

**SCRIPTA MECHANICORUM:
CRAFTSMEN AND WRITING PRAXIS
IN MEDIEVAL TRANSYLVANIA (15TH -16TH CENTURIES)
– PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS***

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Abstract: *This topic concerning the writing praxis within the community of craftsmen – more specifically, Transylvanian guilds and brotherhoods, is not thoroughly investigated by modern historiography. The present study aims to bring forward the data encompassed in specific trade writs, such as guild statutes and regulations, account books, registers, and answer a set of specific questions: when was the written word of use to craftsmen? Who wrote, in which language and for whom? As craftsmen and tradesmen became an urban elite, how important was literacy for them, for their social environment, for the development of vernacular languages and for the secular aspect of writing? Setting in written form the ancient customs, maintained as oral rules and regulations, was an important step forward in the process of assigning juridical value to the documents issued by lay organizations. The author intends to present an overview of these complex aspects, merely an introduction to the subject, based on preserved written documents of the artisan guilds from Sibiu, Brasov and Cluj.*

Keywords: writing praxis, craftsmen, tradesmen, urban elite

Writing praxis, as a common activity carried out by Transylvanian craftsmen fraternities or guilds, was never considered a major research direction in Romanian historiography, sometimes even missing completely from the scholarly approach to the theme of the present study¹. This essay is trying to fill a gap in an attempt to decipher the data comprised inside specific sources (regulations, ordinances, ledger books, statutes, other acts issued by the guilds) and answer the specific set of questions which arise their very existence: when do craftsmen feel the need to use the written word? Who writes? Which language is from used? Who is the recipient of the written act? Could these sources indicate the literacy level (even level of culture) of this specific urban social category? Are these sources relevant for illustrating the development of vernacular languages (German and Hungarian were

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¹ Although the bibliography concerning the activity of guilds in Transylvania is quite rich, Romanian historiography has only under investigation a few contributions to the subject: Ștefan Pascu, *Meșteșugurile din Transilvania până în secolul al XVI-lea*, București, 1954, p. 303 and p. 306; Samuel Goldenberg, *Clujul în secolul al XVI-lea. Producția și schimbul de mărfuri*, București, 1958, p. 200-202.

used in writing before the Reformation) or even the secularization of the process of writing?

The theme is extremely generous, not only in terms of temporal (15th and 16th centuries) and geographical coordinates (cities and boroughs in the Voivodship of Transylvania), but also in terms of the issues involved. Thus, the present paper will take into consideration the craftsmen communities from only three urban centres, Braşov, Cluj and Sibiu, primarily due to the ease of access to the sources, most of them edited² (except for some of the guilds' ledger books, which are only partly/fragmentarily published) and, secondly, because they are illustrative of the Transylvanian area. Even if the "territorial" approach seems restrictive, we believe that a comprehensive analysis of the subject, which would exceed the limits of an academic paper, does not seem possible in the present state of the art. The proposed research outline, which can surely be improved by further investigation, regards the main categories of sources that could become relevant to our topic through a thorough analysis, both paleographical and diplomatic.

The medieval city is known to have developed such institutions that favoured the improvement and secularization of literacy³. Writing praxis has undergone a profound transformation from the miraculous knowledge of the facts (for many centuries a privilege of the clergy) to the brief, erratic jottings inside a guild's ledger book, and the craftsmen fraternities have played an active role in this process, alongside other urban institutions.

The guild was one of the many forms of association based on occupation incorporated in medieval society that usually comprised all the artisans and craftsmen in a particular branch of industry. Even if Romanian historiography regarded the guild as a "secluded" or "rigid" social group, historical records reveal a more nuanced reality, which restores its image. As crafts and professional associations develop, artisans' communities prove themselves to possess flexible, even dynamic qualities, embodied in the multitude of functions undertaken. The receptive attitude towards the ideas of the Reformation is illustrated by the craftsmen's communities numerous statutes which were "purged" of items deemed "outdated and unnecessary" issued in Braşov and Sibiu in 1539 and 1540, before such notions were to be imposed by the Saxon Nation University in 1550. Given that in the first decades of the 16th century a

² Jakab Elek, *Oklevéltár Kolozsvár Története*, I, Buda, 1870, 420 p.; *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Kronstadt, Neunter Band, Zunfturkunden (1420-1580)*, bearbeitet von Gernot Nussbächer und Elisabeta Martin, Kronstadt/Heidelberg, 1999, 458 p. (hereafter: *Quel. Kron.*, IX); *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Hermannstadt, Zweiter band: Handel und Gewerbe in Hermannstadt und in den Sieben Stülen (1224-1579)* (hereafter: *Quel. Herman.*, II), hrsg. von Monica Vlaicu, Radu Constantinescu, Adriana Ghibu, Costin Feneşan, Cristina Halichias und Liliana Popa, Hermannstadt/Heidelberg, 2003, 580 p..

³ Jakó Sigismund, *Les débuts de l'écriture dans les couches laïques de la société féodale en Transylvanie. Considérations sur l'étude de la paléographie sur de nouvelles bases*, in "Nouvelles études d'histoire présentées au Xe congrès des sciences historiques Rome 1955", Bucarest 1955, p. 221.

guild, devoted to a patron saint, still contributed along with craft fraternities, other lay associations and ecclesiastical institutions to the organization of religious life of the city or the mediaeval town, the formal waiver of these issues (in the new regulations) reveals its innovative and adaptable feature.

It is our belief that the praxis of writing in the trades associations is closely linked to the development of crafts and professional organization and also dependent on the existence of elementary schools able to provide training (reading, writing and counting). The presence of an educational system at the urban level is attested in Transylvania in the first half of the 14th century (at the Orăștie Chapter); in the three designated cities the timeline is as follows: Sibiu – 1380, Brașov – 1388 Cluj – 1405⁴. The fact that in the second half of the 15th century more and more sons of artisans from Transylvanian towns enroll in European universities speaks not only to the effectiveness of these schools in providing a level of training that allowed attendance at higher educational institutions⁵, but also to the wealth of this urban category that records during this period a full institutional matureness. Most of the sources that will be analyzed within the present paper date from the middle of the 15th century and the first decades of the next, thereby revealing that occupational development required the setting in written form of any craft's rules, together with those regulations related to the guild's organization and functions. Regulations and charters were required not only for daily organizational purposes, but also for legal recognition, as the town's magistrate confirmed trades corporations based on these statutes, and therefore granted them legal status, as *universitas*.

