

# The Book as Object of Lay Devotion in Late Medieval Transylvania (Fifteenth – Sixteenth Centuries)

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**Abstract:** Research on late-medieval religiosity in Central and Western Europe has shown that religious books were not only possessed, but also read, and sometimes even copied or disseminated by laymen. The need for a better definition of the relationship between the laity and the religious text leads to the formulation and intensive discussion of concepts such as *devotional reading*, *culture of religious reading*, or *vernacular theology*. Several examples of works that belonged to late-medieval Transylvanian laymen suggest the opportunity and, at the same time, the need to ask whether similar dynamics of pious behaviour can be discussed in their case. In order to provide a convincing answer, this study proposes an analysis of these books from at least three perspectives: theme, language, formal characteristics. The most interesting information is offered, however, by property notes, which suggest that the devotional potential of the book was not activated by reading, but rather by donation. By offering solutions to the everyday necessities of ecclesiastical institutions, these gifts were designed to ensure personal salvation as well. In order to support this hypothesis, I will also address another category of sources from which mentions regarding this kind of donations can be recovered, i.e. last wills.

**Keywords:** religious books, devotional practices, pious donations, last wills, laity

**Rezumat:** Cercetări privitoare la religiozitatea specifică evului mediu dezvoltat și târziu în centrul și vestul Europei au demonstrat că dincolo de a fi deținute, cărțile cu conținut religios erau citite, iar uneori chiar copiate sau diseminate de laici. Din nevoia unei mai bune definiții a relaționării laicului cu textul religios au fost formulate și îndelung discutate concepte precum *lectură devoțională*, *cultura lecturii religioase* sau *teologie vernaculară*. Câteva exemple de lucrări care au aparținut în perioada premergătoare Reformei unor laici transilvăneni sugerează oportunitatea și, deopotrivă, nevoia de a ne întreba dacă se poate discuta în cazul lor despre o dinamică similară a manifestărilor pioase. Pentru a oferi un răspuns concludent, lucrarea oferă o analiză a respectivelor lucrări sub diferite aspecte: tematică, limbă, caracteristici formale. Informațiile cele mai interesante sunt oferite, însă, de însemnările de proprietate, ce sugerează că potențialul devoțional al cărții nu era activat

prin lectură, ci mai degrabă prin donație. Oferind soluții la necesitățile cotidiene ale unor instituții ecleziastice, aceste daruri erau menite să asigure, deopotrivă, mântuirea personală. Pentru a argumenta această ipoteză, voi face apel și la o altă categorie de surse din care pot fi recuperate mențiuni privind asemenea donații – testamentele.

**Cuvinte cheie:** cărți religioase, practici devoționale, donații pioase, testamente, laici

The High and Late Middle Ages represented periods of change in religion and faith, leading to more profound involvement of the laity in matters of devotion. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries spiritual guides were composed, offering suggestions regarding the path that laymen could follow in order to engage in religious life without neglecting daily obligations related to family and work. *Vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* were no longer seen as alternatives, or even opposed to each other, but became complementary. Lay people were to “integrate contemplative practice into the rhythms of the active life”.<sup>1</sup> Among such instructions, some referred to meditation and religious readership as spiritual exercises. At the same time, religious literature began to be translated and produced in vernacular languages while the laity soon became part of the audience of such works which included prayer books, Bibles, Psalters, hagiographic, as well as moral or catechetical works, postils, calendars and many others. For Western Europe, individual endeavours as well as large research projects – some of them of recent date – have explored the role played by books and devotional literature in the shaping of lay piety, proving that laymen were involved in what has been defined as a “culture of religious reading”. For instance, Sabrina Corbellini, coordinator of two important research projects dealing with the engagement of the laity in devotional reading,<sup>2</sup> demonstrated through her studies that laymen owned, sometimes even collected, and read books, while some of them actively participated in the production and transmission of religious knowledge as they copied or even authored texts on such matters.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sabrina Corbellini, Margriet Hoogvliet, “Artisans and Religious Reading in Late Medieval Italy and Northern France (ca. 1400 – ca. 1520)”, in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 43 (2013): 525.

<sup>2</sup> ERC Grant: *Holy Writ and Lay Readers: A Social History of Vernacular Bible Translations in the Late Middle Ages* (2008-2013); NWO-project: *Cities of Readers. Religious Literacies in the Long Fifteenth Century* (2015-2019).

<sup>3</sup> Sabrina Corbellini, “Beyond Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy: A New Approach to Late Medieval Religious Reading”, in Eadem (ed.), *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages. Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit, and Awakening the Passion* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 33 – 53; Eadem, “Reading, Writing, and Collecting: Cultural Dynamics and Italian Vernacular Bible

This phenomenon or complex of developments has also been conceptualized in terms of “vernacular theology”, designating a third theological tradition, parallel to the monastic and scholastic one, which can be distinguished from the other two through the language of its diffusion, the authors who formulated it and the audiences it addressed.<sup>4</sup>

