KONINKLIJKE VLAAMSE ACADEMIE VAN BELGIE
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NEW APPROACHES TO MEDIEVAL URBAN LITERACY

2-3 June 2008

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CONTACTFORUM

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An important topic in research on medieval literacy is the growth of so-called literate mentalities. In medieval towns one seems to have had more chance of being confronted with writing than elsewhere. The readiness on the part of town dwellers to engage in the use of written documents can be considered as an important sign of changes in thinking and the perception of the world. This urban use of written modes of communication needs to be studied in the context of all modes of communication available to town dwellers.

The papers in this volume try to understand medieval urban literacy from a pan-European perspective, in which both western and Byzantine urban societies are taken into account. They cover several areas of medieval Latinitas (Switzerland, Hungary, Poland, England, France and Belgium) as well as medieval Byzantium. Together, they create an opportunity for putting into a comparative perspective not only the phenomenon of urban literacy, but also the different scholarly traditions in approaching the subject.

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New Approaches to Medieval Urban Literacy

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STUDYING URBAN LITERACY: QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

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An important topic in recent research on medieval literacy is the growth of the so-called literate mentality. Different from other social scientists, such as, e.g. anthropologists, historians usually try to keep their distance from the fuzzy term 'mentality'. Students of medieval literacy avoid exclusive definitions, and prefer to enumerate factors contributing to the development of 'literate mentalities'. Among the most important factors are the realization that, once writing has become an option in any medieval society, it is a 'natural' thing to preserve human actions through writing, and that written records can be used to reconstruct the past. Writing gradually becomes trusted as an instrument for fixing, and thereby defining, events. A quantitative factor is progress in alphabetization: the spread of the elementary skills of reading and writing among ever more social groups. The development of literate mentalities can be measured by the growth (or decline) in the prestige of those individuals who can read and write.[1]

In the Middle Ages, in towns one seems to have had more chance of being confronted with writing than elsewhere. Certain urban milieus participating in written culture, however, have caught the scholars' attention more than others. Studies of the urban communes of northern Italy have suggested a direct link between the reception of the written word in daily life and the emergence of literate mentalities. From the late twelfth century onwards, these communes seemed oriented towards the production and use of written records ("*Schriftorientierung*"); they seemed to possess a collective will to develop literacy. They also preserved written records. This readiness to engage in written culture could be considered as an important sign of changes in thinking and the perception of the world. It showed an increasing growth of the use of the reasoning faculties.[2]

The results of this research, which was mainly carried out in the 1980s and 1990s, seem to have been taken for granted in most studies of urban written culture carried out over the last ten years.[3] Many publications on urban literacy deal with two related topics. First, they consider

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[1] M.T. CLANCHY, *From Memory to Written Record. England 1066-1307*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1993), p. 186. A. ADAMSKA, "The study of medieval Literacy: Old sources, new ideas", in: *The Development of Literate Mentalities in East Central Europe*, ed. A. ADAMSKA and M. MOSTERT (Turnhout, 2004: *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 9), p. 37.

[2] Th. BEHRMANN, "Einleitung: Ein neuer Zugang zum Schriftgut der oberitalienischen Kommunen", in: *Kommunales Schriftgut in Oberitalien: Formen, Funktionen, Überlieferung*, ed. H. KELLER and Th. BEHRMANN (München, 1995: *Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften* 68), pp. 1-16, *passim*.

[3] Among the many studies published so far, see especially: W. PREVENIER, "La production et la conservation des actes urbains dans l'Europe médiévale", in: *La diplomatique urbaine en Europe au Moyen Âge*, ed. W. PREVENIER

the different types of written records produced in the towns. Secondly, they study the history of the institutions producing, using and keeping these records.[4] However, there have been other currents of research as well. Recently, there have been studies of such phenomena as the use of public space in towns, secular and religious ceremonies, and the forms of expressing the town's identity (so-called urban *memoria*). This type of study has been an important stimulus for renewed discussions of the nature of urban literacy.

1. RESEARCH ON URBAN LITERACY

The interest in 'urban' literacy is, however, much older. Already in 1956, at the Freie Universität in Berlin H. Skrzypczak defended a dissertation on the relation between 'town' and 'literacy' (*Schriftlichkeit*) in the German Middle Ages. The work was seen as a contribution to the social history of writing.[5] This work is, to my knowledge, the first in which the role of literacy in medieval towns is investigated. Three years earlier, in a posthumous publication Fritz Rörig had been the first to clearly distinguish between *Schriftwesen*, the technical term for the conditions of the production of the written word in document or book form,[6] and *Schriftlichkeit*, the degree to which the written word was used in any period.[7] The distinction has proven a useful one, and is nowadays no longer in need of explanation.[8]

In English, the term 'literacy' is used in connection with the phenomenon of urban settlements for the first time in 1985 by B. Krekić, in a study of the attitude of fourteenth-century Ragusans towards literacy.[9] Considering the appeal of 'medieval literacy' as a topic, this first appearance of the term is rather late. The first medievalists to use the English word 'literacy' in the title of a publication after the thinking of the social scientists and classicists had sunk in, were F.H. Bäuml and E. Spielmann in their 1974 study of the *Niebelungenlied*.[10]

Several adjectives have come in use to denote the type of literacy an author wishes to address. 'Pragmatic literacy' is a translation of the German *pragmatische Schriftlichkeit*. Suggested by Brigitte Schlieben-Lange in 1979,[11] *pragmatische Schriftlichkeit* was taken up in Münster. There, in 1986, the German research project 231 ("*Sonderforschungsbereich 231*") started with the aim of studying "all forms of literacy which directly serve functional actions, or which were

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and Th. DE HEMPTINNE (Leuven and Apeldoorn, 2000), pp. 559 ff.; V. HONEMANN, "Stadt, Kanzlei und Kultur: Einführung in das Tagungsthema", in: *Stadt, Kanzlei und Kultur im Übergang zur Frühen Neuzeit – City Culture and Urban Chanceries in an Era of Change*, ed. R. SUNTRUP and J.R. VEENSTRA (Frankfurt a.M., 2004), p. XI.

[4] The two volumes, quoted *supra*, n. 3, are representative in this respect.

[5] See the Bibliography at the end of this volume, "A short list of works on medieval urban communication", No. 24.

[6] See W. WATTENBACH, *Das Schriftwesen im Mittelalter*, 3rd edn. (Leipzig, 1896), dealing with the production of written texts and its conditions.

[7] F. RÖRIG, "Mittelalter und Schriftlichkeit", *Welt als Geschichte* 13 (1953), pp. 29-41.

[8] The word *Schriftlichkeit*, however, is used only rarely in the titles of German language publications on medieval urban literacy. An exception is Mihm's study of late medieval urban legislation ("A short list", No. 121).

[9] "A short list", No. 15. Cf. for the use of the term 'literacy' also the survey of J. BARROW in the first volume of the *Cambridge Urban History of Britain* ("A short list", No. 1). This work, however, was published in 2000, long after 'literacy' had become a standard topic in medieval studies.

[10] F.H. BÄUML and E. SPIELMANN, "From illiteracy to literacy: Prolegomena to a study of the *Niebelungenlied*", *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 10 (1974), pp. 248-259.

[11] Cf. B. SCHLIEBEN-LANGE, "Reden und schreiben im romanischen Mittelalter: Einige pragmatische und soziolinguistische Überlegungen", *Lendemains* 4 (1979), pp. 56-62.

meant to teach human actions and behaviour by making available knowledge".[12] Written texts were studied which were demanded by the practice of daily life (*Lebenspraxis*), such as charters and statutes. The Münster project ended in 1999. In the fifteen years of its existence the concept of *pragmatische Schriftlichkeit* has exerted a profound influence on German scholarship.[13] In the context of urban literacy, the English expression 'pragmatic literacy' was first used by a historian from Münster, Thomas Behrmann, who in 1994 wrote about the development of pragmatic literacy in the Lombard city communes,[14] and by E. Mühle, who wrote in that same year about commerce and pragmatic literacy as evidenced by the birchbark documents of Novgorod.[15] Clearly the interest in town chanceries predates these first uses of 'pragmatic literacy' in any language by many decades; the questionnaire developed in Münster, however (which in turn was indebted to that of Michael Clanchy's *From Memory to Written Record*[16]) has been received among students of urban literacy generally from the 1990s onwards. A slightly different approach is implied by the use of 'people's literacy' in the title of A.A. Svanidze's article of 1997, dealing with Russian towns from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries.[17] Here, the stress is on the town schools and their impact on (lay) urban society.

