

RURAL LITERACY IN 17TH CENTURY TRANSYLVANIA. THE CASE OF CLUJ-MĂNĂȘTUR*

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Abstract: *In contrast to the more accepted term of urban literacy, the access to the written word of rural communities was seen as almost nonexistent in Romanian historiographical discourse. The few documents signed by peasants indicate that in the Principality of Transylvania there were some rural communities accustomed to communicate by using writing. This is the case of Cluj-Mănăștur community which, due to favourable circumstances, could manifest in written form in a period which no such cases are known for Transylvanian area.*

Keywords: literacy, rural communities, orality, Transylvania, 17th century

The historian can only rely on texts in the absence of voices¹.

The aim of the present study is to identify literate means available to Transylvanian peasants during the 17th century, more specifically the relationship between the rural world, important in number, and pragmatic writing. The basis of this material is a previous study², however, we have considered the discussion could be updated by new information which restores a possible picture of the interaction between simple man and literacy.

Writing...

Transylvania's rural world around 1600 is contemporary to the intellectual environment that culturally marked out people such as Apaczai Csere János, Michael Halici father, Gabriel Ivul and George Buitul or protopope Vasile from Șcheii Brașovului. Oral memory, cultivated within traditionalist communities, was also contemporary to the world of indestructible memory, consisting of written documents. The limit of the two parallel horizons is visible when the rural community becomes aware of the written act's endurance over the spoken, seen or gestured performance.

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¹ Robert Fossier, *Oamenii Evului Mediu*, București, 2011, p. 304.

² Livia Magina, *Scrisul în orizontul rural din Transilvania (sec. XVI-XVII). Preliminarii în Scris și societate în Transilvania secolelor XIII-XVII/ Writing and Society in Transylvania 13th-17th. Centuries*, ed. Susana Andea, Avram Andea, Adinel Dincă, Livia Magina, Cluj-Napoca, 2013, p. 237-271.

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”Literacy Experiences concerning Medieval and Early Modern Transylvania”, p. 389-398.

Any discussion regarding the rural space usually leans towards the so-called oral culture, or popular story. The spoken word was a major characteristic of the rustic environment, as peasants based their communications on memory and gesture – writing slowly became, from exterior technology, a means of changing mentalities³. On the other side, when addressing the theme of literacy, ideas frequently drift to the printing phenomenon and its pedagogical role in using the alphabet; it is generally true, nonetheless, that the peasant lacked the “quill” to convey the word. Even if the effects of the written word have rapidly propagated throughout the whole of society during the 17th century, literacy did not reach the same magnitude. It is possible that, starting from this century onwards, the development of bureaucracy and the desire to keep evidence of things have failed to keep up with the insufficient number of scribes⁴. The degree literacy degree of a society is also indissolubly linked to writing. In Transylvania one can follow, for instance, an ascending literacy trend from the 17th to the 18th century, and also an increasing statistics at the level of social stratification⁵.

Some vectors can be identified as fundamental for the increase of the literacy rate: the proximity of urban centres, social or occupational status, economy. Geographically, schools were mainly positioned around cities or monasteries. However, in the rural environment the status of the village is also an important factor. Literacy seems to be almost absent in the areas dominated by the seigniorial system in comparison with the areas of free villages. Reasons are obvious, related to the immediate economic aspects. Serfs were never concerned with the status of land property, unlike the free peasants, who called upon the written word to recollect the economic transactions of their assets. Such illustrative examples are the free villages from the Saxon areas, Romanian villages, like Săliște, included. Economic factors also influenced the dissemination of literacy in the rural world, as pointed out by Pierre Chaunu, who correlated the phenomenon of “complete literacy” to economic growth and technological revolution⁶. Some occupational groups, such as traders and craftsmen, perceived literacy and schooling as an investment, while the Transylvanian Orthodox peasants chose learning as a means of rising to a higher social status, in priesthood.

