

Lidia GROSS: *Bresle și conferirii, sau despre pietatea urbană în Transilvania medievală (secolele XIV–XVI) (Guilds and confraternities, or urban piety in medieval Transylvania, 14th–16th century) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2014), 266 p.*

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Lidia Gross's book published at the Argonaut Publishing House in Cluj-Napoca is a continuation of her previous work, presenting the most recent results of her research. The prominent scholar developed the subject of her doctoral dissertation¹ into a new book by further explorations resulting in new data shedding new light on our knowledge of urban piety in 14th-16th century Transylvania. This analysis presents the operation of Transylvanian medieval society, the mentality and social structure of the 14th-16th century. The author points out already in the preface: the most important task for her and the scholarship is to eliminate a very widespread and stubborn view of the literature regarding the secular – ecclesiastical opposition. One of the great merits of the book is precisely the fact that the author does more than just demolish this rigid misconception and declare the pointlessness of this opposition in the 14th-16th century (and let me note: even a long time afterwards); she presents, by her source analyses, how the expectations of church and society and the personal piety and religiousness were built upon each other in a symbiotic relationship in the life of urban communities.

The structure of the volume follows a personal to institutional logic. One of the text types of this age that gives largest room to individual representation is the last will, as also a document of urban piety. In the first two studies of the book the author publishes and analyzes two relatively early testaments. These texts are included into the volume not simply because they put forth the new research results of the author since her dissertation, but also because they are the manifestations of late medieval Transylvanian urban piety. The first last will analyzed comes from the early 16th century: the testament of a member of the influential Eiben family from Bistrița, Ursula Meister Paulin. One may ask whether it was necessary to return to a long known source (especially as the first study of the volume), for Mrs Ursula's last will was already published in 1864, and it has been present ever since, albeit sporadically, in Transylvanian historiography. However, Lidia Gross's thorough argumentation and the profound analysis of the text may justify this decision. The previous scholarship has failed to agree on the dating of the testament, but Lidia Gross clarifies the exact date of formulation based on well-established arguments: 2 July 1512. A further reason that

¹ Published in 2004, new edition in 2009.

makes the investigation even more intriguing is the criteria of analysis: Lidia Gross places special emphasis on the sex (female) of the testament writer, and highlights the possibilities of a gendered analysis of the text. Mrs Ursula's decisions regarding her movable and immovable properties, the passage of her immovable properties into ecclesiastical use, the justification of her decision is interpreted in Gross's book as one of the few – in this age – manifestations of female urban piety.

The text discussed in the second study is again a fortunate choice: the testament of Thomas Jo from 1531, a generic pair of the previous will. In the Cluj County state archives, Gross found the testament of the castellan of Ieciu who died in the plague outburst in Bistrița, and published it in a volume of articles in 2011. The republication is justified by the fact that this time it also contains the source edition. The nobleman had relatively few movable properties to dispose of, but the instructions about his funeral make this testament even more interesting. These gain their full meaning understood, on the one hand, in the context of the mentality of the age (the plague as a proof of salvation), and, on the other hand, in that of the intellectual and political network of Thomas Jo's entourage. His relations, as Werbőczy's *familiaris*, with the judge of Bistrița, Thomas Wallendorffer, in a time of political unrest, explain how a foreigner could be buried in the town church, with the expenses of his funeral ceremonies reaching as high as the price of a good Turkish horse or a house. The instructions regarding the funeral procession also reveal how such a community event could mobilize the masses.

The time period fixed in the title of the book covers precisely the age when religious, often charitable associations flourished all over Europe. Four other studies of the volume deal with religious societies, institutions auxiliary to the Catholic church, the existence of which in Transylvania can be documented from an early age. To define the specific scope of the guilds of craftsmen organized on a professional basis, and the professional confraternities adjoined to these is a serious challenge for a historian. The author maps and presents these religious and professional associations and their fields of operation, while solving terminological problems as well, as there was no consensus in the previous literature about the name and relations, hierarchical or other, between the various kinds of associations. These inquiries take one step closer to the understanding of how medieval Transylvanian cities and urban piety worked.

The first religious association discussed in the book is the Confraternity of the Rosary, functioning in Bistrița between 1525 and 1544. This again is not a new topic for Gross, but the newly found register of the Confraternity justifies a reiteration of the subject. The society which was founded after the onset of the Reformation in Transylvania was not accidentally placed in Bistrița: the ideas of the Reformation penetrated the strong Catholic community of the town somewhat later than in other great cities of Transylvania, e.g. Brașov or Cluj. Gross proceeds to a contrastive analysis and contextualization of this confraternity by mentioning some European examples of its history. On the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary there was one single such Confraternity of the Rosary in Košice/Kassa, which is one more reason why the foundation of the confraternity at a relatively early time in Bistrița was an outstanding event. The newly discovered register offers new data to the history of the society whose members were exclusively laymen and mostly women. The study

presents and analyzes the data found in this register; the register itself and the names of the members of the society are published at the end.

