

## CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RECORDS OF TIMIȘ COUNTY (THE 14<sup>TH</sup>–16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)\*

*Livia Magina\*\**

*Keywords:* administrative writing, documents, Timiș County

*Cuvinte cheie:* scrierea administrativă, documente, comitatul Timiș

The spreading of literacy and the evolution of the art of writing, as well as its escape from the ecclesiastical monopoly during a period when the written word was disseminated, having gained full-fledged currency, are issues that have sporadically been approached in several Romanian historiographical studies. The development of literacy and the evolution of writing represent a niche that has so far been scantily researched. This phenomenon has been studied with greater interest by Hungarian historians and linguists. In both literatures, however, writing at the level of the county's administrative bodies has remained enveloped in obscurity, being treated as a subsidiary theme in the monographs dedicated to various counties. The project of achieving an overview of the entire plethora of documents produced at the level of an institution requires in-depth knowledge of several factors: the territorial sphere of influence that an institution can function within, the organizational chart of the institution and, not least, the types of documents issued thereby and their circuit. On the other hand, the 14th–16th centuries represented a period in which rather than promoting the spreading of literacy and being constantly used, writing as a phenomenon was still allied with innovation and “technologization.”

### *The sphere of influence*

The need to emphasize the boundaries of the county outlines, in fact, the limits within which its officials could act. When we speak about a territorial administrative unit, we usually envisage its boundaries too, but few are those

---

\* This study has benefited from the financial support offered by the Grant PN II-ID-PCE-2012-4-0579 Between the Public and the Private. Practices of Writing in Transylvania (the 13th–17th Centuries), Director Dr. Susana Andea.

\*\* The Museum of Mountain Banat, Reșița, 10 Bd. Republicii, e-mail: liviamagina@yahoo.com.

that have kept their borders intact, without having fluctuated in any way. As regards Timiș County, the line between Galad (Serbia) and Bercsula (Serbia) represented its western boundary, adjacent to Torontal County; the border onto Cenad County stretched from Kikinda, passed through Veliko Selo (Horogszeg), Comloșu Mic and Lenauheim, following then the line that connected Bulgăruș, Satchinez, Bărateaz, Sânpetru Mic and Mailat; the border with Arad County stretched between Mănăștur, Orțișoara, Murani, Ianova, Cralovăț up to Coșteiu de Sus, crossing then the boundary of Hunedoara County through the localities of Crivina de Sus and Lunca Largă. From Tincova, passing through Căvăran, Mâtnicu Mare, Delinești, and Soceni, the Bârzava River separated Timiș from Caraș and Keve.<sup>1</sup> All in all, in the 15th century the territory these boundaries comprised featured 1,042 settlements, i.e. 990 villages, 22 boroughs and towns and 30 fortresses.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the sphere of competence and influence that pertained to the authorities of Timiș County included the inhabitants of these settlements, as the decisions reached by these authorities could have an impact on the population's status and income.

### *Written sources about Timiș County*

There are, at present, several documentary volumes dedicated to Timiș County that open up the possibility of conducting various analyses of the medieval period,<sup>3</sup> but the completion of such an undertaking is still a desideratum. Along with other Banatian counties that have been the subject of diverse forms of monographs,<sup>4</sup> Timiș County enjoyed the attention of Hungarian historiography from an early time, even if these studies have not focused exclusively on the period of the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> Collections of

<sup>1</sup> The limits have been reconstituted according to Pál Engel, *Hungary in the Late Middle Ages. Digital vector map and attaching database about the settlements and landowners of medieval Hungary. Magyarország a középkor végén. Digitális térkép és adatbázis a középkori Magyar Királyság településeiről*, Budapest, (CD-ROM), 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Dezső Csánki, *Magyarország történelmi földrajza a Hunyadiak korában*, vol. II (Budapest, 1890), under the entry Temes.

<sup>3</sup> Frigyes Pesty, *Oklevelek Temesvármegye és Temesvár város történetéhez*, ed. Ortway Tivadar, vol. I (Pozsony, 1896); Frigyes Pesty, *Documente privind istoria comitatului Timiș și a orașului Timișoara (1430–1470)*, ed. Livia Magina, Adrian Magina (Cluj-Napoca, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Sándor Márki, *Arad vármegye és Arad szabad királyi város története*, vol. I–II (Budapest, 1892–1895); Samu Borovszky, coord., *Torontál vármegye*, Országos Monográfiai Társaság (Budapest, s.a.); Frigyes Pesty, *A Szörényi Bánság és Szörény vármegye története* (Budapest, 1877).

