

• PALATUL •
PRINCIPIILOR

Parallel DESTINIES

ALBA IULIA AND SEBEȘ IN THE MIDDLE AGES



The exhibition you are about to discover will take you through nearly five centuries of the history of two settlements with certain urban characteristics; they were geographically close, yet distinct in their legal status, social organization, and economic structure. Our endeavor aims to highlight both the similarities and differences between them, as well as the interactions among their inhabitants, to the extent that these can be reconstructed from diverse yet limited sources, both in terms of quantity and the information they provide.

Curiaș nr. Bebeș

Situated in the Mureș River Valley and centered around a fortification built as early as the Roman era, from the 11th century onwards, Alba Iulia became the seat of the Transylvanian bishopric, one of the foundational institutions of the province. A solid ecclesiastical middle class, as well as numerous officials, gravitated around the bishop. The inhabitants outside the walls, however, were legally serfs, their limited autonomy dependent on the goodwill of the prelate.

Early Alba Transil.

Sebeș followed a different path of development; the settlement of a German-speaking community and the early attainment of the status of a free royal town heralded the consolidation of an important urban center. The presence of guilds, the weekly and annual fairs, the founding of the Dominican convent, and the initiation of major architectural projects — such as the parish church and the defensive wall — transformed Sebeș into a prominent place among the Saxon settlements of Transylvania.

Albe

Both Alba Iulia and Sebeş had favorable conditions to become leading centers of Transylvania, yet they never managed to achieve this status. The main trade routes bypassed them, suffered considerable losses from Ottoman incursions, and their craftsmen and merchants could not compete with the skill of those from more prominent towns. Perhaps their mutual competition was also a factor that hindered their development. Despite a rather modest economic growth, the need of the elites in both places to display authority, along with their devotion, desire for comfort, and thirst for knowledge, generated an exceptionally rich cultural heritage, of which we will present a few glimpses. The Ottoman threat, which played an important role in the history of both settlements, is evoked in the final section of the exhibition.

Ex pertinençijs Castrovm Alba et Zensmizalkense

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EPISCOPAL RESIDENCE



According to a tradition based on medieval legends, the episcopal institution was founded by Saint Stephen, the first Christian king of Hungary (1001–1038). However, the first written and archaeological evidence of the Transylvanian episcopate's existence appeared around the year 1100. It is not out of the question that the founding of the diocese, from the royal initiative to the effective functioning of the diocesan structures, spanned several decades, considering that the institutions of the Western Church were still in the process of being organized throughout the kingdom.



The interior of the Dominican church. Photography by Béla Cserni
© MNUAI.

Initially, the bishop lived with the other clergy at his residence, known as canons—members of the cathedral chapter—in a settlement similar to a Benedictine monastery. The first identified phase of the complex in the southwest corner of the former Roman castrum dates back to the 12th century.



Saint Michael's Cathedral, Alba Iulia
Photography by Béla Cserni
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DISASTERS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

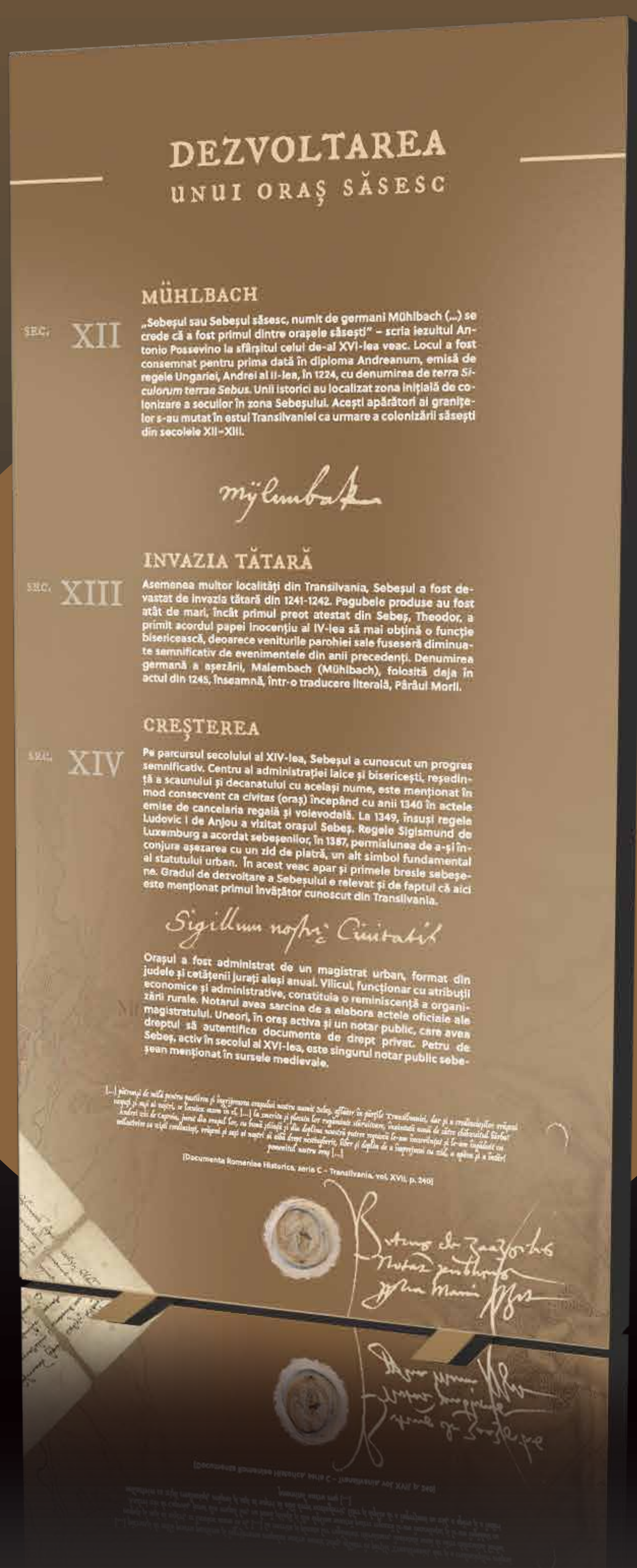
The 13th century brought significant changes to the church's institutional organization, which are also visible in the architecture of the episcopal residence. The expansion of the cathedral, started in the Romanesque style around 1200, was halted by the Tatar (Mongol) invasion of 1241–1242 and the attack of the Saxons from Ocna Sibiului in 1277. The work was finally completed toward the end of the 13th century with help from the master builder John of Saint Dié, one of the earliest known representatives of the Gothic style in Transylvania. Several local carpenters—Syfrid from Cricău, Jacob from Alba, Herbord from Gârbova, and Henc from Călnic—worked on the cathedral's roof. The palace, which had become the bishop's exclusive residence, was also expanded at least twice around 1400.

Bishops Peter Monoszló (1270–1307) and Andrew Szécsi (1320–1356) consolidated the episcopal domain through donations obtained from the kings of Hungary and exchanges with other landowners, but they also did not shy away from armed conflicts to defend their interests.

During this period, the canons, who were increasingly educated at Western universities, built separate houses within the walls of the castrum, and the chapter's domain became distinct from the episcopal one. Spre finalul celui de-al XIII-lea veac, la Alba Iulia sunt atestate conventurile fraților dominicani și augustinieni. Cel dintâi se afla pe locul actualei universități, fiind încă în picioare în ultimii ani ai secolului al XIX-lea.

By the late 13th century, convents for Dominican and Augustinian friars were documented in Alba Iulia. The former was located on the site of what is now the university and remained standing into the late 19th century.

DEVELOPMENT OF A SAXON CITY



mühlbach

"Sebeș, or Szászsebes, which the Germans call Mühlbach (...) is believed to have been the first of the Saxon cities" — wrote the famous Jesuit Antonio Possevino at the end of the 16th century. The site was first recorded in the diploma of Andrew II, King of Hungary, in 1224, under the name Terra Siculorum terrae Sebus. Some historians have located the initial colonization area of the Szeklers in the Sebes region. These border defenders moved to eastern Transylvania as a result of the Saxon colonization in the 12th–13th centuries.

THE TATAR INVASION

Like many other settlements in Transylvania, Sebeş was devastated by the Tatar invasion of 1241-1242. The damages were so great that the first documented priest in Sebeş, Theodorus, received an indulgence from Pope Innocent IV to cumulate more benefices, as the parish's revenues had significantly decreased due to the events of the preceding years. The German name for the settlement, Malembach (Mühlbach), used in 1245, literally translates to "Mill Stream".