German has the possibility to form single words denoting the development of literacy and orality, a possibility not available in English. In 1980, Michael Giesecke wrote of the vernacular and the " 'development of literacy' [*Verschriftlichung*] of life" in late medieval Germany.[18] *Verschriftlichung* became generally accepted in the late 1980s and 1990s, and its process character was strengthened by the use of *Verschriftlichungsprozeß* ('the process of the development of literacy'). These terms were used from the start by the Münster historians dealing with aspects of (mainly Italian) urban literacy. Thus, Thomas Behrmann wrote in 1991 about the charters and statutes of the urban communes in Italy, suggesting that the development of literacy was a learning process.[19] *Verschriftlichung* was translated into Dutch as *verschriftelijking*; it was used in an urban context in 2004 by Jeroen Benders in his study of the development of literacy in the government of Deventer until the end of the fifteenth century.[20]

'Orality' is quite often used in opposition to 'literacy'. 'Oral' has been common to denote spoken as opposed to written modes of communication for a long time. The use of the term 'orality', however, seems relatively recent. It seems to appear in medieval studies as late as

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[12] "Der Münsterer Sonderforschungsbereich 231 'Träger, Felder, Formen pragmatischer Schriftlichkeit im Mittelalter'", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 24 (1990), pp. 430-459 at p. 389.

[13] See, e.g. *Statutencodices des 13. Jahrhunderts als Zeugen pragmatischer Schriftlichkeit: Die Handschriften von Como, Lodi, Novara, Pavia und Voghera*, ed. H. KELLER and J.W. BUSCH (München, 1991: *Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften* 64) and *Pragmatische Schriftlichkeit im Mittelalter: Erscheinungsformen und Entwicklungsstufen (Akten des Internationalen Kolloquiums 17.-19. Mai 1989)*, ed. H. KELLER (München, 1992: *Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften* 65).

[14] "A short list", No. 4.

[15] "A short list", No. 112.

[16] See *supra*, note 1.

[17] "A short list", No. 27.

[18] M. GIESECKE, " 'Volkssprache' und 'Verschriftlichung des Lebens' im Spätmittelalter: Am Beispiel der Genese der gedruckten Fachprosa in Deutschland", in: *Literatur in der Gesellschaft des Spätmittelalters*, ed. H.U. GUMBRECHT (Heidelberg, 1980), pp. 39-70.

[19] "A short list", No. 124. Cf. also Nos. 13, 111, 118 and 119. Hagen Keller used *Verschriftlichungsprozeß* as early as 1988 ("Oberitalienische Statuten als Zeugen und als Quellen für den Verschriftlichungsprozeß im 12. und 13.Jahrhundert", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1988), pp. 286-314).

[20] "A short list", No. 109.

1986, when Evelyn Birge Vitz uses it in a study of the Old French octosyllabic couplet.[21] She explicitly refers to Walter J. Ong's synthesis of 1982, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*.[22] Medievalists, apart from literary historians who used it in a restricted sense,[23] have tended to avoid the use of 'orality' for about a decade; since 1990 the term has gradually become accepted.[24] In general, though, the use of 'orality' remains restricted to certain forms of oral communication. *Oralität*, the German equivalent of 'orality', was used in 1992 in a study of urban literacy by G. Dilcher in opposition to *Verschriftlichung*. It would take some time before the problem of the relationship between speech and writing could develop from an 'either/or'-question into a 'more/less'-question.

The opposition between 'literacy' and 'orality' gave way to an approach in which the use of writing is studied as one form of communication among the many forms (non-verbal, oral or written) that may be available in a society.[25]

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A long series of questions new and old needs to be addressed. First, the 'key-concept' of the medieval town itself needs to be revisited. How should scholars dealing with literacy define a town? A settlement can be usefully termed to be more or less 'urban' if it fulfils more or fewer functions. A town may or may not have functions in the exercise of power, in jurisdiction and in the organisation of religious life (e.g. in the Church administration). A town may or may not have functions in the organization of the local, regional or supraregional economy (it may know trade or industry, and it may provide financial services). One may wonder whether all towns

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[21] E.B. VITZ, "Rethinking Old French literature: The orality of the octosyllabic couplet", *Romanic Review* 77 (1986), pp. 307-321.

[22] W. ONG, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 1982); 2nd edn., reset but otherwise unaltered, with slightly different pagination (London, 2002); E.B. VITZ, "Rethinking Old French literature", p. 300.

[23] E.B. VITZ, "Orality, literacy and the early Tristan material: Béroul, Thomas, and Marie de France", *Romanic Review* 78 (1987), pp. 298-310; D.H. GREEN, "Orality and reading: The state of research in medieval studies", *Speculum* 65 (1990), pp. 267-280; ID., "Individual and society: The evidence of writing and orality in late medieval Germany", in: *Homo Sapiens, Homo Humanus II: Letteratura, arte e scienza nella seconda metà del Quattrocento: Atti del XXIX Convegno internazionale del Centro di studi umanistici Montepulciano–Palazzo Tarugi–1987: Individuo e società nei secoli XV e XVI: Atti del XXX Convegno internazionale del Centro di studi umanistici Montepulciano–Palazzo Tarugi–1988*, ed. G. TARUGI (Firenze, 1990), pp. 291-301; R. BEATON, "Orality and the reception of late Byzantine vernacular literature", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 14 (1990), pp. 174-184. D.H. GREEN, "Orality and reading", e.g. focuses on the implications of orality for the history of reading (preparing ID., *Medieval Listening and Reading: The Primary Reception of German Literature 800-1300* (Cambridge, 1994)).

[24] See, e.g. C.J. MEWS, "Orality, literacy, and authority in the twelfth-century schools", *Exemplaria* 2 (1990), pp. 475-500.; D.L. VANDERBILT, *Orality, Textuality and the Anglo-Saxon Historical Imagination: An Original Study* (Madison, Wis., 1990); L.J. MILLER, "The transition from orality to literacy in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms", *Dissertation Abstracts International–A: The Humanities and Social Sciences* 53,2 (1992), p. 483A; A.V. MURRAY, "Voices of Flanders: Orality and constructed orality in the chronicle of Galbert of Bruges", *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent* 48 (1994), pp. 103-119; J. STEVENSON, "Literacy and orality in early medieval Ireland", in: *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. D. EDEL (Blackrock, 1995), pp. 11-22; and M. INNES, "Memory, orality and literacy in an early medieval society", *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies* 158 (1998), pp. 3-36.

[25] I refrain from giving a full bibliography of studies on urban literacy. M. Mostert, *A Bibliography of Works on Medieval Communication* (Turnhout, 2012: *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 2) lists more than 6700 titles, among them many relative to urban literacy. An extract is published at the end of this volume as M. Mostert, "A short list of works on medieval urban communication".

have a role as cultural centres. Do they, e.g. because of the existence of non-rural forms of life, of physical and mental mobility, influence the development of educational institutions such as schools and universities? Indeed, which 'urban' functions presuppose literate skills for at least some town dwellers?

Next, there are questions about the chronological and geographical limits of the phenomenon of urban literacy. Did the towns and their specific forms of literacy decide the rise of literacy taking place everywhere in *Latinitas* in the so-called 'long' thirteenth century?[26] Was urban literacy equally important in all parts of Europe? Or were there local specificities in the development of literacy?

And what about the documents we associate with urban literacy? Should we, in examining the presence of written records in towns, allow for different registers of literacy? Should we not, in other words, consider the 'horizons of texts'[27] and the literacy skills of their producers and users? Considering the variety among town dwellers (clerics next to lay people, professionals of the written word next to occasional users of writing, and all these next to illiterates), one may assume that literacy skills differed from one social group to another. Did attitudes towards the written word result from an experience of the urban educational system? Who, in fact, learned to read (and write) in medieval towns? And how? And did it make a difference to acquire literacy in Latin or in a vernacular?

On which levels (and in which registers) did different groups of people have access to writing? An answer to this question may be helpful when we analyze the various types of written records present in towns. A distinction can be made here. The *need* and the *usefulness* of written texts may not have been the same for communities and for individuals. Those 'institutional' written records which were indispensable to knowing the rules for the running of whole communities (collections of written law, charters of liberties, different kinds of municipal registers etc.) ought to be distinguished from other, more 'personal' documents. One can think here of the practical use of writing by individuals for their own professional and religious purposes (bookkeeping, testaments, correspondence etc.).[28] Besides written records belonging to the domain of 'pragmatic literacy', other kinds of texts were also produced in town. Was there any connection between practical literacy, literary (and historical) creativity and book production?

Who participated in the production of written records? Here, we think first of the urban chanceries and their personnel, or of notaries. But in how far did these professionals monopolise pragmatic literacy in town? And are their supplementary functions (e.g. as 'literary centres') not exaggerated by today's historians?[29] Was there a connection between the legally-oriented urban

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[26] M. MOSTERT, "Communication, literacy and the development of early medieval society", in: *Communicare e significare nell' alto Medioevo*, 2 vols. (Spoleto, 2005: *Settimane di Studio della Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo* 52), p. 50.

[27] This term was introduced by L.B. MORTENSEN, "The Nordic archbischoprics as literary centres around 1200", in: *Achbishop Absalon of Lund and his World*, ed. K. FRIIS-JENSEN and I. SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN (Roskilde, 2000), p. 143.

[28] It has been noticed that it is almost impossible to distinguish between 'public' and 'private' urban literacy. See Th. BEHRMANN, "Einleitung", p. 2.