<sup>5</sup> The first volume of Ortway Tivadar's monograph, *Temes vármegye és Temes város története a legrégebb időktől a jelenkorig* (Budapest, 1914) approaches only the earlier period. Bárány Ágoston's monograph, *Temes vármegye emléke* (Nagy Becskerek, 1848) is completely outdated, while that edited by Samu Borovszky, *Temes vármegye*, Országos Monográfiai Társaság (Budapest, s.a.) undertakes a general approach to the history of the county.

documents, in either the classic or the virtual format, are truly helpful for research conducted in the field of knowledge concerning the development of administrative and legal institutions.

It should be noted that the first organisation/institution that realized the power that the written word could exert at the level of the population and the long-term consequences that the acquisition of writing skills could have was the ecclesiastical one. Thus, access to the written form became the link connecting ideas and their transposition into faith. The affirmation of the nobility in the process of societal change that occurred in the mid-14th century also led to a transformation of the royal counties into administrative units with a nobiliary character.

### *The administration*

An analysis of the county administrative bodies has been conducted, distinguishing between two levels: that of the collective bodies and that of the individual bodies.<sup>6</sup> The county assembly, superimposed on the judgment seat of the county, was a body that made visible the mechanisms of power in the territory. A three-stage hierarchy, characteristic of all the administrative bodies, may be noticed in the case of Timiș too: the comes, who was appointed by the king, appointed, in his turn, the vice-comes from among his close associates (nobles from the province). The third tier was represented by the noble judges, two for each of the Transylvanian counties and frequently four for the counties in Hungary<sup>7</sup> and the western area (Middle Szolnok, Crasna), Timiș County also following the latter pattern. The powers of the comes referred to the sphere within which legislative decisions could be enforced and to overseeing the functioning of the administration; moreover, the comes could convene the county assembly. On the other hand, the vice-comes was the representative of the comes in the territory, with responsibilities in the administrative, judicial and fiscal domains. Noble judges, elected from among the nobles of the county, represented the main element of the administration in the territory, in the sense that they conducted inquests in various cases and levied taxes.<sup>8</sup>

It should be noted that we do not aim to examine here the documents issued by the comes, because we consider that this office was an *honor* rather than a directly exercised function. Therefore, we shall take into account those documents that were issued under the authority of local officials, vice-comites and noble judges.

<sup>6</sup> Charles d'Eszlary, *Histoire des institutions publiques hongroises*, vol. II (Paris, 1963), 234–247.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Ugocsa County, Norbert C. Tóth, *Ugocsa megye hatóságának oklevelei (1290–1526)* (Budapest, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> D'Eszlary, *Histoire*, 235–236.

If we accept that some of these representatives of the provincial nobility took on scriptorial duties, we should also accept the fact that they must have had a minimal level of education. The families whose members also held in *cursus honorum* the office of vice-comites of Timiș during the two centuries were: Folth (1349, 1351),<sup>9</sup> Iwand,<sup>10</sup> Dyakolch,<sup>11</sup> Chak,<sup>12</sup> Gerebench (1400), Derechke, Baronya, and of Sadan.

It seems that the office of vice-comes was a collegial one, because the county documents indicate that it was occupied by two people simultaneously. Historiographical opinions in this regard contend, for instance, that the first vice-comes was appointed from among the trusted people of the vice-comes, while the second vice-comes was appointed for solving judicial and tax-levying problems;<sup>13</sup> an alternative opinion upholds the theory that a more numerous administrative staff was necessary for the counties that had a more extensive territory. The vice-comites of the 14th-century Transylvanian counties were more rarely mentioned in documents,<sup>14</sup> and only starting from the first half of the 15th century<sup>15</sup> were they referenced frequently. In the case of Timiș, the functioning of the noble county appeared mentioned for the first time in 1321, but we can assume that it had operated in some form or another even before this date. At that time, *magister* Nicholas, together with three noble judges, was mentioned as *comes Themisiensis*,<sup>16</sup> a version underlying which we ought to detect the reality of the vice-comes position. Two vice-comites appeared in the documents only from the end of the 14th century on. In 1394 the magistrate Stephen of Diakolc jointly occupied this position with Thomas,<sup>17</sup> and in 1400 with John of Gerebench.<sup>18</sup> Michael Anyosz of Faiszi and Michael of Hanona filled this position in the years 1436–1437.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the 15th century, one could encounter the same reality instituted at the end of the previous century. Thus, the office was exercised by Ladislaus of Pocsay together with Emeric Therek

<sup>9</sup> Pesty, *Oklevelek*, 78–79.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 231, 232, 1393

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 285–286, 287–288.