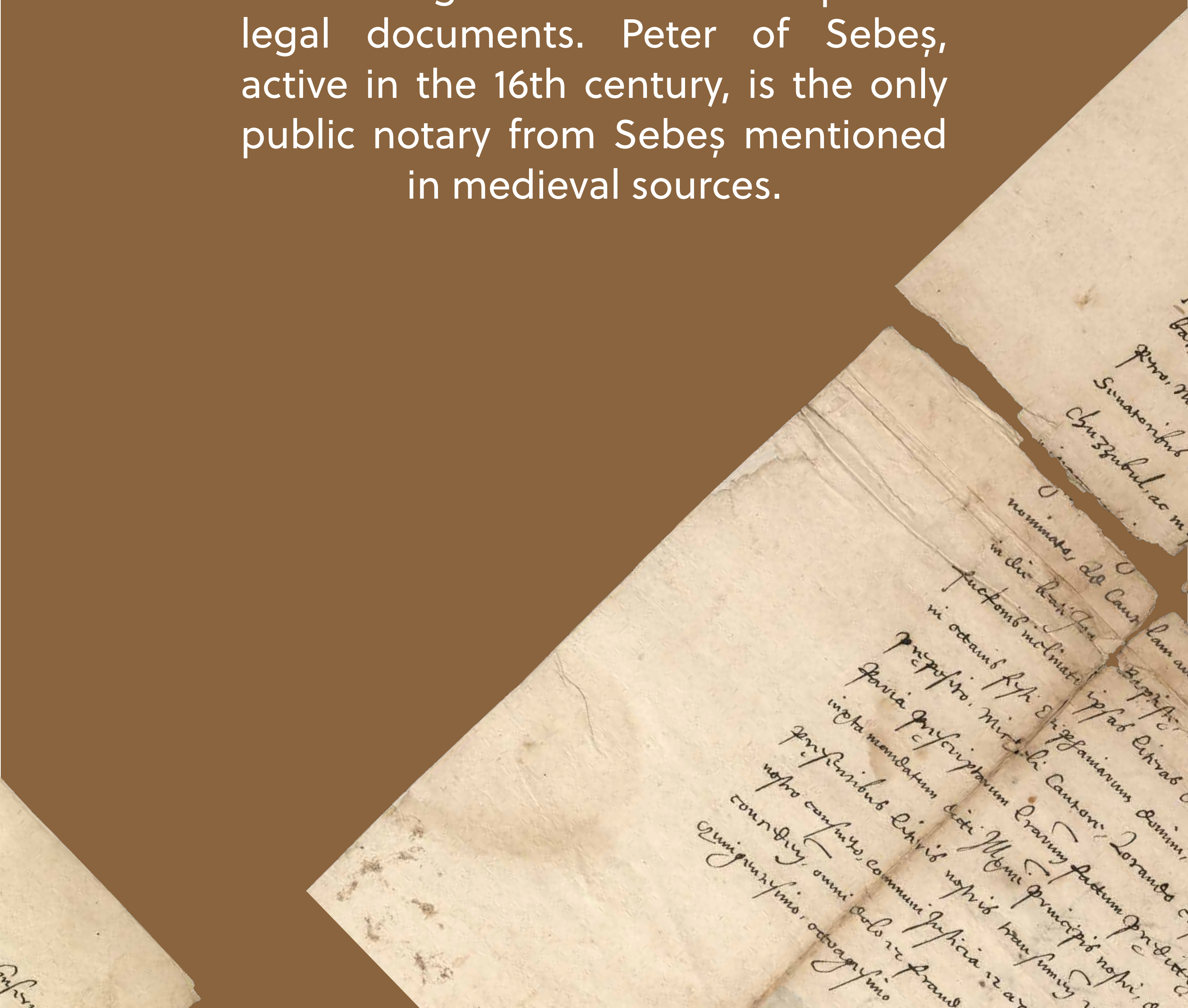


GROWTH

Throughout the 14th century, Sebeş experienced significant progress. Being the administrative center of the secular and ecclesiastical administration, the seat of the same-named seat and deanery, is consistently mentioned as a *civitas* (city) starting in the year 1340 in documents issued by the royal and voivodal chancery. In 1349, even King Louis I of Anjou visited the city of Sebeş. In 1387, King Sigismund of Luxembourg granted the Sebeş residents permission to surround the settlement with a stone wall, a fundamental symbol of urban status. In this century, several guilds were founded in Sebeş. The level of development in Sebeş is further evidenced by the fact that the first known schoolmaster in Transylvania was recorded here.

Sigillum nostre Civitatis

The city was administered by a magistrate, composed of judges and sworn citizens elected annually. The *villicus*, an official with economic and administrative duties, was a remnant of the rural organization. The notary was in charge of drafting the magistrate's official documents. Sometimes, a public notary was also active in the city, who had the right to authenticate private legal documents. Peter of Sebeş, active in the 16th century, is the only public notary from Sebeş mentioned in medieval sources.



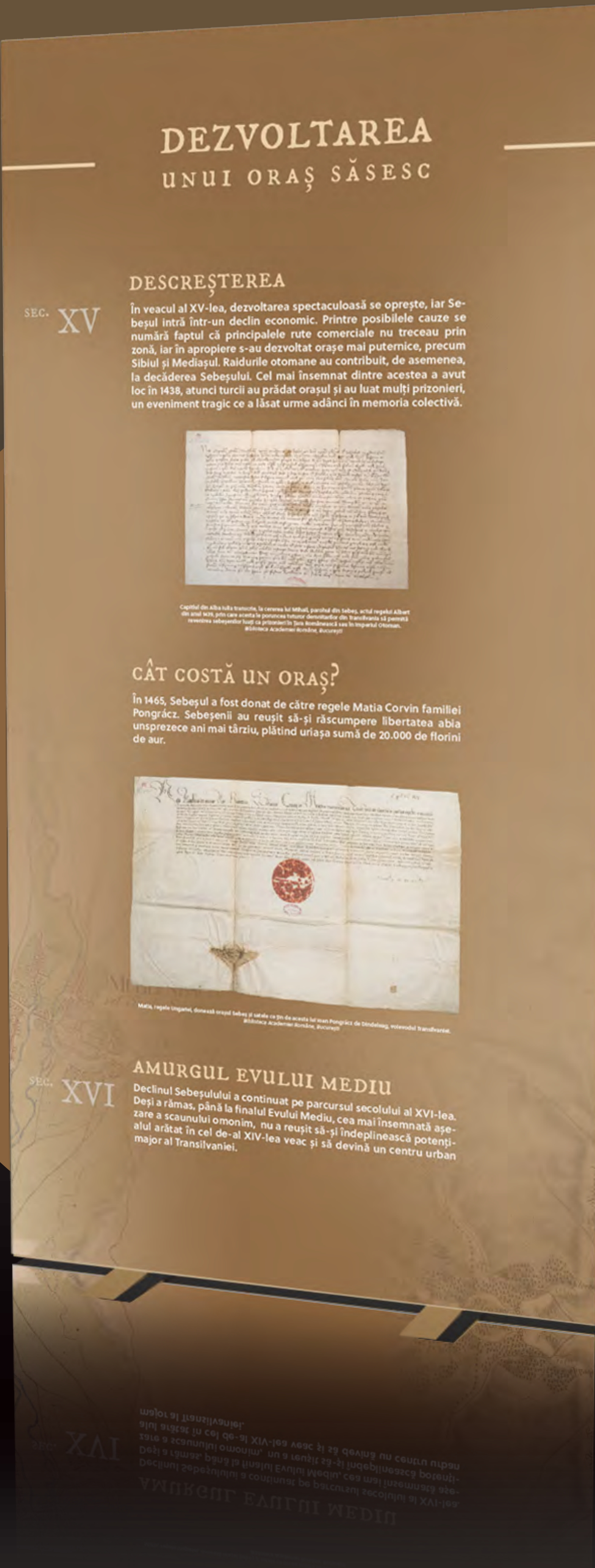
" [...] moved by pity for the desolation and concern for our city of Sebes, located in the regions of Transylvania, and also for our faithful townspeople, guests, and Saxons who now live there, [...] their humble and persistent request, presented to us by the wise man Andrew, known as from Košice, a sworn judge of their city, has, with our full knowledge and complete royal power, received our encouragement and gracious permission, so that the said faithful townspeople and Saxons of ours may have the free, unhindered, and full right to surround, protect, and fortify our aforementioned city with a wall [...]"

[Documenta Romaniae Historica, series C – Transilvania, vol. XVII, p. 240]

Steno de Zaza
Notas penhono
para Manu

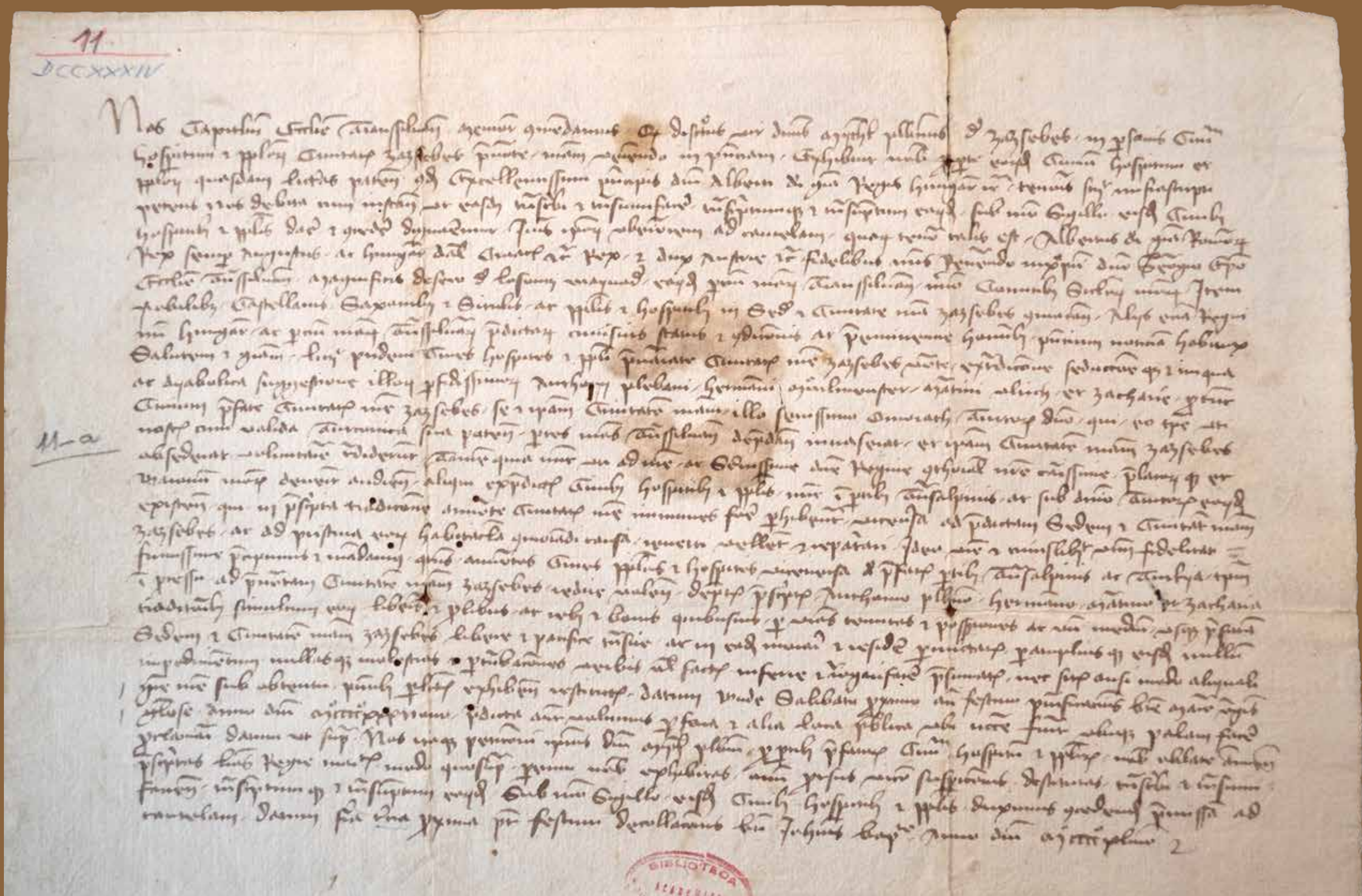


DEVELOPMENT OF A SAXON CITY



DECLINE

In the 15th century, Sebeș's remarkable growth came to a stop, leading to a period of economic decline. This was likely due to the main trade routes not passing through the area, while nearby cities like Sibiu and Mediaș grew more powerful. Ottoman raids also played a role in this downturn, with the most notable one in 1438, when Turks plundered the city and took many prisoners, leaving lasting scars on the collective memory.



