

Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Reformed Theology

**The Requisites of the Place of Authentication from Alba Iulia (1556–1690)**

Doctoral thesis

Abstract

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## Table of contents

Introduction.....	4
I. The establishment of the office of requisitors.....	9
I.1. The secularization of the Chapter of Alba Iulia.....	9
I.2. The activity of the first office holders of the place of authentication from Alba Iulia (until the reorganization in 1575).....	11
I.3. The reorganization of the place of authentication (1575).....	13
II. The intellectual class represented by the requisitors.....	17
II.1. The institutional structure of the place of authentication.....	17
II.2. The appointment of the requisitors and their duties.....	19
II.3. Privileges.....	21
II.4. Income.....	23
II.5. Estates.....	25
II.6. The place of origin of the requisitors.....	32
II.7. Origin, previous functions, the period served as requisitor.....	33
II.8. Studies.....	35
II.9. Confessional identity.....	36
II.10. Social network, influence, circle of clients.....	37
II.11. Matrimonial strategies, descendents.....	41
III. The requisitors of the place of authentication from Alba Iulia.....	46
Archival sources.....	148
Bibliography.....	149
Appendix.....	158
<i>In extenso</i> transcripts of documents concerning the requisitors.....	158
Abstracts ( <i>Regesta</i> ) of documents concerning the requisitors.....	199

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## Introduction

After the secularization of the Catholic ecclesiastical institutions in 1556, a new era had begun in the history of the place of authentication of the Chapter of Transylvania, which resided in Alba Iulia. This period has been characterized by a specific and totally different evolution of this institution, which was no more under the control of the Church. For the purposes of conducting its charter issuing activity, lay letter searchers (requisitors) were appointed by the princes, who were also paying these office holders. The majority of the members of the Chapter have left the country together with the bishop Paul Bornemissza (who's chair remained vacant for a long time), and those who remained in Alba Iulia were converted to protestantism. They became the office holders of Queen Isabela and, after a while, of his son, prince Ioan Sigismund of Zápolya. The fact that some earlier members of the Chapter continued their work at the place of authentication proves that the state apparatus of the newly born Principality needed these intellectuals who had been previously educated by the Catholic Church.

For almost 20 years, the place of authentication and its archives had been given very limited tasks. The institution didn't dispose of a very important object used in the authentication process of the documents, namely the seal of the Chapter. This object has been probably taken by one of the canons, who left together with bishop Bornemissza. For this reason, the appointed office holders could only transcribe the documents kept in the archives of the Chapter. That's why they were called *requisitores*, which means "letter searcher".

The reorganization of this institution took place in 1575, when the requisitors were granted all the previous tasks: a new seal was given to the place of authentication, which was similar to the earlier; the requisitors among transcribing the documents started to issue different charters and to fulfill external activities on the demand of the princes (entering into possessions, boundary inspections, etc.).

Starting with 1556, the requisitors were appointed and paid by the princes and the character of the Chapter's archive has changed as the time passed: not only the documents created by the place of authentication have been kept here, but also the Libri Regii, tax registers and legislative documents. As a result of these changes, the archive became the

institution that preserved the most important documents of the Principality and at the same time the reputation of the office holders grew. So, it was natural that during the period of the Principality, the office holders of the place of authentication were chosen very carefully by the princes from the members of the Transylvanian intelligentsia, which had close ties both with the Unitarian Church and the Reformed Church.

### **The structure and the results of the thesis**

The main aim of this thesis is to present, in great detail, the office holders of the place of authentication from Alba Iulia, a group of intellectuals, which consisted usually of three or four members. The first chapter describes the birth of the *requisitorial* office and the secularization of the Catholic ecclesiastical institutions. This chapter, based on the consulted documents, proves that the ecclesiastical estates (including the lands owned by the Chapter) were already given to Queen Isabela and his son in 1556, and they haven't been returned to the Catholic Church, as one could suppose from the contradictory laws issued at the end of that year. The thesis continues with the description of the period until 1575, when the appointed requisitors' single task was to search and transcribe documents. The reorganization that took place in 1575, based on a detailed written instruction dated at the end of that year, made the charter issuing activity of the requisitors of this institution comparable with the activity of the Chapter before the secularization. These characteristics remained unchanged until the end of the period of Principality.