<sup>13</sup> Iván Bertény, “Vármegyei tisztviselők a középkorban”, *Historia* 2/4 (1980): 26–27.

<sup>14</sup> András W. Kovács, “Administrația comitatului Hunedoara în Evul Mediu”, *Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis* 35–36 (2007–2008): 210.

<sup>15</sup> For Inner Szolnok 1434–1435, Dăbâca- 1414, Alba-1398, Hunedoara-1410, Cluj-1359, Turda-1440, András W. Kovács, *Az erdély vármegyéek középkori archontológiája* (Kolozsvár, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> István Petrovics, *A középkori Temesvár. Fejezetek a Béga-párti város 1552 előtti történetéből* (Szeged, 2008), 119.

<sup>17</sup> Pesty, *Oklevelek*, 245.

<sup>18</sup> Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (hereafter MOL), Diplomatikai Levéltár (hereafter DL), 42753

<sup>19</sup> DL 68360; Pesty, *Diplome*, 73.

of Zenew (1449)<sup>20</sup>, but also with John, son of the Voivode of Giarmata (1451, 1453)<sup>21</sup> or with Anton Pocsay, probably his brother, and examples could go on.

An unclear situation emerges on account of the non-distinctive appellative in the titlature of some documents. Thus, in 1439, after being mentioned with the names of John, son of Andrew of Bobda, John Budai of Ruda and Blasiu Garazda of Istvandi,<sup>22</sup> the joint, post-positioned titlature is *vicecomites et iudices nobilium*. We may surmise that the first mentioned, John, son of Andrew Bobda, and possibly the next one, John Budai of Ruda, were vice-comites, while Blasiu Garazda of Istvandi was a noble judge. A similar wording occurs in a document of 1445, when those who shared their duties were John of Firiteaz, the man of letters, Nicholas of Vyzer, Peter of Hangon and George Csapo,<sup>23</sup> the first two probably having the position of vice-comes, while the other two of noble judges. The mentioning of four instead of six officials in three documents of 1443, one from the beginning<sup>24</sup> and two from the end of that year,<sup>25</sup> suggests that not all the county representatives were present when documents were issued. Even when they were not mentioned by name, they could appear in the consecrated formula (*vicecomites et iudices nobilium*), which meant that in fact it was possible for only some of them to be present at the time.

The office of noble judges, constituted as an integral component of the administrative and judicial apparatus of the counties starting from the first decades of the 14th century,<sup>26</sup> were elected from the local nobles, their number varying between two and four (in most cases) in Timiș County,<sup>27</sup> as shown in the documents that have been preserved. Although their names remain unknown, with few exceptions, the documents refer to them only as *iudices nobilium* or *quatuor iudices nobilium*. We can identify several families from among whose members noble judges were elected: Muron,<sup>28</sup> Doczy<sup>29</sup> and Chechtelek.

<sup>20</sup> MOL, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény (hereafter DF), 285548.

<sup>21</sup> Pesty, *Diplome*, 228, 257.

<sup>22</sup> DL 68369.

<sup>23</sup> Gyula Nagy, *A nagymihályi és sztárai gróf Sztáray család oklevéltára*, vol. II (Budapest, 1889), 364.

<sup>24</sup> DL 55259

<sup>25</sup> DL 55266.

<sup>26</sup> Rűsz Fogarasi Enikő, "Juzii nobiliari în societatea medievală transilvăneană", *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Historia* XLIX (2004): 17–25.

<sup>27</sup> For an account of the number and names of the noble judges in Timiș County, see Zoltán Iusztin, "The noble judges in Timiș county (14th–15th centuries)", *Transylvanian Review* XX, suppl. no. 4 (2013): 253–264, to which may be added the names of those mentioned by the documents along the vice-comites.

<sup>28</sup> 1405: Blasiu de Moron; 1467- *Johannem Muron, iudicem nobilium*: Pesty, *Diplome*, 398; 1482–Valentin de Moruny: DL 18743.