The chapter from Alba Iulia transcribes, at the request of Michael, the parish priest from Sebeș, the act of King Albert from 1439, by which he ordered all dignitaries in Transylvania to allow the return of the people who were taken as prisoners to Wallachia or the Ottoman Empire.

Romanian Academy Library, Bucharest

HOW MUCH DID A CITY COST?

In 1465, Sebeș was donated by King Matthias Corvinus to the Pongrácz family. The residents of Sebeș managed to regain their freedom only nineteen years later, by paying the enormous sum of 20,000 gold florins.



King Matthias of Hungary donates the city of Sebeș and the villages belonging to it to John Pongrácz of Dindeleag, voivode of Transylvania.

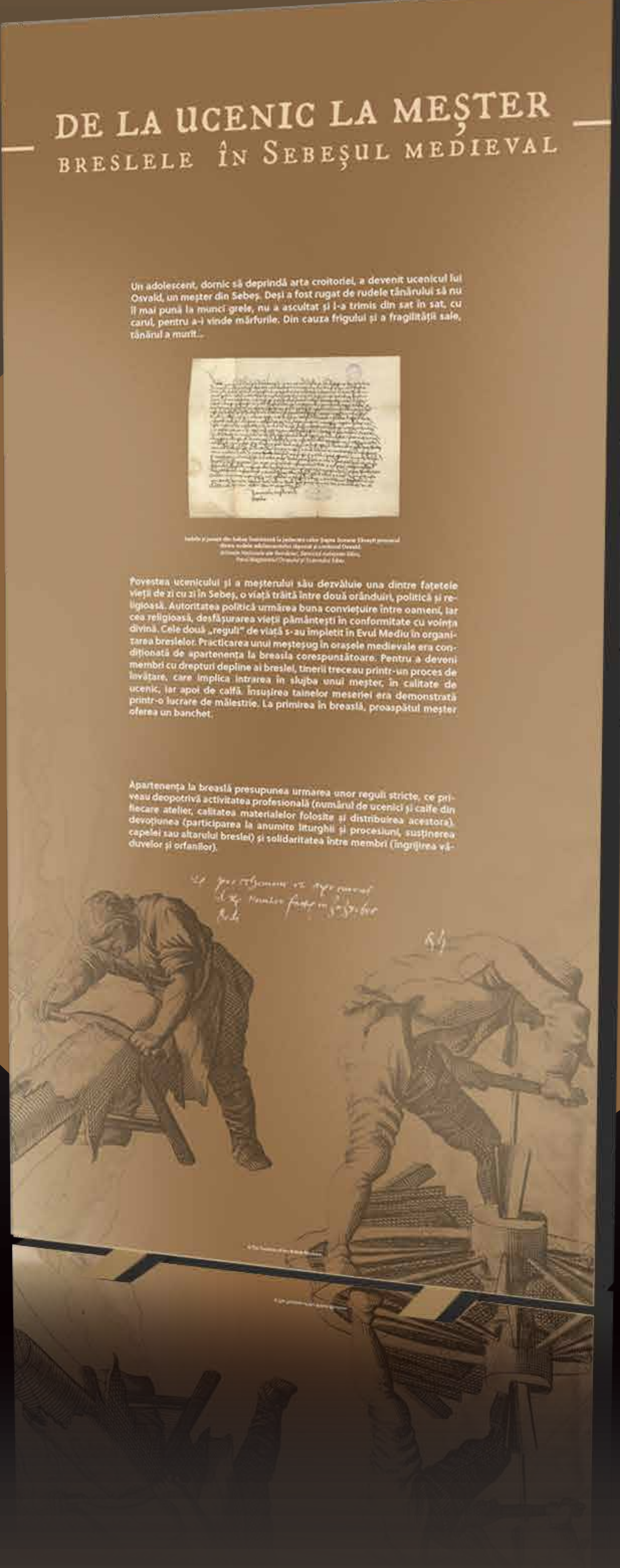
Romanian Academy Library, Bucharest

THE TWILIGHT OF THE MIDDLE AGES

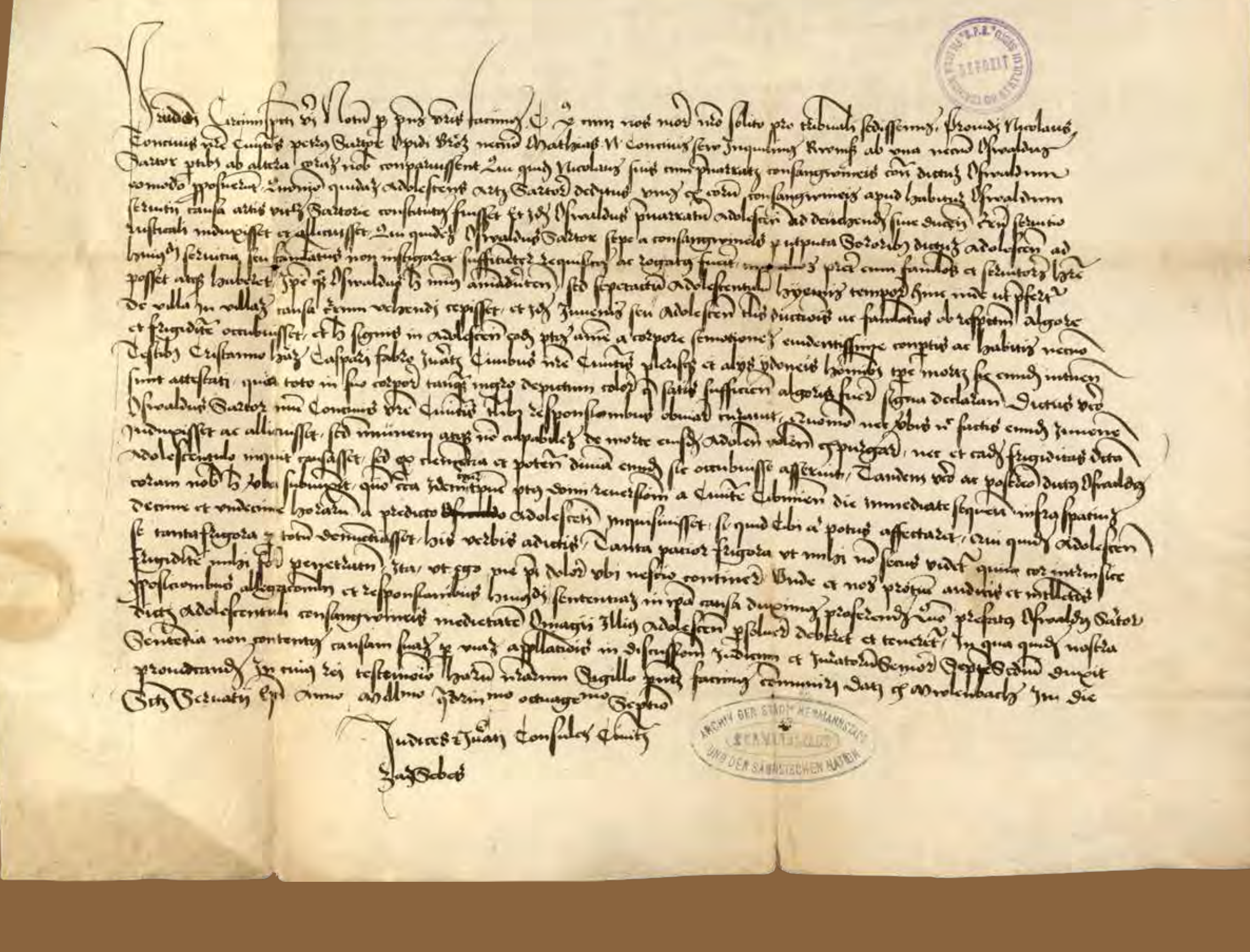
The decline of Sebeș continued throughout the 16th century. Although it remained the most important settlement of the same-named seat until the end of the Middle Ages, it failed to fulfill the potential it had shown in the 14th century and did not become a major urban center in Transylvania.

FROM APPRENTICE TO MASTER

THE GUILDS IN SEBEȘ,



A teenager, eager to learn the art of tailoring, became the apprentice of Oswald, a master craftsman from Sebeș. Although the young man's relatives begged Oswald not to assign him heavy labor, he did not listen and sent him from village to village with a cart to sell his goods. Because of the cold and his own frailty, the young man died.



The judge and jurors of Sebeș bring the case between the relatives of the deceased adolescent and the tailor Oswald before the court of the Seven Saxon Seats.
National Archives of Romania, Sibiu County Service, Sibiu City and Seat Magistrate Fund



© The Trustees of the British Museum.

The story of the apprentice and his master reveals one aspect of daily life in Sebeş, a life lived between two spheres: political and religious. Political authority aimed for peaceful coexistence among people, while religious authority guided how people should live their earthly lives according to divine will. These two "rules" of life were closely connected in the organization of medieval guilds. Practicing a craft in medieval cities depended on belonging to the relevant guild. To become a full guild member, young people went through a learning process that involved working under a master craftsman as an apprentice and later as a journeyman. The mastery of the craft's secrets was shown through a masterpiece. Upon being accepted into the guild, the new master would host a banquet.