History of writing is a less familiar subject to Romanian historians, while Hungarian historians are more accustomed to the subject – the 17th century has

³ J. Walter Ong, *Orality and literacy. The technologizing of the world*, London-New-York, 2002, p. 6.

⁴ Tóth István György, *Alfabetizáció és birtokigazgatás (16-18.század)* in *Rendi társadalom-Polgári társadalom. Vera (nem csak) a városban. Supplementum*, szerk. Varga László, Hajnal István, 1995, p. 247.

⁵ Such an example is pointed out by Pál Judith in her study of the Szekely population during the 18th century; cf. *Írástudás a Székelyföldön a XVIII. században* in *Emlékkönyv Jakó Zsigmond nyolcvanadik születésnapjára*, Cluj-Napoca, 1996, p. 359-368.

⁶ Pierre Chaunu, *Civilizația Europei în epoca luminilor*, București, 1986, p. 189-190.

been mostly analysed by István György Tóth⁷. During the 17th century the technical aspects linked to palaeography are no longer an issue, as the letters are already personalized, making it easier to identify the person who was writing rather than the writing style. This is why the history of writing shifts during this century, and even during the previous one, towards an anthropology of writing and less to the technique of signs. Those who write in the rural areas during this interval do not use writing as amusement⁸ but as assertion, obstacle to oblivion⁹. As the estimated number of the illiterate population in Transylvania during the 19th century reaches over 70%, all questions on the literacy rate two centuries before seem rhetorical. From the literate ones, only the names of those who worked in various administrative positions have been preserved in documents, as writing was always one of the pillars of administration due to its bureaucratic character.

Writing documents with administrative and juridical content was not an everyday activity, which is why the writer followed a certain template – due to this fact, the researcher cannot overcome the limitations imposed by the very nature of the document. At most, the name and occupation of the writer can be apprehended. Unfortunately, unlike the documents issued by Princely chanceries, rural administrative texts have only been preserved by chance, as they became obsolete when the beneficiary lost his interest.

...and space

Mănăștur or Cluj-Mănăștur village owes its name to the Benedictine monastery established in the Western part of Cluj, and kept a close relationship with the town during its entire existence. Inhabitants of the villages west of the town – Mănăștur, Baci, Popești, Florești, Leghia – have kept the Catholic faith even during the 17th century, when Cluj has been witness to more than one change in religious practices.

Like many other rural settlements, Mănăștur has changed its master more than once: it was part of the Gilău citadel's domain¹⁰, then it was subject to the revenue authority and property of the Jesuits, of Ana Apafi, and later, at the end of

⁷ Istvan György Toth, *Iskolák és iskolamesterek Körömend környékén. (1499-1848) in Savaria. A Vas Megyei Múzeumok Értesítője* 1984, p. 187-207; Idem, *Iskolák és analfabéták a szentgotthárdi uradalom falvaiban. A paraszti írástudása a körömenti uradalom falvaiban, in A felvilágosodás jegyében. Tanulmányok H. Balázs Éva 70. születésnapjára*, Budapest, 1985, p. 258-271; Idem, *Paraszti írástudás a körömenti uradalomban a 17-19. században, in Adalékok a 16-20. századi magyar művelődés történetéhez*, szerk. Bálint István János. Budapest, 1987, p. 143-165; Idem, *Írástudó ember után kéne nézni - Az írásbeliségtől az alfabetizált világba, in "Rubicon"*, 1990/5, p. 10-11; Idem, *Jobbágyok, hajdúk, deákok. A körömenti uradalom társadalma a 17. században*, Budapest, 1992 (Értekezések a történelmi tudományok köréből, 115), Szerk. Somogyi Éva; Idem, *Írás, olvasás, könyv a paraszti műveltségben a XVII-XVIII században in "Századok"*, 129, 1995, nr. 4, p. 825-827.