The second chapter of the thesis presents a detailed analysis of a group of intellectuals represented by the requisitors of the Chapter of Alba Iulia. The chapter starts with the presentation of this institution's structure and also discusses both the way the requisitors were appointed by the princes, and their duties and privileges. This chapter emphasizes the fact that the institution needed well-qualified personnel, and the requisitors needed to be well-trained in matters of paleography, Latin and legal issues. Romanian or German language proficiency often constituted an important advantage. It seems to be proven that the majority of the office holders spoke one of these languages.

Due to the fact the prestige of the Chapters archive constantly grew, the requisitors have been entrusted with multiple new duties. In addition to these responsibilities, they were also granted some privileges, such as a dispensation from military obligations, and they were not required to give shelter to the soldiers in their homes. Two subsections of this chapter present the incomes and the remuneration of the requisitors, bearing in mind the fact that their wealth sustained the authority of this office. The remuneration was specified in the instructions issued in 1575; they were paid the same sum as the requisitors of the Cluj-

Mănăştur convent. Their annual income was 50 Hungarian forints, the income of a tithe district and agricultural products as 20 vessels of grain, two barrels of wine and two big pigs. This income level remained unchanged all through the period of Principality.

As regards the estates and other properties possessed by the requisitors, it became obvious that many of the office holders were given goods and possessions by the clients of the place of authentication, in return for their services. The charters granted property rights of movable assets and real estates, and these rights represented the evidence of ownership in trials. For the clients who were taking part in actions for the ownership of properties it was of great importance to find these documents in the Chapters archive and to obtain their transcripts. The services of the office holders were rewarded with different donations.

In the subsection dedicated to the presentation of the estates owned by the requisitors, we concluded that the majority of the office holders possessed at least one house in Alba Iulia, a land and a vineyard close to the town. It is also a certainty that approx. 60 % of the members of the group studied possessed more estates than the above-mentioned persons. We can conclude that the requisitors were middle class nobles, but a few of them were even much wealthier.

The next subsection presents the places of origin of the requisitors. We concluded that at the beginning of the period of Principality (from between 1556 and the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century), as a result of the migrations caused by the Ottoman expansion, the majority of the personnel of the place of authentication was born in the territory occupied by the Turks. Later, during the period until the reign of Gabriel Bethlen, their proportion remained at 50%, but in the Bethlen's period this trend has reversed. After Bethlen's death, until the end of the period studied, the number of the office holders who were born in Transylvania exceeded the number of requisitors born abroad. We concluded that during the period studied, the majority of the requisitors came from outside of Transylvania.

As we emphasized repeatedly, the charter-issuing activity required the work of a well-trained and educated personnel. For this reason, we conducted an analysis of the studies carried on by the requisitors. We proved that 14 of them had at least secondary studies, which represents 40% of the personnel appointed at the place of authentication. Ten of the office holders received higher education, as a result of *peregrinatio academica* outside of Transylvania (in this period there were no universities in this country).

It's well-known that during the Middle Ages, the personnel of the places of authentication consisted of clergy members who studied at Western universities or at the chapter or monastic schools attached to the chapters or convents. After 1556, the place of authentication from Alba Iulia was no longer under the jurisdiction of the church, but the

society, in which this institution functioned, still remained religious. During the first period after the secularization, the earlier members of the clergy were appointed as requisitors and they have worked there until the reorganization that took place in 1575. After that, the personnel consisted of lay intellectuals, many of them with theological training. We may say that the majority of them have received higher education and have studied at Western European universities. A good example is the carrier of the chronicler of the court Gáspár Bojti and the personal librarian of Gabriel Bethlen, Mihály Barsi.

Bearing in mind the fact that the majority of the requisitors have received theological training or were members of the clergy, we considered of great importance to study the religious beliefs of these clerks. As regards the period until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, we could find no Catholic requisitors, for they were all Protestants (Calvinists or Unitarians). Beginning with the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Calvinist princes succeeded to appoint Calvinist clerks in this important office.

