

NOBILITY AND WRITTEN CULTURE IN THE SOUTH-WESTERN BORDERLAND OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF TRANSYLVANIA

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Abstract: *The South western territory of the Transylvanian Principality, nowadays Banat, was a true territory of nobility. These atypical elites, living in the towns of Caransebeş and Lugoj, were closely connected to the realities of written culture. Dozens of documents indicate that at least a part of the Banat nobility has access to literacy. On the first level, handwriting was usual for those noble able to produce literary or religious works (so called Banatian humanists). On a second level could be included all those capable to write an official or private correspondence or who managed to manifest themselves in writing by small notes on the back of documents. A final level can be observed at those nobles whose ability to write is limited to the simple reproduction of their name (manu propria).*

Keywords: Principality of Transylvania, Banat, literacy, nobility, documents.

Concerns on a history of elites have a large tradition in the historiography of Europe. The case of Hungary may be taken for an example, as the first works on nobility were published there yet in the 18th century. It is true that the older works, with certain exceptions, insisted on problems of a patrimonial and genealogical nature, to the detriment of analyses on the elite phenomenon and the nobiliary structures¹.

If speaking about the Romanian historiography, it has also developed a component on the nobility that belonged especially to Transylvania or to areas with a large Romanian population (the Maramureş County, Chioar/ *Districtus Köváriensis*, the Banat)². The Romanian investigations had mainly in view the knezial families or those ones of a certain Romanian origin from the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. In order to recuperate such few exploited historical fields during the communist age, reconstitutions of a classical vision were generated, that still stood tributary to genealogical and patrimonial aspects. Once the analysis on the nobility from the eastern area of the kingdom fulfilled, a series of studies have

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¹ Ladislaus Mikola Liber-Baro de Szamosfalva, *Historia Genealogico Transilvanica*, 1731; Carolus Wagner, *Collectanea genealogico-historica illustrium Hungariae familiarum, quae jam interciderunt*, Buda, 1778; Kövári László, *Erdély nevezetesebb családai*, Kolozsvár, 1854; Nagy Iván, *Magyarország családai czimerekkel és nemzékrendi táblákkal*, vol. I-XII, Pest, 1857-1868; Kempelen Béla, *Magyar nemes családok*, vol. I-XI, Budapest, 1911-1932.

² For instance Ioan cavalier de Puşcariu, *Date istorice privitoare la familiile nobile române*, vol. I-II, Sibiu, 1892-1895.

been also published recently in the Romanian historiography, aiming at other aspects of the nobiliary society (as, for instance, the woman's position in the medieval or pre-modern age)³.

The cultural aspects, illiteracy or reception of the written culture by the nobiliary elites are known but less investigated phenomena in historiography. Some of the Hungarian historical writings outlined a series of specific features concerning the written word reception by the nobiliary Hungarian society. The contributions of Erik Fügedi⁴ or Zsigmond Jakó⁵ for the medieval age, and I. G. Tóth⁶, for the 18th century are the ones I am referring to. All these studies showed without exception that the written culture reception was quite precarious within the nobiliary society from Hungary. The oral culture on the contrary had a significant spreading level and impact⁷. Certainly, there were some specific categories within the nobiliary society, which were inured to the writing: some humanists, clerks, nobles from confirming offices, but those ones belonged to the clergy structures for the most part. The unique secular nobles who had to do with writing were those who had attended some of the various schools in the kingdom (capitular schools, urban ones etc.)⁸. Part of them succeeded to graduate one of the Central-European universities, getting the title of *bacalaureus*, *magister* or even *doctor*⁹. Some nobles were named *litteratus* (Hungarian = *deák*) in the medieval and pre-modern documents, a sign of their approaching to the written culture.

A better reception of the written culture within the nobiliary society is to be found in the early pre-modern age. One of reasons in that case might be the Reformation spreading that encouraged the approaching to the sacred writings,

³ Georgeta Fodor, *Destine comune: viața femeilor între public și privat. Țara Românească, Moldova și Transilvania. Secolele XV-XVII*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut, 2011; Livia Magina, *Un destin feminin în Banatul sfârșitului de secol XVI: Barbara Moise*, in „Analele Banatului”, XIX, 2011, p. 285-296; Ligia Boldea, *Examining the Status of the Noble Woman in 16th - 17th Century Banat*, in „Brukenthalia”. Romanian Cultural History Review, Supplement of Brukenthalia. „Acta Musei”, no. 3, 2013, p. 28-35.