⁸ Doru Radosav, *Nevoințele scrisului. Cultură și credință în spațiul românesc în secolele XVII-XIX in Teologie și cultura transilvănă în contextul spiritualității europene in sec. XVI-XIX*, 1999, p. 18.

⁹ M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, ed. 2, Oxford, 1993.

¹⁰ Jakó Zsigmond, *A gyalui vártartomány urbáriumai (infra: Jakó, A gyalui ...)*, Cluj, 1944.

the 17th century, it returned to the ownership of the Jesuits. The administration of the village was represented by the judge, who was elected for one year from among the inhabitants. The jurors, also elected from among the locals, had juridical and administrative functions, supporting the judge¹¹. From a demographic point of view, the number of inhabitants did not oscillate drastically between 1588 and 1652, with an average number of 300 persons¹².

The end of the 16th century brought the members of the Society of Jesus to the villagers and the establishment of a school through Christopher Bathory's decree from 1579¹³. The Mănăştur school comprised in 1648 three buildings, each with 2 classes¹⁴. Courses began in January and ended in September. The mentioning of poor pupils is proof that peasants' children also attended school – they lived in a big house in the vicinity of the school, and their meals were supported by charity. The school had a certain fame, at least among Catholics, as families from other villages than Mănăştur brought their children here for instruction. The interns paid their tuition fees with money and provisions too: wheat, wine, cheese, butter, vegetables, pigs or lambs¹⁵. The Mănăştur school, *ludus litterarius*, was a grammar school, with two classes for children aged from 11 to 13. In 1580 Jacob Wujek, the Superior of the Transylvanian mission, accounted for more than 30 pupils in the first class, and only 5 pupils in the second. There are no mentions of the pupils' home villages, therefore it is not possible to know how many children from Mănăştur attended this school.

After 1620 a new Jesuit mission was established in Mănăştur by Stephen Mory, and the support of some Catholic noblemen from Cluj is mentioned after 1624: Stephen Erdély and John Vass were the sponsors of the Jesuit College school. Stephen Mory paid the salary of those who acted as *magister* for the two classes, over 80 children¹⁶. The Mănăştur school's registers have been preserved due to the Jesuit reports; however, on the Floreşti school there is little information, although both a church and a school functioned in this village¹⁷.

Daily lessons consisted of Latin and Greek grammar¹⁸. Children learned reading and writing following a method that implied orally spelling various words,

¹¹ Livia Magina, *Instituția judelei sătesc în Principatul Transilvaniei*, Cluj, 2014.

¹² Jakó Zs., *A gyalui vártartomány urbáriumai*, p. 5, 10, 27, 45, 92, 131.

¹³ Vasile Rus, *Pro scientiarum academia. Calvaria și școlile iezuite din Cluj (sec. XVI-XVIII)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 35.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 182-183.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 189-192.

¹⁶ Doru Radosav, *Landmarks in Higher education*, in "Transylvanian Review", 2009, vol. XVIII, no. 4 (winter 2009), p. 21-22; Erdélyi és hódoltsági jezsuita missziók, ed. Balázs Mihály, Fricsey Ádám, Lukács László, Monok István, vol. I/2, Szeged, 1990, p. 419-421.

¹⁷ Lucian Periș, *Prezențe catolice în Transilvania, Moldova și Țara Românească 1601-1698*, Blaj, 2005, p. 200.

¹⁸ Vasile Rus, *Operarii in vinea Domini. Misionarii iezuiți în Transilvania, Banat și Partium (1579-1715), I. Tablouri istorice spirituale*, Cluj-Napoca, 2007, p. 189.

then writing them down. Learning by heart must have had an important role in the unwinding of courses.