[29] Cf. the opinion of Prevenier that "urban chanceries are actually the invention of historians" (W. PREVENIER, "La production et la conservation des actes urbains", p. 563).

chancery and notaries and the other, more or less occasional pen-pushers (the "*Halbgelehrten*",[30] the "*prolétaires d'une sous-culture écrite*"[31]) who were also active in the towns?

The use of the written word was an important (if not dominant) mode of communication in towns, and a crucial factor deciding the model of 'urban' culture.[32] Is this sufficient, however, to conclude the existence of a specifically urban literate mentality? Did urban life provide easier access to the written word than other social environments? Did the town mean a higher level of alphabetization? Also among women? Did it bring bout changes in the forms of piety or in the perception of, e.g. time and space?

All these questions – and many more – need to be addressed to understand the phenomenon of medieval urban literacy.

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[30] U. MEIER, "*Ad incrementum rectae gubernationis*: Zur Rolle der Kanzler und Stadtschreiber in der politischen Kultur von Augsburg und Florenz in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit", in: *Gelehrte im Reich: Zur Social- und Wirkungsgeschichte akademischer Eliten des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. R.Ch. SCHWINGES (Berlin, 1996), pp. 481 ff.

[31] P. CHAUNU, *Le temps des réformes: Histoire religieuse et système de civilisation: La crise de la Chrétienté: L'Éclatement (1250-1550)* (Paris, 1975), p. 20.

[32] See, a.o., "A short list", No. 114.

URBAN LITERACY AND URBAN SECRECY? SOME NEW APPROACHES TO AN OLD PROBLEM

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One of my key questions is: how are the use of literacy and secret information related to each other? If we talk about urban literacy in relation to urban secrecy, this poses general methodological questions. My contribution is merely a suggestion of how to deal with such cases rather than an answer to all problems.

Most of my examples come from the Swiss confederation, and they are mainly illustrative of the fifteenth-century archival situation. Similar cases could presumably be found under different circumstances also in Italy, the Empire or in towns elsewhere. Therefore, these examples are only paradigmatic.

A strong claim I would like to make, is that we should focus on political history – not in the old sense, but in the sense of modern urban cultural history. Let me explain this in a few words. The historical sciences' turn towards culture has new perspectives for the history of political culture in a cultural history of political life. This is true especially when we consider its visuality or mediality, but not only in this way. In contrast to earlier attempts at a history of politics based upon specific events, the approach often chosen nowadays – and the one I would suggest as well – is that of a cultural history of politics that places its object within the context of current, interdisciplinary cultural-scientific knowledge, thus opening up the subject to broader historical interest.

1. URBAN SECRECY AND LITERACY

So what about urban secrecy and literacy then? The topic of secrets and urban literacy poses specific methodological problems for those who investigate its history. Secrets demand decoding, not only in the daily work of secret services but also in that of the historian, who must decode daily practice in the politics of towns, the urban politics of the past. Betrayal, bribery, special codes and spies have existed probably since societies have been in conflict. This was the case in warlike situations or during revolts, or when difficult peace negotiations were necessary. Part of political information was only intended for small groups or specific individuals; much information never found its way to the public, or to adversaries. These small groups increasingly started to control politics, and therefore also the making, using and keeping of the products of literacy.

Information, e.g. about negotiations, about political decision making and about news from outside the city walls, was restricted. But how can one find out secrets when they were meant to be kept secret? How can one decode information which was meant not to be decoded? What techniques, tricks, and means of communication were used to prevent secrets from being revealed to the public, from the enemy, or from future researchers?

I will sketch the problem of encoding and decoding secrets from two perspectives. How were urban secrets kept, decoded, and perceived in the past? And can they be perceived nowadays by us, urban historians? Two features of secrecy will form the focus of this examination: the tension between public and secret diplomacy in late medieval urban politics on the one hand, and non-official secrets in the political field on the other hand. This distinction implies that there was an official or legitimate way of using secrecy as part of policy, but also an unofficial or illegitimate practice that was at times even prosecuted or at least perceived as not properly belonging to day-to-day politics. We will base ourselves on urban sources from fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Switzerland, mainly from the Swiss Diet (*Tagsatzung*) and the network of towns and rural members of the Swiss confederation, but partly also on sources from its political neighbours. I will explore the use of different media. Literacy will be my main focus, but I stress that we should not neglect other media such as oral communication, clothing, architecture, sign language etc.

On the one hand keeping secrets, concealing information, and on the other hand criticizing secret policies and disparaging secrecy, are factors that occur within a single field of tension within politics. Consequently, depending on the political situation and the intention of the official in charge of secrets, the two poles of secret politics and open public critique are variously distant from each other. The question when secrets are allowed, or when critique of secret politics arises, must thus be examined from case to case. For this reason I will refrain from generalizing statements.

In order to bring some clarity to these reciprocally determining factors, it is necessary to consider the question of why it is that something secret comes to light at all and thus, through being written down, gets handed down to us. This is the only way to solve the problem; of course it is only possible when some forms of written remains are found. And here the problems already start. Much was never written down, since contemporaries themselves were aware of the problematic nature of information committed to writing. Not everything was entrusted to the medium of paper or parchment. This should be kept in mind, when we talk about urban literacy as well.

Some older research went so far as to say that what has come down to us in written documents was public, and what was secret was never written down.[1] But this dichotomy between urban literacy and orality cannot be maintained, especially when one takes into account that, particularly in the North Italian communes, increasing quantities of encoded letters and secret writings were part of the practice of urban politics and diplomacy.[2]

Writing definitely became more and more important in towns. Let us think about the masses of materials in urban archives, letters, protocols, records etc. or, as Marco Mostert has put it, "in the Middle Ages, in towns one seems to have had more chance of being confronted with writing

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[1] B.–E. Körber, "Der soziale Ort", pp. 244–258, here p. 257.
[2] Cf. M.M. Bullard, "Secrecy", pp. 77–97.

than elsewhere". Or let us think about urban ways of denouncing heretics and criminals, and the way this affected literate mentalities, when, first in towns such as Venice or Florence and later on also north of the Alps lists of delinquents were written down in the chanceries of every town. But these lists were not public, we should always keep that in mind, they were arcane, or, as in German towns this was called, "*der stat geheim*". Together with the history of scribes and new systems and mentalities of literacy, urban secrets developed. Most town dwellers had no access to these texts – lists, records, letters and charters. The practice of keeping politics secret goes hand in hand with the increase of urban literacy. The Otto di Guardi in Florence or the Venetian Dieci or the Kleiner Rat in other towns only could function within a controllable framework of arcane politics. The Florentine *Libro del chiodo* or the *Catasto* are just some of many examples from south of the Alps. Literacy produced secret denunciation. Florence, e.g. put up letter boxes in which denunciations could be dropped anonymously, the so-called *tambure*.

It is certainly an advantage that, unlike some other media, writing was a fundamental part of secret urban politics. If this were not the case, we historians could not even hope to look for secrets. Fortunately, quite a few written documents have been handed down which provide clues to the politics of secrecy. We should ask the question: how did it come about that documents reporting on secret politics have indeed been handed down to us? In most cases it can probably be assumed that it was a result of miscommunication, insufficient destruction, or accident.

By 'miscommunication' I refer to cases that were uncovered by contemporaries, and that often led to lawsuits. Would we have had sufficient knowledge of the secret proceedings and the concealed signing of a pact between the city of Zurich and Austria in the 1440s if this had not led to a war and peace negotiations between Zurich and the remaining members of the Confederation? The context here was a military conflict. Or would we be so well-informed about the secret policies and forgeries by those in power under mayor Hans Waldmann in Zurich in 1489, if Waldmann had not been overthrown in a urban revolt at the height of his power and sentenced to death? Or would we know about the fact that during these events three false messengers appeared in Zurich on 6 April with the intention of influencing the proceedings against the toppled mayor Waldmann through the carrying of false letters? And that to this end they used a trick and made their clothing wet in the river to create the impression that they were covered with sweat from having travelled a long distance?[3] Probably not. Because if this trick had not been immediately discovered, it would not have entered the narrative of the chronicle of Heinrich Brennwald and would have remained unknown to us. Again the political context is a conflict. Maybe this is typical for the uncovering of secrets and pressures from below.

These are insights into secrets which had already been disenchanted or robbed of their aura of secrecy by contemporaries. This unmasking of secrets tended to result in most cases in their being handed down better, since many of them ended in sentencing.[4] On the other hand, they uncover only one side of the history of political secrets. The other side can be painstakingly reconstructed by the historian through the use of urban administrative and diplomatic written communication, a task made difficult by the often very fragmentary nature of what has come down to us from this sphere by accident. The proceedings of the Diets, e.g. but also those of the city councils formed an *arcanum* in so far as they were not public. For this reason little is known

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[3] Heinrich Brennwald, *Schweizer Chronik*, II, ed. R. LUGINBÜHL (Basel, 1910), p. 314, quoted in V. GROEBNER, *Gefährliche Geschenke*, p. 90.