24 pro themore et aper curru
id. 24. nouiter facti in fabre
Jedi

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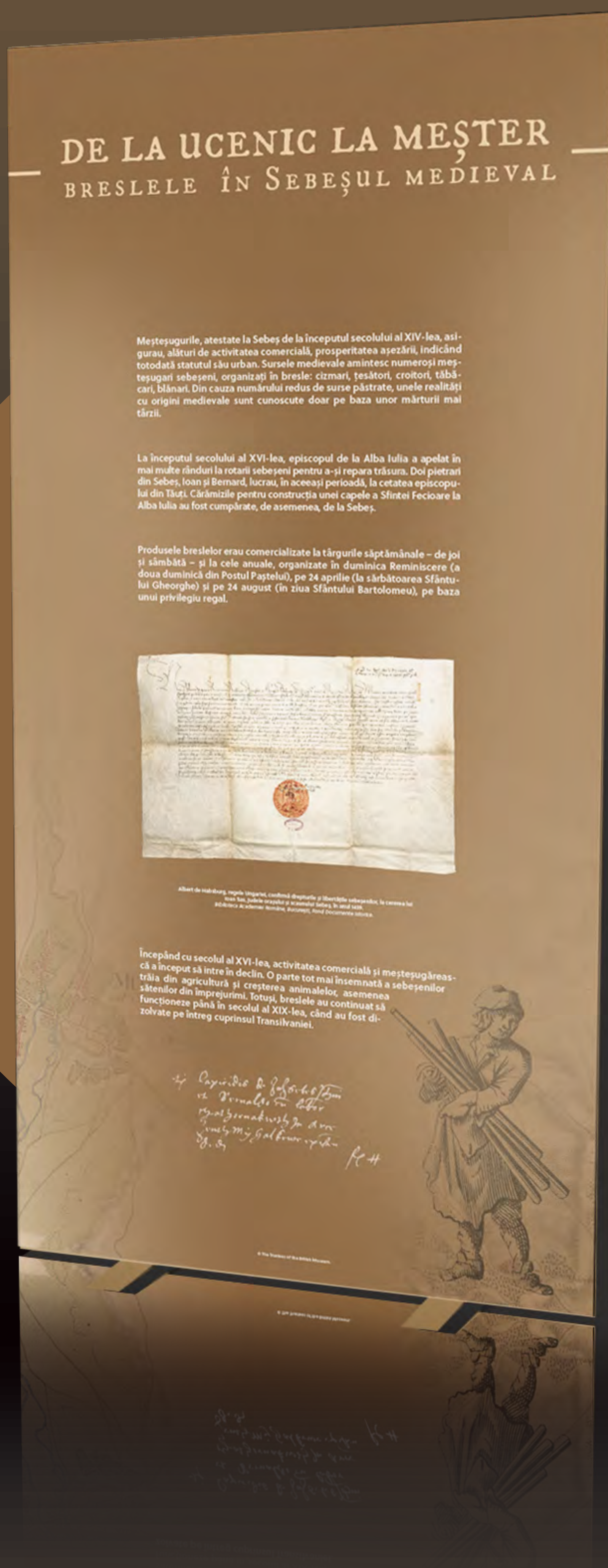
Belonging to a guild meant following strict rules that regulated both professional activity (the number of apprentices and journeymen in each workshop, the quality of materials used and their distribution), devotion (participation in specific masses and processions, and the support of the guild's chapel or altar), and solidarity among members (caring for widows and orphans).



© The Trustees of the British Museum.

FROM APPRENTICE TO MASTER

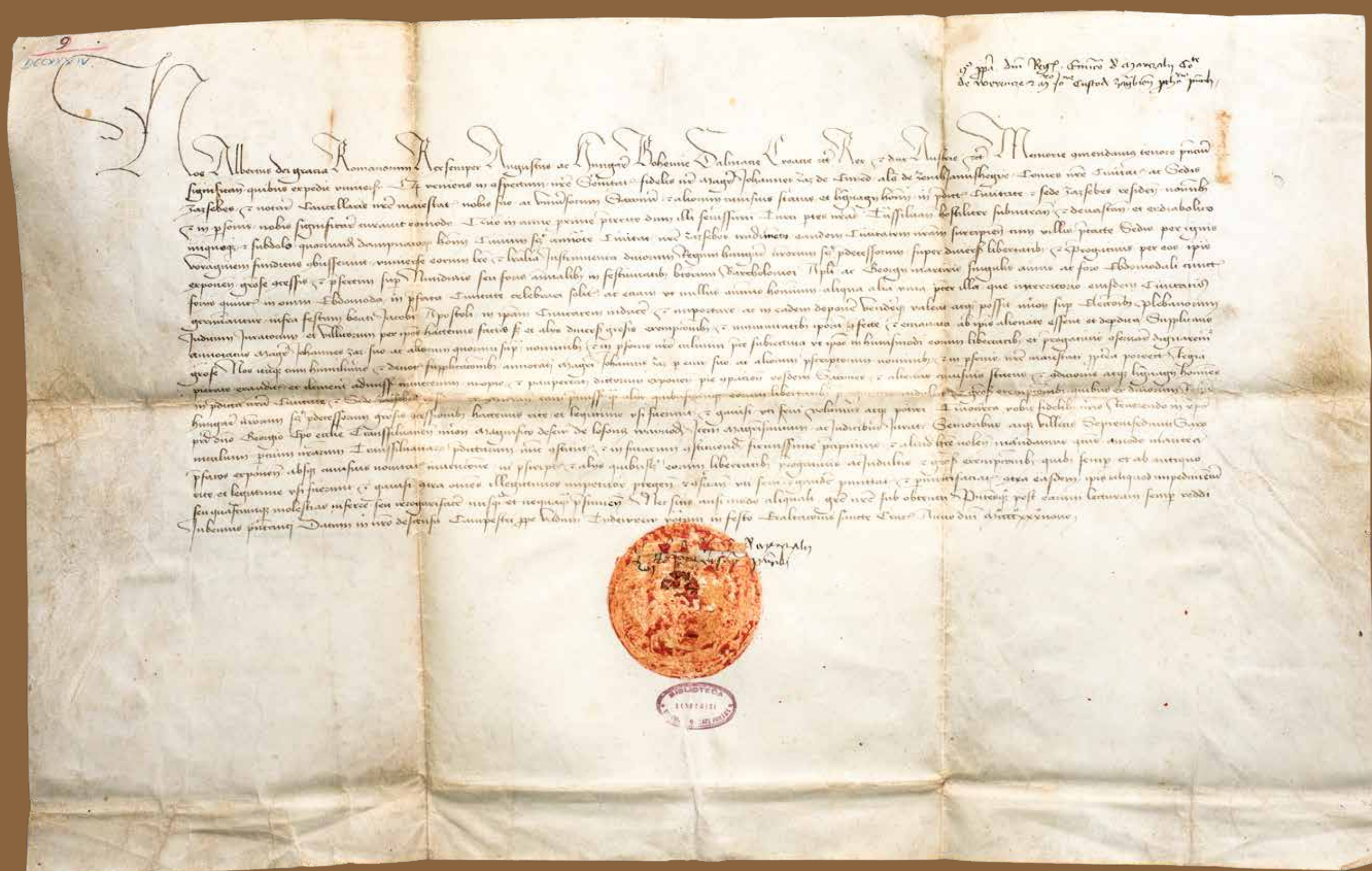
THE GUILDS IN SEBEȘ



Crafts, documented in Sebeș from the early 14th century, along with commercial activities, contributed to the settlement's prosperity and signaled its urban status. Medieval sources mention numerous craftsmen from Sebeș organized into guilds: shoemakers, weavers, tailors, tanners, and furriers. Because of the limited number of surviving sources, some medieval realities are only known through later testimonies.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Bishop of Alba Iulia repeatedly called on the wheelwrights from Sebeș to fix his carriage. Two stonemasons from Sebeș, John and Bernard, worked at the same time on the bishop's fortress in Tăuți. The bricks for building a chapel dedicated to the Holy Virgin in Alba Iulia were also purchased from Sebeș.

The products of the guilds were sold at weekly markets—on Thursdays and Saturdays—and at the annual fairs, organized on Reminiscere Sunday (the second Sunday of Lent), on April 24th (the feast of Saint George), and on August 24th (on Saint Bartholomew's Day), based on a royal privilege.



Albert of Habsburg, King of Hungary, confirmed the rights and liberties of the people of Sebeș at the request of John Sas, judge of the city and seat of Sebeș, in the year 1439.

Romanian Academy Library, Bucharest, Historical Documents Collection

From the 16th century, commercial and craft activities began to decline. A growing portion of Sebeş's residents relied on agriculture and animal husbandry, similar to the surrounding villagers. Nonetheless, the guilds kept operating until the 19th century, when they were dissolved throughout Transylvania.



CLERICI ȘI LAICI, FAMILIARI ȘI IOBAGI ÎN INTERIORUL ȘI ÎN AFARA ZIDURILOR CETAȚII

Reședința Șefului de Județ în Evul Mediu, Mănăstirea din Iași

Episcopul Transilvaniei făcea parte din elita socială a provinciei și a întregului regat. Curtea sa, la care activau peste o sută de oameni, slujbași cu rosturi administrative și militari, numiți în sursele vremii familiari, dar și slujitori de rând – bucătări, brutari, spălătorese ș.a.m.d. – era coordonată de un om de încredere, numit provizor.

Clasa de mijloc a clerului din reședința episcopală era formată din cei 24-27 de canonic, în frunte cu prepozitul. În Evul Mediu, capitulul stăpânea jumătatea estică a cetății („granița” a fost identificată în zona actualei străzi Mitropoliei Andrei Șaguna), acolo unde se aflau casele clericilor.

Inițial, canonicii aveau sarcina de a celebra liturgiile și de a recita breviarul în catedrală. Începând cu secolul al XIII-lea, această activitate a fost încredințată membrilor clerului inferior, respectiv, capelanii episcopului și ai clericilor sau rectorii celor peste treizeci de altare din catedrală.

La vest de cetate se afla așezarea episcopală, iar la est și la sud cea capitulară. Locuitorii acestora aveau statutul de iobagi, adică plăteau o taxă anuală în bani și produse pentru pământul pe care îl foloseau, dar erau plătiți atunci când lucrau cu ziua în grădiniile și la heleștecele episcopului ori capitulului. Ei beneficiau de un anumit grad de autonomie, aveau dreptul de a-și alege judele, care, împreună cu cetățenii jurați, judeca pricinile minore ale locuitorilor. Românii din cartierul Malerei, stăpâniți de capitu, se aflau sub autoritatea unui cneaz.

La jumătatea secolului al XV-lea, sunt menționați numeroși locuitorii așezării episcopale, acuzați de cotoire a unor pământuri stăpânite anterior de capitu. Pe baza numelor, unii dintre aceștia par să fi fost implimentați în comerțul cu sarea exploantată în apropiere și practicanți ai unor meserii relativ simple, fără valoare adăugată mare (măcelari, la totală a cetății și a așezărilor episcopale și capitulare din vecinătate care circa 10% erau clerici.

Reședința Șefului de Județ în Evul Mediu, Mănăstirea din Iași

Los Emeritus Sos Iudex. non Joannis Sol. Blasius Iustus, Maximus Marcor et Elias
 Joannis Comitis Albin, Wittenberg gubernans, et nos quoniam significatus quibus reperit unius. &c

The middle class of the clergy at the episcopal residence consisted of 24–27 canons, led by a provost. In the Middle Ages, the chapter controlled the eastern half of the city (the "border" has been identified in the area of today "Mitropolit Andrei Șaguna" Street), where the canons' houses were located. Initially, the canons were responsible for celebrating Mass and reciting the Divine Office in the cathedral. Starting in the 13th century, this activity was entrusted to members of the lower clergy, such as the bishops' and canons' chaplains or the rectors of the more than thirty altars in the cathedral.

