

Preface

In the last decade of the 20th century – almost in the nick of time – the designation, legal protection, and research of forest reserves were finally started in Hungary, too. The process was not unprecedented, since those familiar with the natural sciences and those studying narrower forestry had already been faced with question of virgin forests more than one and a half centuries ago. A proof of this is that the topic comes up every now and then in former literature and in old documents.

Firstly, we present two studies which illustrate why people in the 19th-20th century could have been interested in the issue of former woodlands. About a century ago, at the millennium of the Hungarian Conquest, attention was drawn to the history of the Hungarian nation. The studies, letters, and proposals we have found are often not confined to woodland history and primeval forests, yet only the parts dealing with these topics are cited. Omissions are denoted by the sign (...). To show the atmosphere of the era we kept the original spelling and typography, although it occasionally hinders comprehension. All the reference works collected are grouped and presented mostly in chronological order.

We compiled the articles and texts with the help of once-lived witnesses, who, although had different qualifications and aims in writing about virgin forests, had one thing in common: they all had eyewitnessed primeval forests. Most of their conclusions stand firmly in time. Furthermore, their publications also prove that the issue of virgin woodlands had come up even before the onset of the forest reserves research programme. The situation has turned rather absurd since then, as the objects of virgin forest research – virgin forests themselves – have disappeared from the Carpathian basin.

Due to the various qualifications of the authors and the different aims of their works, the essays presented in this volume represent a variety of viewpoints. Some authors gave a non-professional, but deeply emotional description of virgin woodlands, creating an „atmosphere of virgin forests”. Such authors were Crown Prince Rudolph, Rezső Francé, and A. E. Brehm. Of course, emotions – just like people themselves – can be manifold. But it should also be mentioned that today’s people may also have divergent opinions about even the very same forest.

Professional foresters gave truly scientific descriptions of primeval forests. They appear to have been interested mainly in the exploitation and the transformation of virgin forests into production forests. Therefore, these studies (e.g. Béla Divald, Ábel Bartha) deal primarily with yield and wood quality.

For us, who deal with today’s forest reserves, the works analysing the structure and dynamics of virgin forests are the most valuable. The stand structure

data of Lajos Fekete, Géza Muzsnay, Gyula Fröhlich, and the inferences that can be drawn from the data are often valid even today. The processes described by these authors, which take place in virgin forests, can help us understand the changes observed in forest reserves, and carry out research.

This volume discusses principally montane and colline spruce woodlands, beech forests mixed with conifers, and beech woodlands. Lowland and colline oak woodlands had been transformed to such an extent by the 19th century, that they could not be considered as primeval forests. Nevertheless, the oak woodlands of the Dráva-Száva interfluve are dealt with in a separate subchapter.

Present publication constitutes part of a book series that publishes the results of forest reserves research. The term forest reserve is defined in detail in another volume of the series. One may lack the modern definition (composition, structure and dynamics) of virgin forest from the preface of this volume. We believe that the reader will find the above mentioned attributes by reading the descriptions and definitions of primeval forests of early authors, and will form his or her own idea of the virgin forests of the Carpathian basin.

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The editors