Identifying books addressing aspects of faith, which at a certain point of their existence belonged to Transylvanian laymen, suggests the opportunity and highlights the need to ask whether we can talk about similar dynamics of piety and comparable forms of devout expression. The existence of such cases for the region I am dealing with can be traced, for example, through last-wills. The well-known case of Ursula Meister Paulin<sup>5</sup> – a Transylvanian widow, member of a wealthy and influential family from Bistrița (Germ. Bistritz, Hung. Beszterce) – brings the subject to one’s attention, mentioning that the woman bequeathed her books to a certain chapel,<sup>6</sup> advising that they should be chained, probably in order to ensure their security as well as their use by clergymen.<sup>7</sup> Additional information regarding the content of a book bequeathed to a church is offered by the last-will of *religiosa domina Anna*, widow of *Jacobus aurifaber*, a citizen of Cluj (Germ. Klausenburg, Hung. Kolozsvár), from 1492, September 1, who provided the altar of St. Catherine from the parish church with a bound printed missal.<sup>8</sup>

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Translations”, *Church History and Religious Culture*, 93, 2 (2013): 189 – 216; Corbellini – Hoogvliet, “Artisans and Religious Reading”, pp. 521 – 544.

<sup>4</sup> Eliana Corbari, *Vernacular Theology. Dominican Sermons and Audience in Late Medieval Italy* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), esp. pp. 8-11.

<sup>5</sup> An edition of this testament in Friedrich Müller (ed.), *Deutsche Sprachdenkmäler aus Siebenbürgen*, (Hermannstadt: Steinhausen, 1864), pp. 156-159. For a thorough discussion regarding several disputed aspects of this document see Lidia Gross, “Testamentul doamnei Ursula Paulin: Reflecții pe marginea unui document de la începutul secolului al XVI-lea” [The Will of Mrs. Ursula Meister Paulin: Reflections on the edge of a document from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century], *Acta Musei Porolissensis*, 36 (2014): 21-34.

<sup>6</sup> Lidia Gross demonstrates that the chapel should be the one dedicated to St. Dorothea, from the parish church. Gross, “Testamentul doamnei Ursula”, pp. 28-30.

<sup>7</sup> The text of the last-will specifies: *Item die bucher lass ich zur Capellen, das man sie soll ankettnen an die stüle*. Similar requests are present in other last-wills as well, sometimes offering further explanations in this respect; for instance, a choir master of St. Stephan's Dom in Vienna donated in 1429 a missal and asked for it to be chained in the sacristy, in order to allow its use by poor priests. Gerhard Jaritz, “Die realienkundliche Aussage der sog. Wiener Testamentsbücher”, in *Heinrich Appelt (ed.), Das Leben in der Stadt des Spätmittelalters* (Vienna: Ost. Akad. d. Wiss., 1980), p. 182, apud Thomas Krzenck, “Books in Late Medieval Wills in Bohemia”, *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, 7 (2001): 187-208, esp. 192. On *libri catenati* and their purpose see Philippe Cordez, “Le lieu du texte. Les livres enchainés au Moyen Age”, *Revue Mabillon*, 17 (2006): 75-103.

<sup>8</sup> *Et unum Missale impressum ligaturaque munitum... ad altare sancte Katherine Virginis in Ecclesia beati Michaelis archangeli in hac civitate nostra fundata*. See Oklevéltár Kolozsvár története [Documents

Last-wills, together with inventories, are among the most frequently cited sources of medieval religious reading in Western Europe. However, for Transylvania only a small number of such documents revealing the last wishes and requirements of laymen offer clues of this nature. Fortunately, several books that were present in this region during the late Middle Ages are still preserved and make available further details. Starting from examples of works with Transylvanian circulation in the period preceding the Reformation, I will question their functionality in relation to lay owners. In order to deal with a manageable corpus of sources, I have only considered the printed books, as the period of their publication coincides with that of a fervent religiosity<sup>9</sup> and as they were also more affordable to the laity, compared to manuscripts.<sup>10</sup>

Although the ownership marks are usually limited to essential information, they are able to reveal interesting details about the possessor and the destiny of a certain book. For instance, a copy of *Sermones Thesauri Novi de tempore* printed in 1484 (See Appendix, nr. 7), bears an annotation on the purchase of the book by *Anthonius de Valle Agnetis* (Rom. Agnita, Germ. Agnethlen, Hung. Szentágota, within the Saxon Seat of Cincu) in 1493 (Fig. 1). As only his name is mentioned, it is not clear whether *Anthonius* was a laymen or not, but it is not impossible, given the fact that members of the clergy usually mentioned their status together with their names. An additional property note (Fig. 2) on the same volume reveals that it belonged to *Ioannis Carpentarii de Cibinio* (Rom. Sibiu, Germ. Hermmannstadt, Hung. Nagyszeben)

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concerning the History of Cluj], ed. Jakob Elek (2 vols, Buda: 1870-1888), vol. 1, doc. CLXXXIV, pp. 300-302.