⁴ Erick Fügedi *Verba volant...Középkori nemességünk szóbelisége és az írás* (= E. Fügedi, *Verba volant ...*), in Idem, *Kolduló barátok, polgárok, nemesek. Tanulmányok a magyar középkorról*, Budapest, 1981, p. 437-462.

⁵ *Írás, könyv, értelmiség. Tanulmányok Erdély történelméhez*, București, 1976.

⁶ *Literacy and Written Culture in Early Modern Central Europe*, Budapest, 1996; *Le monde de la petite noblesse hongroise au XVIIIe siècle*, in „Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine”, tome 46, no. 1, 1999, p. 171-184.

⁷ E. Fügedi, *Verba volant...*, passim.

⁸ Jako Sigismund, *Începuturile scrisului în păturile laice din Transilvania medievală*, in „Studii și cercetări de istorie”, 7, nr. 1-4, 1956, p. 92-97.

⁹ For those students originally from Banat and Transylvania, including nobles, registered in the European universities see Tonk Sándor, *Erdélyiek egyetemjárása a középkorban*, București, 1979; Costin Feneșan, *Studentii din Banat la universitățile străine până la 1552*, in „Revista de Istorie”, 1976, p. 1945-1965; Dragoș Lucian Țigău, *Noi informații despre prezența bănățenilor la universitatea din Viena (secolele XIV-XVI)*, in „Banatica”, 20/2, 2010, p. 49-62.

especially in the case of vernacular languages. The Catholic Reformation and the Counter-Reformation essentially contributed to the process of literacy. Developing of an educational system as well as need of understanding the catechism brought to the literacy spreading toward a larger part of the population¹⁰. However, yet in the 18th century there were lots of illiterate nobles and that was happened even in the western areas of Hungary supposed to have had a higher level of civilization than the Transylvanian or the southern territories¹¹.

The present investigation focuses on the area of the Banat during the 16th – 17th centuries. There really are in the Romanian historiography a good few of investigations on the local nobility of the Banat¹², but the only approaches on the relation between the nobility and the written culture were focused on the 14th century Himfy family¹³. The impact of the written culture was rather studied from the ecclesiastical history point of view, or from that one of the so-called “humanism of the Banat”, the nobility being a marginal subject and only if a nobiliary personality was involved in¹⁴.

The social and political frame of the area might be taken into account in order to better understand the written culture reception within the nobiliary society of the Banat. A quite agitate age was the 16th -17th centuries for the Banat. The western half of the province, namely its plain lands, was conquered in 1522 by the Ottomans, a situation that has remained unchanged for more than a century and a half¹⁵. This fact, in the context of our stuffy now is out of our interest. The montane area was integrated into the autonomous Principality of Transylvania without renouncing to its specific features. It was a peripheral area, a borderland under the permanent Turkish threatening where never the medieval tradition (*jus valachicum*

¹⁰ Doru Radosav, *Cultură și Umanism în Banat, sec. XVII* (= Doru Radosav, *Cultură*) Timișoara, Editura de Vest, 2003.

¹¹ Tóth I. G., *Literacy and Written Culture*, chapter *Literacy among nobility*, p. 95-145.

¹² See the studies of Ligia Boldea, *O familie nobilă română a Banatului montan în epoca Principatului: Mănticeni de Ohaba Măntic*, in *Itinerarii istoriografice. Studii în onoarea istoricului Costin Feneșan*, eds. Dumitru Țeicu, Rudolf Gräf, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, p. 235-269; *Tradiție și continuitate în lumea demnitarilor români ai Banatului de Caransebeș și Lugoj: Gârleştenii de Rudăria*, in „Analele Banatului”, XXII, 2014, p. 275-294; D. L. Țigău, *Familia Fiat de Armeniș în secolele XV-XVII*, in „Banatica”, 14, 1996, p. 21-51; *Familia Bizere-Găman în secolele XV-XVII*, in „Banatica”, 15/II, 2000, p. 31-68; *Familia nobililor Peica de Caransebeș în secolele XVI-XVII*, in „Banatica”, 17, 2005, p. 232-253; *O familie de orășeni nobili: Ivul de Caransebeș (secolele XVI-XVII)*, in *Studii și cercetări. Actele simpozionului „Banatul-trecut istoric și cultural” Zrenjanin-Novi Sad*, 2010, p. 1-16 etc.