<sup>29</sup> DL 97461.

From the point of view of the scriptorial activity, noble judges were regarded as external collaborators of the county chancery. Of course, they can be considered educated representatives of the county's elite, but they lacked the scribal prowess of a professional, unlike, for example, a clerk or a notary. As they were the county representatives in the territory, we must assume that they had acquired at least minimal writing skills.

Another case, in fact the only one in the documentary landscape of Timiș County, is that in which the titulature is that of a county assembly from 1452: *Nos, iudices ac universitas nobilium comitatus Themesiensis*,<sup>30</sup> meeting in session in Timișoara for a general resolution, regarding the amount the serfs had to pay.

### *The documents*

A real breakthrough as regards administrative life occurred in the 16th century, when the process of recording all the cases in a single registry – the protocol – started; during this period, the organization and handling of documents within the internal circuit improved. While insofar as ecclesiastical institutions are concerned, this phenomenon could be detected in as early as the turn of the 13th century, and we refer here to the Registry of Oradea (1208–1235), the administrative institutions of the county had maintained, as far as we have been able to see, the final form of the decisions issued by the judgment seats, considered to have a certain probative value, while the documents compiled during the trial were rather short-lived. The decisions of the judgment seats were transcribed, signed and sealed. While, as stated above, the protocols of the judgment seats began to be drawn up in the Transylvanian counties in the 16th century, such documents issued in the Banatian counties have not been preserved or have not been found yet. There would appear to be a substantial reason for this, defined by the political circumstances, as the Ottoman conquest had “disturbed” the course followed by the Transylvanian counties in this respect. The number of documents issued by the authorities of Timiș County, preserved from the period 1321–1514, is 108: they have been partially published and, to their vast majority, they are held in the Hungarian National Archives (102). For an overall, comparative image: the documentary material concerning the noble counties inside the Carpathian arc, dating back to the period under consideration, has been preserved in fragmentary manner and is not much more consistent: for Cluj County – more than 160 documents, from Turda and Hunedoara – 60 documents each, from Middle Szolnok and Inner Szolnok, 50 documents, and from Dăbâca – 140.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Pesty, *Diplome*, 245.

<sup>31</sup> Rűsz, “Juzii nobililor”, 19.

We do not have concrete information concerning the beginnings of a scriptorial organization at the level of Timiș County, in the sense of a chancery. The need to render in writing various cases, ranging from simple testimonies to, above all, ownership documents, had the direct consequence of an increase in the number of documents that had to be translated into writing. Thus, from the royal chancery, these competences were transferred into the territory, creating the need for training certain people in the province, especially after the second half of the 14th century.<sup>32</sup>

### *The people who wrote*

Scribes, clerks and notaries were the commonly encountered characters in the scriptorial activity of any institution, whether central or local. In a chancery, foremost among those responsible for translating the trials into written form were the so-called *litteratus*, the clerk, but the noble judge or even the vice-comes may have been entitled to record the decisions of the judgment seat, as was, of course, the notary.<sup>33</sup> In the 14th and 15th century documents issued by the authorities of Timiș County, the presence of any notary with permanent or temporary duties is not mentioned anywhere, unlike, for example, in the County of Satu Mare, where, in 1351, there existed the office of notary of the vice-comes.<sup>34</sup> Under these circumstances, other connoisseurs of the letters, possibly clerks, remained in charge of the scriptorial activity.

Up until the end of the 14th century, the ones who turned spoken into written words had originated exclusively from the ranks of the clergy, given the efforts of the church to maintain its monopoly over this science, but from the middle of the century on, such *litterati* could also be encountered among the laity, even though they had not received, in all likelihood, a thorough training in this regard. The dissemination of knowledge pertaining to the art of writing was quite fast, so by the second half of 14th century writing was no longer the monopoly of the men of the church.

Bearing the name *litteratus* – although we have no evidence that he was indeed the one who wrote those documents – there appeared, in 1446, Vice-comes John of Firiteaz, whose family stood out in the cultural/educational and administrative landscape of the area on account of the fact that other of its members were also mentioned with this sobriquet; still, in none of the documents have there been preserved any chancery notes that might give us an indication as to the identity of those who wrote them, such as, for instance,

<sup>32</sup> Géza Istvánfi, “A megyei írásbeliség első körszáka”, *Levéltári Közlemények* 15 (1937): 523

<sup>33</sup> Antal Foglein, “A vármegyei notárius”, *Levéltári Közlemények* 14 (1936): 149–171.

