



RECENZJE

Katalin Szende, *Trust, Authority, and the Written Word in the Royal Towns of Medieval Hungary*, Brepols, Turnhout, Brill, 2018, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy*, 41, pp. xx, 416.

The University of Utrecht seems to have become a centre of researches on medieval literacy, especially pragmatic literacy; it regularly hosts conferences with international participation on this subject. It launched a well-known prestigious series with such titles as *Writing and the Administration of Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy* (I-II, ed. Marco Mostert, Anna Adamska, 2014), also co-authored by Katalin Szende. The topic of urban literacy is apparently widely researched, the book of Agnieszka Bartoszewicz on *Urban Literacy in Late Medieval Poland* was published unfortunately almost parallel to Szende's volume in the same series, that's why a comparison between the two countries is missing from these books.

K. Szende (Central European University – Department of Medieval Studies, Head of Department, Associate Professor) has been a regular participant in medieval urban research projects, just to mention the series of *Hungarian Atlas of Historic Towns*. Her list of publications is impressive, enumerating eight monographs, and most of them have in common that they reflect in some way the literal, archival and material culture of Central European towns in the Middle Ages, a topic she inspected closely during her employ in the Museum of Sopron.

The towns have always been in the centre of her interest, and she prepared and founded the present book by a dozen of preliminary studies and conference papers. The result is a vividly written, well documented, and ground-breaking monograph on a topic – even in international comparison – that should have been presented decades ago. The author realized an existing gap between the international trends and the Hungarian historiography that apparently neglected or at least underestimated the problem of town literacy, and published only case studies on selected minor questions. It is funny – or rather shocking – that while on the earliest, and forged foundation deed of Pannonhalma

„Z Badań nad Książką i Księgozbiorami Historycznymi” – Udział zagranicznych recenzentów w ocenie publikacji; Stworzenie anglojęzycznej wersji wydawniczej publikacji; Digitalizacja tomów archiwalnych rocznika w celu zapewnienia otwartego dostępu do nich przez Internet oraz wdrożenie i utrzymanie cyfrowej platformy redakcyjnej – zadanie finansowane w ramach umowy nr 653/P-DUN/2019 ze środków Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego przeznaczonych na działalność upowszechniającą naukę.

in 1001/1002 an immense library has been written, an overall picture of town literacy was missing in spite of the survived huge quantities of archival documents. As it is well known, the production of documents in the medieval West underwent three phases of quantitative growth, between 1100 and 1249, 1250 and 1349, and from 1350 to 1470 respectively. Present book has focused on the 14th and 15th century periods, with the explicit purpose of analysing everyday documents and documentary practices as they emerged and took root during the centuries in question and at the same time radically transformed the relationships between the written word and medieval people.

In the first chapter an overview on the theoretical and sociological aspects of pragmatic literacy is presented. The reader may understand why the word “trust” appears in the book’s title, as it was a central link between the writing, the written world and society. The notion “trust” was really stimulating in the adaption and development of everyday literary practice in the field of commercial and legal matters, in bookkeeping of incomes and expenses. This “trust” was formerly exclusively monopolized beyond the royal court and judges by the ecclesiastical institutions, by the organization of the so called “*loca credibilia*” functioning as public notaries in Hungary between the 13th and 19th centuries. Szende convincingly emphasized the pioneering importance of the Hungarian professor, István Hajnal’s academic achievement, putting him among the forerunners of modern sociology. Hajnal explained the boom of charters with cultural and social reasons and refuted the importance of formal influences. Based on his long stay in the Austrian imperial archives Hajnal realized that the charter cursive appeared almost in the same decades, with minimal delay, in different parts of Europe, in the center and the peripheral areas of the Latin civilization.

The professor of the Budapest University realized among the first scholars the correlation between the cursivity of Latin notarial documents and the social transformation of a given society. Though the internationally renowned scholar, Hajnal, published his works in many languages, the post-1945 Hungarian cultural politics didn’t appreciate his approach, and palaeography as an auxiliary discipline has fallen into the background for long decades. Szende starts her researches where Hajnal and also his disciple, Dénes Huszti with his monograph, entitled *Literacy and social development in Florence between the end of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period* (Budapest 1935) – stopped: at the end of the 13th century, at a significant period for the Hungarian urban transformation. Recently these palaeographical and social aspects have been analysed by Paul Bertrand’s magisterial work (*Les écritures ordinaires. Sociologie d’un temps de révolution documentaire, entre royaume de France et Empire, 1250-1350*, Paris 2015), also translated into English in the “Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy”, but launched after Szende’s book. Bertrand’s

book confirmed that the local urban scribal practices with a minimal delay followed the speeded but good readable cursive notarial practice of the more developed western territories. Perhaps the *cursivity* (mechanical and continuous movements of the hand that accelerate writing by not pausing between letters) should have been mentioned in a more detailed way in this book, as the above mentioned Bertrand pointed out the new styles of documentary hands, derived from cursively written Gothic script, were clear and rapid, easy to write and read, and facilitated the handling of extensive documentation.