West of the fortress was the episcopal town, while to the east and south was the chapter's settlement. The residents of these settlements were serfs, meaning they paid an annual tax in money and goods for the land they used. However, they were compensated for day labor in the gardens and at the ponds owned by the bishop or the chapter. They had a certain level of autonomy and the right to elect their own judge, who, along with sworn citizens, settled minor disputes. The Romanians in the Maieri district, controlled by the chapter, were under the authority of a knez.

In the mid-15th century, numerous inhabitants of the episcopal settlement were recorded for allegedly encroaching on lands previously owned by the chapter. Based on their names, some of these individuals seem to have been involved in the nearby salt trade and practiced relatively simple, low-value crafts (such as butchers, millers, blacksmiths, potters, coopers, tailors, and others) who were not part of any guilds. According to a recent estimate, the total population of the fortress and the neighboring episcopal and chapter settlements ranged from 670 to 1020 people, with about 10% being clergy.



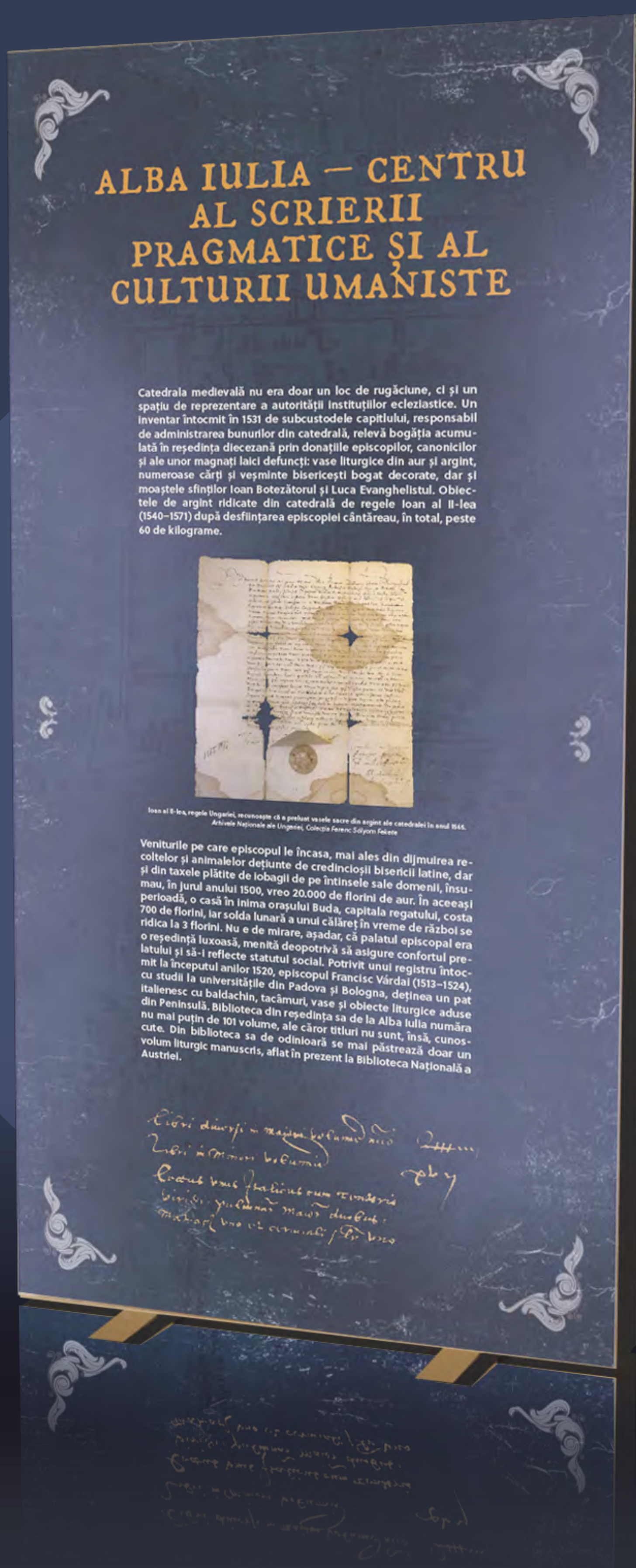
- 1 BISHOP'S PALACE
- 2 CATHEDRAL
- 3 PROVOST'S PALACE
- 4 GARDENS OF THE BISHOP AND CANONS
- 5 MAIERI, THE SETTLEMENT OF THE CHAPTER'S SERFS
- 6 GATE OF SAINT GEORGE
- 7 HOUSE OF THE ALTAR OF SAINT ANDREW
- 8 HOUSE OF THE ALTAR OF ALL SAINTS
- 9 HOUSE OF THE CHAPEL OF SAINT ANNE
- 10 HOUSE OF THE ARCHDEACON OF SĂTMAR
- 11 CHURCH AND DOMINICAN CONVENT
- 12 HOUSE OF A CANON
- 13 HOUSE OF THE ARCHDEACON OF TÂRNAVA
- 14 HOUSE OF THE ALTAR OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST
- 15 HOUSE OF THE ALTAR OF SAINT GEORGE
- 16 GATE OF SAINT MICHAEL AND THE BISHOP'S DUNGEON
- 17 THE SETTLEMENT OF THE BISHOP'S SERFS

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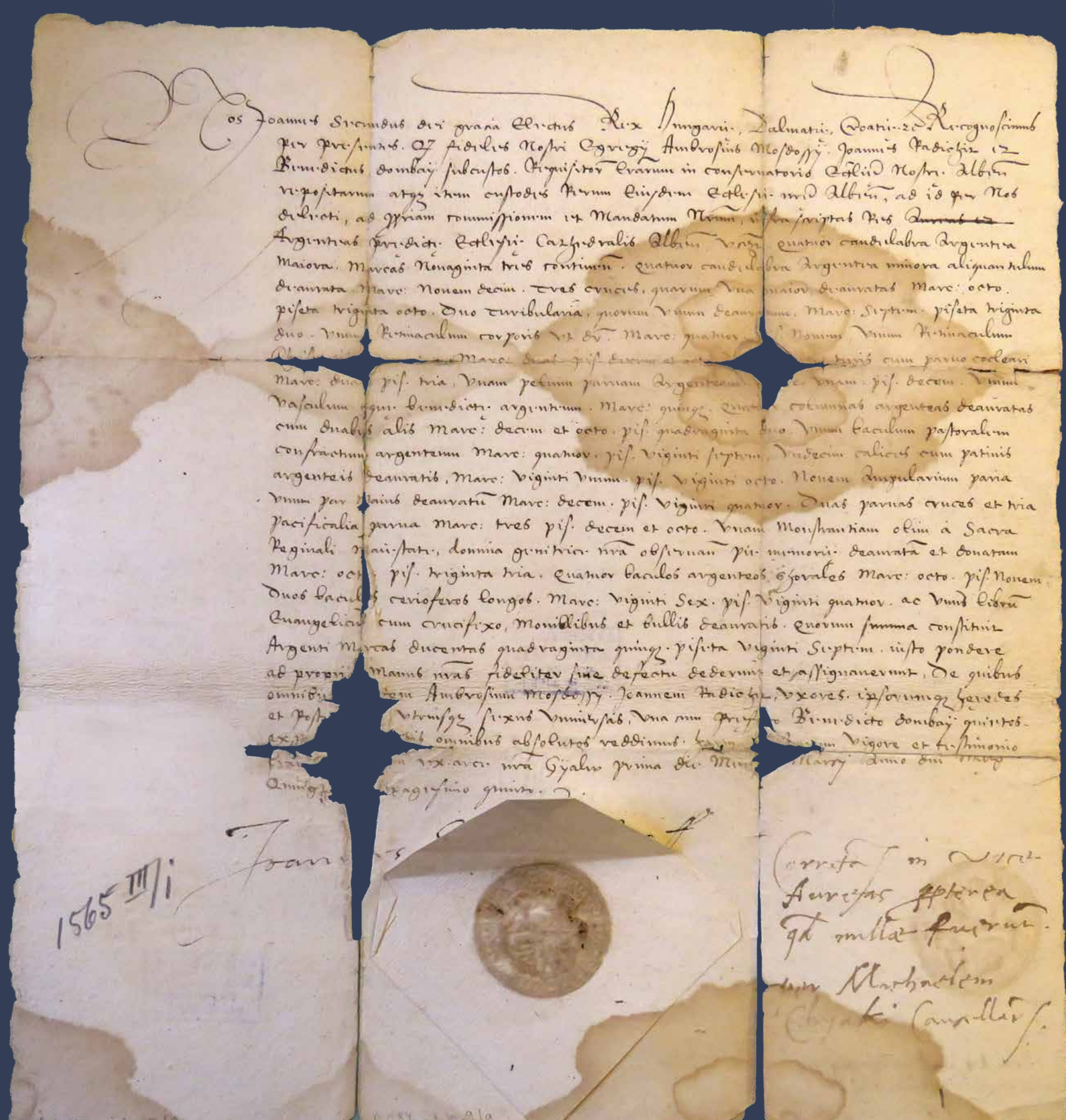
András Kovács, "Arta în Transilvania în secolele XVI-XVII. in: Arta în România din preistorie în contemporaneitate" edited by Răzvan Theodorescu, Marius Porumb, Bucharest-Cluj-Napoca, Editura Academiei Române-Editura Mega, 2018, p. 513

ALBA IULIA

A CENTER FOR PRAGMATIC WRITING AND HUMANIST CULTURE



The medieval cathedral served not only as a place of worship but also as a symbol of the authority of church institutions. An inventory from 1531, made by the subcustodian of the chapter—who was responsible for managing the cathedral's goods—shows the wealth stored at the diocesan residence, gathered through donations from bishops, canons, and deceased lay magnates. This wealth included liturgical vessels of gold and silver, numerous books, richly decorated church vestments, and even relics of Saint John the Baptist and Saint Luke the Evangelist. The silver objects taken from the cathedral by King John II (1540–1571) after the dissolution of the episcopate weighed over 60 kilograms in total.



