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*Maramureş society in the 14th - 16th centuries: nobles and
relationships between families from Maramureş County*

- Abstract -

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Table of contents

Introduction to the study regarding the nobility from Maramureş county in the Middle Ages.....	3
Short historiographic itinerary of the research concerning Maramureş county	17
<i>Charters concerning Maramureş county.....</i>	17
<i>Short historiographic itineraty with regard to the research of the nobility from the Hungarian Kingdom and Maramureş county.....</i>	20
Evidence concerning Maramureş county reffering to the 15 th and 16 th centuries....	20
The evidence of Maramureş proved by chronicaled work from thr 17 th century...	21
Research concerning Maramureş county in the first half of the 20 th century.....	22
Research concerning the nobility from the Kingdom of Hungary and Maramureş county during the Comunist regime.....	24
Further research.....	32
<i>Final considerations - what are the new tendenciess of Romanian historiography?.....</i>	37
Chapter 1. General information concerning the Hungarian Kingdom - from the angevine period until Mohács.....	40
1.1 <i>The Arpadian dynasty and the building of the Hungarian Kingdom.....</i>	40
1.2 <i>The Hungarian Kingdom under the Anjou dynasty.....</i>	43
1.3 <i>The Hungarian Kingdom during the Luxembourg, Iagello, Habsburg and Hunyadi dynasties.....</i>	45
1.4 <i>The Hungarian Kingdom during the last Iagello kings.....</i>	49
Chapter 2. Maramureş county during the 14th -16th centuries.....	52
2.1 <i>Geography.....</i>	52
2.2 <i>Toponyms from Țara Maramureşului.....</i>	60
2.3 <i>Main events.....</i>	63
2.4 <i>Aspects concerning religious beliefs in Maramureş county.....</i>	76
2.4.1 <i>Maramureş county and Catholic influences.....</i>	76
2.4.2 <i>Maramureş county and the Byzantine influences.....</i>	81
2.4.3 <i>Evidence regarding priests and religious buildings from Maramureş.....</i>	87
<i>Final considerations.....</i>	96

Chapter 3. The nobility of Maramureş county	98
3.1 <i>The legal status of the nobility from the Hungarian Kingdom</i>	101
3.2 <i>The Hungarian nobility. General aspects</i>	109
3.3 <i>Gaining the noble status in Maramureş county</i>	116
3.4 <i>The right over the land in Maramureş county</i>	118
<i>Final considerations</i>	146
Chapter 4. Medieval society from Maramureş county	149
4.1 <i>Anthroponomy in Maramureş county</i>	149
4.1.1 Male anthroponomy	152
4.1.2 Female anthroponomy.....	154
4.2 <i>The noble family in the Hungarian Kingdom</i>	155
4.2.1 Religious setting.....	158
4.2.2 Lay setting.....	160
4.2.3 The family from Maramureş county	162
4.3 <i>The participation of the nobility of Maramureş to the public life of the county</i>	167
4.3.1 The counties' magistrat: <i>comes, vicecomes et judex nobilium</i>	171
4.3.2 <i>Homo regius</i>	177
4.3.3 <i>Vicinus et commetaneus</i>	185
4.4 <i>Case study: Petru Gherheş de Sarasău</i>	191
<i>Final considerations regarding the noble families from Maramureş county</i>	198
Final considerations to the study of noble society in medieval Maramureş	200
Selective bibliography	206
Appendix 1: Maramureş county: contemporary and historical perspective	219
Appendix 2: Archaeological evidence concerning the churches from the Maramureş county, located south of the Tisa river	221
Appendix 3: Index of settlements from Historical Maramureş	230
Appendix 4: The offices of the nobles from Maramureş in the county	249
Appendix 5: Petru Gherheş de Sarasău - family tree	271

Key words: social history, Maramureş county, nobiliary county, nobility, Romanians, 14th-16th centuries

The present research aims to debate part of the social structure of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, more precisely the nobility. This particular category was strongly connected with both the *oratores* and the *laboratores*. The monastic orders, together with the diocesan clergy, represented the social category that cared for the souls of the nobles, in the aspects regarding family and the sacraments. In the same time, the nobility contributed to religious ministration by building churches and altars, or attending to the financial needs of the church. In opposition, with the bondsman or peasants, the relationship was purely economic. The nobles needed work force for their land. For this they required as many bondsman as possible. The latter, apart from representing one way of authenticating the power of the nobility, took part in military campaigns. Their everyday life, as well as their wellbeing, depended largely on the nobles. For example, they were not entitled to have any legal status, they were grounded to their noble every time legal matters were concerned.