<sup>9</sup> The subject of late medieval piety was intensively discussed by scholars who emphasized that the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries brought a shift in the way religion was assumed and integrated in people's lives, consisting of a diversification of pious behaviors, an interest in surpassing the limits of "conventional devotionalism" - as Richard Kieckhefer put it - as well as the emergence of various reform movements. Beside the before-mentioned studies regarding lay concern for religious reading, see: Richard Kieckhefer, "Convention and Conversion: Patterns in Late Medieval Piety", *Church History* 67, no. 1 (1998): 32-51; Idem, "Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion", in Jill Raitt (ed.), *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, (New York: Crossroad, 1996), pp. 75-108; Berndt Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Although books remained expensive objects, due to the new technology the production costs lowered together with the prices. See Giovanni Bonifati, *Dal libro manoscritto al libro stampato. Sistemi di mercato a Bologna e a Firenze agli albori del capitalismo* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2008); Leonhard Hoffmann, "Gutenberg und die Folgen: Zur Entwicklung des Bücherpreises im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert", *Bibliothek und Wissenschaft*, 29 (1996): 5-23; Idem, "Buchmarkt und Bücherpreise im Frühdruckzeitalter", *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch*, 75 (2000): 73-81. A recent theoretical and methodological approach of the subject at Francesco Ammannati - Angela Nuovo, "Investigating Book Prices in Early Modern Europe: Questions and Sources", *JLIS.it* 8, 3 (September 2017): 1-25. doi: 10.4403/jlis.it-12365.

*legatum per venerabilem virum dominum Paulum Seratoris de Birthalben* (Rom. Biertan, Germ. BIRTHÄLM, Hung. Berethalom, within the Saxon Seat of Mediaș). The term *venerabilis* could imply that Paul was a clergyman, a fact that would explain the ownership of a sermon collection, but John, the one who receives the book, seems to be an artisan, a carpenter, as his name indicates.<sup>11</sup> Another individual fitting in this social category appears as owner of a religious book, namely *Michael Aurifaber Mediensis* (Rom. Mediaș, Germ. Mediasch, Hung. Medgyes), whose name was written on a theological work, the third part of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologica* (Appendix, nr. 11). In turn, *magister Johannes Myld, aurifaber* or *aurifabri*,<sup>12</sup> received or borrowed a copy of *Postila super epistolas et euangelia* (Appendix, nr. 2a) – bound together with a copy of *Vocabularius utriusque juris* (Appendix, nr. 2b) – in 1508, from his friend, *Nicolaus de Megies* (Mediaș), who seems to have been a priest, according to annotations on other books.<sup>13</sup> The homonymy suggests a possible identification of this character with *Johannes Myld, rector scholae* in Sibiu in 1510 and 1524, notary of the chapter of Sibiu and notary of the town, as well as owner of a Venetian edition of the calendar of Johannes Stöffler von Justingen and Jakobus Pflaumen von Ulm,<sup>14</sup> who might have been a priest and not a

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<sup>11</sup> It is also possible that *Johannes* was the son of a carpenter and not a carpenter himself, as seems to be the case for *Paulus*. As his name is in the Genitive case it is not clear if the Nominative form would be *Johannes Carpentarius*, i.e. John the Carpenter, or *Johannes Carpentarii*, i.e. John of the Carpenter. A single person with the name *Johannes Carpentarius* could be identified so far, in the Account registers of Mediaș for the year 1507, where he is mentioned in *labori civitatis Soluimus*. Joseph Bedeus von Scharberg, "Mittheilungen über ein Medwischer Stadtbuch aus dem 16. und 17. Jahrhundert", *Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, Neue Folge 3 (1858): 31-123, here pp. 36, 59.

<sup>12</sup> The name is again in the Genitive case, making it difficult to determine whether this person was a goldsmith or not. Searching for an argument in this direction, I identified the name *Johannes Aurifaber* mentioned in the Account registers of Mediaș for the year 1507 as paying 92 dinars *pro avena*. See Bedeus, "Mittheilungen über ein Medwischer Stadtbuch", pp. 36, 59. This record seems to fit very well the context sketched by the ownership mark, written only a year later and mentioning someone from Mediaș as well. Still, the other name of *Johannes* suggests another possible identification, as will be further presented.

<sup>13</sup> His identity is revealed by a detailed annotation on a copy of *Missale secundum chorom almae ecclesiae Strigoniensis* (Venice: Johannes Emericus de Spira, 1498): *1518 Liber iste legatus est testamentaliter per Nicolaum presbiterum de Megyes unacum casula rubea pro aede virginis gloriosae foris civitatem*, Library of the Brukenthal Museum, Sibiu, Inc. 265, Veturia Jugăreanu, *Catalogul colecției de incunabile* [The Catalogue of the Incunabula Collection] (Sibiu: Biblioteca Muzeului Brukenthal, 1969), nr. 221 (henceforth: Jugăreanu).

<sup>14</sup> See Karl Schwarz, "Vorstudien zu einer Geschichte des städtischen Gymnasiums A. K. in Hermannstadt", in *Programm des Gymnasiums A. K. zu Hermannstadt* (Hermannstadt, 1859), pp. 3-33, esp. pp. 11, 13; Franz Zimmermann, "Chronologische Tafel der Hermannstädter Plebane, Oberbeamten und Notare in den Jahren 1500 bis 1884. Auf Grund archivalischer Quellen verfasst", *Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, Neue Folge 19 (1884): 529 – 578, here p. 532; Friedrich Müller, "Gleichzeitige Aufzeichnungen von Thomas Wal, Johannes Mildt und

layman, given that two charters issued by Volfgangus Flaschner, dean of the chapter of Sibiu, mention him as *reverendus* and *venerabilis*, terms which usually apply to members of the clergy.<sup>15</sup> Still, there are details which do not entirely fit the same profile, supporting the hypothesis that we may be dealing deal with two different persons.<sup>16</sup>