A. Statutes and/or Ordinances

In order to develop this topic we consider it necessary to clarify the semantic aspect of the terms “ordinance” (regulation) and “statute” in historical context, namely from the point of view of diplomatic. It should be mentioned that the difference between simple regulations/ decisions and statutes (non-existent in Romanian historiography) was first noticed by the publishers of the documentary series “Urkundenbuch”. They observed, in the abstracts of the documents, the distinction between “Bestimmungen” (ordinances, instructions, regulations) and “Satzung” (statute, charter). In the context of our theme, the ordinances are more relevant in illustrating the activity of the occupational communities, because some of

⁴, Friedrich Teutsch, *Geschichte der evangelische Kirche in Siebenbürgen*, I, Hermannstadt, 1921, p. 135; Jakó Sigismund, *op.cit.*, p. 214; Philippi Maja, *Die Bürger von Kronstadt im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert*, Bukarest, 1986, p. 226.

⁵ Sibiu, Brașov and Cluj are towns with the most students attending European universities from the 15th century until 1521. In: Tonk Sándor, *Erdélyek egyetemjárás a középkorban*, I, Bukarest, 1979, p. 68.

them are even written by craftsmen. The statutes or charters, on the other hand, are official documents issued by the town magistrate or the Saxon Nation University.

As mentioned above, along with the development and improvement of craft activities and of forms of occupational organization, it is required to set written standards, canons, directions and rules that are to be accepted and followed by each fraternity, in order to ensure both the unfolding of practical activity and well-functioning of the guild. Once recorded, these rules become ordinances or regulations, characterized by several aspects.

a) The ordinances were written in most cases in a vernacular language (in this specific case, German) either within a guild's ledger book⁶ or on loose pieces of parchment or paper, on pages later bound in the form of a notebook⁷. Just in one known case the language used was Latin, and, according to the neat calligraphy, the ordinance was written by a notary public: the Ordinance of the Goldsmiths' Guild in Cluj, dating from the second half of the 15th century⁸, before the year 1473, when it was sanctioned by the town's magistrate⁹. The ordinance was written on 7 parchment pages, bound as a notebook (the first page is missing), and was attested by the Statute of 1473 (preserved only in a German copy); this charter mentions a "registern" that was brought before the town's council by 4 guild masters and from it the rules and ordinances (*dy selbigin gesacz und ordenungin*) of the fraternity were copied, so that they could be strengthened by in written testimony¹⁰.

b) Regulations and ordinances are usually established by all masters and are laid down in writing by the guild masters¹¹. For instance, within the ordinances of the tailors' guild in Sibiu (1485) it is stated that "on Saint Mark's day (April 25th) the wise and provident guild masters of the tailors' guild ... laid out their customs and laws with the favour of all wise and honest masters of the guild..."¹². Or, in another example, the ordinances of the goldsmiths' guild in Sibiu (1491) state that "the wise lords and masters from the entire fraternity of goldsmiths from Sibiu had

⁶ For instance: the ordinances of Sibiu tailors' guild, 1485 (*Quel. Herman.*, II, p. 168-175, nr. 66); the ordinances of Sibiu goldsmiths' guild, 1494 (*Ibidem*, II, p. 213-220, nr. 78); the ordinances of Braşov furriers' guild, 1424 (*Quel. Kron.*, IX, p. 24-28, nr. 2).

⁷ For instance: the ordinances of the Sibiu drapers' guild, cca. 1500 (*Quel. Herman.* II, p. 234-239, nr. 82); the ordinances of the Sibiu tinsmiths' guild, cca. 1500 (*Ibidem*, II, p. 230-234, nr. 81); the ordinances of the Sibiu furriers' guild, 1520, (*Ibidem*, II, p. 269-278, nr. 95).

⁸ *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen* (hereafter: *Ub.*), VI, hrsg. von Gustav Gündisch, Herta Gündisch, Gernot Nussbächer und Konrad G. Gündisch, Bukarest, 1981, p. 560-563, nr. 3974

⁹ *Ibidem*, VI, p. 563-565, nr. 3955.

¹⁰ "...mit pryfflichin hantschriften besorget, befestiget und beschreibin sollen werdin", (*Ibidem*, VI, p. 564).

¹¹ "Item dy erberen meyster haben das beschlossen...", in the ordinances of the furriers' guild from Cluj in 1488 (Jakab Elek, *op.cit.*, I, p. 285).

¹² *Quel. Herman.*, II, p. 172.

laid down the guild's customs and laws (*Gewonheit und Gerechtheit*)... as they have done, from time to time, since the days of the elders..."¹³.

c) Ordinances are rarely written in Latin (although their title is usually written in this language)¹⁴ and they do not use a fixed template, thereby later additions, deletions and amendments can be noticed, some of them even added to the original text decades later, as required by the evolution of craftsmanship and economy, i. e. the ordinances of the furriers' guild in Braşov, put in writing in 1424¹⁵ together with the guild's ledger book. In 1450 and 1466 new rules are added to the ordinance, summing up 21 articles (in German, partially in Latin). The same guild renews its ordinances in 1528 (almost a century after the first draft of the regulation) counting 27 articles entitled "*Die Statuta oder Gesetzt der Erligen Czech der Kyrnsner*", written in the same ledger book¹⁶.

Who exactly the person was writing these ordinances is still unidentified, yet this paper represents an attempt to solve this unknown factor and to provide firm support for future research.

