



**BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY OF CLUJ-NAPOCA**  
**FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY**  
**DOCTORAL SCHOOL *HISTORY. CIVILIZATION. CULTURE***



# **PhD. DISSERTATION**

**HISTORY**

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**Cluj-Napoca**

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**THE SEALS AND THE SEALING PRACTICES OF  
THE PLACES OF AUTHENTICATION IN  
TRANSYLVANIA AND EASTERN HUNGARY  
(13<sup>TH</sup> – 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)**

**-summary-**

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## KEYWORDS

Sigillography; Diplomatic; *Loca credibilia*; Chapters; Convents; Seal matrix; Seal imprints; Charters; Wax; Parchment; Paper;

## SUMMARY

Product of a time characterized by an "intense emblematic fermentation" (Michel Pastoureau), the seal articulated itself as an instrument specific to medieval pragmatic literacy, with the role of confirming to the recipient, nominated or not, that the charters to which it was affixed reflected the will, findings or accomplishments of its owner, whether he represented an institution with an individual or collective projection, or the documents which he had drafted were issued only in his own name. At the same time, the seal shaped an *alter ego* in the universe of the written law, with the purpose to identify, represent and proclaim its possessor. Generally composed of an image and a legend, both chosen by and linked to its owner, the seal stated not only his identity and social status, but also his personality, aspirations and claims.

In his work, *Summa de arte prosandi* (1275/76), Konrad von Mure, who previously had graduated from the Universities of Bologna and Paris and, later, became canon of the Zürich cathedral and rector its school, when comparing the structure of a man with that of letters, associated the seals affixed to them not with the human soul, as a distinctive element in the entire Creation, but with his body, since he is the structure one that can actually put all its will into effect. The allegory formulated on this occasion emphasizes the fact that seals, tangibly present on medieval documents, played the role of genuine mediators between the abstract character of the written word and the actual provisions contained by them.

In the eastern parts of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, currently within the boundaries of contemporary Romania, the most prolific issuers of sealed documents were, from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the places of authentication which developed in the canonical territories of the dioceses of Transylvania, Oradea and Cenad. With an institutional profile similar to that of public notaries, thus dealing in their documents with various daily life aspects of the people inhabiting these areas, especially with patrimonial subjects but strongly anchored in the precepts of the Hungarian customary law, the places of authentication, their

charters and, more importantly, the seals they had used in time determine together a vast research area, generous in particular by the amount of first-hand historical sources. However, the Romanian historiography rarely explored the complexity of such probation offices, apart from the few mentions in works targeting regional and legal history, more notable being a single monographic contribution and several older or more recent studies. Nevertheless, the latter papers did not succeed to increase the state of knowledge, limiting themselves to a linear and exponential discourse, some of them even stating many conceptual errors and current functionalities of these institutions.

Therefore, the present research aims to bring to attention the central element that gave force to the charters drafted within the chanceries of these offices, seeking not only the legal grounds through which their seals were recognized as authentic in the medieval Hungarian jurisprudence, but also the changes that were made and how they influenced the specific sealing practice of these institutions (the making of new seal matrices, changes and innovations in sealing methods). As part of several corporate bodies of the Roman Church, the places of authentication that had functioned in the already mentioned area were the episcopal chapter of Alba Iulia, the Benedictine convent of Cluj-Mănăştur, the episcopal chapter of Oradea, the Premonstratensian convent of Dealul Orăzii, the episcopal chapter of Cenad and the collegiate chapter of Arad. Some other minor offices might be included together with these forums, but they, beside a rather limited functionality in time, characterized themselves by the development of specific attributes, which not only brought them closer to the institutional profile of the places of authentication, but, simultaneously, delimited them firmly, operating within the Hospitaler convent in Turda and the mendicant convents of the Dominicans and Augustinians in Alba Iulia. As a consequence, the addressing of a theme which focuses on seals and sealing practices of the places of authentication requires a convergent deepening in both the complexity of the seal as a historical source and the institutional specificity of these probation offices.