A connection with the administration of Sibiu can be traced for *Laurentius Hon*,<sup>17</sup> whose name and function (*comes Cibiniensis*) appears on a volume containing three texts, two of which addressed the subject of Christian morals: *Donatus moralisatus seu per allegoriam traductus* (Appendix, nr. 4a) and *Barlaam et Josaphat* (Appendix, nr. 4b), while a third one was a historical work (Appendix, nr. 4c). Two volumes containing Raynerus de Pisa's *Pantheologia* (Appendix, nr. 9) belonged to a certain *Petrus Ursule*, a name that can be found among the members of the council of Sibiu in a document issued on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 1505,<sup>18</sup> year which luckily coincides with the one mentioned by the ownership note. Likewise, *Caspar Pileus* or *Hwet*, owner of a copy of the extremely popular *Legenda aurea* (Appendix, nr. 3), is mentioned by an annotation on a different volume<sup>19</sup> as member of the urban administration of the same town. This second note (Fig.3) offers further details about him, revealing a link with the ecclesiastical environment. It informs us that *Casparius* was the father of *Martinus Pilladis de Cibinio*, parish priest in *Omlas* (Rom. Amnaș, Germ. Hamlesch, Hung. Omlás, within the Saxon Seat of Sibiu) at that moment and later in Sibiu and Richiș (Lat. *villa Richvini*, *Riquinium*, Germ. Reichersdorf, Hung. Riomfalva), as well as dean of the Sibiu chapter.<sup>20</sup>

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einem Heltauer aus den Jahren 1513-1532", *Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, Neue Folge 15 (1879): 45-62, here p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> National Archives of Romania, Integrated Information System of the National Archives (henceforth: ANR - SIIAN), SB-F-00011-1-78 and SB-F-00011-1-85 - available on-line: <http://arhivamedievala.ro>.

<sup>16</sup> It might be worth taking into account that neither the attribute of *magister*, nor that of *aurifaber* or *aurifabri* were mentioned in other sources issued by or referring to *Johannes Myldt/Mildt*. The title of *magister* related to that of *aurifaber* could indicate the position in the guild. Otherwise, it could designate an academic degree. The character who became *rector scholae* is known to have studied in Vienna, but he is only mentioned as *bacallaurus*, even two decades later. In such circumstances, the owner of the above-mentioned book could be a different person.

<sup>17</sup> Gustav Seiwert, "Chronologische Tafel der Hermanstädter Plebane, Oberbeamten und Notare. Erste Abtheilung von 1309 bis 1499", *Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, 12 (1874-1875): 189-256, here pp. 212-213; Zimmermann, 'Chronologische Tafel', p. 531.

<sup>18</sup> ANR - SIIAN SB-F-00060-1-28 - available on-line: <http://arhivamedievala.ro>. *Comerț și meșteșuguri în Sibiu și în cele șapte scaune 1224-1579/Handel und Gewerbe in Hermannstadt und in den Sieben Stühlen*, ed. Monica Vlaicu et alii, Sibiu, 2003, 3, no. 84, p. 239-243.

<sup>19</sup> Gregorius I, *Moralia (Expositio in Jobum)* (Basel: Bertold Ruppel, ante 1468), Library of the Brukenthal Museum, Sibiu, Inc. 102, Jugăreanu, no. 162.

<sup>20</sup> Gustav Gündisch, "Die Bibliothek des Sachsegrafen Albert Huet: 1537 - 1607", *Korrespondenzblatt des Arbeitskreises für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, 4, 68 (1974): 32-51, esp. 38, note 27.

A stronger connection with the ecclesiastical milieu is to be found in the case of *Georgius, vitricus ecclesie beate virginis*, i.e. warden of the parish church from Sibiu. He possessed a sermon collection (Appendix, nr. 6) and donated it to the Dominican convent of the Holy Cross, asking for prayers from the pulpit<sup>21</sup> for the soul of *Georgius*, chaplain of the same church, for as long as the prior of that convent would want (Fig. 4). A copy of a similar work, authored by Leonardus de Utino (Appendix, nr. 5), brings to attention a feminine figure, the widow of a certain *magister Nicolaus*, who made a donation to the same friary, for her and her sons' souls (Fig. 5).

Three other volumes, which are currently part of the collections of the Szekler Museum of Ciuc, might provide further evidence of lay ownership of religious books in Transylvania. The third part of *Summa theologica* (Appendix, nr. 10) was donated to the friars minor from Șumuleu Ciuc by *Georgius de villa Walthidia* (Rom. Valchid, Germ. Waldhütten, Hung. Váldhíd, within the Saxon Seat of Șeica). An almost identical annotation mentions *Laurentius de Wydombach* (Rom. Ghimbav, Germ. Weidenbach, Hung. Vidombák, within Burzenland) as donor of Albertus Magnus' *Enarrationes in evangelium Johannis* (Appendix, nr. 1). And finally, a volume containing the sermons of (Pseudo-) Petrus de Palude, for both Lent and the feasts of saints (Appendix, nr. 8a, 8b), was purchased, according to a note, by *Jacobus de Praschmar* (Rom. Prejmer, Germ. Tartlau, Hung. Prázsmár, Burzenland) in 1492. Unfortunately, since only the names of these possessors are known, their status as laymen is uncertain.