[4] In the Waldmann-Trial, the winners destroyed some sources. Cf. M. JUCKER, "Negotiating and Establishing Peace"; E. GAGLIARDI, *Dokumente*, I and II.

about their internal matters, the rituals during the negotiations, and about how the protocols and lists were used there. Only during riots or negotiations in court do we get some glimpses of it.

The distinction between official secret policies, intended by the ruling authority and therefore safeguarded – and also in most cases successfully kept secret – and unofficial secret politics, mostly practiced by single individuals, cannot always be made equally clearly. There are definitely gray areas and degrees.

2. THE KEEPING OF RECORDS

Another important aspect of secrecy and literacy is the keeping of the records. Although many records were destroyed, we can nevertheless keep an eye open to get glimpses of how archives were used and built, and who had access to them in the Middle Ages. In the Swiss Confederation, no common archive existed for the records of the Diets until the 1520s. Archives and chanceries, as far as they existed in cities like Zurich, Bern or Lucerne, were also places of secrecy for smaller communes. Uri, e.g. let their charters sometimes be written in Lucerne, although Lucerne was another political entity. It could be very fruitful to investigate the use of urban archives. We should take inventories as mirrors of political organization, as Peter Rück put it. The chancery with its boxes, registers, collections and drawers represented in certain ways the political organization. The inventories displayed homologies with the larger system they served. Thus, the archives mirror the understanding of literacy and its use in an urban context.

It seems important to me to analyse secrecy also in the organization of archives and their structures. This should be done first of all from a *functional* perspective. Why were certain documents kept secret, whereas others were not? For what purpose? What techniques were used to keep records, and which demands came from the authorities and which from the public?

We should, however, also ask *structural* questions, such as: how did different regimes use different ways of organizing their archives? And how did they keep records? How did changing inventories affect institutions and *vice versa*? Did control over archival knowledge contribute to old and new forms of power in politics? If it did not, what does the structure of keeping records represent, if anything? Such questions are barely answered yet. Some of my research has shown that keeping records of the Swiss Diet was often due to political influence and also to archival traditions. Berne, e.g. made copies of the protocols, because the mayor wanted a bound book to keep at home.

We should also be more aware of the use of archives in the *topographical* sense. What kind of buildings were used to keep the records, and where did they stand? And does their position mirror any relation to the arcane? A good example is Lucerne; I am sure there are other examples as well. As Randolph Head has put it:

> Fifteenth-century archival inventories in Lucerne consisted of lists of documents that included copies of the most important charters; the charters themselves were scattered around the city, with the most important preserved in a special treasury, the Wasserturm, in the middle of the Reuss River. There they accumulated in nine boxes and two cabinets, safe from both fire and easy scrutiny. Placement in the Wasserturm visibly demonstrated

that the documents there were a treasure to be guarded, rather than a working administrative collection.[5]

To my understanding, the keeping of the most important records in the middle of the river is not just because of the danger of fire, but also because it is a way of keeping them away from the public. Plunder of archives or chancercies was not rare in these times; maybe the fear of such events let the Lucerne authorities place their holdings away from the public, but still in a very visible place.

3. POLITICAL SECRECY

Political secrecy and secret politics developed within a complex system. Keeping records away from the public, espionage, conversations behind the backs of others, etc. led to a climate of distrust in urban politics generally, and especially in urban diplomacy and outgoing letters. For this reason, long-distance epistolary communication was difficult. The means of transportation were uncertain, too. During wars the robbery of letters and the kidnapping of messengers by hostile powers took place regularly. In addition, spies were hired to steal the messengers' letters or even to murder the messengers. Infringement of a messenger's immunity by foreign powers could lead to war. In the Burgundian war between the confederates and Charles the Bold, the putative murder of Berne's envoys by retainers of Jacob of Savoy, Count of Romont, led to Bern's declaration of war on 24 October 1475, and finally to war itself.[6]

The older research saw secret politics as deviations from the norm, as crisis-like outgrowths of the autumnal Middle Ages nearing their end. In this view the Reformation was seen to first illuminate this corrupt darkness.[7] It is an old image or topos, that has been with us in one way or another since Petrarch. But we should not forget that secrets had their function in official politics. One possible approach to finding out about secrets approved by the authorities is to study the media that were used to this end, and to ask who was behind secrecy. Who produced and used literacy to deceive those who kept secrets? The written production of town councils was done by local scribes. The scribe – the term *secretarius* at least indirectly refers to his obligation to secrecy[8] – was, however, also the point of intersection between the archive, the chancery (or *registratur* as it was often called), the town council and the urban envoys. It was the scribe who ranked certain information as secret, and which he was then obliged to forward to a specific group.[9] In addition, he took care of written correspondence with the other confederation localities, the Diets and with foreign powers. It was the secretaries or scribes who controlled most of the outgoing letters. And they noted down when and to whom letters were sent.

In Berne, to take an example, the letters do not show continuous increase, from a few letters at first to masses of letters at the end of the fifteenth century; their number is due to the scribe in charge at any given time. Nevertheless a tendency towards increased numbers of records can be observed. But on the other hand much still remained in the sphere of oral communication. Instructions to envoys, e.g. were often only given orally. If instructions were given written form

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[5] R. HEAD, "Mirroring governance", p. 321.
[6] E. GAGLIARDI, "Mailänder und Franzosen", I, p. 130.
[7] Cf. E. GAGLIARDI, "Mailänder und Franzosen", I, p. 54.
[8] M.M. BULLARD, "Secrecy".
[9] Luzern, Staatsarchiv, Ratsprotokolle II fol. 36 (1411): "für ein heimlich rât".

at all, they were intentionally kept terse. Their brevity was due to fear of losing letters, and also to secret tactics of delay, directed against the council's interlocutors and one's own envoy. One does sometimes encounter explicit instructions to the envoys to negotiate certain things at the Diets confidentially. These are mostly very short entries containing the German word *heimlich*.[10] The entries usually indicated that the envoys were to speak secretly with other envoys; whether these talks took place at the Diets themselves or in preparatory secret meetings can rarely be determined, since it is not possible to discover what the outcomes were – or the envoys were instructed to keep for themselves certain things that might be communicated to them. Envoys also had official assignments to engage in espionage. Thus, Bern's authorities instructed their envoys – who, during disturbances in Zurich in 1489, were supposed to be mediating a peace – to secretly procure information about the other mediators and the political stance of the other Confederate localities.[11] The Bern envoys were supposed to find out which ambassadors intended to come to Bern, what their position on a prohibition against pensions was, and with which means they were operating. Reciprocal espionage was probably the order of the day, but it is difficult to generalize, since very few explicit instructions of this kind are extant. But we can at least conclude that secret politics were even required by the local authorities from the envoys.

Apart from official, explicit or implicit, secret policies, there was a large gray area. It was, so to speak, semi-official, but also difficult for the authorities to monitor. Many meetings, for example, took place independently of the Diets. Mostly the envoys met in inns, bathhouses, or in private houses. That these informally conducted discussions belonged to the half-official political culture is demonstrated by the rarity of punitive measures against envoys. Only the very gravest of offences were severely punished, and then only as a result of pressure from the incensed population. This indicates that semi-official areas such as secret lobbying outside the Diet, without instructions, also formed part of political communication, and that they were at least tolerated.

4. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude. It is important to give more time to the question, how secrecy and literate mentalities are linked. In an international comparison, the secret politics in the Confederation are less ingenious than for example those in Venice or Florence. The use of secret codes cannot be established for the late medieval Confederation. However, some of the examples given show how strongly the use of secrecy was linked to literate mentalities. In the tension between politics and public critique a culture of keeping secrets arose that was characterized by reciprocal mistrust and surveillance. It seems to me methodologically useful to pose the fundamental question of how secrets were concealed and how they were later dragged out into the light of day. This happened often during revolts or wars, as we have seen. The use of writing affected the mentalities of the public during disturbances. Archives and chanceries were often in danger of plunder by peasants or town-dwellers during revolts, mainly because they kept secret information. The general assumption found in older research that written information belongs properly to the public realm and oral communication to secrecy, could here be shown as unsatisfactory. An evaluation of the extant records does provide clues about secrecy in politics. These clues traverse an arc stretching from officially sanctioned secret politics to secret politics

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[10] Ibid. A. A. A. fol. 33 (19 February 1421); "item des Küngs anbringen, das gros, ist in geheimbd anzuostellen", RM 15, fol. 3. Cf. UP Bd. 44, Nr. 14.