Ştefan Pascu, in his paper "Meşteşugurile în Transilvania" (*Crafts in Transylvania*) stated that each guild had its own scribe or notary, a position occupied by the youngest of guild masters, and later by one of the literate young masters¹⁷. However, according to historical sources and guilds' ledger books, the findings do not match the previous statement. There were, for sure, masters who had been involved in writing activities within the guild, and their name is known in some cases, and yet there were journeymen who could take care of the fraternity's register or even specialized notaries public, on payroll, who drew up the documents needed by the occupational associations.

The guilds' ordinances represent only a part of the documents issued by the craftsmen's fraternity written either by one of their own or by the city's notaries public. We should, however, mention the name of 2 scribes, who were probably crafts masters: Cristanus Baconi, who, in 1488, compiled the Ordinances of the Furriers' Guild (written in German) under the Latin title "*Lex*"¹⁸, and Johann Frydsch¹⁹, who drew up the 20 "renewed" articles of the Ordinances of the

¹³ *Ibidem*, II, p. 217.

¹⁴ The ordinances of the Cluj goldsmiths' guild, ante 1473, and certain articles from the ordinances of the Braşov furriers' guild, 1424, are written in Latin.

¹⁵ *Quel. Kron.*, IX, p. 24-28, nr. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 146-150, nr. 73.

¹⁷ Ştefan Pascu, *op.cit.*, p. 306.

¹⁸ Jakab Elek, *op.cit.*, I, p. 285-289, nr. 178. In order to prove his knowledge of Latin, Cristanus Baconi writes as closing: *Item et sic est finis per manus Cristani Baconi in der/die ? Saturni cum Sociis (29 noiembrie), sub anno Domini MCCCCLXXXVIII.* (p. 289).

¹⁹ A certain Johann Frydsch is present in the Sibiu Tax Register as collector from 1485 to 1487, and in 1501 he was mentioned in the vilicus' expense list with 2 florins for his son's wedding.

Furriers' Guild in Sibiu²⁰ on parchment, in notebook form, in German. Both documents were compiled by more than one hand, some added later (on the Cluj document 3 sets of different calligraphies can be identified).

Although the ordinances were set in writing in order to be known and followed by the members of the fraternity and to be extended to the newly arrived apprentices, they were intended for private use within the guild, thereby they are part of the category known as "*Privatakten*". They could become official, public documents only after their sanctioning by an authority from outside the guild: the city's council, the Saxon Nation University or a notary public. Only these sanctioned documents endowed with legal power can be called statutes or charters, in order to separate their meaning from the previous category, that of ordinances.

Statutes can be differentiated with respect to ordinances not only through their legal value, but also through their contents (they are more comprehensive and include the text of the ordinances) and their 3 part structure, similar to that of documents (*Urkunden*).

1) **Initial protocol**²¹ – offers information about the issuer: judge, master/mayor (*judex, magister civium, Richter*), town's council (*iudices et iurati cives civitatis; iurati consules civitatis; geschworne Burger der Stadt*)²², notary public²³, Saxon Nation University²⁴, followed by the address, often blended with

(*Rechnungen aus dem Archiv der Stadt Hermannstadt und der sächsischen Nation*, I, Hermannstadt, 1880, p. 102, 105, 110, 111, 135, 136, 359).

²⁰ "In nomine domini Amen. Item, dy Gerechtheit der Herren und Mayster der Kürschner Czech yn der Hermannstatt, verrnytt und geschryben durch Johann Frydsch yn dem Jar nach Christ Geburth 1520" (Quel. Herman., II, p. 269).

²¹ An example of initial protocol: "Nos, magister Thomas Altenberger, magister civium, iudices et iurati cives civitatis Cibiniensis, memorie commendamus tenore presencium significantes quibus incumbit universis presentibus et futuris etc. Cum nos certo die ad officia reipublice in consistorio civitatis nostre pariter consedissemus, comparuerunt coram nobis providi viri Matthias Heen de Burgberg, Cristofferus de Braschovia et Andreas Sybeth de Grosschewren, artis et czeche linificum magistri nomine et in persona omnium et singulorum aliorum magistrorum artis eiusdem, qui exhibuerunt et presentarunt nobis ceros articulos infra scriptos, supplicantes nobis sepenumero ut eosdem confirmare, roborare et pro uberiori eorum conservacione manutenere deberemus, quos articulos pro maiori cautela, materna lingua presenti literis conscribi fecimus". (*Ibidem*, II, p. 183).

²² For instance, the Statutes of: Sibiu: 1487 November 9th (*Quel. Herman.*, II, p. 183), 1520 June 8th (*Ibidem*, II, p. 264); Braşov: 1511 January 24th (*Quel. Kron*, IX, p. 93), 1511 September 25th (*Ibidem*, IX, p. 97), 1532 July 15th (*Ibidem*, IX, p. 153); Cluj: 1479 December 13th (*Ub*, VII, hrsg. von Gustav Gündisch, Herta Gündisch, Konrad G. Gündisch und Gernot Nussbächer, Bukarest, 1991, p. 221), 1507 February 26th (Jakab Elek, *op.cit.*, I, p. 315), 1516 February 25th (*Ibidem*, I, p.342).

²³ The Charter of the Sibiu Glovemakers' guild, issued November 21st, 1523 by the notary public Greger Mayer from Nürnberg: "Und ich Greger Mayer, Nuermberger, aus des Bistum Regensburg Erpon aus bebstlichen Gewalt, offenwarwr Schreyber pin kegenwertig gewest der Samblung der obgemelten erlichen Czech...hab alle die selben beschrieben mit meyner egenen Handt..." (*Quel. Herman.*, II, p. 283-287, nr. 99).

²⁴ For instance, the statutes issued in Sibiu in: 1539 July 23rd (*Ibidem*, II, p. 308-313, nr. 108), 1540 November 24th (*Ibidem*, II, p. 343-347, nr. 118).

the notification: “*memorie commendamus tenore presencium significantes quibus expedit universis*” (and known versions).