Even if some of these examples need caution, it is clear that we can talk about lay ownership of religious books in Transylvania. In order to better understand their function, some observations concerning the nature of these volumes might be useful. In what concerns the types of works owned by Transylvanian lay persons, it is rather striking that many of them are collections of sermons, both model-sermons and simpler, more exegetical discourses. A question arises here: why would a layman own a homiletic work? The fact is that sermons were always a fluid genre that overlapped with many others.<sup>22</sup> During the Middle Ages it was not uncommon for treatises to be transformed into sermons and for sermons to be developed into treatises.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Two other cases where the testators ask for masses celebrated from the pulpit are mentioned by Maria Lupescu, "Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval Sighișoara (Segesvár, Schässburg)", *Caiete de Antropologie Istorică*, 1-2 (2004): 93-106.

<sup>22</sup> Anne T. Thayer, "The Medieval Sermon: Text, Performance and Insight", in Joel T. Rosenthal (ed.), *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 43-58.

<sup>23</sup> Otto Gecser, "Itinerant Preaching in Late Medieval Central Europe: St. John Capistran in Wroclaw", *Medieval Sermon Studies*, 47 (2003): 5-20, esp. 13; Richard Newhauser, 'From Treatise to Sermon: Johannes Herold on the *novem peccata aliena*', in Thomas L. Amos, Eugene A. Green,

Moreover, in the Late Medieval period, above all after the emergence of printing, written sermons were no longer just instruments or handbooks for the clergy. As their content offered explanations of the scriptures, moral examples, teachings and instructions for a Christian life, they became suitable for the needs of those believers who were, as stated before, more and more interested in devotional exercises. In this respect, it is worth mentioning, for instance, that Guilelmus Parissiensis in the prologue of his highly popular work *Postilla super epistolas et euangelia* emphasized the expanded addressability of his work, declaring that it was created for the needs of less expert clergy and those starting out as preachers, as well as for all those desiring an explanation of the holy epistles and gospels.<sup>24</sup> Although in theory all these arguments could be valid, a reliable explanation can be drawn only from the information provided by all the cited ownership annotations. A significant aspect is that none of them, not even the most detailed ones, refer to reading, meditation or any spiritual exercise. As Andrew Pettegree has pointed out, the buying of books should be understood as a “culturally complex decision” and reading should not be considered as an unquestionable purpose of these purchases.<sup>25</sup> Their simple presence in the domestic space was sometimes perceived as helpful or protective, speaking, therefore, about a different kind of pious intention.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, medieval Transylvanian sources do not provide data in this respect, nor do the ownership marks. What many of the books presented above seem to have in common, is the fact that they were the object of donations to religious establishments, especially friaries of the mendicant orders. From this perspective, their content seems to have suited the profile of these institutions, even if we are talking about homiletic literature or theological works. Another observation can be made concerning the authors. In each and every case, we have to deal with extremely popular medieval figures, whose works were real best-sellers of their time.

Regarding the theme of all these writings, sanctity seems to be very well represented. Most of the sermon collections contain explanatory texts for the feasts of saints, Gaspar Huet owns the most popular hagiographic

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B. M. Kienzle (ed.), *De ore Domini: Preacher and the Word in the Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institut Publications, 1989), pp. 185-209.

<sup>24</sup> *Sacrorum euangeliorum ac epistolarum de tempore diebus dominicis et sanctis, etiam super commune apostolorum, martyrum, confessorum, virginum, et pro defunctis, expositiones in unum colligere volumen, minus expertis clericis, ac incipientibus predicatoribus per necessarium fore iudicauit (...) ac pro omnibus sacrorum euangeliorum ac epistolarum expositionem cupientibus.*

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 156-159.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Scribner, *Religion and Culture in Germany: (1400 - 1800)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 187.



work, *Legenda aurea*, and *Barlaam et Josaphat* tells a story that was also included by Iacobus de Voragine in his book. Sermon collections *de sanctis* could have been even more suitable for devotional reading, creating the occasion of introspection, self-evaluation in comparison with holy models, and meditation. On the other hand, as books were objects of bequests or pious donations, sanctity could have been pursued for its intercessory dimension. Donors' concern for the further use of the gifts assigned to religious establishments, like Ursula Meister's request regarding the chaining of her books, could indicate their belief that usage made those object effective in the process of salvation. The simple care of writing down one's name on these books could suggest the intention of ensuring not only the perpetuation of one's memory, but also the use of that gift in the name of its donor.<sup>27</sup> In this respect, books which honoured the lives of saints might have been conceived as capable of guaranteeing their intercession with God every time the volume was read.