¹³ Cosmin Popa-Gorjanu, *Scrisorile private și răspândirea științei de carte în mediul nobilimii din Ungaria (secolele XIV-XV)*, in „Annales Universitatis Apulensis” Series Historica, 8, 2004, p. 19-23; Idem, *Practica scrisului în mediul familiilor nobiliare. Registrul de scocoteli al magistrului Nicolae (mai-iunie 1372)*, in „Apulum”, XLIII/2, 2006, p. 63-70.

¹⁴ Doru Radosav, *Cultură*, passim; Adrian Magina, *De la excludere la coabitare. Biserici tradiționale, Reformă și Islam în Banat (1500-1700)*, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Cluj-Napoca, 2011.

¹⁵ For all those aspects connected to the Ottoman rule see Cristina Feneșan, *Vilayetul Timișoara 1552-1716*, Ariergarda, Timișoara, 2014.

using, for instance) disappeared. Three administrative superposed structures were set there: the district of Caransebeș, the county of Severin, and the banat of Caransebeș-Lugoj. The first two units practically run with the same corps of clerks, but the ban was supreme decisional forum in the area, as representing the princely authority in the region. Excepting the three superior officials, members of the local nobiliary families are to be found within all the three institutions. It is about a corps of officials that went round from county to urban authorities or to those of the banat¹⁶. More than 80% of the local population seems to have been of Romanian origin that offers a specific feature of the Banat. During the early pre-modern age, the nobiliary elite of the Banat passed somehow through a different process. It went on with having various estates, as during the medieval age, but of smaller area for the most part, namely parts of villages, rarely an entire village. Conscription of 1603 presents that breaking up and few are the nobles from the Banat to be compared with the Transylvanian elites, from this point of view¹⁷. The difference consists in the residence of the nobles from the Banat, that elite being an atypical one as it lived in the towns of the time. Almost entire nobility of the Banat highland was living in Caransebeș and Lugoj, which were considered urban centers able to offer a relative security against the Ottoman threat. It is no surprising thus that almost exclusively nobles were appointed in the major administrative functions in Caransebeș (mayors-judges, notaries or senators)¹⁸. The documents point out that almost all the transactions in that town involved members of the elite, so it might be possible that the nobiliary community there have been a numerically dominant one toward the townfolk. The geographic insulation of the Banat nobiliary society was enforced by a political seclusion in the 16th - 17th centuries, the local elite having never been almost entirely involved in the great functions of the Principality or in the great politics. It is hard to say if those representatives of the elite are to be taken for townfolk with a nobiliary statute or nobles with a statute of townfolk. I do believe that in fact they were a little of both categories, a kind of nobles who had assumed the similitude of the townfolk.

Part of the nobiliary society, even bound down to live there, benefited of literacy. A Catholic school had worked in Caransebeș, with the Franciscans' support most likely, but it disappeared with the Reformation time. The early contact with the Protestant aspects offered an extra opportunity to literacy. The Calvin school took the

¹⁶ Adrian Magina, *At the border of Transylvania: the County of Severin/ the District of Caransebeș in the 16th-17th centuries*, in „Transylvanian Review”, XXII, suppl. no. 4, 2013, p. 295-306.

¹⁷ Idem, *Conscrierea porților districtului Caransebeș în anul 1603. Considerații pe marginea unui document*, in *Pe urmele trecutului. Profesorului Nicolae Edroiu la 70 de ani*, eds. Ioan-Aurel Pop, Susana Andea, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 283-295.

¹⁸ Pesty Frigyes, *A Szörényi bánság és a Szörény vármegye története*, vol. II, Budapest, 1878, p. 253-269; Dragoș Lucian Țigău, *Aspecte din activitatea prim juzilor orașului Caransebeș în secolele XI-XVII*, in *Studii bănățene*, eds. Valeriu Leu, Carmen Albert, Dumitru Țeicu, Timișoara, 2007, p. 87-136.

place of the Catholic one and it would be, in the 17th century, a model for the similar settlements in Transylvania. The existence of the scholars' corps in that town, interested in religious writings, is mainly illustrated by *Palia de la Orăștie* [the Bible first two Books] editing in 1582, and Calvin Catechisms Book, in 1648. The Protestant educational offer in the town was doubled in the 17th century first half by the Jesuits missionary's school that was attended by tens of pupils, as the Jesuits themselves confessed. Most of those pupils were of a nobiliary origin. It is clear that literacy was an accessible process for a part of the nobiliary elites at least in the urban milieu of Caransebeș and Lugoj¹⁹.