2) **Main text** (context) – opens with the exposition, containing the events or circumstances that have determined the issue of the document, the description of the guild’s representatives (each one identified by name), the oral or written account of the regulations and the request for their sanctioning, the approval of the magistrate and the confirmation decision by their inclusion in the document. The articles (ordinances) are next enclosed in the document²⁵, each starting with the demonstrative pronoun *idem* (*item*) or the ordinal numeral *primus*, *secundus*, *tertius*, etc. The main text will conclude with the *corroboratio*, the statement of the means to be used for validation of the document. The mostly used formula of the Latin template is: *in cuius rei memoria...presentes literas nostras ... duximus concedendas*, or its German version: *dysen vnserenn offentliche Brieff mit vnserenn grossen Sygel versigelt...gegeben...habenn*²⁶.

3) **Final protocol** – consists of dating elements²⁷, place (Cluj or Sibiu) and name of the issuer of the document (notary public – i. e. the Statute of the Sibiu Glovers’ Guild from 1523 states the notary public Greg Mayer of Nürnberg as issuer)²⁸.

This structure, slightly altered (as in the case of some charters from Cluj where a preamble precedes the name of the issuer)²⁹ can be found in all analyzed statutes from the three mentioned towns, and is generally valid for the entire Transylvanian area.

²⁵ For other examples, see the documents quoted at notes 22- 24.

²⁶ *Corroboratio* examples, in Latin: “*In cuius rei evidenciam presentes literas nostras patentes sigili memorate civitatis nostre maiori et autentici subapenso consignatas predictis magistris artis linificum nomine et in persona omnium aliorum magistrorum artis et czeche eiusdem postulantibus ad cautelam duximus concedendas*” (*Quel. Herman.*, II, p. 187); in German: “*Welche obgemelte Punct wnd Artickel wyr Richter, Hon wnd gesworne Purger der obgenante Stat Kronstat czu einem ewigen Gedächtnuß wnd stercker Befestigung, habenn dysenn wnsrenn Pryeff mit dem anhangen grösse/r/nn Sigel wnser Stat den obgemelten ersamen kwnsreychen Mesterenn lassen gebenn*” (*Quel. Kron.* IX, p. 94).

²⁷ For other examples, see the documents quoted at notes 22- 24.

²⁸ The Statute of the Cluj Tailors’ guild (November 11th 1475) written by *Johannes Dobo notarius in premissis* (*Ub.*, VII, p. 65-68, nr. 4078); the Statute of the Cluj Ropemakers’ guild (April 2nd 1486), written by *Laurentius Reynhart notarius in premissis* (*Ibidem*, VII, p. 417-418, nr. 4631); the Statute of the Cluj Wheelwrights and Coachmakers’ guild (December 20th 1515) written by *Johannes Isaak notarius* (Jakab Elek, *op.cit.*, I, p. 340-342, nr. 210); the Statute of the Cluj Goldsmiths’ guild (February 25th 1516) written by the same *Johannes Isaak notarius, manu propria* (*Ibidem*, I, p. 342-344, nr. 211); the Statute of the Sibiu Glovemakers’ guild (November 21st 1523) issued by Greger Mayer from Nürnberg, notary public (*Quel. Herman.*, II, p. 283-287, nr. 99).

²⁹ For instance, the preamble of the Cluj Ropemakers’ guild Statute (April 2nd 1486), states as reasons for the issuing of the document the fragility of memory with the passing of time, thus making it necessary for facts to be written down, so that they won’t be forgotten (with a special emphasis on the importance of the written word). *Ub.*, VII, p. 417.

Some differences can be observed when comparing the Transylvanian statutes: the Cluj charters are issued as privileges (*presentes literas nostras privilegiales*)³⁰, with lasting value, while the Sibiu and Braşov charters were written as open letters (*presentes literas nostras patentes, offentlige Brieff*)³¹, reflecting a temporary aspect of the document, suitable with the dynamic activity of the craftsmen. Other differences regard the language used: Latin for the Cluj statutes (even if the ordinances are in German), German for the Braşov statutes and a mixture of Latin and German for the Sibiu guild documents (the articles were written in German as a guarantee of their observance, as stated in the opening of the document: *pro maiori cautela materna lingua presenti literis conscribi fecimus*)³². One could wonder whether the ethnic composition of Cluj (Germans, Hungarians) determined the use of Latin in the guilds' statutes issued here. Another reason could have been the traditional, conservative spirit of this town (taking into account the privilege form of the guild documents) when compared with Braşov or Sibiu, two cities who seem more sensitive to the practical effects of this type of act.

Other distinction between the analyzed statutes resides in the notification: Cluj and Sibiu charters state: *significamus quibus incumbit universis*³³ or *significamus quibus incumbit universis presentibus et futuris*³⁴, the Braşov documents use another formula: *allen dy dysen unseren Brieff sehen, hören oder lesen werden*³⁵, that is "to all those who will see, hear or read this letter of ours". The ways of getting accustomed to the document, by means of sight, hearing and reading, may lead to the assumption that there was a significant number of those not able to read and/or write.

Most of the statutes that were analyzed in the present paper illustrate the assertion of writing as opposed to spoken communication as a means for the occupational associations to pass over the canons and standards of their professional activity and organization. When asking the town's magistrate to sanction their internal regulations, the representatives of the fraternities, usually the guild masters, bring them in written form, thus reflecting the diffusion of literacy within the craftsmen environment starting with the middle of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th: *quandam cartam certis articulis conscriptam* (Cluj Shoemakers' Guild Statute, 1481)³⁶, *articulos per eos nobis in scriptis porrectos* (Cluj Weavers' Guild Statute, 1507)³⁷, *quedam Registra super statutis et*

³⁰ *Ub.* VII, p. 222 (nr. 4324); p. 418 (nr. 4631).

³¹ *Quel. Herman.*, II, p. 187 (nr. 69); p. 193 (nr. 71); *Quel. Kron.*, IX, p. 141 (nr. 68).

³² *Quel. Herman.*, II, p. 183 (nr. 69).

³³ *Ibidem*, II, p. 183 (nr. 69).

³⁴ *Ub.*, VII, p. 417 (nr. 4631).