Another important relationship of the nobility was the one they shared with the Hungarian kings. This is mainly because the king was the one entitled to grant or revoke a nobility title. High administrative positions could only be gained by these persons of high status. The most important positions to be reached, in this aspect, was that of count or viscount of a county – in this case of Maramureş. For the lower nobility, lower functions, like magistrate (with legal attributions in the county), royal bailiff, neighbor and abutter, were the only ones accessible.

Quite often, the county nobility was present at the kingdoms' diets or at the judicial seeds organized by the king, the palatine or the judge of the curia. The research of this social category is of great significance. This is because of the role that the noble played in the construction of the counties' institution, but also because of the high status offices that held.

The present research can be defined as a study of social history for Maramureş county in the 14th-16th centuries. More precisely, the geographical space of Maramureş county, located south of the river Tisa. Chronologically speaking, the time frame taken into consideration starts with the half of the 14th century (when the written sources regarding

the nobles from Maramureş become more frequent), and ends in 1526. The administrative organization known as *county* has been documented for the Hungarian Kingdom since the 13th century. Maramureş county is one of the last geographical units that applies this administrative pattern. Chartres show a wide interest and an intense participation of the lower nobility in the counties' offices.

Written sources, issued by the *loca credibilia*, the royal and palatinal chanceries, as well as by the court seat of Maramureş county have raised a series of research questions. The first question revolved around the actual possibility of a historical social study being conducted for Maramureş. Another question regarded the way in which the royal decrees applied in the realities of Maramureş county. Also, there was the question of an existing ownership pattern for the land. Anthroponomy constituted another subject to be debated. The question was related to the extent in which new names (of Eastern tradition) were adopted in the area and how much were the typical traditional Romanian ones kept.

Methodologically speaking, the primary way of assessing the subject was through charter analysis. The focus was on the ones referring to the realities of the nobility located south of the river Tisa. In this way some patterns were observed. One example, largely found in these sources, is that of the ownership of the land. Secondary literature was used to complete and give context to the information extracted from charters. In this case, especially studies of social history were examined, that regard Maramureş county and its nobility. Inductive and deductive methods were used to reconstruct aspects concerning the family life of the nobles. Statistical methods were used to make a quantitative evaluation of nobles that were active in the public life of the county. Through the synoptic instruments, presented in the appendix, this information was valued.

The structure of the research is as it follows: "Introduction", "Short historiographic itinerary of the nobility from Maramureş County", followed by four chapters: "General information concerning the Hungarian Kingdom – from the angevine period until Mohacs", "Maramures county during the 14th-16th centuries", "The nobility of Maramureş county and Medieval society from Maramures county".

The integration of Maramureş county in the Kingdom of Hungary has had a number of effects. These have been observed with the help of charters issued by the *loca credibilia* and different chancelleries.

Based on a number of charters, kept in different locations and with different issuers, a contribution to Romanian historiography, regarding the Romanian nobility in the

Kingdom of Hungary, could be made. Although scholars and historians, have been attracted by the particularities of Maramureş county, a social history of the county could not be found in the available studies. Over time, the preferred subjects for research revolved around the richness of the area or historical events that defined the dwellers of Maramureş. One of the most important events of the 14th century was the revolt of Bogdan the voivode. He renounced his dependency to the Hungarian king and crossed the Carpathians. There he formed a new settlement cared for by Romanians – Moldavia. Another aspect debated by Romanian historiography, were the Byzantine characteristics of the region. This was showed by studies concerning the existent churches and monasteries, out of which, the religious centre at Peri, Ukraine, was given the greatest attention. The nobility of the county was researched according to accurate documentation and numerous general studies centred on the nobility from the current territory of Romania. Genealogical studies, as well as micro monographies regarding the villages of the county represent a significant contribution to the new millennium. The best monography of the county for the 14th century has been written by Radu Popa. A complete study for the Middle Ages is still a desideratum for the Romanian historiography.