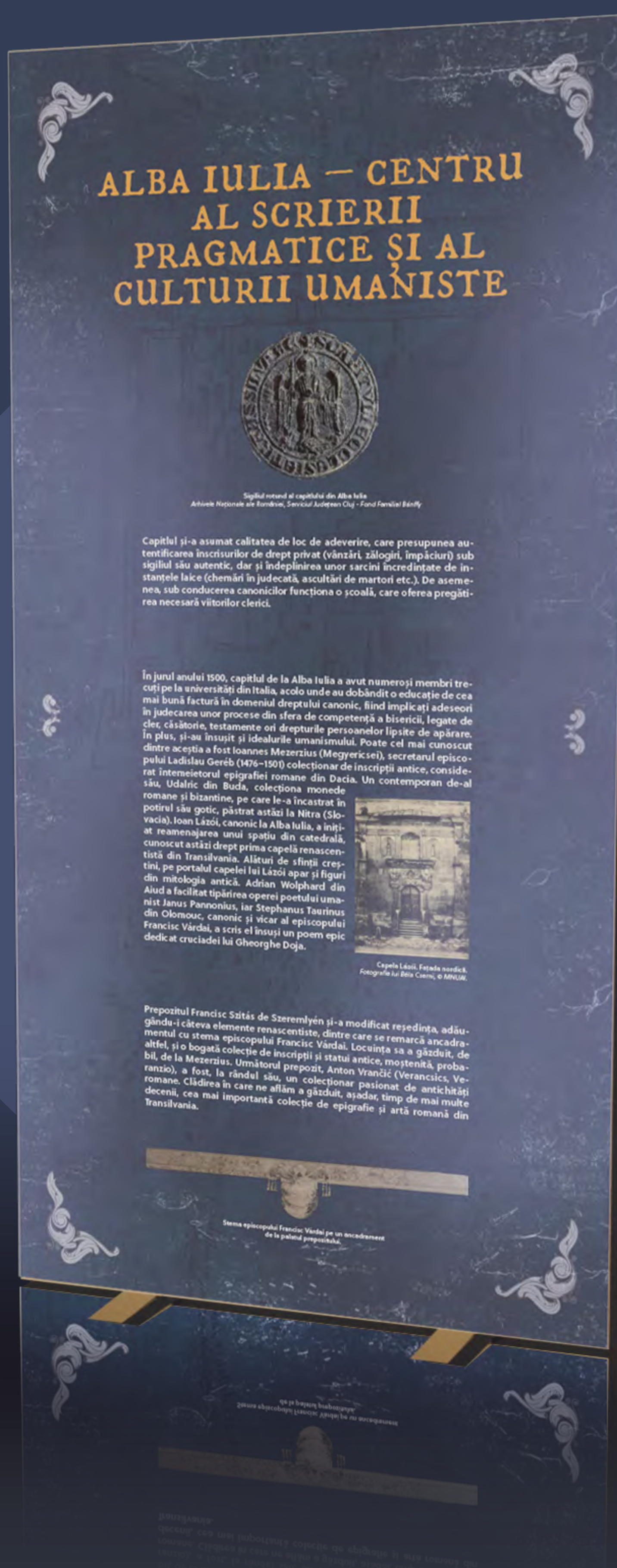
King John II of Hungary acknowledges that he took possession of the sacred silver vessels from the cathedral in 1565. Hungarian National Archives, Ferenc Sólyom Fekete Collection

The income the bishop received—mainly from tithing the harvests and animals owned by the faithful of the Latin Church, as well as from taxes paid by the serfs on his vast domains—totaled about 20,000 gold florins around the year 1500. During the same period, a house in the heart of Buda, the kingdom's capital, cost 700 florins, and a cavalryman's monthly wartime pay was 3 florins. It's no surprise, then, that the episcopal palace was a lavish residence, meant both to ensure the prelate's comfort and to reflect his social status. According to a register from the early 1520s, Bishop Francis Várdai (1513–1524), who studied at the universities of Padua and Bologna, owned an Italian four-poster bed, cutlery, and liturgical vessels and several other objects brought from Italy. The library in his Alba Iulia residence contained no fewer than 101 volumes, though their titles are unknown. Of his former library, only a single liturgical manuscript survives, now held at the Austrian National Library.

Libri diversi in maiori volumine
Libri in minori volumine
Creatus vultus fraticulus cum tondis
viridi pulcherrimus maior ducibus
mahar vno et curiali sicut vno

ALBA IULIA

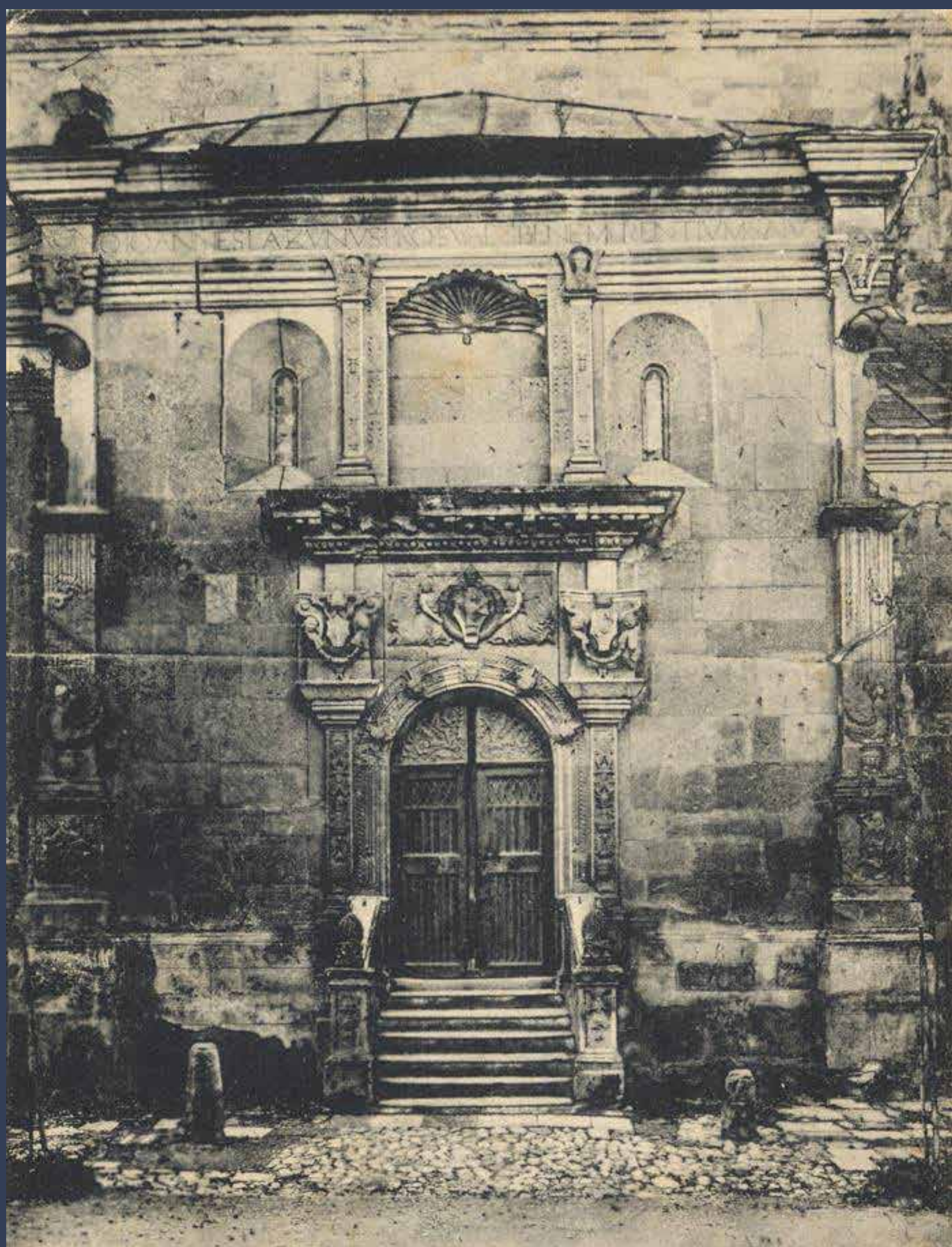
A CENTER FOR PRAGMATIC WRITING AND HUMANIST CULTURE



The round seal of the chapter of Alba Iulia
National Archives of Romania, Cluj County Service –
Bánffy Family Collection

The chapter assumed the role of a place of authentication, which involved issuing private legal documents (sales, pledges, reconciliations) with its official seal, and carrying out tasks entrusted by secular courts, such as hearing witnesses. Additionally, a school operated under the canons' leadership, providing the necessary education for future clergy.

Around the year 1500, the chapter of Alba Iulia had numerous members who had attended universities in Italy, where they acquired a high-quality education in canon law. They were often involved in judging ecclesiastical cases related to the clergy, marriage, wills, or the rights of defenseless individuals. Moreover, several canons embraced the ideals of Humanism. Perhaps the most well-known of these figures was Ioannes Mezerzius (Megyericséi), secretary to Bishop Ladislás Geréb (1476–1501) and a collector of ancient inscriptions, considered the founder of Roman epigraphy in Dacia. A contemporary of his, Udalricus of Buda, collected Roman and Byzantine coins, which he embedded in his Gothic chalice, now preserved in Nitra, Slovakia. John Lázói, a canon in Alba Iulia, initiated the redesign of a space in the cathedral, now known as the first Renaissance chapel in Transylvania. Alongside Christian saints, the portal of the Lázói chapel also features figures from ancient mythology. Adrian Wolphard of Aiud helped facilitate the printing of works by the humanist poet Janus Pannonius, while Stephanus Taurinus from Olomouc, a canon and vicar of bishop Francisc Várdai, wrote an epic poem dedicated to the crusader's uprising in 1514.



Lázói Chapel. Northern façade.
Photography by Béla Cserni, © MNUAI.



The provost Francis Szitás of Szeremlyén modified his residence, adding several Renaissance elements, among which the windowframe with the coat of arms of Bishop Francis Várdai stands out. His home also housed a rich collection of ancient inscriptions and statues, likely inherited from Mezerzius. One of his successors, Anton Vrančić (Verancsics, Veranzio), was also a passionate collector of Roman antiquities. The building we are in, therefore, housed the most important collection of Roman epigraphy and art in Transylvania for several decades.



The coat of arms of Bishop Francis Várdai on a doorframe from the provost's palace.

”THE ENEMIES OF CHRISTIANITY” AT THE CITY GATES

„DUȘMANII CREȘTINĂȚĂII” LA PORȚILE ORAȘULUI

Istoria medievală a Sebeșului debutează în urma unui moment de criză, care a marcat întreaga Transilvanie: invazia mongolă din 1241–1242. „Furia tătarilor” a fost înlocuită spre finele veacului următor de cea a turcilor otomani. În 1438, aceștia au ajuns și la porțile Sebeșului. Ademeniți de promisiunile lui Vlad Dracul, domnitorul Țării Românești (1436–1442; 1443–1447), parohul Anton și alți doi cetățeni i-au lăsat să intre în oraș. Unii locuitori au refuzat, însă, să se supună, retrăgându-se în turnul crotitorilor. În acel turn s-a aflat și Georgius, student din Romos, care a descris atacul și perioada de prizonierat la turci într-o lucrare foarte populară de-a lungul deceniilor următoare. Ca amintire a acelui moment și personaj istoric, turnul crotitorilor a fost denumit turnul studentului.