³⁵ *Quel. Kron.*, IX, p. 153 (nr. 76).

³⁶ *Ub.*, VII, p. 261, (nr. 4393).

³⁷ Jakab Elek, *op.cit.*, I, p. 315 (nr. 194).

ordinacionibus eiusdem cehe (Cluj Coopers' Guild Statute, 1507)³⁸, *quandam cartam papyream* (Cluj Wheelwrights and Coachmakers' Guild Statute, 1515)³⁹, *quantam scedam papiream super certis decretis, statutis et ordinacionibus* (Cluj Goldsmiths' Guild Statute, 1516)⁴⁰, *certos articulos infrascriptos* (Sibiu Weavers' Guild Statute, 1487)⁴¹, *constitutiones ipsorum...in pergamento materna lingua conscriptas* (Sibiu Painters, Carpenters, Glassworkers and Woodcarvers' Guild Statute, 1520)⁴², *diese nachgeschriebene Artickel* (Braşov Bowmakers' Guild Statute, 1505)⁴³, *yre Statut wnd Artickel dy sy wns haben scryffthlich geczeigt* (Braşov Goldsmiths' Guild Statute, 1511)⁴⁴ *dy Artikel auff Pergamen geschriben* (Braşov Painters, Carpenters, Glassworkers and Woodcarvers' Guild Statute, 1523, following the model of the Sibiu guild)⁴⁵.

Certain references to “the ancient and praiseworthy customs, preserved from the older days” (*antiquas et laudabiles consuetudines more alias ab antiquo observatas*)⁴⁶ passed over from generation to generation orally are quite scarce in the analyzed statutes, a fact which can only attest to the triumph of the written word in craftsmen activity, with more and more documents being issued at the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th.

The guild statute presents itself as a public document with a very important content: it establishes the rules of the crafting activity, organizes the occupational association and provides social equilibrium through a moral conduct guide. It becomes relevant for the maturity degree of the occupational fraternity, reflecting its relation with the “world of words” and with the ruling institutions. Town administration and the Saxon Nation University had to adapt to the craftsmen requirements and use in writing of public documents the spoken language (German) or a commonly used, official language (Latin) where the ethnic factor required it (such as in Cluj). This represents only one of the reasons we have decided to stress upon this type of document, even if it acts as an indirect historical source for the present study.

B. The Guild's Ledger Books

The study of the guild's ledger books was only a secondary topic in Romanian historiography, mainly due to the scarce number of preserved items from the period under investigation (15th-mid 16th century) and also due to

³⁸ *Ibidem*, I, p. 312 (nr. 193 a).

³⁹ *Ibidem*, I, p. 341 (nr. 210).

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, I, p. 342 (nr. 211).

⁴¹ *Quel. Herman.*, II, p. 183 (nr. 69).

⁴² *Ibidem*, II, p. 265 (nr. 94).

⁴³ *Quel. Kron.*, IX, p. 83-84 (nr. 34).

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 93 (nr. 40).

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 139 (nr. 68).

⁴⁶ The statute of the Cluj Ironsmiths' guild (1477), *Ub.*, VII, p. 150 (nr. 4203).

historians' interest in the economic, social or occupational aspects revealed by these ledger books. German historiography has developed a special research field (Amtsbuchwesen) which places the guild's ledger books in the wider category of "Amtsbücher", together with town registers, *Urbaria*, land registers, account books, tax registers, transcripts, etc.⁴⁷.

The 3rd article of the Cluj Tanners Guild from 1569 describes the role of the guilds ledger book: "the guild should have a book (*jahr buch*) to record, year after year, all events, tasks and requisites concerning the journeymen, the young masters who have joined this guild ... also the rulings of the guild master, the work done, good or bad, the contributions to the fraternity; also what had been built or purchased during that year; also the events that have happened during that year in the town or country..."⁴⁸. However, the guild's ledger books preserved from up to the mid-16th century (and even later) illustrate a different situation, which does not comply with the abovementioned instructions or with the rigorous distinction made by Ștefan Pascu, based on previous bibliography, which identifies 4 types of ledger books for each guild: 1) a guild master's ledger book (a register of assemblies and accounts); 2) an apprentices' ledger book (stating the starting and finishing dates of their apprenticeship); 3) a masters' ledger book (recording the date of acceptance as masters in the guild, and also the masters' death dates); 4) the punishment ledger book⁴⁹. This classification may be valid for the 17th century and even later, up to the 19th century.

Some of the earliest ledger books from Brașov, Sibiu and Cluj will be presented below, with the special mention that the present study is based both on edited material (Sibiu, Brașov) and on unpublished sources (for Cluj). It is our opinion that in the process of publishing the guild's ledger books the editor should not cling to the old, fragmentary manner of illustrating the information, but should present the ledger book as a whole, in order to better understand its structure and evolution during time, the setbacks or progress made, and more than anything to bring forth the relationship between craftsmanship and writing.

Brașov

1) The Furriers' Guild Ledger Book (1424-1570)⁵⁰ is one of the oldest preserved guild books; it belonged to one of the most powerful guilds in town, and it is written probably by the masters in German (partly Latin). The ledger book contains

⁴⁷ Hartmann Josef u. Kloosterhuis Jürgen, *Amtsbücher*, in *Die archivalischen Quellen. Mit einer Einführung in die Historischen Hilfswissenschaften*. Hrsg. von Friedrich Beck und Eckart Henning, 4. Auflage, Köln, Weimar, Wien, 2004, p. 40-73.

⁴⁸ Samuel Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

⁴⁹ Ștefan Pascu, *op.cit.*, p. 303.

⁵⁰ Registrum statutorum magistrorum de arte pellificum civitatis Coronensis. A D. Millesimo quadragentesimo XXIII, in: *Quel. Kron.*, IX, p. 28, passim.

the ordinances from 1424⁵¹ and 1528⁵², names of masters from 1424-1506⁵³ and 1507-1570⁵⁴, together with some brief notes concerning the acceptance or the running away of some apprentices⁵⁵.