Some formal aspects of these books deserve attention too. First of all, it has to be pointed out that the texts taken into account here were written with no exception in Latin. Returning to the concept of vernacular theology, it was already mentioned that one of its main features is the use of vernacular. The great majority of studies on the topic of devotional reading during the late Middle Ages emphasize the spread of translations and the production of religious literature in vernacular languages. Although within the current holdings of Transylvanian libraries there are also German or Hungarian books written or printed in the first half of the sixteenth century, they bear insufficient evidence of contemporary presence in the hands of Transylvanian lay owners. Could these people read Latin? A positive answer is not impossible, as the urban milieu – characteristic for the identified examples – offered the context for wider use of literacy together with opportunities of acquiring such knowledge, through the schools and gymnasia of the main royal free towns.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, university studies were quite popular among the citizens of the Saxon towns at that moment, students being considered as

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<sup>27</sup> Susan Hagen Cavanaugh underlines that devotional books were perfect gifts in testamentary contexts, because their further use was able to preserve the memory of the testator as well as benefit his soul. Susan Hagen Cavanaugh, *A Study of Books Privately Owned in England 1300-1450* (University of Pennsylvania: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 1980), p. 10, apud Janika Bischof, *Testaments, Donations, and the Values of Books as Gifts. A Study of Records from Medieval England before 1450* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> G. D. Teutsch, "Über die ältesten Schulanfänge und damit gleichzeitige Bildungszustände in Hermannstadt", *Archiv des Vereins für Siebenburgische Landeskunde*, Neue Folge 10 (1872): 193-232; Idem, "Ein urkundlicher Beitrag zur ältesten sächsischen Schulgeschichte", *Archiv des Vereins für Siebenburgische Landeskunde*, Neue Folge 12 (1875): 368-372.

one of the channels of book distribution in Transylvania.<sup>29</sup> Still, in similar conditions other European urban citizens were buying and reading vernacular texts, not the Latin ones. We should ask ourselves again whether these books served the needs of the beneficiaries of these donations, better than those of the donors. Further suggestions could be offered by a rather neglected aspect, namely books' dimensions. Most of the examples presented above are folios (ca. 35-45x25-35 cm), a format that would make an exercise of private reading rather uncomfortable. They were better suited for public reading and were mainly used in church.

The main question to which I return is: What was the function attributed to these books by their lay owners? The ownership notes together with the comments made on the content and the formal aspects of the volumes allow some tentative conclusions. First of all, the manuscript annotations offer information about the profile of books' possessors. All of the examples identified so far belonged to members of Transylvanian Saxon communities. Although more concrete details are sometimes absent, for several cases additional information is available, displaying these book owners as artisans, as citizens involved in the urban administration or as having a certain connection with the ecclesiastical milieu. Besides, women, mainly widows, are also present, being a well-represented social category especially within last wills. For any of these groups religious aspects would have been important and advantageous not only for spiritual benefits, but also in the logic of a proper functioning of the community or in pursuit of social prestige. Another aspect regarding the content of the notes made by all these people on their volumes should be further emphasized in order to clarify how books were integrated in the religious lives of their owners. None of these records mentions reading, nor are there any other sources offering clues about such a concern. Instead, annotations are frequently formulated as short testamentary dispositions or highlight pious donations made for one's remembrance and salvation. In the absence of further data about books being used directly by their owners, any attempt to consider them from the perspective of the sociology of reading, as evidence of a devotional reading culture, could only be regarded as wishful thinking. Clues concerning the belief that the simple presence of religious books in their houses would be beneficial are also absent. In such circumstances, the sociology of books would be more appropriate as it would enable one to explain their integration in a system of relationships forged on the mechanisms of devotionally motivated gifts.<sup>30</sup> As an additional

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<sup>29</sup> Sándor Tonk, *Erdélyiek egyetemjárása a középkorban* (Bukarest: Kriterion, 1979), pp. 37-88; Maja Philippi, *Die Bürger von Kronstadt im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Sozialstruktur einer siebenbürgischen Stadt im Mittelalter* (Köln: Böhlau, 1986), pp. 236-249.

<sup>30</sup> Bischof, *Testaments, Donations, and the Values of Books*, pp. 46-49.

argument in this direction I shall mention that last wills offer evidence that not only books themselves were bequeathed. Sometimes churches were provided with money for the acquisition of certain books. For example, the widow of *Stephanus Pistoris* donated money to the Dominican friary from Sighișoara (Germ. Schäßburg, Hung. Segesvár,) that were to be used for the purchase of parchment needed for two liturgical books, a Gradual and an Antiphony.<sup>31</sup> Another case is the one of *Dyonisius Weres de Farnas* (Rom. Sfăraș, Hung. Farnas, Cluj County), who bequeathed 12 golden florins to the Franciscan friary from Târgu Mureș (Germ. Neumarkt, Hung. Marosvásárhely or Székelyvásárhely), for the redemption of a Psalter.<sup>32</sup> These examples reveal that the necessities of these churches were known to the donors and bequests came as solutions to these needs. The personal option of the donor was limited, in consequence, to the act itself, while the appropriate gift was suggested.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, even if the available data do not enable us to talk about a profound engagement in appropriating Christian precepts through the practice of reading, concern for piety is not absent. Transylvanian laymen were interested in ensuring the salvation of their souls and religious books met pious intentions while being objects appropriate for donations, needed by clergy and ecclesiastic institutions, the instances which had the greatest authority in terms of *cura animarum*. In this context, books played a multifaceted role, corresponding to the three values identified by Janika Bischof: the use value – as their content was to serve the needs of their recipients; the exchange value – since they were economic goods and, what is more important, they became part of a contractual agreement through which the donor ‘bought’ himself a chance for salvation; and the symbolic value comprised in their spiritual meaning.<sup>34</sup>