The next chapter begins with the radical turn in the development of literacy in Hungary around 1200. Though the first charter scripts appeared by the 1130s, their regular and continuous use starts with the reign of King Béla III (1172-1196), a few decades later the first authentic document was issued by an urban community, Esztergom (Ostrzyhom) in 1255. It is not by chance that the spread of literacy and the development of privileged towns were connected and supported each other. The urban communities testified important points of reference and interconnectedness, fitting into the overall legal system of the country, and using the models provided by the literacy of other administrative centers. An interesting aspect of this interwoven connection is the influence of the places of authentication (the above mentioned "*loca credibilia*") on town literacy. The success of these specially Hungarian institutions certainly paved the way to a radical turn toward charters and written forms, having "trust" in them (a really key term of this book), while the presence of cathedral chapters in the episcopal towns hampered the administrative literacy, at least for a while. On the other hand, in the royal towns the chapters and convents were able to offer their experience and services to the newly emerging town authorities, and after an emancipation, the town chanceries themselves were regarded as "*loca credibilia*", using a trustworthy seal. Towns soon became the producers of a wide variety of written documents, though as the author formulates "their documentary practices were self-generated rather than deriving from constitutional authorization". Further important administrative innovations were the use of municipal books, the employment of notaries for a long term, the passage to the vernaculars, the setting up of special repositories for the stock of records. The different types of documents and registers became a part of an administrative system – and at least theoretically – they could be found and checked at any time in case of need. It's a telling example that to handle the administration of last wills a big, folio format book, entitled "*Protocollum testamentorum*" was introduced by 1427, and it was kept continuously until 1872.

A wide range of novelties supported the specialization of urban administration, as the municipal books appeared by the end of the 13th century in Italy and in the Low Countries, even the book form offered advantages in contrast

to the folios and rolls, but also the spread of the paper as a writing material opened up new perspectives. It is not by chance that the Hungarian king, Sigismund personally visited the paper mill of the Stromers in Nuremberg, though we could learn from Szende's book that from the 1330s paper became the customary writing material in the Hungarian towns. The notaries and chancellors played a key role in this process. These persons, described by Bertrand as heads of graphic communities, were high-ranking administrators, typically clerics, experts in writing and specialists of law or accounting, who imparted their methodology to their staff of mostly anonymous scribes.

A separate chapter is dedicated to the historiographical sources of the early urban administration. Really not too much of such sources survived, but we have a few records from the Spiš region (today Slovakia) and Braşov (today Romania). It is interesting that on a column of St. James church in Levoča (today Slovakia) a short historical chronology was depicted mentioning among others the church foundations and the date of a local earthquake. This column and further wall chronicles of towns inhabited by Germans remind us of the close connection of the spiritual and civic sides of the *universitas civium*, as communities of common historical memory at the same time, mentioned also in this book concerning the urban seals with saints. It testifies the differences in literacy between towns and villages; in the latter the church walls were covered by frescoes depicting St Ladislas' heroic legend, instead of written chronologies. On the other hand, we have town chronicles, or rather chronicles copied and edited in towns from the first half of the 16th century on. The first testimony, the Spišská Sobota or Georgenberger German chronicle from the mid-15th century is rather an exception. Just to mention a few later examples, the Levoča chronicle of Melchior Genersch (ca. 1552), or the German chronicle of Conrad Sperfogel, who was born in Konstanz and moved to Levoča by 1508, the bilingual chronicle of Daniel Türck, notary and later judge of Levoča in the 1550s, in the case of Braşov the short "*Scheda memorialis*" of Lucas Grüngrass circa 1526-28, deposited in the tower of the city hall, or a wall chronicle, called "*Brevis Chronicon Daciae*" from the 1550s. Recent researches emphasized the close connection between the legal compilations, collections of laws, decrees (like in the case of the "*Zips-er Willkühr*") and the abridged chronicle versions in Latin. Concerning Buda, the autobiographical notes of the first historian of Buda, John Kakas are equally interesting. In his "*Liber memorialis*" the author didn't see the city as an outsider, instead he recorded memories that the local citizens found important – analysed for the first time by András Kubinyi. Liebhart Egkenfelder, a notary until 1457 in Bratislava (today Slovakia) is famous for possessing a library of 38 volumes, containing manuscripts on King Arthur and Alexander the Great.