2) The Tanners' Guild Ledger Book (cca 1478-1558)⁵⁶. In 1558 Augusthen Hans, master tanner, together with "der Czech Wortman" (Wartmann, guard) wrote a list comprising the names of about 200 masters called *Liber vite* and explained, in German, this undertaking: "We have considered appropriate and good to write in this register the names of all the masters in our guild, old and young, from beginning, for the better evidence of those who want to use and benefit from the fraternity's regulations, for them and their descendants"⁵⁷. Beyond the specific mentioned goal (to have an evidence of those entitled to benefit from the guild's regulations) the masters' list redeems decades' old names (a frequent situation in registries of the time), and reveals to the reader the relationship between the craft fraternity and its own past, building through *memoria* its own identity. 13 years later (in 1571) we find Augusthen Hans among the town's council members⁵⁸.

3) The Carpenters' Guild Ledger Book (1520-1526)⁵⁹ contains notes starting in 1520 until 1526 when the guild broadens its membership, after the Sibiu example, including painters, glassmakers and woodcarvers⁶⁰. The annotations are written by several hands, but one of them is known to have been that of the town's notary public Nicolaus, who was in 1520 a member of this guild⁶¹. In 1525 the guild is mentioned to have owed him 3 florins for "the interpretation" of a letter from Sibiu. According to documents, master Nicolaus was active as a notary public, writing acts issued in the name of the town's council⁶² and copying acts issued by other institutions⁶³, as scribe for other guilds and as juror (1505)⁶⁴. The notes he made in German within the guild's

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 24-28.

⁵² *Ibidem*, IX, p. 146-150.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 26-34.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 86-88.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 34 and 41.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 64-68. Preserved only as a copy in a registry opened in 1599.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 68.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 318.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 136-137.

⁶⁰ On January 13th 1523, the Braşov magistrate sanctions the statute of the Carpenters, woodcarvers, painters and glassmakers' guild. *Ibidem*, IX, p. 139-141, nr. 68.

⁶¹ Together with other masters he comes before the town's council and asks the sanctioning of the statute, based on the charter of the similar guild from Sibiu (1523). *Ibidem*, IX, p. 139.

⁶² The Statute of the Bowmakers' guild (August 25th 1505, Braşov). *Ibidem*, IX, p. 83-87, nr. 34; document issued by town's council on December 18th 1511. *Ibidem*, IX, p. 100-101, nr. 43.

⁶³ Hungarian king Ladislas II issues a command on March 19th 1513, from Buda, to the goldsmiths' guild from Braşov to accept master Christopherus in their midst, copied by master Nicolaus (*magister Nicolaus, notarius civitatis Brassoviensis, manu propria collacionavit*). *Ibidem*, IX, p. 115-116, nr. 54.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 85.

ledger book regard the measures taken for the maintenance of the altar, the list of members (1520), the record of a master's fine (1524) and the imposition of 25 dinars on an apprentice for sealing his apprenticeship letter.

4) The Coppersmiths' Guild Ledger Book (1554)⁶⁵ was opened in 1554 due to a master who considered appropriate to leave a mark not only of his name, but of his home address as well, citing *memoria* as a reason: "I, Michael Kesler, have written this registry with my own hand, in the house of my father in Horses' Market (my house too), for my remembrance"⁶⁶. He cites himself among the members of the guild, the only one with the home address listed, and additionally records, in German, some regulations concerning the apprentices' indenture and responsibilities.

Sibiu

1) The Tailors' Guild Ledger Book (1449-1528). Its contents were recomposed (partially/totally?) based on the annotations published by Friedrich Müller⁶⁷ and the editors of the second volume entitled "Handel und Gewerbe" from the series "Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Hermannstadt"⁶⁸. Most of the notes in this ledger book are written in German, with only titles in Latin, and comprises the names of the guild's members, information on some punishments, tailoring of some clothing items, guild ordinances, apprentices' and journeymen's indentures, and guild accounts. We assume these notes were written by several masters (not by a notary public) mainly because of the note about master Jacob Kamner (Camer) as author of the list (in German) comprising the guild's arsenal: *Registrum Jacobi Camer super arma pertinencia ad cecham Sartorum*⁶⁹. As *hospes* of Sibiu⁷⁰ and member of the Tailors' Guild⁷¹, Jacob Kamner was involved in organizing the town's guard and in 1486 he was one of the four *custodes ad portam sartorum*⁷². This is the only master's name preserved as a scribe of the register, an attribute linked to his mission as guard.

Cluj

1) The Tailors' Guild Ledger Book (1528-1552)⁷³ it is the oldest register that has been preserved in Cluj and one of a kind as it comprises the annotations of the

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 213-215, nr. 110.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, IX, p. 214.

⁶⁷ Müller Friedrich, *Deutsche Sprachdenkmäler aus Siebenbürgen*, 2. Auflage, Bukarest, 1986, p. 65-68, passim, chronologically until 1500.

⁶⁸ *Quel. Herman.*, II, p. 141-146, nr. 54.

⁶⁹ Müller Friedrich, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁷⁰ *Rechn. Herman.*, I, p. 45. In 1479 he can be found in the town's taxation list as *hospitum*.

⁷¹ Müller Friedrich, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

⁷² *Rechn. Herman.*, I, p. 125.

⁷³ Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale/County Service of the National Archives (hereafter: SJAN) Cluj, Documente medievale/Medieval Documents, Fond breasla croitorilor/Tailors' guild holding, Nr. 47. Format 31x21 cm., paper, leather covers, 255 file.

guild itself and of the All Saints Fraternity⁷⁴, the confraternity patronized by the guild, a relationship explained in the register's title: "*Register der herren wund mester der schneyder czech wnd der Brwder der Brwderschaft Aller lyben heyligen*"⁷⁵. The ledger is written in German with the names of each master noted on one page, thus leading us to the conclusion that it was intended to be a masters' registry. Later annotations, written by a different hand, were added under the name of each master stating some punishments – it is unclear whether they regarded the members of the guild or those of the fraternity. Another unclear significance have the lines drafted beside some masters' names (different in number): do they mark some professional errors, the presence/absence at liturgy, or maybe something else? The annotations continue until 1552, in a random manner: for instance there can be found some notes from the 18th century on the 3rd page.