[11] Bern, Staatsarchiv, Deutsches Missivenbuch E fol. 460r (1 May 1489).

that were not tolerated and were at times exposed by contemporaries. Various spaces of secrecy can be established that helped to characterize the structures just described. In most cases, the formation of local and over-regional political opinion was secret.[12]

But why was political information kept secret? Political information was kept secret partly because of political tensions, uproars, and partly because of the danger of letters being stolen or letters and messengers being kidnapped. General mistrust in the Confederation and increasingly strong criticism led ever more to the characterization of political decision-making as secret, and the characterization of secret operations as intolerable. And then there was the development of archives. With the appearance of written documents on paper, which was cheaper than parchment, the city archives emerge. As soon as they exist, I would claim, urban politics become more and more secret. The fear of stolen documents even let the Lucerne authorities place their most important documents in the middle of the river: not a place where a secretary would like to work, I guess. But it symbolizes the authorities' imagination of a secret and safe place away from the public. And this of course also belongs to literate mentalities: secrecy and writing documents go hand in hand with the fear of treachery, bribery and stealing information. Literacy and secrecy are developing in unison. This of course is not a continuous process, but a tendency towards the arcane. Through the interplay of inertia, political pressure, and personalities, real changes in the means employed to access stored documents took place between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries in present-day Switzerland. What took place was not simply a matter of scale: it also embodied critical shifts in how political actors understood their roles, and in how archivally managed knowledge could support their positions.

This brings us back to the key question of Peter Rück. What do changes in archival practice and the use of literacy and secrecy tell us about changes in political culture? I tried to give the beginning of an answer to this question. For the understanding of political secrets and secret politics the study of archival organization is more necessary than ever, as is the study of the use of the archival records within their political contexts.[13] The growth of making, using and keeping records and secrets within urban politics and diplomacy can thus be seen rather as the beginning of an ongoing process than as a crisis, or the end of dark medieval times.

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[12] Zürich, Staatsarchiv, B II. I–Vb Ratsbücher (Stadtbücher) 1314ff.

[13] Cf. R. HEAD, "Mirroring governance".

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URBAN LITERACY IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN: QUESTIONS, RESULTS, PERSPECTIVES

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In the growing bulk of publications on literacy, alphabetization and the use of the written word in medieval Europe, a considerable share has been devoted to Eastern and Central Europe. Although much of the research done in this region is not readily accessible to international scholarship for reasons of language, notable efforts have been made to improve this situation, the collected volume on *The Development of Literate Mentalities in East Central Europe* with its 28 studies being one of the best examples. It is in this spirit of integrating questions and research experiences from the eastern half of the continent into the framework of European development that a small piece of the overall picture, the use of writing in the towns of medieval Hungary is presented here.

1. CONTEXTS AND DEFINITIONS

Although the theme seems to be straightforward enough, practically all the elements of the title require some explanation. In the order of the title itself, first the *urban* variable needs to be considered. For a long time up to the 1980s, several scholars, including György Györffy and Erik Fügedi, have assumed that in the first centuries of Hungarian statehood (from the end of the tenth to the first third of the thirteenth century) towns of an 'oriental' type emerged. They based their assumptions on the relatively large area and dispersed structure of the early towns described by Arab authors and revealed by archaeological excavations. However, in the last few decades, similar settlement structures have been identified for much of continental Europe for the period between the ninth and the eleventh century. This means that the first period of urbanization in Hungary shows common traits with Western and Central Europe, only with a delay of 150 to 200 years. The same statement can be extended in many ways to the later centuries of urban development, too.

To give a very brief summary of this development, one can divide it into two phases, the watershed being the mid-thirteenth century, when a series of new processes started to operate. In the period prior to that date, various 'old centres' can be observed, among which early royal seats took pride of place. Esztergom and Székesfehérvár both fulfilled secular and ecclesiastical functions alike, while Óbuda, the northern part of present Budapest served as a secondary royal

residence at the crossing of the Danube. The set of bishop's seats included fourteen settlements in this period, whereas in the secular administration over fifty county seats with their earthwork fortifications and the adjoining suburban markets played the central role. This system was complemented with a number of other marketplaces as secondary centres, in the vicinity of which one can often find specialized villages of craftsmen or the seat or monastery of a powerful family.

I would be reluctant to term these early centres 'pre-urban', since they fulfilled the central functions needed in their own time. However, I would agree with calling them 'pre-literate', because writing and written administration played a very minor role, if at all, in their internal life and external connections. This was one of the features that changed considerably in the second phase of medieval urban development, which led to the emergence of 'full-fledged towns'. The changes during the reign of King Andrew II (1205-1235) and his successors for most of a century brought about new ideas and, consequently, new attitudes and arrangements. These formed part of the overall structural changes of society, which affected practically every inhabitant of the country, from peasants to nobles, as well as the urban population and those people who were to join their ranks from other strata of society.

As an instrument to achieve these changes, the kings issued an increasing number of urban privileges, to confirm existing development and to promote new sites. Such charters were not unknown to the royal chancery before the Mongol invasion (1241/42), but from the 1240s onwards their number increased and embraced settlements all over the country. Between 1240 and 1270 twenty, and until 1300 a further twelve settlements were given royal privileges. Furthermore, the contents of these documents became more extensive and systematic. The town charters included commercial privileges, allowing for holding weekly markets, annual fairs, and liberating the inhabitants from paying customs duties in a well-defined area; ecclesiastical privileges, that is the right to elect their own parish priest; but first and foremost an extensive set of jurisdictional measures. The exemption from the county leader's authority, the right to elect a local leader (termed *villicus, maior villae,* or *iudex* in the various documents) and the right to be judged by their own court with the involvement of witnesses of the same standing had been cornerstones of urban autonomy for centuries in towns of Western Europe, and were now, for the first time, introduced in Hungarian towns as well.

In our context, the issuing of these charters is important not for their legal significance, but because they introduced 'literate' thinking into a formally 'pre-literate' social context. A community that received a charter had to apply methods and appoint persons for safekeeping and handling it. With time and often with the help of bodies more acquainted with the practice of writing, the towns started to produce their own documents and developed a system of storing and retrieving information from them. This process could last for several decades or even a century, and reached its peak with the appearance of professional scribes employed by the town councils and, closely linked to this, the setting up of register books and other town books of specialized contents from the last decades of the fourteenth century onwards.

The foundations thus laid in the late Middle Ages were so strong that they could carry the weight of the administration in the Early Modern period as well. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, office work in towns increased in its amount, but remained the same in qualitative terms, the same types of books (sometimes even the very same volumes) being used until the intervention of an absolutist state at the end of the seventeenth century. In some cases the late medieval system could fulfil the needs even until the administrative reforms of the late

nineteenth century. The volumes of registers of last wills, the so-called *protocolla testamentorum* of Bratislava (Pressburg, Pozsony), for instance, follow each other in an uninterrupted series from 1429 to 1872. This feature of continuity raises the issue of what upper time limit to choose when studying urban literacy. In order to observe the patterns on an extended body of evidence, I would be in favour of including Early Modern materials in the scope of investigation. This argument may be strengthened by referring to the above-described time-lag in the development of towns in the Carpathian Basin compared to their western counterparts.

Beside the time frame, another challenge to the limits of research is posed by the existence of transitional forms between urban and rural settings. The question of market towns (*Märkte* in German) is not an exclusive phenomenon of Hungarian history, as such settlements under private landownership can be found in several countries. It is often hard to discern those that really fulfilled urban functions. For the Carpathian Basin, András Kubinyi assessed their number around 100, on top of the fifty or so royal free towns. For this, he devised a method of calculation based on a bundle of ten different criteria including administrative, economic and ecclesiastic central functions and geographic centrality. He also included a cultural phenomenon, the number of students attending foreign universities from the given settlement, which indeed reflects the importance of a town in the network of central places. Forms of literacy would be difficult to quantify, but it would be worth taking a closer view in a qualitative way. Differences compared to the literacy of royal towns could derive from the fact that these settlements were subject to and needed to have regular correspondence with the county administration. A further distinction was, that on the local level the administering of justice and the pertaining written tasks were supervised by the landowning nobles. Nevertheless, by the mid-sixteenth century many of these small communities also appear as issuers of documents and start to develop their own internal administration, just as their bigger counterparts did a couple of centuries earlier. This may be a further point in favour of extending the time limits of the inquiry into 'medieval' urban literacy.

The second element of the title is *literacy*, a term which can also profit from some further qualification. In medieval Hungary, the use of the written word was very much confined to legal and pragmatic issues, in towns and in other social contexts alike. The materials of the town archives consist almost exclusively of privileges, judiciary records, statutes and various accounts. Correspondence with the ruler, with other towns and with the neighbouring noblemen is also centred on legal and economic issues. Wherever archival materials of smaller communities or (very rarely) of private persons within the towns have come down to us, they also bear witness to litigation or economic activity. A good example is the recently published material of the German butchers' guild of Buda, which fortunately survived the period of the Ottoman occupation because the masters saved their chest when they fled from the endangered capital in 1529. This assemblage consists of eight charters of privileges transcribed and reconfirmed by a series of subsequent kings, plus a book that contains entries on rents of shambles, loans and other financial issues.