<sup>34</sup> Sabin Belu, Ioan Dani, Aurel Răduțiu, Viorica Pervain, Konrad Gündisch, eds *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, C. Transilvania, vol. X (1351–1355) (Bucharest, 1977, hereafter *DRH. C.*), 37.

“X, *notarius/litteratus scripsit*.” Although the documents mention two other family members, Valentine and Francis, only the former appears to have had writing skills. The nearest educational centres where John and Valentine might have received training must have been the capitular ones, from Arad or Cenad.

Other laymen, like Paul *litteratus*, were mentioned among the noble judges in 1481,<sup>35</sup> which is why we may consider that at least some of the judges were knowledgeable about writing. We may assume that there were many more such clerks, even by comparison with the scriptorial activity in the Transylvanian counties during the same period, in whose documents they appeared frequently.<sup>36</sup>

Basic knowledge about how a legal-administrative document had to be drafted could be acquired through courses on rhetoric, known as *ars dictaminis*,<sup>37</sup> that is, the art of compiling and writing a letter of a legal and administrative nature, respecting the rigors and formulaic standards.

The establishment of educational institutions on the territory of the kingdom, at Pécs (in 1367), Buda (in 1389) or Bratislava (1467) put a curb, for a while, on migration for educational purposes to universities outside the Hungarian space, such as those from Prague, Vienna or Krakow.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, however, these institutions had a relatively short existence, so most of the scholars in medieval Hungary were trained in the Central European universities. All in all, during the period 1450–1526, 2900 students from the Hungarian territory were enrolled in Vienna, while in Krakow, between 1460 and 1500, there were attested over 1600 students.<sup>39</sup> Among them, 173–180 Banatian students<sup>40</sup> were educated abroad and managed to obtain various academic degrees (baccalaureate, bachelor’s, master’s or even doctoral degrees). Some of them probably returned as teachers at the capitular schools in the area.<sup>41</sup> Although the names

<sup>35</sup> DL 18477: *ad infrascriptam inquisitionem nostrum hominem videlicet Paulum literatum, iudex nobilium duximus*.

<sup>36</sup> DRH, C, X, doc. no. 11, 14, 35, 55, 84, 352.

<sup>37</sup> Kovachich Martinus Georgius, *Formulae solemnes styli* (Pesta, 1799), 134; M. Camargo, “Where’s the brief?: The *Ars dictaminis* and the reading/writing between the lines”, *The Late Medieval Epistles*, ed. Carol Poster, Richard Utz (Illinois, 1996), 1–2.

<sup>38</sup> L. S. Domokos, “The state of education in Hungary on the eve of the battle of Mohács (1526)”, *Canadian-American Review of Hungarian Studies* II, no.1 (spring 1975): 4–5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6.

<sup>40</sup> The number of young people who crossed the border of the kingdom for educational purposes differs: 173 in Costin Feneşan, “Studenti din Banat la universitățile străine până la 1552”, *Revista de istorie* 29, no. 12 (1976): 1945 and 180 in Dragoş Lucian Ţigău, “Noi informații despre prezența bănațenilor la Universitatea din Viena (secolele XIV–XVI)”, *Banatica* 20/2 (2010): 50.

<sup>41</sup> Feneşan, “Studenti”, 1945–1946; 1954. We may also notice that a certain Ioan Thimisiensis – Pesty is mentioned among the canons of the Chapter of Cenad in documents from the mid – 15th century *Diplome*, *passim*, next to others who identify themselves with their place of origin.

of those who attended schools abroad are known, their being mentioned in the consecrated formula, by juxtaposing their names to their localities or areas of origin, provides us with slim chances of identifying any of them as the author of the documents in question. Besides, their aim was not to secure a position in the administration, but to gain access to the frameworks provided by the ecclesiastical institutions.