This being the situation of Romanian historiography, the research concerning the Romanian noble society of Maramureş, is coming as means to complete the existing information. In the same time, it was observed that this research could be only done by combining the existing information with a new perspective on the assessment of events form charters that refer to the everyday life of the county. In this way the necessary information for a reconstruction of Romanian medieval society was possible.

Reassessing the research concerning Maramureş county has shed light on data concerning the specificity of the region. The first aspect to be observed is the evolution of the way the area was mentioned in medieval charter: starting with *forest* and ending up beign mentioned as an administrative form of voivodal and cnezial forms. These institutions were doubled by the one of county, as imposed by the Hungarian Kingdom, starting with the 14th century, and fortified at the end of the aforementioned century.

Maramureş county was organised in conformity with the equivalent administrative units form Hungary. They were led by a count, assigned by the king, a viscount assigned by the count, four magistrates assigned from the most important nobles, and *judicis assesoris*. The officials assigned represented the king in the county. After the unfaithful voivode Bogdan left the county, a couple of administrative changes occurred. The last decades of the 14th

century, Maramureş county is almost as a whole integrated into the Hungarian Kingdom, due to the functioning of the judicial county seat. This is because being a border territory, with a strong identity, Maramureş did not comprehend all the characteristics of the Hungarian counties. One such aspect refers to religious belief.

The Hungarian kings were aware of the multilingual, multi-ethnic and multiconfessional character of the dwellers from their kingdom. The issue of the schismatic Romanians was not unknown. There is a very interesting thing happening in Maramureş at the end of the 14th century. The two counts plead the Patriarchate of Constantinople for title of *stauropagal* for the monastery they inherited, meaning that it had to answer directly to the patriarch. Up until now, research has showed that Peri was an important centre for the Byzantine religion in the eastern part of the Hungarian Kingdom. Actions that would have counterbalanced these wishes of the nobility cannot be perceived from written sources, although in the 14th and 15th centuries there are some bounding reactions to the Byzantine tendencies of the Romanians from the Kingdom. Despite this fact, the monastery at Peri does receive, with the approval of the king, lands. In the issues concerning the invasion of the monastery's lands the kings officiate a just judgement in favour of the monks, whose rights had been crossed over by the judges and justices of the settlement of Câmpulung la Tisa.

Of course, archaeologically, a series of churches, monasteries and priests have been recorded. About the mentioned priests it can be said that they came from the good noble families of the Kingdom. The best known and most controversial churches are those built in stone in Guleşti, Cuhea (Bogdan Vodă) and Sarasău. Although they were not built by local craftsmen, it is possible that the religious cult practiced was the Catholic one (further research, that could clarify this aspect, is awaited). One of the unresolved issues by Romanian historiography is revolving around the existence of the sacristy at Cuhea (specific element to the Byzantine tradition).

The Catholic organisation of the county was a necessary process after the settlement of colonists that led to the formation of the five royal cities of the county (Hust, Visc, Teceu, Câmpulung la Tisa and Sighet), but also of the salt cutters (*tailatores salis*) at Coştiui. We believe that the Catholic confession in the Kingdom did not go beyond these centres and that of the Pauline monastery at Remeţi. The former did not have a long lifespan. The fact that the Catholic faith was not popular between the nobles can be

observed from the fact that there is no such construction or any solid written evidence from the villages dwelled by nobles.

Hungarian and Moldavian chronicles and travel accounts, respectively, written after the instauration of Hungarian leadership, show particularities about the specificity of Maramureş. Apparently, this area was renowned due to its salt and water, but also for the wilderness of the border regions. Even the name of the county can be attributed to an element of the reaches of the soil, *marble*. Despite this fact, a more plausible thesis is the connection between the name of the county and the stream Mara, whose name in the Middle Ages resembled the one of the county a lot.