This concentration on pragmatic matters might even be seen in a positive light, as Anna Adamska and Marco Mostert view it in their Preface to the volume mentioned at the beginning of this essay: "The use of writing in daily life (pragmatic literacy) is considered more important for the development of literate mentalities than the use of literate behaviour in matters religious or scholarly."[1] Nevertheless, the almost complete lack of literary genres flourishing in towns

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[1] A. ADAMSKA and M. MOSTERT, "Preface", in: *The Development of Literate Mentalities in East Central Europe*, p. 3.

of other European regions in the late Middle Ages, for instance town chronicles or the praise of towns, not to speak about poetry and other literary work, shows the limitations of literate behaviour in medieval Hungary and restricts the scope of modern research.

These limitations apply especially to the secular sphere. Apart from this, in practically each town there existed a rich and varied tradition of ecclesiastical literacy, which is only seldom considered in its urban context. The liturgical books and collections of sermons are more often investigated in the context of intellectual history, theology or codicology, with little regard to their lay audiences. Unfortunately much of the original stock fell victim to destruction for various reasons. However, the remaining pieces, together with the scrutiny of other written records, for instance last wills of burghers who had ordered their copying or illumination, can give insights into lay and ecclesiastical interaction and the social uses of the written word. An excellent example of such an approach is Juraj Šedivý's recently published monograph on the literacy of the Pressburg Collegiate Chapter.

Finally, one must also keep in mind that literacy in towns was not restricted to parchment and paper. Other forms and material manifestations of writing on stone, wood or metal were integral parts of the same intellectual framework. One just needs to think of the inscriptions on tombstones, church bells and baptismal fonts, which are seldom regarded as witnesses of the alphabetization process. Šedivý's above-mentioned book is pioneering also in this respect: as part of his account, he presents the epigraphic remains as yet another form of the chapter's written culture. New archaeological excavations in Buda, the medieval capital, also underline the importance of non-paper-based writing. During the excavation of the Carmelite friary in the north-eastern suburb, Judit Benda found slate tablets with fragments of German words, showing the educational practice and testifying to the fact that these friars were part of the German province of the Carmelites. Another slate tablet, this time excavated by András Végh, from a well of a private house in the foreground of the Royal Palace of Buda, turned out to be in Hebrew letters and revealed the name of its owner, Chajjim Katz. This proved, together with other datable materials, that the property was in Jewish ownership at the end of the fourteenth century – a conclusion that was confirmed a year later by finding the foundations of the synagogue in the same street.

The third main element of the title, the Carpathian Basin, also deserves a brief comment. It is well known, that the territory of medieval Hungary is nowadays shared between eight different countries, all of which have their own perception of their medieval past and their own traditions of researching them. The situation is made even more complex by the geographically uneven survival of the sources. Due to the Ottoman occupation and the following reconquest campaign, most collections of urban records on the territory of present-day Hungary (with the exception of Sopron) were destroyed, whereas the towns in the northern and eastern parts of the country, in modern Slovakia and Romania, got away with only minor losses. This means that anyone doing research on the Carpathian Basin must generalize from these surviving pieces of evidence. Furthermore, whereas the Middle Ages had its own *lingua franca*, Latin, and in the urban context German functioned in a similar way, the modern researcher would need to master almost a dozen languages to follow the current results of research. Paradoxical as it may sound, often it seems to be easier to return to the roots and read the sources themselves, than to make use of our colleagues' achievements. Nevertheless, it makes little sense to use the present borders as boundaries of research areas; instead, cooperation is the only viable path to proceed.

2. RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

In the following section of this essay my intention is to give an overview of the results achieved so far in the research of urban literacy in the Carpathian Basin. This will not be a full historiographical survey arranged in chronological order – the space at my disposal would doom any such attempt to fail – but rather a thematic sketch of the most important fields. Most items referred to here were not conceived under the label of 'urban literacy', but created as contributions to more traditional fields of study, such as diplomatics, palaeography, or epigraphy. Nevertheless, the knowledge amassed in them can be put to very good use also when one poses questions on literacy and attitudes towards the written word.

The most extensively treated component of urban literacy is undoubtedly the archival material. Until now, for a full overview of the available sources one has had to rely on the registers of archival fonds provided by the archives themselves, which are often only available on the spot. In the near future this situation will change favourably with the publication of the next volume of the Hungarian *historical bibliography*, initiated and for a long time edited by the late Domokos Kosáry. This project, which surveys all relevant materials and institutions in the Carpathian Basin, will provide in its forthcoming Volume 4 a concise description of the holdings of all municipal archives. The already published third volume deals with the county archives in a similar way, which, due to the close connections of some towns to the county administration, can also yield useful data.

A further commendable feature of current research is a revival of *source publications*. Both volumes of the Kosáry-series mentioned above provide bibliographical data of the available source publications as well, which makes it unnecessary to give detailed references here. Instead, let me present a brief overview of the main tendencies. Although it does not sound entirely logical, this section of historiography has been strongly influenced by the political situation of our region. The first golden age of transcribing and printing materials from town archives were the three or four decades before World War I. This coincided with the flourishing of positivism and its sensitivity towards data and detail. Compared to this, the interwar period showed a clear decline, when only isolated local initiatives survived, and even those with the ideological background of backing up modern claims for the ownership of a territory. It is explicitly stated, for instance, in the introduction of Jenő Házi's otherwise excellent thirteen-volume publication of Sopron's medieval archival material, that his purpose was to strengthen the fidelity of the contemporary inhabitants of the town towards Hungarian statehood.

After 1945, source publication as a genre was regarded as of secondary importance compared to more conceptually oriented monographs and studies. Initiatives, if any, came from abroad. The revival of the series *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, the edition of charters concerning the Saxons of Transylvania, who also populated most of the medieval towns in that region, was due to scholars who emigrated from Romania to Germany. The edition of several town books and mining laws from towns in present-day Slovakia was initiated by the Finnish-born scholar Ilpo Tapani Piirainen, from a strictly linguistic point of view (i.e. without historical apparatus), who always added the subtitle "*Ein Beitrag zum Frühneuhochdeutschen in der Slowakei*" to his publications. His recently published register of all German-language manuscripts in Slovakia also takes the modern borders of Slovakia as the framework of his data collection.

1989 proved to be a turning point in source editions, too. New series have been launched in several countries, and international cooperation has been strengthened. As one of the most extensive undertakings, the enterprise of the University of Szeged with the title *Materialien zur Geschichte der Geistesströmungen des 16.–18. Jahrhunderts in Ungarn* can be mentioned, which involved collecting materials from practically all countries of the Carpathian Basin. At present, we are experiencing the 'digital turn', just like anywhere else in the world. The most recent source editions, like the above-mentioned materials of the Buda butchers, often contain a digital appendix, or are exclusively in digital form, like the customs registers of Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben) attached to Mária Pakucs-Willcocks' book. Furthermore, from the end of 2010, the entire medieval holdings of the National Archives of Hungary are made available on high-resolution digital photos, with more or less detailed summaries on the Archive's website (http://www.mol.arcanum.hu/dldf). This site will also include photos of documents related to medieval Hungary kept abroad.

Turning now to other fields of textual studies, *codicology* has had relatively little to offer. The catalogues of modern collections contain only scant materials of urban origin. One of the notable exceptions is the 75-volume library of the parish church of Bardejóv (Bartfeld, Bártfa), which was moved, together with its monumental lime-wood chest, to the National Museum in Budapest in 1915. Another possibility has been the reconstitution of the former stocks of medieval urban libraries, a task that Juraj Šedivý undertook for the Collegiate Chapter of Bratislava, virtually uniting in his work the volumes dispersed nowadays in several different collections. A third direction of research, painstaking but rewarding, has been the collection of fragments of codices later used for bookbinding, a work that has been carried out for several decades by the project *Fragmenta et codices in bibliothecis Hungariae* of the *Res libraria Hungariae* research group of the National Széchényi Library in Budapest. The best results in connecting the fragments to local literacy can be achieved if the place of secondary use is identical with that of the primary one. This seems to have been the case in Sopron, where several fragments of medieval liturgical books were used for binding archival materials.

Another field of traditional textual scholarship with ample urban connotations is *epigraphy*. As I have briefly discussed above when surveying the forms and materials of literacy, inscriptions preserved on stone or metal objects have a rich research potential. So far, several specialized collections of material have been assembled or are under way. Zoltán Váradi and Pál Lővei have collected the inscriptions of gravestones, also paying attention to their art historical qualities and to the social status of the persons that they commemorate. Juraj Gembický and Juraj Šedivý have collected epigraphic materials from present-day Slovakia, the former being especially interested in church bells. Bells and baptismal fonts have been collected and published for Transylvania by Elek Benkő. When dealing with inscriptions on metal objects, the publications of coins can also be relevant, especially with regard to those few towns that were sites of minting. The work of Lajos Huszár on minting in Buda is the most comprehensive study in this field. Sphragistics can yield data both on the town seals and their inscriptions, and on their use on various kinds of documents, as studies on Buda, Esztergom, Székesfehérvár and some other places have shown.