Mănăștur had a rich tradition in the issuing of documents due to the activity of the *Saint Mary the Virgin* Convent, which emitted numerous documents for the Principality's noblemen – however, the inhabitants of the village have interacted with the written word on an administrative and juridical level. When composing such a document, it was imperative that most of the population could understand it in order to avoid possible disputes; this is why we encounter in these documents expressions and names from the spoken language, *vulgo dicitur*, such as names of places or people. The language in question was Hungarian, which had been used alongside Latin in official documents from the second half of the 16th century, becoming predominant during the 17th century¹⁹, when we encounter fewer and fewer documents written in Latin. In Hungarian written documents, Latin expressions only mark technical aspects used by the chancery, such as *Correcta per nos, Lecta et correcta, arbitris*, etc.

Texts

The written texts were not of lay or intimate nature, nor profound and ecclesiastic, but issued with a clear administrative intent; this is the main reason they were preserved. 25 documents issued under the sanctioning of the Mănăștur village link forever some villagers' names to literacy. Judges or jurors, the elite of Mănăștur, simple serfs or poor widows are active or passive participants in the document's creation: Mesei György, Bathi Márton, Varga Gergely, Daróczy Mihály, Dragsy György, Serenyessi András, Tóth András, Kasoni István, Boldizsár György, Czizmadia Boldizsár, etc. Along the entire 17th century fragments of such meetings dedicated to the precise aim of issuing testimonials can depict the change of attitude towards written information in opposition to memory.

The documents' contents indicate the reason of their preservation. Without exception, they were issued for practical purposes, such as leasing or buying/selling houses from the village. The documents were preserved in the fiscal archive that was registered as part of F 234, fascicle XXII, which contains the property documents of the Jesuit Society. The authors of these texts may have been the administrative personnel of the village's leadership, or the village notary, who was specifically assigned to writing documents. The first category of issuers are clearly defined, however, the village's scribe or notary is still a sporadic presence²⁰.

¹⁹ Kiss András, *A kolozsvári városi levéltár elsőlevéltári segédlete* in "Levéltári közlemények", 66, 1995, p. 197-216; Szende Katalin, *Integration through language. The multilingual character of late Medieval Hungarian Towns*, in *Segregation – Integration – Assimilation. Religious and Ethnic Groups in the Medieval Towns of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Derek Keene, Nagy Balázs, Szende Katalin, Farnham- Ashgate, 2009, p. 211.

²⁰ Livia Magina, *op.cit.*, p. 237-271.

The first document was issued in 1614²¹, when Bathi Márton was village judge, and has the autograph signature of another peasant, Serennyesi András²². The writing is round, with letters' extensions typical previous century, somehow different from other investigated acts. Another document certifying the sale of a house and a garden, issued in 1630 in front of the judge, jurors and scribe Peter, is unique as well: it was written with an elongated calligraphy, angled towards the right. It is possible that scribe Peter was the author of the document²³. In 1636 the judge and jurors were testifying again to a sale. The text of the documents was written by someone familiar with composing such scripts, proven by the easily readable and small calligraphy, slightly angled towards the right²⁴. The two documents issued around the middle of the century bring to light other distinct information which will be discussed below.

In 1628 the judge of Mănăştur, Bathi Marton, *falusi biró*, signs a document certifying the sale of a hayfield within the village's confines²⁵. In 1650 can be identified, on a letter regarding the sale of some property by the villagers²⁶, the signature of Stephan Dragi, *iudex Colosmonostoriensi*, another Mănăştur judge.

Another documentary collection was issued in 1674-1676. The tenures from 1674 to 1676 were made by the same person: Menasagi Mihály *deák*. Their object were some hayfields situated in the upper or lower regions of the village (*alsorend* și *felsorend*), for the price of 2-4 florins.