The linguistic plurality of towns may be explained by the practical necessity of communication, keeping up relation within and outside the town – as it is

investigated in the chapter describing the ways to vernaculars, first of all German, in a few cases Hungarian, Italian and Slavic languages. In most of the towns in the period it was German that made the greatest progress, Hungarian will be adopted in the towns of the Great Hungarian Plane (Alföld) during the 16th century. We can read amusing examples of ethnic interference in language in the form of a mixed language, the differences between the written and spoken version, a noticeable hierarchy between the languages, the choice of language seeking the recipient's favor, or on the contrary, complaining of the town delegates about the spoken Hungarian at the diets. It is interesting again that such a great difference existed between the language usage of German settlements in the country: exceptionally among the Saxons of Transylvania Latin remained the exclusive written language till the 16th century.

The last chapters focus on the literacy of the Jews and the birth of the town archives. It turns out that the pragmatic, ordinary literacy in some limited way existed even in the first centuries of the kingdom, regulated for the first time by King Coloman (1095-1116) concerning commercial transactions with the so called "*cartula sigillata*" between Jews and Christians. The proportion of the Jews in the medieval urban population of Hungary was not significant, though because of their internal and international commercial affairs with Christians it was necessary to regulate it. Their typical activity was money lending that was documented by charters endorsed by the town seal, and registered in the so called "*Judenbücher*". Hebrew appeared only exceptionally in the town books, their language was used only within their community, and was used by them putting practical notes on the verso of the charters concerning active debts.

The treatment of charters signals yet another important aspect of this literary process. It also involved a great deal of inventions, as it raised the twin expectation of preserving information and of its availability. In these circumstances, it was less the single ordinary piece of writing (charters, notes, certificates, receipts, memos) than their integration within a web of other documents that produced their relevance. The single ordinary document functioned by reference to other documents, provided by its insertion within registers and cartularies. This documentary network permitted the manipulation of data that, already available in earlier formats, could be re-deployed in newer documents arrayed for different purposes. The town archives followed the example of the "*loca credibilia*" but there was a great variety among the towns as to how they tried to ensure the safe preservation of documents and – at the same time – the easy and quick access to them. The structure of the archives always mirrored the local political administration – as formulated by Michael Jucker. The reader gets an overview in this chapter about the written testimonies and the material side of the archives, protocols, buildings, furniture. It is not by chance that the Archives of Sopron dominates this chapter because this is the only town in Hungary where the

holdings have been preserved continually since the turn of the 15th-16th centuries. The local archives still possess a unique series of old bindings, made of outdated parchment manuscripts. The bookbinder also became part of the paid personnel of the town. Here we may refer to the catalogue of the *Latin Codex* fragments from Sopron, and to the studies on their cultural background (*Mittelalterliche lateinische Handschriftenfragmente in Sopron*, ed. by Edit Madas with K. Szende, Budapest 2006; and Edit Madas, *Trente ans de recherches en Hongrie sur les fragments des manuscrits médiévaux*. “Cultura Neolatina. Rivista di Filologia Romanza” 2005, vol. 65, pp. 233-244).

The libraries of cities were not typical of the analysed period, the first list of books came from the 1500's, but in a certain way they had a common origin with the archives. Some of them had an ecclesiastical origin, like the private library of the Fraternity of twenty-four parish priests founded by Johann Henckel (1481-1539) in Levoča. In some cases, the stock of urban school libraries was selected from these church collections, like in Banská Bystrica (today Slovakia) during the 1570's, counting 122 volumes. In another case the books were placed in the church but remained municipal property like in Kőszeg in 1614, or after the reformation the confiscated books of former catholic possessors were put – after a close examination – into the “*Bibliotheca publica*” of protestant towns. Some smaller collections, sometime only a few books served as a reference library for the town council, the local hospital or pharmacy, as in Banská Bystrica the hospital was donated with almost a hundred of books in the 1530's and 1540's.

At the end of the book there is a complete list of charters issued by towns (1244/1255-1305) and those issued by municipal authorities in episcopal towns, a list of town notaries until 1400, and a list of municipal books started before 1500.

The present book is an original and genuine contribution to the field of medieval literacy, with new approaches that are both engaging and challenging. It is supported by a thorough exploration of preserved archives, while shedding sharper light on the unique importance of pragmatic literacy in the general transformation of the medieval society in this period. “The medieval city is daughter to the written word”, according to Paul Zumthor. We knew it very well, but having read Szende's book, we understand it much better. We have travelled centuries, from “illiterate” to “semi-literate” thirteenth century, to the “literate” fourteenth century. The book aims to identify a key moment in the great documentary revolution that transformed the Middle Ages.

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