Another branch of scholarship dealing with scripts that can eventually contribute to the study of urban literacy is *palaeography*. In the last few decades, several general overviews of the palaeography of the Carpathian Basin have been compiled (see L. Veszprémy's article in the present bibliography), which provide guidance to the analysis of urban documents as well. Detailed case studies by Jenő Házi and Károly Mollay and by Darina Lehotská and Juraj Šedivý highlight the development in Sopron and Bratislava respectively. Both towns testify that the

identification of hands with documents and scribes can shed light on the professionalization of writing and the way work was distributed in larger towns among a growing and ever more differentiated chancery personnel. The same issue has been taken up from a social historical point of view by older and more recent *archontological* studies, which collect data on notaries, scribes and other personnel. Such information is available for Banská Bystrica (Neusohl/ Besztercebánya), Bratislava, Cluj (Klausenburg, Kolozsvár), Kosice (Kaschau/Kassa), Kőszeg (Güns), Sibiu and Sopron, but the lists before the sixteenth century are rather incomplete.

Beside the examples listed here, there are several further fields of study which can significantly broaden our picture on urban literacy, such as art history, economic history, legal history and linguistics (especially historical sociolinguistics), to name just a few. Besides the in-depth inventorying of the extant archival holdings, archaeology can considerably increase the amount – and variety – of materials at our disposal.

3. PERSPECTIVES AND POSSIBLE RESEARCH AGENDAS

Besides continuing the work on processing the primary sources, the results briefly reviewed above allow us to pose more complex questions as well. In the last section of my paper, I would like to point out some of the questions that can form part of a future research agenda.

The first and perhaps most seminal question is to investigate the role that literacy played in the *process of urbanization* in medieval Hungary. As we saw above, one of the consequences of the 'urban boom' of the thirteenth century was the appearance of urban literacy, which increased the efficiency of administration and strengthened the corporate identity of the town community. Receiving privileges and experiencing their value and practical use fostered a new attitude towards documents. Safekeeping, consulting and producing records were important elements of emerging urban literacy, which contributed to towns becoming non negligible partners in communication with the king and the nobility. Dealing with literacy issues can also give a new meaning to legal documents in urban studies. In contrast to the old legalistic approach, they have to be seen not necessarily as preconditions of urban status, but as important indicators of the level a given settlement reached.

The second item on the research agenda can be to look at various forms of *interaction*. The most decisive one of these was, especially at an early phase of urban development, the *cooperation between lay and secular literacy*. This owes its importance to an organisational form peculiar to the Carpathian Basin: the so-called places of authentication (*loca credibilia*). These institutions were ecclesiastical bodies: chapters and convents, which issued authentic documents in cases involving two outside parties, just as notaries public did in other parts of Europe. Their special function was due to their almost exclusive expertise in writing in the first centuries of Hungarian statehood. Thus, they could offer their services to the newly emerging town authorities as well. The two best-researched examples are again Sopron and Bratislava. In the former case, the town cooperated with the Knights Hospitallers. They were settled by King Béla IV in the northern suburb of the fortified county seat and who played a role in issuing the town's charters from the late 1260s up to 1351. In the latter town it was the collegiate chapter, with whom the town shared its main parish church, which provided the town with manpower for writing up to the mid-fourteenth century. After the town set up its own chancery, the chapter reduced its involvement in communal literacy, but did not stop it completely. Similar interaction can be observed in the case of the town of Cluj and the convent of the nearby Cluj-Manaştur (Kolozsmonostor).

A connection emerging from the cooperation between towns and places of authentication is the *link between scriptoria and chanceries*, that is, between book culture and pragmatic literacy. This means that even if book hands and charter hands were distinct from each other in palaeographical terms, the same persons or the same workshops could be behind them. This was nicely proved by Juraj Šedivý in case of the Bratislava chapter by surveying the entire written legacy of this ecclesiastical body. That the 'audience', i.e. the users of both forms of literacy, often overlapped, can be proven by those instances, when burghers ordered in their last wills (committed to writing by the town notary) to make liturgical books for the use of the local chapter, parishes or altars. An even more telling example is that of Liebhard Egkenfelder, notary of Bratislava (d. 1457), who not only owned a library of 38 hand-written books, but copied several of those himself.

A different kind of interaction can be observed *between the royal administration and the town chancery*, again in case of Bratislava in the 1420s and 1430s, when King Sigismund set up and extended his residence in the castle next to the town. The royal chancery did not contribute directly to the work of the town administration, but provided a model for more sophisticated record-keeping. This resulted in setting up thematic town books in the Bratislava chancery in the very same decades. Unfortunately, the archives of the other two royal seats of the period, Buda and Visegrád, have not come down to us, so it is hard to tell if the royal chancery played a similar model role in the pragmatic literacy of those places as well. The detailed instructions regarding the keeping of town books in the early fifteenth-century law code of the town, the so-called Ofner Stadtrecht, seem to confirm this assumption.

One could go on and list several other forms of interaction. Some of these are more technical, such as the overlap between town books and individual documents, where the task is to establish what was copied from one to the other, why and how. Others go further to the roots: how did schooling and pragmatic literacy co-exist, not only on the level of writing instruction, but also by teaching elements of customary law that enabled the pupils to use and even to produce charters. Yet others lead us to the social use of writing, as in the case of craftsmen, whose guilds were based on written statutes and who often needed to 'sign' their products but were often illiterate – which brings us to the vast field of the interactions between orality and literacy.

As a peculiar example of the *interaction between pragmatic literacy and spiritual and material culture*, I would like finish this essay by referring to the case of liturgical books dismantled and reused for the binding of archival material. The fate of these parchment leaves, which were turned from mediators of spiritual culture to material covers of more down-to-earth pieces of pragmatic writing, reveals two stories at once. First, it tells about the 'life and death' of several liturgical manuscripts in the town, and secondly, parallel to this, it also informs us about the growing need to produce and safeguard documents in the local archives.

From describing the particular case of urbanization in the Carpathian Basin, the line of thought led us to cases and issues that are familiar to most readers of this essay. My intention was indeed to show that, although towns in Hungary had a development of their own, questions arising in connection with their literacy are not unlike those in other towns of medieval Europe. Thus the example of this region and its towns can broaden the framework of research and at the same time profit from more general approaches and results.

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URBAN LITERACY IN POLAND

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As everywhere in Europe at the time, from the end of the thirteenth century in the medieval towns of Poland one notices a significant increase of writing as a tool used for administrative and economic purposes, and also in social communication.[1] This came about through the development of parish schools in the bigger cities from the thirteenth century onwards. At the same time there was an increase in the number of literate people – people who were able to read and write, or who possessed at least the skills necessary for reading. In the fourteenth century, writing was a basic means of expression both in religious and public life, in politics, in law, and in the culture of the towns of the region. Literacy led to a growing demand for well-educated people; it gave rise to the creation of new professions such as those of scribes – a job done by lay people (or by people referred to as *clerici uxorati*) – illuminators, bookbinders and others. These professions appeared on a larger scale at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, first mainly in Cracow (the capital of Poland at the time and an important, cultural, scientific, political and church centre), then also in other Polish cities (Poznań, Gdańsk, Lwów, Płock, Toruń and Warsaw). These new professionals of the written word, together with poor clergy, teachers or students, mainly dealt with copying decorative liturgical codes and legal, medical and religious texts.

The biggest influence on the development of reading and writing skills, however, was due to the work of local authorities, who started to use writing on a large scale in the thirteenth century. The first visible evidence of this activity were town books with various contents (the oldest of these books were written as early as the thirteenth century). From the fourteenth century, all books written in Polish urban chanceries were divided into three basic groups: general books of the council (collections of rights and privileges, of the town authorities' resolutions, protocols, elections of town authorities, lists of citizens, etc.), administrative and financial books (books registering income and expenses, tax books, books of the town's authorities, etc.) and court books. Some of them – particularly those containing copies of privileges, books of town laws, or tenement books – were beautifully decorated. As examples may be quoted the book of town laws of Głubczyce from 1421, the Book of the Old Town of Elbląg from the same year, the book of the town privileges of Legnica from the first half of the fifteenth century, and the book of rights and privileges of Cracow written by Baltazar Behem, richly decorated with scenes from everyday life.

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[1] I will use the term 'medieval Polish towns' also to refer to urban centres in Silesia and the Teutonic State in Prussia.

From the thirteenth century dates the oldest preserved information about the existence of a profession of scribes, with the work being done by hired workers. Until town halls were built in the urban centres, in which separate rooms were reserved for writing offices and archives, such rooms had been located in parish churches or in the houses of mayors or scribes. Originally the town chanceries employed only one notary; however, with time the number of notaries increased. Clerical personnel was recruited from the inhabitants of a town or from the region, seldom from abroad. Supposedly the profession was hereditary and was handed on from one generation to the next in certain families. The decisive factors for employing someone in this position were, apart from trust, qualifications from a parish school, a cathedral or college school, or sometimes from a university. Another factor was experience.

Sometimes, due to financial or family reasons, clerks made a decision to change their place of employment, moving from one town to another. This brought about the transfer of certain methods and customs, or even the keeping of all series of books to which a notary had been accustomed. The effect was standardization of the work in writing offices in any given area.