Regarding the local education system during this period, in which the local nobility could receive training, this was limited to a few capitular schools. These educational institutions, which represented nurseries for the spreading of written culture, functioned under the aegis of the ecclesiastical institutions from Oradea and Alba Iulia, but also at Arad and Cenad,<sup>42</sup> these being the main issuers of documents, given their status of places of attestation (*loca credibilia authentica*). Historiographical opinions on the subsequent establishment of schools in the urban areas legitimates the notion that not only in the towns from Transylvania (Braşov, Sibiu, Bistriţa or Cluj), but also in the Western cities, there could function educational bodies where the townspeople's children – less scholarly ambitions, but keen on being schooled so that they could solve quotidian problems – were trained. Starting from the second half of the 15th century, the members of the gentry and of the merchant class who knew the secrets of writing were more and more frequently mentioned.<sup>43</sup> We can assume that it was under the influence of teachers trained abroad that the children of the nobility from the area south of the Mureş were formed. Although the stated objective of the schools functioning under the chapters for the formation of the clergy, it is possible that some of those who attended the capitular schools joined the administrative ranks.<sup>44</sup> According to the typical structure of capitular schools, students had to attend at least the *trivium* cycle, which had as its main objective the acquisition of grammar, conversation and composition ground notions. Document drafting and studying liberal arts were the main items in the teaching-learning process. In the absence of other data, we will assume, therefore, that among the pupils in the capitular schools from Cenad or Arad, were also those *litterati* of Fırteaz, noble judges whose administrative duties required writing skills. It is difficult to determine whether at least some of the

<sup>42</sup> Altogether summary data on the chapter school from Cenad may be found in Samu Borovszky, *Csanád vármegye története 1715-ig*, vol. I (Budapest 1896), 113–114.

<sup>43</sup> Sigismund Jakó, “Începuturile scrisului în păturile laice din Transilvania medievală (unele probleme noi ale paleografiei latine)”, *Studii și cercetări* 1–4 (1956): 88, 92; Domokos, “The state of education”, 11; for the dissemination of the educational principles in the urban environment over the next period and its effects on the Transylvanian trade, see Francisc Páp, “Negustori literați (deák) la Cluj (1599–1637)”, *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie G. Bariț, Cluj-Napoca* XLV (2006): 9–21.

<sup>44</sup> Jakó, “Începuturile”, 88.

vice-comites of Timiș, whose appellative – frequently used in the Banatian documents of the 14th century – was *magister*, were familiar with reading and writing. At that time, the above-mentioned title did not necessarily mean that the one in question was trained, but represented rather an attribute of the distinction that could be bestowed upon the members of the middle nobility.<sup>45</sup>

### *Where the documents were written*

The main scriptorial activity at the level of the county body resided in transcribing the rulings of the judgment seat, *sedes judiciaria*, which convened in the county's town of residence, in this case, Timișoara, at least twice a month, usually on a Tuesday, under the leadership of the vice-comes/vice-comites magistrates, seconded by the noble judges. The cases discussed and the decisions reached were written down according to a well-known pattern. Over the course of the two centuries, small differences could be observed, probably on account of the authors' writing dexterity and knowledge of law.

The location where the members of the judgment seat met is uncertain. By comparison, however, with Severin County, for which we have documentary evidence, dating back to the 17th century, that the judgment seat was convened in the home of one of vice-comites,<sup>46</sup> we could speculate that the same held true for Timiș, especially since in historiography it is argued that for the period under consideration, the venue was of little significance, because there is no building specifically designed for this purpose.<sup>47</sup> The *scriptorium*, if one may say so, the place where the rulings were written down, was the same place where the county seat assembled.

### *The type of documents*

The development of administrative and economic life entailed the diversification of the cases that had to be valorized in written form, with the consequence that the number of intermediate documents pertaining to some trials increased: inquiries, testimonials, complaints, evidence of payment, adjournments or transfers of lawsuits, the delegation of lawyers, letters of opposition or deferment.

The palaeographic cataloguing of the documents in two main types, depending on their legal value – closed letters (*littere clause*), with the seal

<sup>45</sup> Gyula Kristó, Pál Engel, Ferenc Makk, eds., *Korai magyar történeti lexikon* (Budapest, 1994), 422. I hereby thank my colleague Géza Hegyi for the information.

<sup>46</sup> Adrian Magina, "At the border of Transylvania: the county of Severin/the district of Caransebeș in the 16th–17th centuries", *Transylvanian Review* XX, suppl. no 4 (2013): 301–302.