Another aspect that should be brought into attention and in connection with which information was offered is the noble family. This base unit of society was touched by Hungarian elements. This aspect can be observed by analysing the anthroponomy present at county level. Apart from this, names that are for certain of Romanian origins, can be found in the Catholic calendar. Out of the Hungarian ones, Benedict, Carol, Clement or Leonard, and respectively, for women, Caterina or Margareta, can be mentioned. Although in the 14th century, the mention of a person in charters was done by using the first and the fathers' name, starting with the end of the 15th century, the family (last) name is adopted. Thus differentiating between nobles was easier. The pattern of mentioning a noble was done after the following example: Petru Gherheş, son of Ioan Gherheş of Sarasău. Almost every time a noble was mentioned in a charter, there are always mentions regarding family ties, or the office in which he was inside or outside the county, in accordance with the situation.

The family of the county is characterised by marriages between dwellers of the same village or villages located in the vicinity from one another. Also, there have been different situations in which the husband or the wife remarried after the death of their partner. Husbands can be identified together in charters, in situations of disputes with other nobles for the ownership of the land, in the situation in which they acquire land or in mortgages.

In what concerns the society of the county, it can be mentioned that most of the issues in-between the members of the community were based on land ownership. Also, the nobles of Maramureş could be identified in all leading offices or judging offices: count, viscount, judges of the nobility, witness representative (king, palatine, or *judgex curiae*), referee, as well as *vicinis et commetaneis* (neighbours and abutters). The main organ that

settled minor disputes of the county was the judicial seat located in Sighet on Wednesdays and that was led by the magistrate of the city (count or viscount, the four magistrates, *judex asseorsi*, and notaries). In solving the minor practices that concerned settlement between nobles, an important role was given to the referees, those men that settled the land borders and the divisions of certain territories.

The witness man of the king, the palatine or the *judices curiae* represented the will of the one that delegated them with a mission in the county, this being called only when concurred by a representative of the places of authenticaces (for Maramureş this was the Convent of Lelesz). These witness men, for finding out the best solution in the cases they were assigned to, were collaborating with the *vecinis et commetaneis* for litigates and issues regarding land. The oral confession was considered the most accurate and true and the only one that existed in society, writing being restricted to only a few persons. This made the *vicinis et commitaneis* indispensable characters.

Ownership of the land can be observed in the numerous examples that were subject to research. This aspect was important for a person because it automatically made him a noble. The decrees issued by kings and the existing land costume in the kingdom can be identified in the case of Maramureş. Certain persons were designated to be awarded the *nova donatio* of some lands for faithful services brought to the crown. In conformity with known prescriptions, the nobles from Maramureş often showed their fidelity by participating in military campaigns or supporting necessary expenses for the Kingdom. Also, the problems concerning daughter were closely observed, especially in the *de prefactio* cases. This issue was observed in the case of Petru Gherheş de Sarasău. He manages to gain some pieces of land due to his mother that gained the legal right of *prefactio*, in order to inherit the lands of this brother that did not have any issue. Mobile heritage offered to daughters, as well and the dowry belonging to widows could also be identified. Concerning the later, it was observed that in accordance with the costume of the Kingdom, they could stay on the lands belonging to the deceased husband, as long as they did not remarried. Of course, in the problem of land ownership, the coming out of indivision, mortgaged and land donations can be seen.

In the end, the current research aims to stir up and increase awareness in what concerns the studies done for the county of Maramureş as well as other apparently insignificant areas of the Hungarian kingdom. In the same time some new research directions were identified. One aim of the current research is to complete the information

referring to the events and families north of Tisa. Also, the examination of the relationships between the nobility from Maramureş and those from Bereg, Ung and Ugocea. This is because the charters show that often there was a relationship between these administrative units. Moreover, news archival sources are a pertinent requirement for completing the existing *corpus diplomaticus*. Last but not least, a correlation of information regarding the situation with that of the other counties where Romanian nobility prevailed, is being showed as mandatory.

The study of the nobility from Maramureş and of the society in which its activity is conducted, is welcomed in order to consider the regional particularities of administration of the Hungarian Kingdom. These "deviances" from the norm (of counties dwelled by Orthodox Romanians) were known by kings, but tacitly approved and overviewed, in order to maintain the peace of the kingdom, so desired by the rule of any king.