Since the main subject of this research is itself a historical source, the most important sources of investigation are the original charters issued by these places of authentication, where in fact seals found their actual usefulness and functionality. Most of these documents were recovered from the online databases of the National Archives of Romania ([www.arhivamedievala.ro](http://www.arhivamedievala.ro)) and the Hungarian National Archives ([archives.hungaricana.hu/hu/charters/](http://archives.hungaricana.hu/hu/charters/)). Equally essential were the most important collections of documents regarding Late Medieval Transylvania, namely *Documente privind Istoria României*, *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der*



*Deutschen in Siebenbürgen* and *Erdélyi Okmánytár*. Although not as many, several non-diplomatic sources were of particular relevance to the institutional dynamics of seals. They include both documents for internal use, which recorded their activities in a normative or current manner (such as statutes, registers, protocols), and several parts of the medieval Hungarian legislation, which, when discussing problems related to the functioning of the places of authentication, were often drafted by regulating the use of this specific instrument for diplomatic validation. On the other hand, the secondary literature, rather wide when viewed from a thematic, historiographic and a chronological point of view, allowed the construction of rigorous theoretical and terminological frameworks and, at the same time, it gave an example of contemporary approach towards this specific historical source.

The research methodology involved quantitative, qualitative and statistical analysis methods. From a quantitative perspective, the preserved original charters issued by the already mentioned places of authentication were recovered as many as possible. Secondly, based on the gathered diplomatic material, the qualitative analysis led to the extraction of the best preserved seal imprints in order to capture the totality and variety of seals and sealing practices that succeeded in time and which these probation offices had used in their specific written activity. At the same time, the statistical approach intended to construct a percentage recurrence of the three recognized diplomatic categories, since they determined not only the institutional profile of each place of authentication, but also recorded the variety of sealing solutions for the confirmation and validation of the charters they issued. In other words, each diplomatic category of the documents issued by the places of authentication shaped a specific and well-circumscribed seal practice, with its features, innovations and restrictions.

The limits of this paper were imposed as a necessity determined by the progressive increase of documents, as they multiply in time due to the augmentation of the prestige and value given to the written act. From a chronological point of view, the upper limit was fixed for the year 1400 because the most extensive institutional changes occurred during the reign of the Neapolitan branch of the house of Anjou in Hungary (1308-1382), other documentary surveys, from the next century and a half, only revealing the continuity of forms and solutions which were already employed. Moreover, in order to organize and to capitalize as much as possible these sources, all preserved original charters from this period, issued by the already named places of authentication, were grouped together. The forms under which medieval documents have survived so far are much more numerous than the originals, but the detection of all of them would have required an oversized effort in relation to the estimated results, especially since there are no few imprecisions in the two mentioned online

databases (faulty identification of issuers, inaccurate processing of document structures, or both in the same time). However, appreciating the importance of the relation between seals and charters, regardless the non-original form under which they survived – even these being originals in a precise point in time, but which were lost for various reasons –, when the analysis pointed out variations of the sealing practices, this secondary category of documents were also examined in order to improve these observations. In other words, the investigation of the seals and sealing practices of the places of authentication within the dioceses of Transylvania, Oradea and Cenad started from the original preserved charters, issued by these institution during their period of activity until the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This is the reason why one office of this sort, the Benedictine convent of Sâniob situated in the canonical territory of the bishopric of Oradea, is not subject of this research, since its specific activity is quite uncertain for the period preceding the reign of King Matthias (1458-1490), while its earliest preserved original charter dates back only to June 9<sup>th</sup> 1468. Nevertheless, in 1468 and 1492 the Hungarian kings already outlawed the authentic activities carried out here, but in 1498 Vladislaus II (1490-1516) would reconsider his initial decision and returned the representative seal to the convent, a gesture equivalent to a restoration of this probation office.