On the lease document concerning a village house, issued in 1676, there can be found under the text an annotation made by the same hand: *Correcta per nos* – as the document bears the name and seal of the village judge, we can speculate that he was the author and corrector of the text, a fact that indicates Mesei György's level of language, grammar and legislative knowledge. Another set of 15 documents²⁷ issued during the time Mesei György was judge, from 1674 to 1676, can act as sample of administrative rural literacy. The procedure for validating low value transactions, like leasing hayfields, was the same as for high valued dealings: coming before the judge, composing the documents according to the epoch's formulary, sealing of the transaction. The entire above mentioned group of 15 documents that were issued during 2 years in Mănăştur were formulated in the name of the judge and jurors: *Mü, Colosvarmegieben Colosmonostori falusi biro* or *Mü, ez alab közbirak ugi Colosmonostori falusi biro*. After the presentation of the cause or transaction, it was

²¹ Magyar Országos Levéltár (infra: MOL), F 234, Erdélyi Fiscalis Levéltár (hereafter F 234) XXII szekrény, fasc. 15, unnumbered.

²² Idem.

²³ Idem, 17 februarie 1630.

²⁴ Idem, 26 martie 1636.

²⁵ MOL, F 234, XXII szekrény, fasc.16, unnumbered.

²⁶ Idem, fasc. 15.

²⁷ Idem, fasc. 17.

each time mentioned that the document was sanctioned by the village's seal, imprinted on the left side, under the text. Under the name of juror Kasoni István on the document issued on February 6th 1676 there is also an autograph signature. 13 of the above mentioned documents were written by the same person, a fact apparent in the writing's stroke and enunciation. The first row of the document and the names of the officials are written with elongated letters in an over-row, while the body of the text has smaller letters, neater and more confident. The two different documents were written with a rounder and neater stroke, without differences between the letters from the rows at the beginning, middle or the end of the text.

Presuppositions regarding the literacy of the villagers are thus confirmed, some could write, others were just witnesses to the writing process. Both judge and jurors from Mănăștur village had the opportunity, during the 17th century, to learn to read and write, to appreciate the value of the written word for memorising the events from the villagers' lives.

Voices

Unlike music, where silence has its role and meaning, the documentary laconism is due to the lack of authors. Literate, scribe, notary are concepts that somewhat cover the same reality. Their voice is heard through the annotations left on the back of the documents. Only their voice reaches us, even if they were silent at the moment the document was conceived. Their origin, rural or urban, might add to the hypothesis of their acknowledgment of the writing's importance and of the literacy's descent to a lower social level. Certainly, the power of the written document is confirmed by another: the power, importance and position of those who knew how to write. Writing skills are visible in the acronym *m. p.*, meaning *manu propria*, and in the well-known and already mentioned chancery phrases: *Correcta per nos* or *Lecta et correcta per nos*.

The community's and the Prince's appreciation for the literate person is visible in the economic status. Many scribes manage to gather significant wealth, like Menassagy Mihály who received for his literate services some leased lands. Others manage to gather even more, allowing them to buy houses, i.e. Jacob from Aiton who bought in 1610 a household in Alba Iulia on Racz Street for 40 florins²⁸ – he was visibly rich enough to afford to buy such an estate²⁹. Numerous diplomas, with or without coats of arms, issued for scribes all over the Principality are another proof. Gáspár Bőjthi, the historian of the Princely Court, may be the most famous of these scribes. He was a serf who climbed the social ladder with the help of literacy – thus, the voice of Gáspár

²⁸ MOL, F 2 Protocolla, vol. II, f. 304. 1610, January 24th.

²⁹ About the scribe Jacob from Aiton, see Gálfi Emőke, *Bethlen Gábor hitelezője, Ajtonyi Jakab deák* în *A magyar arisztokrácia társadalmi sokszínűsége változó értékek és életviszonyok*, szerk. Papp Klara, Püski Levente, Debrecen, 2013, p. 115-127.

Veres Bőjthi was heard through his writing³⁰. The increased number of such documents, granting nobility to former peasant scribes who had proven their fidelity and merit within the Princely Chancery, indicates the awareness of literacy and scribes; in the rural world it can be observed in the increased number of professional scribes.