În 1442, otomanii au atacat, din nou, sudul Transilvaniei. În 1444, papa Eugeniu al IV-lea a acordat o indulgență conținuând de turci, printre acestea fiind menționat și așezământul dominican din Sebeș. Papa Calixt al III-lea (1455–1458) a emis o altă indulgență care le scurta pedeapsa din purgatoriu tuturor celor ce vizitau în anumite sărbători biserica parohială – afectată, la rândul său, de raidul otoman – și contribuiau la repararea și înnoirea în zona Sebeșului. Turcii, conduși de Ali Beg, au pătruns din nou în zona Sebeșului, pe care au devastat-o și jefuit-o în 1479, înainte de a fi învinși în bătălia de pe Câmpul Pâinii. În ciuda înfrângerii repetate a raidurilor, orașul a suferit pagube majore din pricina raidurilor otomane, consemnate în mărturiile scrise păstrate până în zilele noastre.

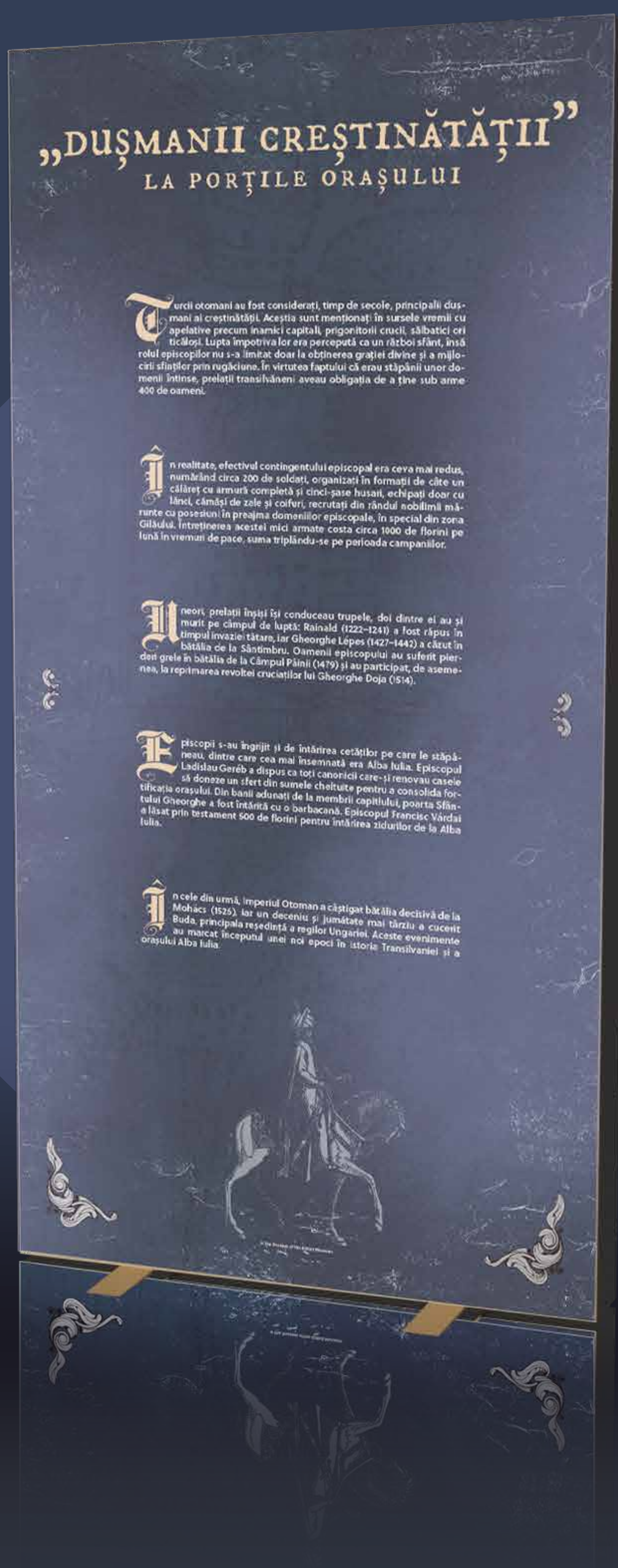
The medieval history of Sebeș began with a moment of crisis that affected all of Transylvania: the Mongol invasion of 1241–1242. "The fury of the Tatars" was replaced toward the end of the next century by that of the Ottoman Turks. In 1438, they reached the gates of Sebeș. Lured by the promises of Vlad Dracul, the ruler of Wallachia (1436–1442; 1443–1447), the parish priest Anton and two other citizens allowed them to enter the city. Some residents, however, refused to submit and retreated to the Tailors' Tower. Among them was Georgius, a student from Romos, who described the attack and his period of captivity under the Turks in a work that became very popular in the following decades. In memory of this historical figure and event, the Tailors' Tower was renamed the Student's Tower.



In 1442, the Ottomans attacked southern Transylvania again. In 1444, Pope Eugene IV granted an indulgence to the Dominican and Franciscan convents in Transylvania that had been destroyed by the Turks, including the Dominican settlement in Sebeș. Pope Calixtus III (1455–1458) issued another indulgence that reduced the time in purgatory for all who visited the parish church—which was also affected by the Ottoman raid—on certain feast days and contributed to its repair. The Turks, led by Ali Beg, once again entered the Sebeș area, devastating and plundering it in 1479, before being defeated in the Battle of Câmpul Pâinii. Despite repeatedly strengthening its walls, the town suffered major damage from the Ottoman raids, as recorded in written testimonies that have been preserved to this day.



„THE ENEMIES OF CHRISTIANITY” AT THE CITY GATES



For centuries, the Ottoman Turks were considered the main enemies of Christianity. They were often referred to in contemporary sources with terms like "capital enemy," "persecutors of the cross" and "savages" or "heathens." The role of the bishop was not limited to obtaining divine help and intercession through prayer. By virtue of the extensive domains they controlled, the Transylvanian prelates were required to provide up to 400 armed men.

In reality, the episcopal contingent was somewhat smaller, numbering around 200 soldiers, organized into formations of one fully armored knight and five or six hussars, equipped with lances, chainmail shirts, and helmets. This force was recruited mainly from local lesser nobility, especially from the settlements near the episcopal estate of Gilău. Maintaining this army cost about 1000 florins per month during peacetime, and the expense tripled during campaigns.

Bishops led their troops often personally, and some of them died in battle. Rainald (1222–1224) was killed during the Tatar invasion, while George Lépes (1427–1442) fell in the Battle of Sântimbru. The bishop's men suffered heavy losses in the Battle of Câmpul Pâinii (1479) and also participated in the crushing of the crusader uprising (1514).

Bishops also took care of the inhabitants on their lands, especially those in Alba Iulia. Ladislau Geréb ordered all the canons to consolidate the city's defenses. From the contributions of canons, a barbican was built at the gate of Saint George. Bishop Francis Várdai left 50 florins in his will for the fortification of Alba Iulia's walls.

In the end, the Ottoman Empire won the decisive Battle of Mohács (1526), and a decade and a half later, conquered Buda, the main residence of the Hungarian kings. These events marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Transylvania and the city of Alba Iulia.



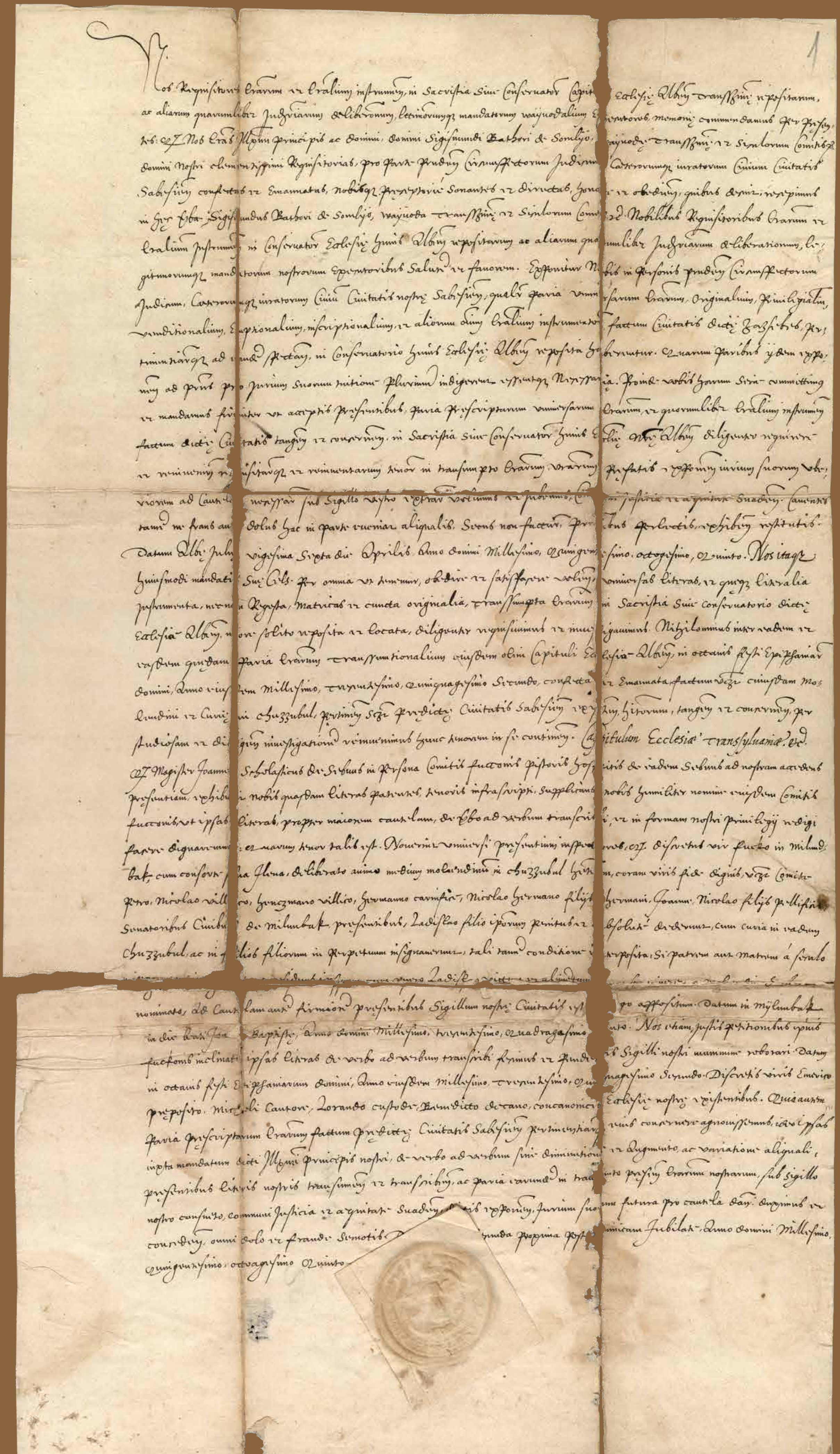
CULTURAL HERITAGE

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THE ARCHIVE

The archive of the city and seat of Sebeș is one of the treasures for understanding the medieval past of the locality. The first known document issued by the Sebeș magistrate dates to 1345. It attests to the donation of half a mill, made by the baker Fucco and his wife, Ilena, to their son. Today, the act is preserved within another document issued by the chapter of Alba Iulia in 1352, transcribed by the same institution at the end of the 16th century.