2) The Goldsmiths' Guild Ledger Book (1546-1582)⁷⁶ was written in Latin with some annotations in Hungarian (dating from the second half of the 16th century) and it comprises the names of the masters, the year of their death, fines collected and the guild's expenditure lists for 1545-1550 (the 1550 expenditure list was partially published by Samuel Goldberg⁷⁷). According to the 1550 list (*exposita*), the guild paid 1 florin to a notary public for accountancy services⁷⁸ – as the list seems to have been written by one hand in neat calligraphy, the writer may as well have been a professional. Several "chaotic" annotations made by more than one hand on other pages of the registry during the same time span as the previously mentioned notes suggest that other masters were involved in writing down information.

3) The Coopers' Guild Ledger Book (1548-1629)⁷⁹ is written mostly in German, with the exception of the title, *Registrum doleatorum*, and it is written loosely by many hands, probably from within the guild, with several surveys of the same pages. The book was started as a masters' register, but it lost its initial structure and registered fines, accounts, earnings and expenditures, without following a certain chronological timeline (one can notice on the same page annotations from different centuries and on the title page a note from the year 1610).

⁷⁴ On the subject of the All Saints Confraternity of the Tailors' guild in Cluj, see: Lidia Gross, *Bresle și confrerii sau despre pietatea urbană în Transilvania medievală (secolele XIV-XVI)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2014, p. 201.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 2r.

⁷⁶ *Nomina Dominorum magistrorum per ordinem sequuntur 1549 renovate* (includes accounting evidence starting with 1546). At: SJAN Cluj, Documente medieval/Medieval Documents, Fond breasla aurarilor/Goldsmiths' guild holding, Nr. 3, Format 28x18 cm., paper, 85 file.

⁷⁷ Samuel Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p. 370-375.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 371.

⁷⁹ *Registrum doleatorum. Anno Christi partus conscriptum 1548*. La: SJAN Cluj, Documente medievale/Medieval Documents, Fond breasla butnarilor/Coopers' guild holding, Nr. 1. Format 26x18 cm, paper, 38 pages.

The hand-written pages show “the fastest form of the late gothic, however disorderly and ugly”⁸⁰; this appearance proves that writing had become an efficient sign system, used in everyday life. The common language used in the registries is the vernacular (except for titles, which are written in Latin), only the goldsmiths’ guild ledger book being written mostly in Latin. The guild masters were responsible with keeping these books, and they sometimes delegated this task to one of the younger, literate masters, or to public notaries. Annotations are written in these ledger books for a long period, sometimes more than a hundred years, a fact that could be explained not only by the high price of the writing material, but also by the appeal to *memoria* and perpetuity, even if old masters’ names and notes are erased in order to mark their “exit” from the guild’s current interest. The registers also lack internal “order”, the only fixed element being the title page and the masters’ names list – later annotations and accounts were randomly written, the same page comprising notes from different centuries.

Despite the mentioned inconsistency and sometimes “chaotic” aspect, we should stress upon the role played by these texts in the development of written language and the promotion of writing in towns. Other relevant documents, along with the guilds’ registers, are the fraternity ledger books kept by the journeymen – these registers from before the Reformation have already been investigated in previous papers⁸¹, and we only mention here, as an example, “das Register der Johannes Bruderschaft”, a register kept by the shoemaker journeymen from Sibiu comprising, in German, their names and home town, starting from 1484 until the end of the 16th century, written by several generations of journeymen⁸².

C. Documents and Letters Issued by Guilds

The guilds were institutions specific to the occupational associations during the middle ages (even modern times in some areas) which could be traced not only in towns but in boroughs as well. They were legal entities, having the right to issue documents sanctioned by their own seal. Along with the registers, these documents serve as an important and relevant source, as they were directly linked to the guild which composed and issued them. However, in the three towns we have investigated during the specified time period, this aspect of the guild’s activity is not well represented. It was mandatory for the master craftsmen to issue apprenticeship certificates (*lerbrief*, *littere famatoriales*) at the end of the

⁸⁰ Jakó Sigismund, *Paleografia latină cu referire la Transilvania (sec. XII-XV)*, in *Documente privind istoria României, Introducere*, vol. I, București, 1956, p. 217.

⁸¹ Lidia Gross, *op.cit.*, p. 184-238.

⁸² Franz Zimmermann, *Das Register der Johannes-Bruderschaft und die Artikel des Hermannstädter Schuster-Zunft aus dem 16. und 17.- ten Jahrhundert*, in “Archiv der Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde”, N.F., XVI, 1880, nr. 2, p. 355-426; Lidia Gross, *op.cit.*, p. 203-227.

occupational placement, as mentioned in ordinances and statutes. According to certain articles of the ordinances, this certificate had to mention the number of years of apprenticeship, the name of the master who was assigned as teacher, the conclusion of the internship stage and the receipt of all the taxes paid by the apprentice to the guild⁸³. Journeymen also received a certificate stating the time they spent as assistants in a guild, the name of the master who supervised them, and the proof of acquittal of the guild-imposed taxes. No such certificate has been preserved from the 15th to mid-16th century, neither for Sibiu, Braşov, Cluj, nor for any other Transylvanian town (according to the present state of research).

On August 28th 1469 the “masters and elders” of Sibiu Weavers Guild issued a document, written in German, meant to present the standards of their craft to all masters⁸⁴. The guild masters considered that “writing all articles and parts might be a little bit disagreeable” (*eyn wenig vordrosslich*), so they decided to render only the essential standards of their craft. Although the letter mentions as authentication mark “the seal...with tools of their craft”, the preserved documents shows no sign of validation (according to the editors).

