

Lidia Gross, *Bresle și confrerii sau despre pietatea urbană în Transilvania medievală (secolele XIV-XVI)*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut, 2014, 266 p., ISBN 978-973-190-502-8

Following the two editions of the book *Confreriile medievale în Transilvania (secolele XIV-XVI)* ["Medieval confraternities in Transylvania (14th – 16th c.)"] and also of several studies regarding the larger theme of the devotional phenomenon for the same time and space context, Lidia Gross brings to the historiographical debate the results of six different researches, reunited into a dense volume. Put under the sign of urban life, a research domain still exotic for the Romanian historical writing, the present work offers several insights on how piety functioned within medieval society. Overall, she aims to outline the general framework of Transylvanian townspeople – men or women, privileged or not – in which their religious life found its most appropriate and strong expression in connexion with the group they were part of, but also with the demands of the era. On the other hand, the six studies can be categorized either according to the sources put under investigation or pursuing the concepts articulated on the basis of their highly critical survey.

The studies consist of extensive analysis, most of them revolving around a single historical document, which was either recovered directly from archives or was known from a prior critical edition. Thus, the volume brings to light the unpublished testament and funeral expenses of Thomas Jo (castellan of Ieciu / Wetsch / Marosvécs castle who died at Bistrița / Bistriz / Beszterce in 1531 and was buried in the parish church) and fragments of the registry belonging to the Confraternity of the Rosary from Bistrița (which records the period 1525-1544). Where documents were known from previous editions, the information was processed in the form of lists or tables – the testamentary legatees of Ursula Meister Paulin from Bistrița, the members of the above mentioned confraternity and of the ones of Saint John's Confraternity in Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben), with the role of emphasizing quantitative aspects, namely the impact these institutions had among individuals.

Therefore, the first category includes four studies discussing two types of historical sources – the individual testament and the registry of a well determined organization – each of them serving the definition of the spiritual profile of the medieval townspeople. In approaching the two testaments, Lidia Gross did not applied the same research strategy, but rather a complementary analysis intended to highlight that this type of historical document represents "ways for expression and exercise of piety". Thus, despite the fact that medieval testaments generally followed the same

pattern, in the case of Ursula Meister Paulin the legatees and the possessions they received were carefully analysed, while for Thomas Jo's was emphasized his attempt to ensuring a "good death" throughout his specific legacies. In both cases, the information gathered from testaments was highly contextualized and details were added for a more complete point of view. The approach of these two testaments is even more valuable due to the double perspective upon the exercise of piety in the urban society – woman vs. man, townsman vs. nobleman, family vs. celibacy. Although a justly disavowed matter among historians – republishing already edited documents – one might ask if it would not have been useful, with this occasion, a textual resumption of the testament of Ursula Meister Paulin, since the study itself wished to be "a detailed examination in order to highlight and to return its distinctive feature in relation to other documents of the same type".

Starting from two confraternal registries, Lidia Gross reconstructs the history of the two associations, the Confraternity of the Rosary from Bistrița, developed within the Dominican convent, and the Saint John Confraternity from Sibiu, started by the local shoemaker journeymen. The matters regarding to the establishment, duration, members and the religious life sustained by the two institutions were emphasized through a rigorous argumentative structure. Furthermore, Gross offered thorough documented contextualization and also comparisons with similar examples from several German cities in order to create a more coherent demonstration. One might notice here too, the complementary value of both researches – if one refers to a clerical confraternity founded within a larger European pattern, the other is individualised by the wide social origin of its members (952 only for the period 1484-1508), therefore exceeding the borders of a single craft and even of a single town. This gives to the association from Sibiu the profile of a lay devotional confraternity that seems to have originated in a handicraft fraternity of the shoemaker journeymen, an associative form discussed in a separate study of the present work.

The second category consists of two studies which relate to a problem still "thorny" in the European historiography, the professional confraternity, both from the perspective of masters reunited into a guild and also of journeymen grouped into a fraternity, this type of association representing "the union – and not the fusion – between economy and religion". Following the example of the German type of handicraft confraternities, Lidia Gross examined to what extent the Transylvanian corporations resonate with this paradigm. The complex relationship between corporation and confraternity within the same profession, considered Gross, is also suggested by the diplomatic language used within

the official guild documents, which is why she undertook a thorough investigation of this type of historical source from Cluj (Klausenburg, Kolozsvár), Sibiu, Braşov (Kronstadt, Brassó) and partially Bistriţa. Without forcing the conclusions, but grounding her assessments on extremely limited information provided by the sources, in some cases only the presence of the term *confraternitas* within guild statutes, such as the weaver's Confraternity of the Holy Spirit in Cluj, Lidia Gross considers that during the 15th and 16th centuries the handicraft confraternities are more detectable in Cluj, while in Sibiu and Braşov guilds had a more prominent role in organizing the religious life for the community of masters. The idea that professional confraternities were forerunners for the Transylvanian urban craft guilds is formulated with high caution, an entirely present-day point of view for this geographic area, but a known and validated theory within the Western historiography. With a similar approach was managed the issue of journeymen's fraternities in Transylvania, scarcely mentioned by historical sources. Most of them were identified in Braşov, namely five, while at Sibiu, Cluj and Saschiz (Keisd, Szászkézdvéra) was traced only a single association for each town. Unlike confraternities developed within craft guilds, the main aim of this type of association was to implement several social and religious behaviour standards, especially against immoralities that could corrupt the youngest considered to be an unstable social and professional category of the medieval town.

To conclude, Lidia Gross's present work consists of detailed studies referring to well-defined segments of urban laity from Transylvania – women, masters, journeymen and so forth. In other words, if the study of different associative forms captured a series of religious ideals common to all members, the testaments that were examined created a favourable background about the extent to which these ideals could have been achieved or not by each individual. A noteworthy feature of this volume is represented by the publishing of several unedited historical documents, one of them discovered just recently. Very useful are the English and German abstracts and, especially, the final name and place index. Unfortunately, one cannot fail to notice some discrepancies and inconsistencies among the six studies, especially text editing problems. Even so, the overall value is not diminished, each study making an important contribution not only to the history of medieval Transylvania, but to the entire associative phenomenon – devotional and/or professional – specific to the European urban world of this time.

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