

FOREWORD

The present volume congregates the papers presented at the International Conference *Writing and Society in Transylvania 13th-17th Centuries*. Their common topic is represented by the analysis of the written document and the writing experiences of the official institutions or private persons, in various places and geographical locations from the medieval – later princely – Transylvania.

Writing was and continues to be an instrument of communication, preservation and immortalizing events and everyday experiences. Invented and practiced for a long time along oral memory, it slowly managed to come to preeminence. The trust invested by people in the validity and testimonial value of a document increased over centuries. Thus, from documents accessible to a small group, writing becomes commonly used on a large scale. Written acts comprise all levels of events, from royal donations, to privileges and ennoblements, to small family or personal episodes.

Writing experiences within the confines of Transylvania during the Voivodship implied the analysis of institutional activities with an accent placed on urban space which has discovered the utility of the written document on an early development stage. Documents accompanied the institution of notary public, the benefits granted by royalty to the *hospites* – a group that will later be known as the Saxon Nation University –, and the ecclesiastical activities, not only on theological level but in everyday administrative tasks regarding church assets. Out of the same practical reasons, the craftsmen guilds have used the written text in order to standardize their internal relationships or the communication with other persons or institutions.

The initial support of writing was the parchment, but it later gave way to paper. In parallel, writing was practiced on stone or other solid materials, with another aim altogether. This type of writing intended, as main goal, to preserve in the mankind's memory certain events or persons, and not to directly communicate or grant rights. The language of documents issued in the Voivodship of Transylvania was Latin, the same language used all over Catholic Europe, inspired by the model of the Pope's chancery. The terms usually encountered during that time and frequently used by various chanceries have received, over time, new meanings and significances. Slowly, the language of the provincial inhabitants made its way into the text of the document, with concepts and expressions different from the Latin language used in the written documents. These vernacular statements, witnesses of the vernacular, have prepared the transition from writing in Latin to using exclusively the spoken language.

Writing in Princely Transylvania was diverse from the point of view of languages used (Latin, Hungarian, German, Romanian), but also from the

perspective of documents' typology, a fact that illustrates a new dimension of writing, transitioning from the exclusive space of the elite to the middle classes. The highest institution that issued documents was the Princely Chancery, and it kept its preeminent position in this hierarchy over time. Documents issued by this office, inspired by the formularies collected over generations, composed by the scribes most skilled and educated, have kept and perpetuated the templates of the forbearers. On one hand, Latin continues to be the language used by documents of juridical nature, a praxis followed by lower administrative offices too (at counties, seats or towns' level); on the other hand, Hungarian becomes more and more the language used in documents. The topic of the mentioned documents is diverse, covering not only economy, social issues, politics within the confines of the Principality but also border problems and liaisons with other states.

The diversity of documents written initially on imported paper, later on locally produced support, demands new requirements in the diplomatic analysis of the act. The highest the value of the written act, the more attempts to fake it – this old occupation received a new addition: alongside the forgers from chapters and convents, other falsifiers were simple but literate persons, who did not work in an institution.

Many literates were educated in simple village schools or colleges from Transylvania; in certain cases, they attended European universities. For many of them writing became an instrument for gaining livelihood, for some it was a way of climbing the social ladder. Education opened the way for social ascension in ecclesiastical and laic environments. The high majority of those who achieved bishopric offices attended some form of higher education and managed to gather impressive libraries or even to write themselves reference writings. The same remark is valid for the lay environment, however the practical aspect of writing comes first. Many members of the small nobility from Banat, Maramureş and Transylvanian counties are involved in the issuance of varied locally produced documents. These persons have added to their name the occupational condition of scribe or magister, no matter what ethnic group they belonged to – the spiritual affiliation to one of the received religions was, nonetheless, an important aspect of their lives. These scribes are authors of official and practical texts, but they also wrote personal literature. Another important praxis in both urban and county environments was the drawing up of testaments, an indicator of the value placed by society on written documents. The coexistence of oral and written last wishes, sanctioned by ecclesiastical or laic authority involves a certain tradition and reduced material prospects.

It is our strong belief that the historical discourse regarding the written experiences in medieval, pre-modern and even up to present day Transylvania will encounter in the present volume interesting suggestions and novel resolutions from prestigious researches from England, Germany, Serbia, Hungary and, of course, Romania.