The first known document issued by the Sebeș magistrate, preserved in a 16th-century transcription. Romanian Academy Library, Bucharest, Historical Documents Collection

The archive of Sebeș archive included both the city's documents and those of the seat. Over the past two centuries, this collection has been scattered. Today, items from the Sebeș archive are stored in several institutions across the country: the "Ioan Raica" Municipal Museum in Sebeș, the Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest, and the county branches of the National Archives in Alba and Sibiu.



THE SCHOOL AND ITS DISCIPLES

The document from 1352, mentioned earlier, names the first known master of a school in medieval Transylvania, John, who was active in Sebeş. Throughout the Middle Ages, many residents of Sebeş studied at universities in Padua, Prague, Vienna, or Kraków. The most famous disciple of the local school is a man named George (Georgius Septemcastrensis), who was captured by the Turks during the raid of 1438. After escaping captivity, he became a Dominican friar and authored a work titled "Treatise on the Customs, Ceremonies, and Infamy of the Turks," which was very popular in Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries.



**Tractatus De Ritu Mo-
ribus. Aequitia et Multi-
plicatione Turcorum** In quo
si quis plā
aliquid de secta Turcorum: magna atq; admiranda scire
re desiderat. Pauca que hic sub compendio narrant me-
moriam reuoluat Namq; si ea sane diligenterq; inspexerit
de multis inquisitionis veritatem agnoscat



The title page of one of the many editions of "Treatise" by Georgius Septemcas-
trensis, from the early 16th century (details).

Romanian Academy Library, Bucharest

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MOȘTENIREA CULTURALĂ

BISERICA PAROHIALĂ

Cel mai grăitor martor al gloriei și declinului orașului medieval Sebeș este biserica parohială, în prezent evanghelică. Începută în secolul al XIII-lea, biserica din Sebeș a fost modificată în mai multe rânduri, în conformitate cu gusturile și aspirațiile generațiilor care s-au succedat în oraș, dar și cu posibilitățile lor financiare. Corul impresionant, ridicat în a doua jumătate a celui de-al XIV-lea veac, anunța unul dintre cele mai grandioase lăcașe de cult ale Transilvaniei, un proiect ambițios rămas neterminat din pricina decăderii economice a orașului.

În secolul al XIX-lea, circula o legendă potrivit căreia meșterul care se angajase să construiască biserica din Sebeș lucra și la Biserica Neagră din Brașov, astfel i-a încredințat lucrarea sebeșeană celei mai iscusite calfe din atelierul său. Când meșterul a venit în inspecție la Sebeș și a văzut corul bisericii de aici, care era mai frumos decât cel ridicat de el la Brașov, și-a aruncat calfa de pe șchelă. Nemaigăsindu-se o calfă atât de pricepută, biserica a rămas neterminată.



CONVENTUL DOMINICAN

În 1322, la Viena, s-a întrunit capitulul general al ordinului fraților predicatori, numiți și dominicani. În cadrul acestuia, s-a aprobat fondarea conventului de la Sebeș. Aceste așezăminte erau specifice mediului urban medieval. Dominicani au rămas la Sebeș până la jumătatea secolului al XVI-lea, atunci când au fost alungați în contextul Reformei. Două veacuri mai târziu, după integrarea Transilvaniei în monarhia Habsburgilor catolici, așezământul dominican de odinioară a fost preluat de franciscani, care i-au atribuit hramul Sfântului Bartolomeu, păstrat până în zilele noastre.

BIBLIOTECI ȘI CĂRȚI SEBEȘENE

Parohii și frați dominicani făceau parte din elita intelectuală a orașului. Bibliotecile lor cuprindeau, fără îndoială, cărți liturgice, literatură devoțională, predici, lucrări fundamentale de teologie scolastică ori drept canonic, dar și volume de literatură clasică, dar și romane sau istorie. În epocile ulterioare, cărțile medievale, considerate vetuste, au fost adesea aruncate ori tăiate în bucăți și refolosite pentru lemn, garea unor volume mai noi. Astfel, în zilele noastre mai cunoaștem doar o mică parte a acestei moșteniri, uneori doar sub forma unor fragmente dispartate.



THE PARISH CHURCH

The most eloquent witness to the glory and decline of the medieval city of Sebeș is its parish church, now an evangelical church. Built in the 13th century, the church in Sebeș was altered several times to reflect the tastes and aspirations of the successive generations in the city, as well as their financial resources. The impressive choir, built in the second half of the 14th century, announced one of the most grandiose places of worship in Transylvania, an ambitious project that remained unfinished due to the city's economic decline.

In the 19th century, a legend spread that the master who was responsible for building the church in Sebeș was also working on the Black Church in Brașov. He entrusted the Sebeș project to the most skilled journeyman from his workshop. When the master visited Sebeș for an inspection and saw the church choir, which was more beautiful than the one he had built in Brașov, he threw his journeyman off the scaffolding. Since no equally skilled journeyman could be found, the church remained unfinished.

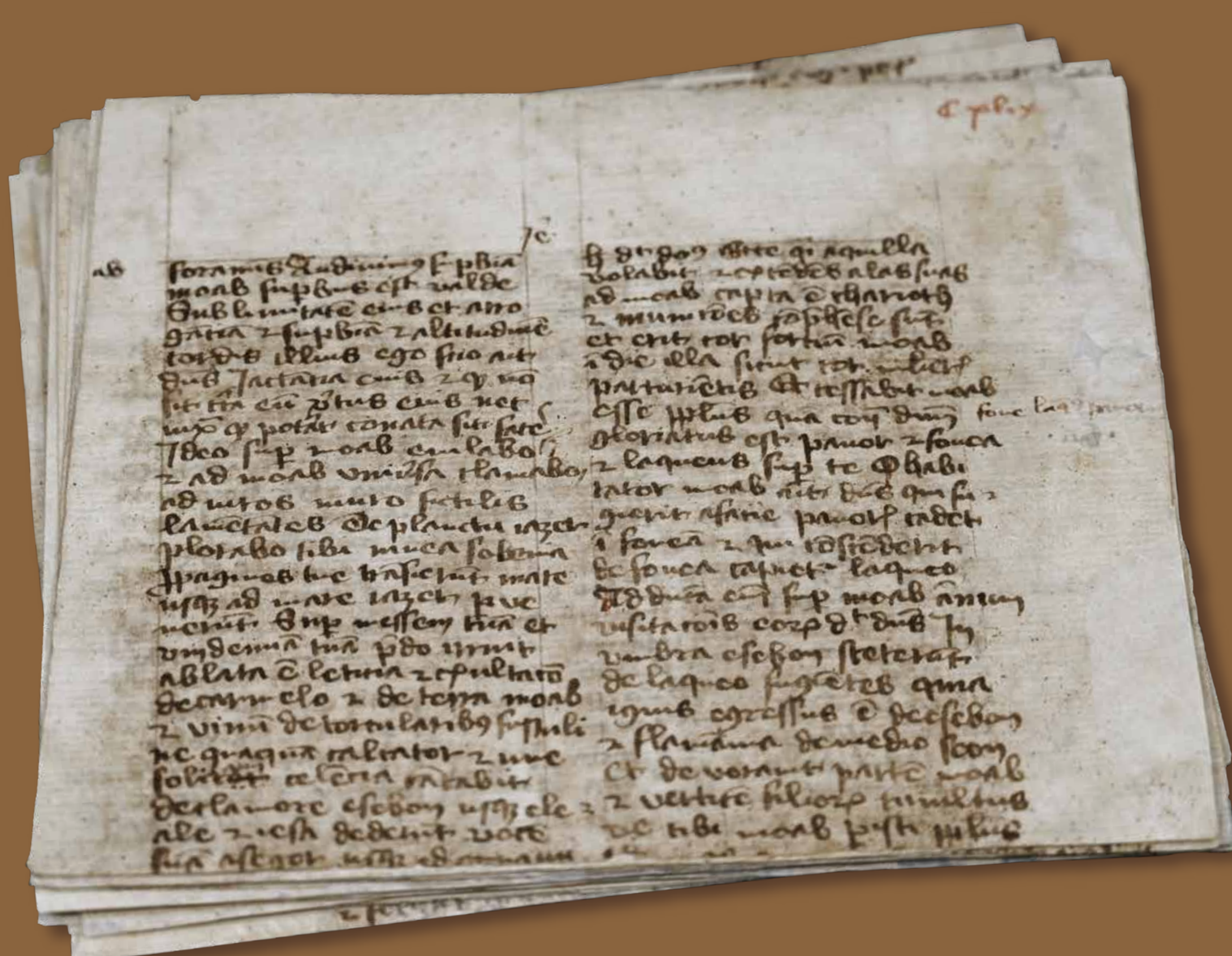


THE DOMINICAN CONVENT

In 1322, the general chapter of the Order of Preachers, also known as Dominicans, met in Vienna. During this gathering, the approval of the convent in Sebeș was granted. These establishments were specific to medieval urban settings. The Dominicans remained in Sebeș until the mid-16th century, when they were expelled due to the Reformation. Two centuries later, after Transylvania became part of the Catholic Habsburg monarchy, the former Dominican establishment was taken over by the Franciscans, who dedicated it to Saint Bartholomew.

LIBRARIES AND BOOKS IN SEBEȘ

Parish priests and Dominican friars were part of the city's intellectual elite. Their libraries undoubtedly contained liturgical books, devotional literature, sermons, fundamental works of scholastic theology or canon law, but also volumes of classical literature, Roman law, and history. In later periods, medieval books, considered outdated, were often discarded or cut into pieces and reused for binding newer volumes. As a result, today we only know a small part of this heritage, sometimes only through scattered fragments.



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