2.*
MALLER S. (1985): John Paget, Magyarország és Erdély, válogatás – *Budapest, Helikon Kiadó*
PAGET J. (1839): Hungary and Transylvania ... – *London, 1839, 1850, 1855; Leipzig 1842, 1845.*