What the literacy means for the writing process? Three are, at least, the levels I identified as referring to the nobility society from the Banat interaction with the written culture. An "elite among the elites" forms the first level, namely those certain nobles who might belong to the so-called "humanism of the Banat". They could be count on one's fingers: the two Michael Halici, father and son, for the Protestant vision, and George Buitul and John Sebessi as representing the Reformation vision. The last two, originated from Caransebeș, trained in Hungary and Italy, whiles the representatives of the Halicis learnt to read and write in their native town. Their appetite concerning the written culture manifested by their works of author (with religious valences mainly), by renderings or by getting books. Halici's own library, of 540 toms, was the largest private library in Transylvania at that time. The influence of those nobles was but a limited one in the Banat, as they might rather be connected with the ideas of Europe than of their native region²⁰.

The second level comprises those representatives of the elites who were appointed in official functions, for having known to read and write. The written products in the county of Severin and the town of Caransebeș rise up to several hundreds in 1550-1658. Undoubtedly there were much many documents but they didn't stand the storm of time. For instance, none of the town or county protocols was kept although we have information on their existence²¹. The main parts of the documents we find today were kept in some familial stocks especially and they speak about patrimonial or juridical subjects (agreements, debates on ownership etc.). The nobiliary milieu with its juridical or patrimonial questions asked for documents editing in order to be used in the competent offices. If we knew the editors of those supplications, mandates or other similar documents, we would be in a position to infer the writing impact on the nobiliary society. We might presume

¹⁹ Adrian Magina, *De la excludere la coabitare*, p. 103-107.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 113-115; Doru Radosav, *Cultură*, p. 177-224.

²¹ Mentioned several times in some law suits. See, in this sense, the document from 1628 preserved in Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale Cluj (= SJAN Cluj), Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 8, no. 812 or the document from 1613 published by Costin Fenesan, *Documente medievale bănățene (1440-1653)*, Timișoara, Facla, 1982, p. 135-141.

that the nobles themselves were the editors, but nothing is for certain in the field. And more than this, to appeal to a specialized literate should have been a proper choice, especially when speaking about juridical terms.

Within the 17th century, the Hungarian is in large proportion the language of documents editing, the documents edited in that town being exclusively in this language. Generally speaking, the local notaries were called to edit official documents; they belonged to nobiliary families from the Banat. Beginning with the 17th century second part, only the members of the two local families Ivul and Bobic were appointed as notaries both for the town and the county. The documents that the notaries edited were legally signed below the text by the notary, with the function mentioning and the note: *manu propria*²². But they weren't the single ones to have a connection with the written documents. The *litterati* are to be found besides the notaries. To take an example, in the 50s – the 60s of the 17th century, a noble *litteratus*, Andrew Veres was the judge of the nobles from the district of Caransebeş and the county of Severin²³. A part of the county documents of that time, in Hungarian and Latin, was written by him, especially those which didn't need the notary's presence. Other local officials were able to write and read too. It is the case of Nicholas Moise, judge of the town of Caransebeş, who wrote, in 1599, below the text of a document: *lecta per me Nicolaum Moises, iudicem, manu propria*. Although the handwriting of that note is the rest of the text alike, the difference concerning the ink may indicate that the document was written by another one and checked by the judge²⁴. Certainly, this nobleman was not an illiterate as he knew reading and writing. Not all the documents carry such notes, but many times the editors noted in the end: *idem qui supra*²⁵; does this mean that they wrote the document? I'd rather say that the notice certifies the content as a validation formula of the seals on the document²⁶. For a positive answer, certainly it is a problem that needs many thoroughgoing studies from now on. When the formula *correcta per eosdem* appears, we might understand that one of the editors was a literate one at least. Thus, the will of Magdalena Files from 1640 is a visual example. Nor less than six nobles from Caransebeş played for her witnesses. The author of the written will is easy to be named: Gregory Bako, a *litteratus* (deak) who was a noble as the other were²⁷. The same formula can be found in a document from 1648, of John Josika and Nicholas

²² On the activities of notaries in early modern Banat see Adrian Magina, *Notarii Caransebeşului în secolul al XVII-lea*, in „Analele Banatului”, S.N., Arheologie-Istorie, XIX, 2011, p. 303-309.