All assertions regarding the literacy of the judge and jurors from Mănăștur seem to lose substance before the documents bearing the clear mentioning of the scribe. Such an annotation, made on May 24th 1650³¹ may change the research approach: the autograph signature placed on the right lower corner of the text, belonging to Kassai Fazekas Mihály *falu hites notarius* – *village's juror notary*. Fazekas Mihály was not one of the village's inhabitants, nor one of the scribes of the Princely Chancery. The writing is elongated, grouped, readable, and the signature's strokes are similar, thus allowing us to surmise that the scribe of this document was Fazekas Mihály himself. According to the present state of research, the village notary is a historical figure only from the 18th century onwards. The *Urbarium's* instructions state that he could be elected by the villagers without the interference of the estate's master, as was the custom in Maramureș and Satu Mare counties. County administration allowed villagers to elect their own village scribe, maybe because of the fact that he was remunerated directly by the settlement. In Southern Transylvania the notarial activity is better delineated due to the larger number of preserved documents. As the area was influenced by the Saxon administrative institutions, the notary has managed to shape more rapidly a clear structure. Aurel Răduțiu has identified in this area many individuals who acted as villages' notaries: in Zărnești Ion Constantin, in Bran the priest Grigore, in Tohanul Nou Stoica, in Vlădeni the priest Dumitru. The election procedure followed a few simple steps: the notary was elected by the village, then confirmed by the Brașov magistrate, then the details of the contract were established. Usually, a person known for his literate activity was chosen as notary, mandated, just like the rest of the village officials, for 1 year. His attributions were to ensure the written output of the village according to the inhabitants' needs, and his salary was to be made by the village too³². During the 18th century the salary of a village notary ranged from 1 to 12 florins, depending on the community³³, however this situation is difficult to transpose in the 17th century.

The identification of a village juror notary, even if in only one circumstance, changes the chronological delineation of the rural notary's existence to the beginning of the 17th century. Fazekas Mihály might also have been just passing through and had written the mentioned document without having any other connections to the village.

³⁰ Gálfi Emőke, *A gyulafehérvári hiteleshely levélkeresői (1556-1690)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2015, p. 106-110.

³¹ MOL, F 234, XXII szekrény, fasc. 16., unnumbered.

³² Aurel Răduțiu, *Acte țărănești în limba română din Transilvania până la 1848 și importanța lor documentară*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie", Cluj-Napoca, XIX, 1976, p. 87.

³³ David Prodan, *Răscoala lui Horea*, București, 1979, I, p. 113.

The same 1650 document preserves other interesting information, as a colophon. Under the text, on the left side of the page, an annotation was inserted 4 years later, confirming that Mănăștur village had quite a big and well organized group of literate inhabitants. Another Mănăștur villager marks his presence: Michael Jó (Michael Joo). In 1652 Mihaly Jó *deak* owned a household in the village³⁴ and one of his relatives was elected village judge. The 7 rows written by him around 1654 on the 1650 document, over the seal, confirms that the act was made *cum consensu judicis et juratorum supranotati. Michael Joo, notarius Colosmonstra m.p.* The first document from May 24th 1650 was not written by him, but by Fazekas Mihály, the village notary, however a second one, issued on the same date, was written and signed by Michael Jó³⁵, and the signature is accompanied by the annotation *scriba*. This proves that in 1650 the village of Mănăștur had at least 2 literate persons, involved in the issuing of documents Michael Jó was notary of Mănăștur village until 1654. Due to the vicinity of the Prince's residence, Michael Jó's career took a beneficial turn, as he was co-opted to write documents for the Princely Chancery around the 7th decade of the 17th century³⁶. A simple scribe at first, later chancery notary, Michael Jó can be considered a representative figure for the peasants who managed to climb the social ladder due to their literate skills. A scribe and a notary working together, later a village notary who becomes a member of the Princely Chancery around the mid-17th century cannot be simple coincidences or sporadic instances. The fact that such characters are not encountered in other regions is merely a circumstantial situation.