Following the rigorous establishment of the sources, methodologies and inner limits, the objectives of this investigation can be articulated in the form of several research questions: How many seals did the places of authentication have and which were they? When and why did these change? What were the ways of sealing through which the places of authentication validated the charters they issued? What are the exceptional sealing situations and why do they occur? How did these probation offices relate to their own seals? All these questions involve a research in connection to the cultural anthropology with semiotic perspectives, as the medieval seal is far more than a simple diplomatic validation instrument, being simultaneously a depositor of essential information about its rightful owner, sometimes impossible to reconstruct starting from other types of sources. Seals are therefore not only highly individualized objects, but also omnipresent indicators of civilization. Being accurately dated and located thanks to the documents they authenticated, but also characterized by the presence of their own legend and iconography, these instruments for diplomatic validation comprise a very generous historical source for the entire medieval culture and society.

In such circumstances, the structure of the present work articulated itself in a convergent and diachronic manner, bringing together both the specificity of medieval seals

as a historical source, on one hand, and, on the other hand, the institutional profile of the places of authentication, all in order to follow the features and functionalities of these diplomatic validation instruments within the already named probation offices. Thus, the investigation develops, from general to particular, throughout five chapters, each dealing with various well-circumscribed aspects of the subject, being accompanied by several annexes in which the collated sigilographic and diplomatic sources were graphically and statistically processed. The first chapter, entitled “Sigillography. Auxiliary Discipline of History” details not only the articulation and evolution of sigilography as a field of study in modern and contemporary Romania, but also several issues of regional and western sigilographic historiography, the latter referring particularly to the contemporary approaches of medieval seals. The second chapter, “The Places of Authentication in the Legal History of Medieval Hungary”, engages also a disjunctive approach. If the first part follows an insight into the history and specificity of the activities carried out by these offices, the second section aims to explore the emergence, structuring and development of various forms for validating documents issued by places of authentication. The following chapter, entitled “The Diplomatic Practice of the Places of Authentication in Transylvania and Eastern Hungary”, addresses punctually the subject in case of each of the six probation offices within the designated area, as well as in the three more modest offices, but with a similar profile. In this respect, aspects related to the institutional history were highly scrutinized, with particular emphasis on the debut of the specific activities, the involved personnel, the chirograph method as a validation solution, the elaboration of protocols or registries, all of which were followed by statistical analyzes of the pre-15<sup>th</sup> century charters preserved in their original form, both from the perspective of the diplomatic categories to which they belonged to and of their formal typology, ending with the examination of some atypical documents (the co-participation of several issuers, contemporary correction and alterations, or exceptional authentication situations). The fourth chapter, “The Seals of the Places of Authentication in Transylvania and Eastern Hungary”, the most extensive in the entire dissertation, also addresses, for each of the same offices, the question of the use of seals in their specialized chancelleries, focusing on their quantitative determination, identification and dating, but also emphasizing some material aspects of these instrument, such as the color of the wax and cords used for pendent seals and also the recurrences they caused. Moreover, with the exception of the Arad collegiate chapter, for each of the other offices, in one or two distinctive subchapters, several more details were examined, either regarding the replacement of seal matrices, especially context and consequences, or particular and/or

faulty uses of seals by the same institutions. The last chapter, as its title suggests, deals with a series of “Particularities of the Sealing Practices of the Places of Authentication in Transylvania and Eastern Hungary”. Starting from two distinctive categories of sources, this chapter aims to reconstruct, as much as the wideness of sources allows it, the status of the sealing regulation and the use of seals in two of the mentioned places of authentication, as well as the special sealing procedure called *cum capite sigilli*, tracing the formal arguments behind this technique.

In the end, on the basis of a conceptualized analysis of the medieval seal as a historical source and the institutional specificity of the places of authentication, by answering the previous research questions, the present research aims not only to reveal the whole set of sealing practices of these offices from Transylvania and Eastern Hungary, but also to identify the actual grounds that determined actual changes or alteration of their representative seals, in the period elapsing between the assumption of such probative roles and the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.