<sup>47</sup> See, in this sense, Enikő Csukovits, "Sedriahelyek –megyeszékhelyek a középkorban", *Történelmi Szemle* XXXIX (1997): 363–386.

applied over the folded edges of the paper and with the address, type of deed and content on the back page, and letters patent (*littere patentes*), characterized by the application of the seal on the back page or even underneath the text<sup>48</sup> – is valid for the documents coming from the chancery of Timiș County.

The first known letter issued by the officials of Timiș County is that of 15 December 1321: it was an adjournment – *littere prorogatorie* – in the lawsuit between Ladislaus Himfy and Peter, son of Isep.<sup>49</sup> The last letter we have examined dates from 1514,<sup>50</sup> and falls within the *inhibitoria* category. In statistical terms, the highest percentage of documents is represented by the *littere judicatorie*, the first letter of this type kept having been issued in 1322, followed by a search/ investigation warrants – *littere inquisitorie*. The first investigation warrant preserved dates from 1337, when the county officials demanded that an inquiry be made concerning the lawsuit between Peter of Baty and John yclept Tompa, on the one hand, and Stephen yclept Feir, on the other hand.<sup>51</sup> *Littere procuratoria* were documents through which various people appointed their legal representatives in the cases that had to be upheld before the county seat. In the first deed of this kind that has reached us and dates from the year 1393, the widow of Stephen Feldes of Ciorna appointed Andrew Toti, George Chechtelek, Simon of Binya and Stephen Harangus as procurators in all her lawsuits for a year.<sup>52</sup> A special case involving the appointment of proxies is that of 1426, when the sons of Stephen of Remethe chose 11 people authorized to represent them before the judgment seat of the county.<sup>53</sup> Complaints, trial adjournments, oppositions to vesting of possession, and divisions of inheritance can also be identified in large numbers, a sign that the county authorities had a varied scriptorial activity.

### *The material support*

A prevalent conception at the time about the materials used for writing on was that only less significant issues were to be recorded on paper, parchment being the primary choice for documents of outstanding relevance. It may be, however, assumed that it was no coincidence that the spread of writing, the increase in the number of documents and the widespread use of paper occurred

<sup>48</sup> *Documente privind istoria României*. Introducere, vol. II (Bucharest, 1956, hereafter *DIR*), 255–259.

<sup>49</sup> Petrovics, *A középkori Temesvár*, 119. Only copies of the document are preserved, as the original, found in the archives of the Batthyány family from Körmend, was destroyed during World War II.

<sup>50</sup> DF 244235.

<sup>51</sup> Pesty, *Oklevelek*, 44.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 593.

roughly around the same time. From this point of view, the material for the documents examined here consists solely of paper strips measuring 18–20 cm in length and 4–10 cm in width. We cannot ascertain whether the type of letter influenced in any way the size of the paper strip. While up until the end of the 14th century, the entire strip was used/written on, after this point a different ordering can be detected, in the sense that margins were set aside, this behaviour representing an argument in support of the evolution of writing and the authors' attitude towards the writing medium, given that paper gradually became a common material and its price decreased. Only research conducted on the original documents issued by the authorities of Timiș County and the analysis of the watermarks might reveal the source of the paper used, which may have been produced in domestic or foreign mills.

### *The language of the documents*

The fact that the region and the scribe belonged to a particular cultural area or another was visible in the language the documents were written in. The entire set of documents issued by the Timiș County officials was drafted in Latin. Both the language and the style in which the documents were written were more rudimentary at first. The writing style suggests a cursive, fast writing style and the spacing between characters and words is minimal. Featuring rather numerous abbreviations, which were customary at the time, the documents of Timiș County were typical of that period.<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that most of the documents issued in the county that have survived to this day are original.

### *Authentication by seal*

At the county level, the scriptorial activity from the second half of the 14th and the following centuries demonstrates the fact that it overlapped the period in which writing had become a common practice, which was no longer the privilege of men of the church, but was rather intensively used in the administration.<sup>55</sup> Even if the science of reading and writing had not spread too much among ordinary people, the symbol represented by the seal imprinted on the document could be recognized by all those concerned. Of course, the use of the seal was not an innovation of the 14th century, but was the main instrument for the recognition of official documents among the illiterate. The degree of authority of each of the judgment seat members was complemented by the right to own and use a seal. Under the law of the kingdom, a document issued the

---

<sup>54</sup> For the entire problem of the evolution of writing in the medieval Latin documents from Transylvania, see the considerations of Sigismund Jakó in *DIR. Introducere*, vol. I, 184–222.

