

**BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY**  
**DOCTORAL SCHOOL *HISTORY. CIVILIZATION. CULTURE***

# **PhD. DISSERTATION**

**HISTORY**

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**PREACHING AND HOMILETIC LITERATURE IN  
LATE MEDIEVAL TRANSYLVANIA.  
A REPERTOIRE OF PRINTED TEXTS  
(CCA. 1470-1550)**

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## **KEY WORDS**

preaching; homiletic literature; model-sermon collection; parish church; mendicant orders; medieval Transylvania; printed texts; history of libraries; book history

## **ABSTRACT**

During the Middle Ages, through their function as spiritual guides and mediators between God and the laity, the clerics were messengers of the word of God, responsible of spreading the Gospel and of carrying on the mission of the Apostles. Explaining the meaning of Biblical texts, sermons shared the divine message and offered the occasion of transmitting the doctrine to every member of the Church, representing a form of communion and a means of shaping the Christian identity. Furthermore, the homiletic discourse was a powerful instrument of public communication, announcing and promoting the intentions, reforms, norms and decisions of the Church. Nonetheless, it represented an academic exercise, specific to the scholastic method in the study of the Holy Writ and practiced in medieval universities. The plurality of functions, of approached subjects and of contexts in which it manifested, generated an abundant production of homiletic literature. These texts are the main sources available today for the research of medieval preaching.

Homiletic writings and collections of medieval sermons also exist in Romanian libraries, as expressions of both Western and Eastern Christianity. In Transylvania, the Latin rite was specific to the elite of the region, so that for the medieval period, the products of the Western tradition are preserved in a greater quantity within historical book collections, in manuscript and in print alike. This situation represented the premise for initiating a research concerning the medieval preaching at the Eastern periphery of the territories of the Roman Church. If manuscript texts had drawn some scientific interest during the last years, printed homiletic works were only mentioned as potential sources, capable of contributing to the better understanding of the topic. In these circumstances, the aim of my research was to sketch the profile of the phenomenon of preaching in late medieval Transylvania, by exploring the printed model-sermon collections, locally

circulated in the mentioned period. Given that the analysis was based primarily on printed homiletic materials the lower chronological limit was set according to the earliest identified sermon collection, around the year 1470. However, by contextualizing the information provided by these sources the argumentative construction descends towards the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and, sometimes, even towards the first half of it. The analysis focused on a century of developments, as around the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the confessional landscape of Transylvania became more complicated with the penetration of the ideas of the Protestant Reformation.

In order to reach an understanding of the profile of medieval preaching, I have focused on the two essential dimensions of the phenomenon, the sermon collections and the act of preaching, as they can be retraced in Transylvania, and on their interactions, overlapping and mutual influence. The main objective of the research was to define the two mentioned aspects by describing the features of the written, especially printed, sermons with medieval Transylvanian circulation and by delineating the institutions and actors involved in preaching, through an analysis of the contexts of reception of the homiletic literature. Secondly, I intended to initiate the integration of the topic in the Romanian historiographical debates, by opening a theoretical and terminological discussion, as well as by providing a working tool, able to support further investigation, i.e. a repertoire of printed homiletic works preserved in Transylvania.

Without intending to compile a complete history of the study of sermons, the first chapter aims to provide an introduction to a field already well-established in European research, pointing out the key moments of its evolution and the main approaches that have been formulated in time. The long tradition of medieval sermon studies has clarified, sometimes in great detail, many aspects of the manifestations of this phenomenon in the medieval West. Romanian historiography has not achieved the same performance in the field as studies conducted at European or international level. However, some research endeavours that are closer in scope to the present dissertation have been conducted by Hungarian scholars. Without being directly concerned with the specific situation of Transylvania, the contributions related to preaching in medieval Hungary, to the sermon collections produced in this geographic area or existing in libraries of the country have the merit of outlining the general framework, applicable to the concrete case of the Eastern part of the Kingdom. Thus, it is demonstrated that the study of medieval sermons and preaching in Transylvania is in its infancy, but has promising prospects. A second

part of the first chapter offers an introductory theoretical, terminological and taxonomic discussion on medieval sermons, defining the key concepts used in the present paper.

The research involved the identification of all the printed sermon collections currently existing in Transylvanian libraries, having as a result the repertoire included in Appendix I. The second chapter presents the results of this inventory and the statistical analysis of the gathered data, according to various parameters and criteria, such as: authors, origin, types of sermon collections, the time span between the moment of printing and the arrival of the work in Transylvania etc. Such evaluations initially targeted the entire listed material, in order to define a frame of reference for the volumes identified as having medieval local circulation, analysed in their turn in the same manner. Thus, the chapter brings to attention the bibliographic contributions of the doctoral dissertation.