²³ Mentioned between 1629-1643, Pesty Frigyes, *A Szörényi bánság*, vol. I, p. 326-327.

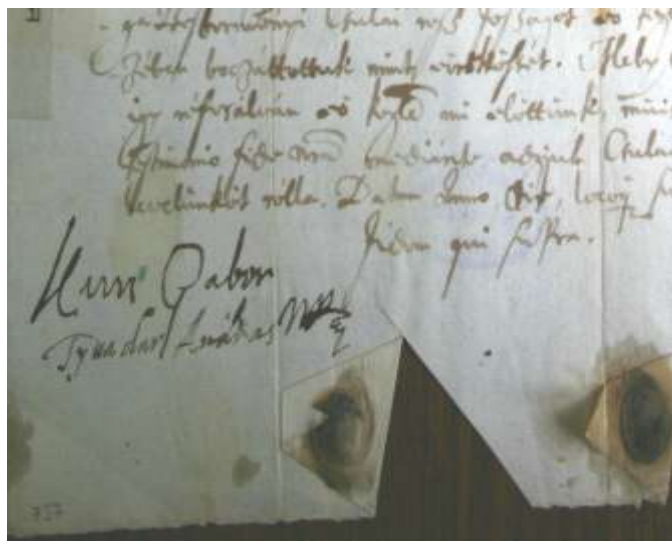
²⁴ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (= MNL OL), P 1916 Sombory család levéltára, 2 csomó: Gámán család, f. 29.

²⁵ This kind of mention is quite common. E.g. SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 8, no. 816; 887; MNL OL P 291 Gámán család levéltára, 1 tétel, f. 68.

²⁶ It seems to be the case of the document from the 10th of March 1604 (6670), where under *Idem qui superius*, the seals are placed without any signature. MNL OL P 291 Gámán család levéltára, 1 tétel, f. 50.

²⁷ SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 7, no. 726.

Gârliște senior²⁸. Did they write or only correct/check up what had been written? Hard to say. In both cases cut be persons with some writing/reading skills. At all events, John Josika knew writing as we can see his holograph signature on a document from 1641²⁹. We might suppose that the future mayor-judge of Caransebeș (in 1652), Nicholas Gârliște was in the same situation. Another document in the name of the county was written by notary Ioan Bobic (*manu propria*) and verified by those who had emitted it (*correcta per eosdem*)³⁰. People who could have verified the correctness of the document: Nicholas Ivul, the nobles' judge, a former notary of the town and the county³¹ and, maybe, the *vicecomes* Gabriel Kun. The latter had some knowledge in writing, as indicated by his signature on a document from 1656³². He and the judge of the nobles issue an act in Morencz village, where the *vicecomes* exercising his official capacity³³. A comparative analysis shows, however, that writing does not match his own signature, maybe was written by someone else, possibly county notary John Bobic.



1656. The signatures of vicecomes Gabriel Kun and nobleman Andrew Tivadar. SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 7, no. 737.

²⁸ SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 7, no. 730.

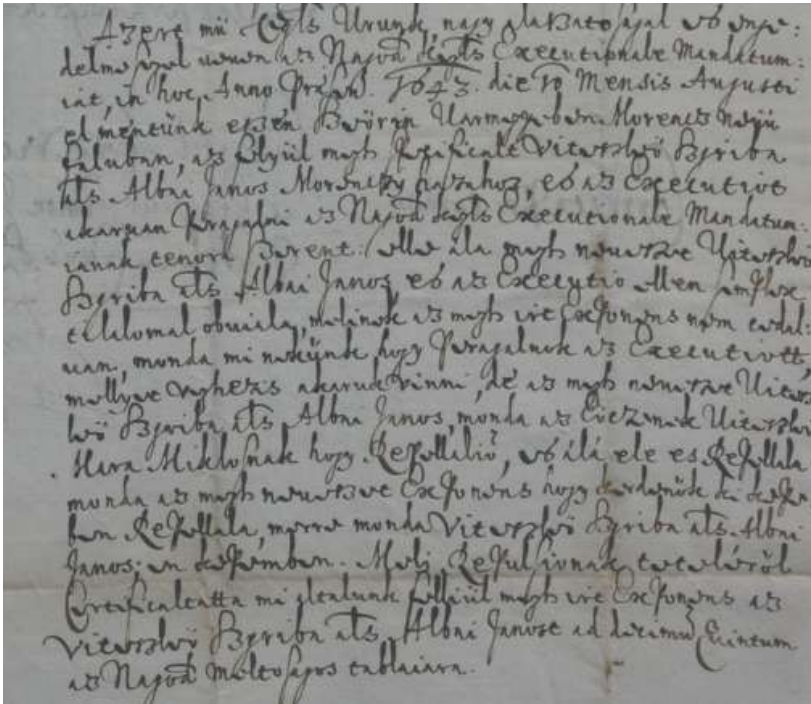
²⁹ SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 7, no. 729 edited in Pesty Frigyes, *Krassó vármegye története*, vol. IV, Budapest, 1883, p. 328-330.