The fourth, longest text in the volume deals with the religious associations organized by criteria of profession in medieval Transylvania. The roots of this discussion are already there in the author's dissertation, but here it is turned into a thorough analysis extended both in terms of sources and literature. In this chapter Lidia Gross gives an answer, relative to Transylvania, to one of the hardest questions of European historiography: that no general conclusions can be drawn about the religious confraternities formed beside professional groups (guilds) following Western European (German, English, French) models, either in terms of terminology or organization. On the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary (Transylvania included) the German model was followed, as proven by the statutes of the confraternities in three large Transylvanian cities: Cluj, Sibiu and Braşov. In these three cities the first religious confraternities adjacent to guilds were established quite early, in the mid-15th century. Their function was to harmonize economy and religion, satisfy spiritual needs, while the guild preserved its secular economic character all along. In respect of the religious associations established on professional criteria, the most complex case of the three cities was Cluj: in addition to a dynamic economy and trade, it also had a strong interest in devotional movements. Religious professional confraternities existed next to seven guilds (butchers, tanners, blacksmiths, weavers, shoemakers, harness makers, tailors). Gross also examined the statutes of five other guilds (potters, hoopers, goldsmiths, furriers, ropemakers), some of which undertake religious functions as well. The comparison with the cities of Sibiu and Braşov is difficult because of the lack of similar types of sources; however, the sources available permit the author to draw the following conclusions: the use of other types of sources (increasing number of guild statute requests, documents on altars or saints served by guilds) may yield insight into devotional needs and the accessibility of the ideas of religious innovation and the Reformation. Gross also finds that, although similarities exist between the organization and attitude towards religious life of guilds of Sibiu and Braşov, there are also significant differences: the Braşov guilds were primarily interested in trade, and were more indifferent to religion than those of Sibiu. Gross ends her insightful analysis with reference to the examples from Bistriţa, starting with the testament of Mrs Ursula discussed in the first chapter, as there is no other evidence extant as yet for this town about religious confraternities organized on professional basis. One may agree with the author to encourage new perspectives and criteria for research: she states that she was not interested in a technical description of guilds, in how their hierarchical structure changed throughout the ages, but in their complex roles within the Transylvanian society. Her question was how it could fulfil several functions (profession organization, military, religious-charitable and cultural roles at the same time), as such questions take one step closer to the understanding of how the medieval Transylvanian society worked and how it was organized. In contrast to the author's very accurate questions and exhaustive answers, her remark that the Reformation brought the end of the previous colourful world of Transylvania seems oversimplifying.²

² Gross, *Bresle şi confrerii*, 182–183.

The fifth chapter continues the subject of the previous one, in a structure that corresponds to the hierarchy within a guild. She now presents the religious confraternities of journeymen, created on the basis of the same devotional needs as seen before, and highlights their outstanding role in Transylvanian urban piety. This is a subject of special importance for two reasons: these associations were motivated by the same religious needs as the ones discussed before, therefore are organically connected to the confraternities of the guilds; and the research of this subject is quite marginal in Romanian historiography: if it is discussed at all, it is usually viewed as class struggle within the guild hierarchy. The analysis conducted with the close reading of the sources reveals that another town can be added to the list of Transylvanian towns with confraternities: the association of journeymen shoemakers from Saschiz and the neighbouring settlements had an irregular status, a double authority of moral education and religious-charitable work under the supervision of both the town authorities and the church.

The topic of the last chapter is a group completely unlike any of the confraternities previously discussed: the Saint John confraternity of shoemaker journeymen from Sibiu. Several attempts have been made in the scholarship to explain this, and Gross starts the presentation of this most special confraternity by summarizing and rectifying them. The society's preserved register book contains the number of its members: between 1484 and the end of the 16th century more than 1900 members were registered. The membership of this confraternity is outstanding not only because of the number of members but also because this was the first society with members from abroad. This shows that the medieval mobility in Transylvania was not unidirectional (from Transylvania to Western Europe), but people from the West also spent some time in Transylvania, at least in Sibiu, and they were obliged, but also felt the need, to belong to some local community. This Sibiu-based confraternity comprised a larger area: in addition to the foreigners, journeymen from other Transylvanian settlements also joined in. Apart from its numbers and territorial range, the composition was also outstanding: it comprised not only the shoemaker journeymen, but also master craftsmen, and even wives and children as well. It was also more spiritual than most confraternities: not only did it have an altar and a patron saint, but is also accepted members from other professions and its main purpose was the cult and care of its patron saint and altar. Gross's most important rectifications in the scholarship are that this confraternity was not a professional association but an explicitly religious society, and that the settlement name *Ardesch*/*Ardisch* was misunderstood and the confraternity was wrongly placed in connection with Wallachia. The register of the society allows the reconstruction of its profile, but the statutes, which could offer more information about its operation, have not been discovered yet.

Lidia Gross's book yields insight into the life of medieval Transylvanian society. She reads the sources already known with a fresh eye and discovers new ones, her competent analyses almost visualize the pulse of the community. The German and English summary is a helpful tool for the book, but a bibliography and a final index of names and places, and a more detailed table of contents marking the subtitles as well would have made it easier to use. It is not (necessarily because of?) the author's carelessness that the text contains an almost confusing amount of typos; also, a more

thorough proofreading could have eliminated many of the optional use of synonyms marked with a “/”.³

Translated from the Hungarian by Emese Czintos

³ Just some examples: înțelegeri / convenții (agreements/conventions, 14), ipotetic / prezumtiv (hypothetical/presumptive, 16), ilustrative / grăitoare (illustrative/telling, 55), aleatoriu / nu consecvent (aleatory/inconsistent, 81), întărire / confirmare (enforcement/confirmation, 142), aluzie / sugestie (allusion/suggestion, 156), refăcut / reconstruit (remade/reconstructed, 175), model / exemplu (model/example, 181), clericală / ecleziastică (clerical/ecclesiastic, 187), estimării / aproximării (estimate/approximate, 211), contribuții / taxe anuale (contributions/annual taxes, 220), etc.