The ultimate goal of the repertoire was the identification of the material that was used in Transylvania soon after being printed and whose investigation was considered able to provide details about medieval preaching in the region. Therefore, the most consistent part of the PhD thesis examines the reception of homiletic literature in medieval Transylvania. This stage of research also involved contextualizing and supplementing the details revealed by the circulation of the registered volumes by considering other printed works that could support the preparation of sermons, manuscripts with homiletic content and other types of historical sources. The analysis was structured according to the contexts of reception of the homiletic literature, i.e. the categories of owners of sermon collections, which also indicate the main actors involved in disseminating the Christian message in Transylvania. Thus, chapters III-V discuss the preaching activity and the presence of sermon collections in the parish environment, in the ambiance of mendicant convents and in other, less thoroughly documented circumstances. The elaboration of the three chapters in which the reconstruction of the profile of preaching is concentrated reflects the dialogue between norm – whether it is represented by decisions applicable to the whole Western Christendom or by regional or local regulations – and practice, as much as it can be recovered.

The third chapter deals with the involvement of the parish clergy in the preaching activity. A first part highlights the regulations formulated at the level of the Hungarian Kingdom regarding the responsibilities of priests in this regard. According to those requirements, the sermon delivered in the parish churches must have had a strong catechetical function, in addition, aiming at most to explain the Gospel pericopes read

during the liturgy. Instead, the available homiletic literature shows that priests had at their disposal materials that would have allowed them to deliver more elaborate speeches. For the preparation of sermons, they could use both the volumes belonging to the churches in which they ministered and books they had purchased themselves. Printed texts are predominant in private collections, which suggests that in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Transylvanian secular clergy was well connected to Central European developments, benefited of superior education and exercised its duties thoroughly. Parish churches, in turn, were renewed during the same period, their architecture being enriched with stone pulpits, from which specialized preachers must have more and more often addressed the congregations. Although only one clergyman holding this office is mentioned in a note on the pages of a sermon collection, alternative sources have shown that he does not provide a singular or isolated example.

The fourth chapter considers the homiletic literature available to the mendicant friars from Transylvania, trying to place it in relation to their activity in the region and in the broader context of the meaning attributed to sermons by the rules and the constitutions of these orders. Especially the members of the order of St. Dominic seem to have had access to well-equipped libraries, which included numerous preaching aids. The homiletic material of Franciscan provenance exists in a smaller quantity, either because the friars minor benefited from fewer volumes all in all, or because their books were dispersed or lost, especially once the activity of the convents was interrupted at the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter also demonstrates that the actions of the begging friars complemented the services provided by parishes, with whom they sometimes collaborated, while other times came into conflict. The fact that pastoral work was disputed between the parish clergy and the mendicants reveals a dynamic activity and the multiplication of contexts in which the urban public had access to the message of the Gospel. Outside the major urban centres, the actions of those responsible for the care of souls seem to have been complementary. Several rural Saxon settlements benefited of the services of educated parish priests, while some villages and market-towns from Szeklerland and from the territories of the counties enjoyed the presence of the friars minor.

In the fifth chapter, other contexts of reception of the homiletic literature are discussed. A single volume attests to the interest of the episcopal clergy from Alba Iulia for sermon collections. Medieval manuscripts with similar content add several other clues

in this regard, but overall the image of the preaching activity in the atmosphere of the cathedral remains diffuse. The available sources suggest, however, that those who usually delivered sermons in the cathedral church were the canons and the vicars of the Transylvanian bishop, while their speeches appear to have been mostly exegetical. Another category of owners of sermon collections is the laity. However, the existing data does not suggest an active involvement in devotional reading of the Transylvanian laity. Still, earning the salvation was a constant concern and those volumes responded to pious intentions as objects suitable for donations, necessary to the clergy and ecclesiastical institutions. The copies that do not show signs of being used as an expression of charity directed towards religious establishments leave room for other interpretations. For some of these owners, such books could have function as means of representation, of status display or of acquiring prestige.

Summarizing, the circulation of the printed sermon collections brings to the fore the activity of the mendicant friars and of the parish clergy. The involvement of members of the mendicant orders in the pastoral care is not at all surprising, as they were the main actors in preaching throughout Europe and, through their internal network, they had the best chances of connecting with the trends manifested at continental level. The dynamic activity attested in Transylvanian parish churches seems to reflect developments that were specific to Central-Eastern Europe, influenced by the universities of Vienna, Prague and Krakow. Access to the latest works in the field of *cura animarum* was by no means generalized. It was rather limited to a professional category and an intellectual and, to a certain extent, social elite. The owners of the analysed books and, implicitly, the messengers of the Roman Church in Transylvania were educated individuals, whether trained in universities or in the internal system of the mendicant orders. They came from and were active in prosperous communities, active in the field of written culture, especially in areas inhabited by the German colonists. The major urban centres, such as Sibiu, Braşov, but also Cluj or Bistriţa, were the beneficiaries of the most fervent preaching activity. However, the preserved copies also seem to have served the needs of some semi-urban or rural communities. Without having a uniform intensity and erudite level, at the dawn of the Reformation the preaching activity in Transylvania was integrated in the routine of the religious life of the urban population and of the prosperous rural communities, while for the clergy it was a constant intellectual concern, cultivated by appeal to books.