## Appendix

### List of religious works owned by Transylvanian laymen

1. Albertus Magnus, *Enarrationes in evangelium Johannis* (Köln: Johann Guldenschaff, c. 1478), The Szekler Museum of Ciuc: 6597, Muckenhaupt: II. 1, GW 00612

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<sup>31</sup> Karl Fabritius, “Zwei Funde in der ehemaligen Dominikanerkirche zu Schäßburg”, *Archiv des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, Neue Folge 5/1 (1861): 1-40, here p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> *Ecclesiae Monastery Beate Marie virginis de Vasarhel pro redemptione Psalterii duodecim florenos in auro* National Archives of Hungary, DL 29277 – available on-line: <https://archives.hungaricana.hu/en/charters/165680/>.

<sup>33</sup> Maria Lupescu, “Item lego... Gifts for the soul in late medieval Transylvania”, *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, 7 (2001): 161-185, esp. 169-170.

<sup>34</sup> Bischof, *Testaments, Donations, and the Values of Books*, pp. 59-69.

- *Memoriale domini Laurency de Wydombach pro fratribus in Schick ad locum eis deputatum 1483*
- 2. a. Guillermus Parisiensis, *Postila super epistolas et euangelia* (Basel: Nicolaus Kessler, 14. VIII. 1486), 2<sup>o</sup>, Brukenthal: Inc. 189, Jugăreanu: 165, GW 11958
- b. Jodocus Erfordensis, *Vocabularius utriusque iuris* (Venice: Octavianus Scotus, 25. XII. 1483), 2<sup>o</sup>, Brukenthal: Inc. 188, Jugăreanu: 380, GW M12674
  - *Liber Nicolai de Megies*
  - *Liber Magistri Johannis aurifabri Myldt amicus domini Nicolai ut supra quem modo accomodat. Anno domini M508*
- 3. Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea sanctorum sive Lombardica historia* (Nürnberg: Anton Koberger, 1482), 2<sup>o</sup>, Brukenthal: Inc. 32, Jugăreanu: 185, GW M11246
  - *Sum Gasparius pileij*
- 4. a. (Pseudo-)Jean Gerson, *Donatus moralisatus seu per allegoriam traductus* (Augsburg: Günther Zainer, 1472), 4<sup>o</sup>, Brukenthal: Inc. 130, Jugăreanu: 154, GW 12451 (P. 8)
- b. *Barlaam et Josaphat* (Speyer: Printer of 'Gesta Christi', 1472/73), 2<sup>o</sup>, Brukenthal: Inc. 132, Jugăreanu: 63, GW 03396
- c. Wernerus Rolewinck, *Fasciculus temporum seu Chronicon-Chronicarum* (Köln: Nicolaus Götze, 1474), 2<sup>o</sup>, Brukenthal: Inc. 131, Jugăreanu: 271, GW M38682
  - *Liber dominii Laurencii Hon, comitis Cibiniensis, continens donatum Moralem fasciculum temporum et historiam Josaphat et Barlaam*
- 5. Leonardus de Utino, *Sermones aurei de sanctis* (Venice: Johann von Köln et Johann Manhen, 1475), 4<sup>o</sup>, Brukenthal: Inc. 244, Jugăreanu: 358, GW M17905
  - *Iste liber datus est ab uxore quondam magistri Nicolai ex parte anime eiusdem et duorum filiorum eius Johannis et Michaelis Conventui Cibiniensi ordinis predicatorum 1488 ita quod per registrum animarum satisfiat pro ipsis – See Fig. 5*
- 6. (Pseudo-) Petrus de Palude, *Sermones Thesauri novi de Sanctis* (Strassburg: Printer of 'Vitas Patrum', 1484), 2<sup>o</sup>, Brukenthal: Inc. 167, Jugăreanu: 296, GW M41817
  - *Librum istum dominus Georgius, vitricus Ecclesie beate virginis, ad conventum S. Crucis ordinis fratris predicatorum contulit ut in ambone pro anima domini Georgii quondam capellani predictae ecclesie exoretur quamdiu priori pro tempore placuerit – See Fig. 4*