In addition to the above mentioned objectives, our purpose was to characterize the social class from which the requisitors originated, to describe their previous career and the time they served as a clerk at the archives. After analyzing the data, we concluded that the majority of the requisitors came from towns and market-towns, a smaller number originated from the nobility or from the Szekler regions, while those who came from the class of serfs represented a very small percent (the only one in this category is Gáspár Bojti, the court chronicler of Gabriel Bethlen). It was also proven that every clerk became a noble at the end of his career as a result of his services rendered at the place of authentication on the request of the princes and other clients.

Based on our study focusing on the biographies of the requisitors, we concluded that before being appointed to this office, the clerks were often notaries of the princely chancellery and sometimes this office constituted a gift for different services rendered on behalf of the princes. There were cases when an important office, such as the *director causarum*, was recompensed with the office of requisitor. It is also certain that in most of the cases, this function was carried out until the death of the requisitor. There were only 3 clerks (from 36), who left the archives for different reasons. We should notice that probably none of them left on their own free will. They were constrained by the princes or some malady. The average term of office for the requisitors was 9 years.

In the last two subsections of the second chapter, we tried to describe the various relationships of both the requisitors and their families. It can be noted that the clerks had tight ties with the elites of the Calvinist Church, some of them were even members of the bishop's

family, but there was also a close relationship with the central institutions of the Principality, such as the *cancellaria maior*.

As regards the families of the requisitors, we have analyzed (based on the available archive sources) the origins of the office holders, their marriages and children, as well as the career of their children. In most of the cases, we could observe that this group of intellectuals had matrimonial strategies, which allowed them to carry on their career with success. In most of the cases studied, the wealth of the wife was at least comparable with their husband's fortune. There were a few instances where the fortune of the wife exceeded that of her husband's, as it is the case of the wife of Ambrus Barkai or Gáspár Diósi. In most of the cases, the wives came from noble families (80 %), four of them were born in towns (16 %) and only one person was born in a market-town, namely Gáspár Bojti's wife, Erzsébet Kalah, who came from Mediesul Aurit. We must mention the fact that the second wife of Bojti was a member of the nobility.

With regard to the children of the requisitors, we can note that, contrary to the expectations, the clerks appointed at the place of authentication did not have many children, and due to the bad living conditions, only a few of these children reached maturity. This small number of offsprings had various causes. Bearing in mind the hard conditions of the clerks career, they hardly succeeded to gather some money or to make good matches as regards their marriage. A good example is János Hercegszölösi who, at the age of 38, didn't have any children. So, it is understandable that requisitors did not want to share their hardly gained fortune. This fact and the late matrimonies explain the low number of births.

The third, longest chapter presents the biographies of 36 requisitors. Among them there were important figures of the Transylvanian cultural history, such as the chronicler István Szamosközy and Gáspár Bojti, both professors at the college founded by Prince Gabriel Bethlen, as well as Mihály Barsi (who later became the prince's librarian as well) or Benedict Árkosi. A few personalities forgotten by the historians, such as János Pápai, Ferenc Taracközi and István Bárdi, had a major role in the conservation and the moving of the archives during the Tartar invasion in 1658.

Based on our archive sources, we were able to clarify some aspects regarding the personalities of the Transylvanian culture with identical names (János Laskay, Benedek Árkosi, János Hercegszölösi and Gáspár Diósi). During the study of the career of István Zákány, new questions occurred on what concerns the propagation of Protestantism amongst the Romanians in Caransebeș. It seems that the father of István Zákány was a close relative of Efrem Zăcan, one of the editors of *Palia de la Orăștie*.

The thesis presents the members of a group of intellectuals who worked at the probably most important charter-issuer institution during the period of Principality. To reveal the role and importance of these office holders, it is enough to have in mind the character of the Transylvanian society, based on the possession of estates. Nevertheless, the requisitors were members of an intellectual class that continued the heritage of the Medieval Era, they've had close ties with the Church, which supported their activity.

The Annex of the thesis contains transcribed documents and regesta of documents on the life and career of the requisitors, based on the study of the protocols of the Alba Iulia place of authentication. Altogether, we have looked through 17 volumes of protocols comprising approximately 6600 pages.

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