³⁰ SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 7, no. 738.

³¹ A. Magina, *Notarii*, p. 305-307.

³² SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 7, no. 737.

³³ SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 8, no. 850 edited in Pesty Frigyes, *Krassó*, vol. IV, p. 337-338.



The document issued in Morencz by vicecomes Gabriel Kun. SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 8, no. 850, edited in Pesty, Krassó, vol. IV, p. 337-338.

I do believe that the nobles from the Banat frequently only set their seal at the end of a text, so to screen their bookless from view. Sometimes the name was written by the seal, not by those nobles but by the one who had edited the document. A visual situation I consider to be that one of the end of 1656. The name of that one who edited a document appears at the end of the text: Peter the Literate, notary of Lugoj; the seals of those present there appear on the sheet side. Easily to see that all those names are written by the same hand, deák Peter being the single one who signed *manu propria*³⁴. The same situation is in the case of testamentary dispositions written in Peștișul Mic, Hunedoara County in 1662 and certified by some nobles from Banat. Although for three banatian noblemen appears *manu propria* formula, writing is the same everywhere, a sign that it was written by the same hand, possibly John the Literate mentioned as witness³⁵.

³⁴ MNL OL P 291 Gámán család levéltára, 1 tétel, f. 82v.

³⁵ MNL OL, R 314 Városi iratgyűjtemény, 9 csomó, f. 8, edited by Costin Feneșan *Caransebeș după Caransebeș-Note cu privire la destinul nobilimii și orășenimii din Banatul Caransebeșului și Lugojului după anexarea de către Poartă*, in *Patrimonium Banaticum*, vol. III, 2004, p. 95-96.

It appears that, at least in one case, the document was written by one of those who had emitted it. It is a document from 1679 that was emitted in the name of Luca Olasz and Gabriel Măciçaș, noble persons from Biñiñți, both refugees there after the entire Banat occupying by the Turks, in 1658. According to Gabriel's notice and signature below the text, we might conclude that he was the one who had edited the document, although Luca Olasz was also a literate one as his signature proves at all: *Olasz Lukács nobilis persona, manu propria*³⁶. Petru Călinoiu was another nobleman who had a similar level in editing documents. We do not know his position before the town of Caransebeș falling into the Ottomans' power, but certainly he was a sufficiently cultivated man to write, on the back of some urban privileges, his own version on how he had succeeded to save the documents from under the Turkish horses' legs³⁷. His exercise is a memorable and very a pragmatic one to justify his effort to save some documents that were to glorify his native land. But not all the county or urban officials were able to read and write. In the very proximity of the Banat, namely in the county of Hunedoara with a nobiliary community well connected to that one from the Banat, I have found one case of illiterateness at least. Some noblemen and representatives of the county authorities emitted two documents in the end of the 17th century. The seals and signatures appear at the end of the text. The writing by the judge of the county nobles Orbanas Voda's seal is the same handwriting of that one who edited the documents and also there is a notice there to show that the respective one wrote by the agency of another one: *manu aliena*³⁸. Many of the nobles in the highland of the Banat must have been in the same situation, especially those who got no public functions.



Document issued by Orbanas Voda but written *manu aliena*.
SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova fund, box 7, no. 755

³⁶ MNL OL P 291 Gámán család levéltára, 1 tétel, f. 67.

³⁷ Costin Feneșan, *Caransebeș după Caransebeș*, p. 86, footnote 1.

³⁸ SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 7, no. 755; 756.