„Sub sigillo nostre ceche” is written clearly under the text of the document issued in Latin by Braşov Shoemakers Guild on February 25th 1472. The letter informs all craft masters, wherever they might live (*universis magistris eiusdem artis ubivis commorantibus*) about Johannes Slezita “cum longis crinibus cognominatus” who fled the town after attacking the wife of his master, Steffan Sutor⁸⁵. The aim of the letter was to warn all shoemaker masters not to receive this fugitive, until he atoned for his crime – the fact that this letter was preserved in Bistriţa proves it circulated “sent from place to place”, as it was requested within, sending a message of notification and warning⁸⁶.

Braşov Goldsmiths’ Guild had an interesting exchange of letters with similar guilds from Bács and Szeged in 1512 concerning the “Christopherus case”⁸⁷. The letters from the two towns of the Hungarian Kingdom are still preserved in the archives from Braşov (4 letters), and mention the correspondence sent by the goldsmiths of Braşov in relation to the innocence or guilt of Christopherus, master goldsmith, who was accused of stealing silver while working as a *servus* (journeyman) in the workshop of Blasius from Bács. Without going into further details of the case, worthy of an independent paper, we need to stress upon the importance given to the written testimony and its relevance in the guilds’ relationship: these letters are legal instruments which proved

⁸³ Samuel Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p. 191.

⁸⁴ *Quel. Herman.*, II, p. 156-160, nr. 61.

⁸⁵ *Quel. Kr.*, IX, p. 57-58, nr. 16.

⁸⁶ SJAN, Primăria oraşului Bistriţa/Bistriţa City Hall, Series I, Nr. 194.

⁸⁷ Letters from: 1512 February 9th, Bács (*Quel. Kron.*, IX, p. 101-102, nr. 44); 1512 February 14th, Szeged (*Ibidem*, IX, p. 103-104, nr. 45); 1512 August 2nd, Bács (*Ibidem*, IX, p. 108-109, nr. 49); 1512 August 26th, Szeged (*Ibidem*, IX, p. 108-111, nr. 50).

the innocence of a master, and determined the Braşov guild to reconsider his petition to become a member of the goldsmiths' association. The guild members mention in one of the letters that Cristopherus made a mistake when he did not present his letter of reconciliation with the Bács goldsmiths' guild, and did not place it "in its natural place, the guild house, but rather kept it in his bag (*sed potius tenet in sua bursa*) and if he continues to keep in his bag then /the truth/ would never reach you or any other"⁸⁸. The importance of the written word is emphasized in this context, mainly due to its authentication and sanctioning value (being imprinted with the guild's seal) and the letter becomes a piece of testimonial evidence. However, this testimonial value is only recognized if presented in public.

The four letters sent to Braşov (preserved in their original form or in copies) are written in Latin, a fact that supposes the presence of a notary public, acquainted with the official language, who was able not only to write but also to read and translate other Latin letters. It is our opinion that it is not likely that the *mechanici* were familiar enough with this language in order to use it for this type of documents (or to read and understand them). A certain literacy level cannot be excluded if we take into consideration the register kept by the Sibiu *Corpus Christi* Fraternity (a lay association) written for the years 1525 to 1527 in Latin by Petrus Kirchberger, one of its "curators" who was not a churchman, nor had any academic title or degree⁸⁹.

The same official character can be found in the letter sent by the Tanners' Guild in Buda to its counterpart in Sibiu in 1522, written in German, regarding the exoneration of Paul Poldner, journeyman from Sibiu, unjustly accused by another journeyman from Sibiu⁹⁰.

Whatever the used language of these letters (German or Latin) and whoever was their real writer, they prove an informal relationship between the craft association and literacy and stress on the use of emphasize written word as official means of communication between the guilds. These letters, together with the guilds' ledger books and ordinances, are conclusive testimony to the importance of the written word for the occupational associations, a trend continued after the 16th century and transformed into a norm after the religious Reformation when these writs (in vernacular languages) multiply exponentially.

Final Considerations

This brief presentation of the writing praxis within the crafts associations in Sibiu, Braşov and Cluj reveals both common traits and specific aspects which can be extended in a comparative and comprehensive manner to the entire Transylvanian area. The most important items for this research are those scripts

⁸⁸ 1512 August 26th, Szeged, (*Ibidem*, IX, p. 110).

⁸⁹ Lidia Gross, *Confraeriile medievale în Transilvania (secolele XIV-XVI)*, ediția a II-a, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 236-239.

⁹⁰ 1512 August 26th, Szeged, *Ibidem*, IX, p. 110.

written by the craftsmen themselves (quite difficult to identify when there is no name present in the document and the calligraphy is the only distinctive feature) but the documents written by others (such as notaries public) could be relevant too. The role played by these documents illustrates the amplification of literate activity in towns, especially the advancement of vernacular languages before being generalized by the Reformation⁹¹ at the level of masters and journeymen.

Even for the specified time interval the theme is extremely vast and complex. We quote firstly the diversity of sources, directly linked to the activity of crafts associations: guild's ledger books, masters' or journeymen's fraternity registers, ordinances, letters, indentures and craftsmanship certificates, as well as statutes as indirect sources. Additionally, we quote the specific evolution of each town and borough in Transylvania, together with the particular traits of each guild and their involvement in city life.

Other pertinent documents for our investigation are those texts that are not directly linked to the occupational *corpus*, but are issued by masters' confraternities, organized in lay associations, such as account books written by officials/curators.

A consistent and extensive overview of the present theme would only be possible by comparing the literate output aforementioned crafts associations from Transylvania with those of other urban settlements from medieval Hungary and even, if possible, of other Central European towns. Only in this manner would we be able to reassess and bring forth the crafts history from the point of view of literacy research, with the goal of enriching the existing image, outlined by economic, social, artistic, religious and military perspectives of the artisan community during the Middle Ages.

(translated by Teodora Bonțeanu)

⁹¹ "*Reformationsbüchlein*" is printed by Johannes Honterus in 1543, but only in 1550 the Saxon Nation University decides that the "religious order of all Saxons from Transylvania" was to be mandatory for all Saxon inhabited territories.