<sup>55</sup> Istványi, "A megyei írásbeliség", 551–552.

county authorities had to bear the seal of all the noble judges,<sup>56</sup> to the extent that they participated in the court sessions.

The seals preserved on the documents issued by the Timiș County officials have a circular shape, are generally small (ring-shaped signets), being generally impressed on white wax. At present, most of them are either detached or illegible. It is possible, however, to detect a few sphragistic elements. The emblem preserves in the field of the seal an old French shield featuring at the centre a figure that is frequently used in heraldry: an eagle with the wings closed, head turned towards the heraldic sinister. Another representation is that from the field of the seal on the document of 1505 issued by *Petrus ispan et Demetrius magister de Kereztwr, vicecomitis*. The ring-shaped, octagonal seal matrix is charged with a plant with three flowers in its field.<sup>57</sup>

Regarding the positioning of the seal embossments, depending on their number, when the documents were sealed by two noble judges and the vice-comes, the large seal was applied to the centre and was surrounded by two smaller ones, as is the case, for example, of the document from 1351.<sup>58</sup> When all the four noble judges and the vice-comes were present, the arrangement of seals followed the shape of a square, with the larger seal (belonging to one of the vice-comites) at the centre and the smaller ones in the four corners, as one can notice on the document of 1405.<sup>59</sup> During the period when George the Small was vice-comes (1405, 1406, 1407), the seals had the same layout and the same size.

The material onto which the seal was impressed was generally white/natural wax, used both for the seal of the vice-comes and for those of the noble judges. There were also a few cases in which the seals were impressed in green wax, as was the case of the 1467 document, on which the signet of one of the vice-comites (Nicholas Aranyagy or James Kerthes) was applied onto green wax (fallen) and two of the seals belonging to the noble judges of that year (Peter Pan of Thofew, John Muron and Peter Kwre) were impressed in white wax.<sup>60</sup> We have not detected impression differences according to the importance of the document or degree of participation in the meetings of the *sedrie* (administrative court).

Another point in the sphragistic analysis is the use of a particular seal for the documents with which the representatives of the legal authorities identified themselves in the territory. Expressions like *quod ipse testimonio sigilli nostri*

<sup>56</sup> Sigismund Jakó, "Sigilografia cu referire la Transilvania", in *DIR*, vol. II, 608

<sup>57</sup> Magyar Tudományos Akademia Könyvtára, Kézirattár, Pesty Frigyes gyűjteménye.

<sup>58</sup> DL 41167.

<sup>59</sup> DL 42851. Similarly, in the 14th and 15th centuries, documents issued in other counties were sealed too, Jakó, "Sigilografia", 608.

<sup>60</sup> Pesty, *Diplome*, 398.

*accessisset ori testimonio sigilli nostri*<sup>61</sup> impel us to consider that when they arrived at the investigation scene, the noble judges or those appointed *unus ex nobis* could exercise their duties only after showing the well-known seal, which further emphasizes the quintessentially oral character of the time and the fact that written documents were trusted only when accompanied by a recognizable symbol – the seal ensuring their authenticity.

Although only a small number of documentary artefacts have been preserved for Timiș County due to various historical events, we can assume that the scriptorial activity here was similar to that of other counties from the medieval Hungarian Kingdom of the 14th and 15th centuries. Besides each of the 108 stored documents, we can imagine that there were another few, which have not been preserved, failing to survive even beyond that period for understandable pragmatic reasons. Characterized by Latin cursive writing on paper as a medium, authenticated by the seal of the county officials, the documents issued in Timiș County reveal a glimpse from the history of the region south of the Mureș River and serve simultaneously as evidence of their cultural impact in the aristocratic/secular milieu of medieval Hungary.

#### CONSIDERAȚII ASUPRA SCRIPTELOR COMITATULUI TIMIȘ (SEC. XIV–XVI)

##### *Rezumat*

Scrisul administrativ la nivelul comitatului Timiș s-a concretizat prin documente emise în urma activității scaunului de judecată. Diversitatea cauzelor a dat naștere la o mare diversitate de acte. Primul document păstrat pentru comitatul Timiș este din anul 1321 iar ultimul din anul 1505, din această perioadă supraviețuind un număr de 108 scrisori. Cine a scris, cum a scris sunt doar câteva dintre întrebările la care încercăm să răspundem în acest articol.

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 32, 57, 135, 257.