7. (Pseudo-) Petrus de Palude, *Sermones Thesauri Novi de tempore* (Strassburg: Printer of 'Vitas Patrum', 1484), 2<sup>o</sup>, Brukenthal: Inc. 358, Jugăreanu: 300, GW M41794
  - *Emptum per dominum Anthonium de Valle Agnetis. Anno domini Millesimo quadringentesimo nonagesimo Tercio.* – See Fig. 1
  - *Liber domini Iohannis carpentarii de Cibinio legatum per venerabilem virum dominum Paulum seratoris de BIRTHALLBEN cuius anima in deo vivat* – See Fig. 2
8. a. (Pseudo-)Petrus de Palude, *Sermones Thesauri novi quadragesimales* (Strassburg: Martin Flach, 1488), 2<sup>o</sup>, The Szekler Museum of Ciuc: 6211, Muckenhaupt: II. 73, GW M41840  
b. (Pseudo-)Petrus de Palude, *Sermones Thesauri novi de sanctis*, (Strassburg: Martin Flach, 1488), 2<sup>o</sup>, The Szekler Museum of Ciuc: 6211, Muckenhaupt: II. 74, GW M41806
  - *Emptus est liber iste per dominum Jacobum de Praschmar Anno salutis 1492*
9. Raynerus de Pisa, *Pantheologia seu Summa universae Theologiae* (2 vols, Nürnberg: Anton Koberger, 1477), 2<sup>o</sup>, Brukenthal: Inc. 316, Jugăreanu: 267, GW
  - *Iste liber datus est conuenti sancti Crucis Cibiniensis ordinis fratrum predicatorum ab honesto viro domino Petro Ursul. ab salutem sui et suorum omnium tam vivorum quam eciam defunctorum anno domini 1505*
10. Thomas de Aquino, *Summa thelogica*, Pars III, (Treviso: Michele Manzolo, 1476), 2<sup>o</sup>, The Szekler Museum of Ciuc: 6182, Muckenhaupt: II. 81, GW M46501
  - *Memoriale dominy Georgy de villa Walthidia pro fratribus in Schik*
11. Thomas de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae pars III* (Venice: Phlippus Pincius, 12. IX. 1493), 4<sup>o</sup>, Brukenthal: Inc. 75, Jugăreanu: 334, GW M46506
  - *Michael Aurifaber Mediensis est possesor hujus libri, quem ex divisione bonorum viduae cuiusdam accepit.*
  - *Michael aurifaber Mediensis 1569.*

rita. abijt z veu...

**O**pus putile smontum dñicaliu totius  
 anni. Thelaurus nouus nuncup atum .im/  
 pressum argentine. Anno dñi. Mcccclxxx  
 uij. Finit feliciter. *Compositum per dñm*  
*Anthoniũ de Valle Agnetis*  
*domi Villagimio 2.º de Villagimio*  
*Donagimio 2.º de Villagimio*

Fig. 1. Ownership note of Anthonius de Valle Agnetis

Liber do' Pauli Seratoris d'  
 Cibinio legatus p' vincallens

dñi est quadruplex. Ibidem  
 xpi in carnem quibus pteritus. ecc  
 instituit peragendum quatuor de  
 xpi in carne considerare multa co  
 noe. i. f. et sex sequentibus p totu.  
 huius hanc ueliam mala tamna

*Paulus Seratoris d'*  
*Institutus p'*  
*Paulus Seratoris d'*

Fig. 2. Note mentioning Johannes carpentarius/ carpentarii and Paulus Seratoris

1511

Liber Eadrici caspadoris  
 s' maradoris caspadoris  
 in omnia

Martini Martini pilladis d' alio filij caspadoris  
 s' maradoris caspadoris

Fig. 3 Note presenting Caspar Hwet as the father of Martinus Pilladis de Cibinio and as villicus of the same town

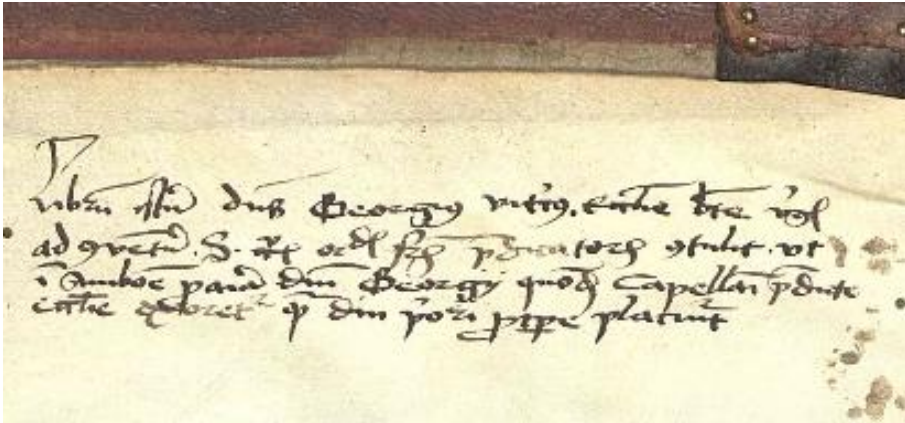


Fig. 4 Note mentioning the donation made by *Georgius, vitricus ecclesie beate virginis*

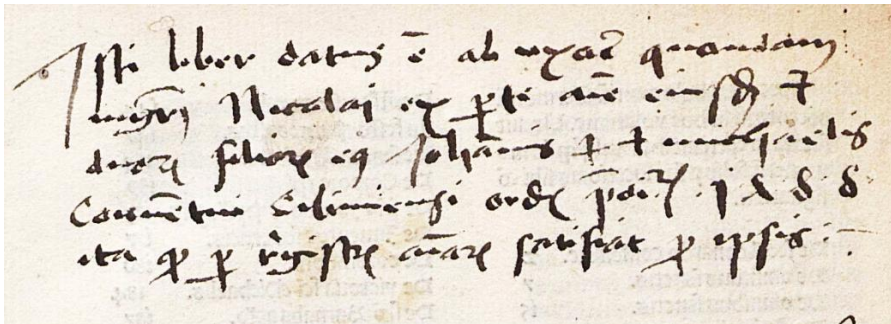


Fig. 5 Note mentioning the donation made by *uxore quondam magister Nicolaus*