Some documents from outside our present research area mention, 40 years before, another character, Michael Zambo, an inhabitant of Cluj-Mănăștur. In the Mănăștur *Urbarium* from 1638-1640 there is mention of a house belonging to the widow of Michael Zambo³⁷, but his story begins in 1607, when he started working as scribe and notary for the Princely Chancery until 1619. In 1624 he became the secretary of Stephen Bethlen³⁸. The tax exemption for his house and his ennoblement were due to his literate services for the chancery and Prince. On December 10th 1607, Michael Zambo of Cluj-Mănăștur, *scribae et jurati notarii cancellariorum nostrorum majoris*³⁹, received a grant of arms which specifically mentioned the fact that he was a trustworthy companion of the Prince's advisor, John Pesky of Ders⁴⁰, for whom he wrote many letters. What is unknown about

³⁴ Jakó Zs., *A gyalui vártartomány urbáriumai*, p. 131.

³⁵ MOL, F 234, XXII szekrény, fasc. 16, nenumerotat.

³⁶ Trocsányi Zsolt, *Erdély központi kormányzata 1540-1690*, Budapest, 1980, p. 192.

³⁷ Jakó Zsigmond, *A gyalui ...*, Cluj, 1944, p. 28, 47.

³⁸ Trocsányi Zsolt, *Erdély központi*, p. 197.

³⁹ MOL, F 234, XXII szekrény, fasc. 15, nenumerotat.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem: quae ipse ab eo toto tempore quo per cancellariae nostram connumeratum tam in aliis negocium... quam eiam in conscribere variorum generis epistolis magna cum animi sui constancia uti ex commendationi magistri domini Joannis Pesky de Ders, intimi consilarii et cancellarii nostri.*

Michael Zambo, as well as for Michael J6 or Fazekas Mihály, is the places where they studied; however, his peasant origin is certain.

Another case study is that of scribe Peter. A juror in 1640, he is mentioned among the peasants of Mănăștur in 1642⁴¹. These 2 aspects compel us to take into consideration the large number of inhabitants who have attended the village school. Peter does not seem to have been wealthy as he lived in the same house with his son⁴², but his literate skills brought him a good name.

For the history of writing the author represents the keystone of research. In the rural world of the 17th century the literate persons were like islands in an ocean of *idiotae, illiterati* or *rusticani*⁴³; their number and language used for written communication is still problematic. Those who issued documents with juridical and administrative value, even if they never knew how to read or write, had the right to sanction such documents. It was by the means of sealing that they came into direct contact with the written word or by hearing the contents of the document they were persuaded of its credibility. An interesting opinion on this matter belongs to Michael Clanchy, who considered, at least for medieval England and some other regions, that owning a seal was a factor of increased self-esteem and personal overestimation of one's capacity to write: "The possession of any type of seal implied that its owner considered himself to be of sufficient status to use and understand documents, even if this were an aspiration rather than a reality"⁴⁴. The documents issued by the Cluj-Mănăștur judges are sanctioned by the imprint of a seal on wax. The one in charge of safekeeping of the village seal was the judge himself, who, even if could not read or write, was part of the literate life of the village due to the imprinting of the seal on various documents.

The peasants seem to have pragmatically adapted, in the general and everyday life frame, to the rather new technology of writing. A relatively steady cultural society, as the peasant world is considered to be, needed more than one generation to embrace literacy as a mundane event and trust its functions. The documented emergence of notaries and rural scribes on the outskirts of the cities during the 17th century indicates the intense use of writing in the provincial world and, at least, the indirect interaction of rural communities with literacy.

(translated by Teodora Bonțeanu)

⁴¹ Jakó Zs., *A gyalui ...*, p. 94.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁴³ Restas Attila, „*Inter idiotas et rusticanos*”. *Szövegalakítás és tanítás egy bölöni unitárius kéziratok prédikációskötetben* în *Studia Literaria* 2013, nr. 3-4, p. 189-203.

⁴⁴ M.Clanchy, *From memory to written record*, p. 51