We arrive now to the last level of the written culture reception within the nobiliary society, the level of those ones who knew at least to write their own name. It is the most difficult aspect we might document as very few of the elites' members did effectively write on various acts. Nevertheless, as ones who were taking part in the certain public questions, as witnesses or assessors at the judges' seat, the nobles from the Banat set their seals and signatures to certify the content of the documents emitted with those occasions. Such a situation came from 1641, on the occasion of an act emitting by some officials of the county of Severin, by the town of Caransebeș, and several nobles from the Banat³⁹. The regular formulae are to be found below the text into Hungarian: *idem qui supra* and *correcta per eosdem*, together with the seals and signatures after, belonging to vice-count Wolfgang Josika (Vol Josyka), first judge of Caransebeș Lawrence Giuraca (Giurak Leörinc), and to the five present nobles: Nicholas Micșa (Nicolaus Mixa), John Josika (Ioannes Josika), George Simon (Gyorgiu Simon), Michael Tivadar (Michal/Michul Tivadar) și Nicholas Lățug (Nicolya Laciug). The major handwriting differences between text and signatures, as well as the differences among the last ones plead for each nobleman's own signature. It was Nicholas Lățug to write *manu propria*, and the awkwardness in the text editing proves that part of the respective nobles was less enough familiarized with writing. More than this, the written names seem to reproduce the usual pronunciation in the Banat area: Giurac, Georgiu, Micul, Nicolă.



The document issued in 1641 containing signatures of seven nobles from Caransebeș. SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 7, no. 729, published by Pesty Frigyes in *Krassó*, vol. IV, 328-330.

³⁹ SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 7, no. 729; Pesty Frigyes, *Krassó*, vol. IV, 328-330.

It is not an atypical situation. On the back of a document of the same times, noble Stephen Gârliște wrote with Cyrillic letters (it is the unique case of such a nature): *Grăliște Ștefan*, like in the local idiom⁴⁰. Some other nobles were at the same level with writing their signatures: Gabriel Kun and Andrew Tivadar in 1656⁴¹, and George Găman, Nicholas Găman (the judge of nobles in Hunedoara County) and Stephen Fiat, by the end of the 17th century. Two of the Banat nobles made a point of writing their social status, in Hungarian obviously: *nemes szemely*⁴², besides their signatures.



End of 17th century. The signatures of Banat noblemen's refugees in Hunedoara County.
SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova fund, box 10, no. 900.

The several samples of signatures prove that a part of the Banat nobility at least was familiarized with writing and maybe reading too. The most of them were representatives of the nobiliary families from Caransebeș area, from whom almost all the officials of the county and town were recruited. Nothing was preserved until the given moment to represent the little nobility or the townsfolk, because their archives were destroyed, the preserved sources belonging to the relative important families.

May we speak about literacy/illiteracy, even rudimentary, within the early modern noble society in the Banat? I believe that the above samples show only the

⁴⁰ Reproduced in C. Feneșan, *Documente*, p. 103.

⁴¹ SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 7, no. 737.

⁴² SJAN Cluj, Matskasi of Tincova collection, box 10, no. 900.

usage of writing not the profoundness of this phenomenon. At any rate, the Hungarian language was the medium of the documents, the Latin being reserved to a limited group of initiated persons, notaries or literati. Maybe the difference between a literate person and an illiterate one (*litteratus versus illiteratus*) consisted just in ability to communicate through the medium of the Latin not only of the vernacular. Romanian was the usual language at home and in church at that time. The Catechisms Book of 1648 shows that certain persons were able to read and even to write into Romanian. We have a unique sample in the field, namely the poem that Michael Halici junior wrote by means of the Hungarian spelling. Could he have written by means of another spelling if, as still tributary to Slavonic, the Romanian language had no spelling yet?

A question concerning the cultural and identity assuming is rising if analyzing the written products of that time. What is the identity reference of those nobles from the Banat? Could it be the spoken language? Or the way they were writing? Certain evidence belonging to the 17th century showed that the Romanian nobility from the Banat was persuaded of its ethnic origin. May we speak about Romanians in such a case, even if they wrote exclusively into Hungarian? It could be taken for nonsense nowadays, but part of the nobility from the Banat assumed its Romanian identity (Michael Halici junior is the most representative case) but of Hungarian expression, as the written products point out. I believe that we may speak about a cultural bilingualism up to the Banat falling into the Turks' power, finally the Hungarian language having been imposed upon the nobility of the Banat.