The activities of the town notaries resulted in the production of written records. Sometimes they also created unofficial records. If a town notary wanted to do his job well, he had to take care of keeping the books, editing documents, providing the office with different texts and writing materials for himself or for his townsmen (legal books, formularies, ceremonies, customs at election time and other ceremonies, records about current events in the town and country, etc.) As an example of such extra activities may be quoted the notary of the Old Town of Toruń, Waltherus Echardi, who in the years 1400-1402 compiled a copy of Magdeburg (Meideborg) law and created the Toruń formulary. Another example is Blasius Preusse, from Elbląg, who was the author of one of the editions of the Lübeck law. Yet another example is Konrad Bitschin, who, having moved from Gdańsk to Chełmno, produced a collection of local privileges, continued the chronicle of Peter of Duisburg, and wrote an encyclopedia of the conjugal life (*De vita coniugali*). However, unlike the large Western towns (such as Strasbourg, Cologne, Bremen, Lübeck, Magdeburg, Augsburg or Nürnberg), where town histories, and even world chronicles, were produced quite early, in the Polish and Prussian towns historiographical activity developed much slower. Even in the largest towns of fourteenth-century Poland records of current events were not kept systematically – except for those produced in monasteries, which are outside our present interest. From Gdańsk survive only a few unrelated records about the construction of the church of the Virgin Mary, the town walls, floods and the fire of the castle. It was not until the fifteenth century that some records appeared in the area which could have served as annals. They were factual, stylistically brief, and objective. A further development of history writing occurred in Polish towns in the mid-fifteenth century, when in Legnica Ambrosius Bitschen's chronicle occurred, and when in Gdańsk, during the thirteen-year war (1454-1466) a chronicle of the war was written by Johannes Lindau, a town notary. These works meant to record events. From the war period we can also find a few poems and songs; after the war there appeared more numerous private annals. It must be noted that creating such chronicles was the initiative of their authors, not that of the town authorities. It is assumed that works of this kind were not aimed at the wide audience, but were intended for members of the town authorities, to help them to run and represent the town, and to conduct legal cases. That is why they could have been officially considered a secret.

However, town councils and offices were not the only places where such records were created. Sometimes they were created by private people: merchants, craftsmen and members of the local authorities other than town notaries. This is connected with a breakthrough observed in

Northern Germany around the mid-thrieteenth century (in Silesia, the Teutonic State in Prussia and the Polish lands the phenomenon took place later), when merchants started to use writing on a large scale, mainly for correspondence and trade books. A spinoff of this was the recording of facts concerning the life of the merchant's family, and also of important political, economic and religious events in the town or region. These records used both written and oral information; this information might also concern the world farther afield. In Polish towns, records of this kind appeared relatively late. Among the earlier works are included the order by a Sandomierz townsman, Mikołaj from Pacanów, to translate Saxon-Magdeburg law into Latin for his own purposes. This law was used in the area. Sometimes (and this is evidence of a scribe's sense of humour) the record finished with a joke or a funny commentary in its colophon, for example: "It is good when copyists drink good wine" ("*Most est scriptorum vinum bene sumere bonum*"). From the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, ever more townsmen were owners of books. An example is the collection of twenty juridical, educational, literary and religious books owned by Mikołaj Wiśliczek of Cracow. He was *magister artium*, the head of the village of Bodzanowo, town councillor and deputy chief officer of a group of villages in the Highest Court of German Law in Cracow castle.

Urban written culture in medieval Poland was inspired mainly by the models from Western Europe, more in paricular those of the Hanseatic towns, with which many urban centres maintained close economic and social contacts (Braniewo, Chełmno, Elbląg, Gdańsk, Toruń, Cracow and Wrocław were also members of the Hansa). Although the writing processes in Polish medieval towns started at a slow pace, in time in most of the towns the customs of writers became standardized, which can be considered evidence of the towns' growing familiarity with writing, and consequently its growing importance in town life.

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CIVIC LITERACY IN LATER MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

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In 1516 Erasmus published *Utopia* by Thomas More in Leuven (Brabant). Utopia contains a vision for the perfect society which has at its heart a perfect city. Scholars have debated at length the various sources of Thomas More's inspiration, locating his ideas in a revival of interest in Plato and Greek learning, in northern Christian humanism, in his experience of Carthusian monasticism and his experience of the politics of the royal court.

Yet my interest in Utopia is rather different. In an article published in 2001 I argued that we needed to take account of Thomas More's experience as a leading citizen of London (England).[1] *Utopia,* both in the rhetorical forms which More used in its composition, and in the ideas of social justice which he examined within it, was strongly rooted in and inflected through his experience as a London magistrate, in which he was charged with both making and administering London law. In writing *Utopia* Thomas More explicitly drew on the materials in London's many registers of law and custom accumulated since the thirteenth century. His new learning enabled him to recognise London law as a faint reflection of a discourse on classical civic virtue inherited by civic administrators through their training in the *ars dictaminis*. His experience as a magistrate taught him about the problematic (and sometimes humorous) situations encountered in the practical applications of those virtues in the daily running of a great and complex medieval city. So he composed Utopia in part to explore those tensions of city life between pragmatism and idealism, and this was an interest that he shared, of course, with his friends and collaborators in continental Europe.

Writing this article on the specifically civic context of Utopia has encouraged me to think more broadly about the development of civic literacy in later medieval England which has to be set (as Utopia was) within a much wider understanding of comparative European civic literacy. By civic literacy I mean the capacity of urban governments to generate both records and archives as part of their processes of self-government, and also the uses of that writing in creating a sense of identity and purpose within a civic community. In the rest of this short presentation I am going to highlight possible research in three areas: changes in the scope and function of civic literacy over time, regional variation in cultures of civic literacy within England and the integration of civic literacy with the material culture of the city.

Volume One of the *Cambridge Urban History of England* now provides a strong and detailed history of the extent of urbanisation in medieval England, while the extent of surviving records

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[1] "Thomas More's Utopia and Medieval London", in: *Pragmatic Utopias*, ed. R. HORROX and S. REES JONES (Cambridge, 2001).

has been well charted through the cataloguing of local borough and county archives, in the publication series of local history societies, and through the work of the national Historic Manuscripts Commission which began reporting on surviving local archives in 1870. Professor Geoffrey Martin, CBE (1928-2007), Keeper of the Public Records from 1982-88, also deserves a special mention as the British historian who has most systematically studied the development of medieval borough records in Britain in general and in his own native counties of Essex and Suffolk in particular.[2] As a consequence the volume of surviving medieval English civic records is well charted, and we can detect significant shifts in their nature, organisation and use between 1200 and 1500. The earliest records produced *by* urban administrations often take the form of lists (such as lists of those belonging to the burgess community or merchant guild), or lists of contributors to taxes. By the middle of the thirteenth century greater volumes of legal records survive, in particular registrations of titles to property and contracts together with lists of cases heard before the borough court. Some towns, including London and Ipswich, were also compiling lists of legal customs, but often these early rolls of custom have been lost and it is not until the last decades of the thirteenth century and the early fourteenth that we find new registers of civic custom being compiled in book form in a number of English towns. With the arrival of registers of customs and ordinances we also find more inventive civic writing such as the compilation of civic chronicles (for example in London and York) and the development of the index to help readers locate materials within books. During the fourteenth century city officials were increasingly required to deposit all their records in civic archives when they left office, and larger numbers of administrative staff were employed to keep the expanding collections of records, manage them in archives and provide access to the public. It is clear too that subsidiary officials within the town were also keeping written records by the fourteenth century, and in particular we have increasing evidence of the use of written records by trade and craft guilds, some of which, especially in London, had developed quite sophisticated court systems and archives and required high standards of literacy of their members.

As elsewhere in Europe, the century after the Black Death saw a particularly rapid development in the sophistication and range of both record keeping and archive management. This proliferation of records meant that by 1400 the town clerk, or secretary, was often a powerful figure in urban government, and the imprint of different town clerks can clearly be detected in the record cultures developing in different towns. John Carpenter of London or Roger Burton of York may not be as famous their contemporary, Leonardo Bruni Chancellor of Florence, but both had a decisive influence on the reconstruction of their city's archives and were employed in the writing of civic history and custumals for propaganda purposes.

Indeed whereas earlier civic registers had tended to be compiled mainly of records of decisions that had already been made, by the fifteenth century there is a significant increase in the recording of the *processes* through which decisions were reached, often with the explicit agenda of combating sedition and disorder. Town clerks began to keep records of council meetings, of who was present and of what their opinions were, and to keep copies of correspondence with third parties involved in reaching decisions. Sometimes, as in the case of protracted disputes in Norwich and Coventry in the early fifteenth century, these records contain direct quotation of speeches made. A fascination with speech, and the control of speech through record, seem to be new features of fifteenth-century civic registers, which coincided with increased concern about the government of speech in the confessional, the town court and even the street. It

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[2] Timesonline Obituary, 31 January 2008. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article3278657.ece

is perhaps not surprising therefore that it is from this same period that we also begin to find extensive written scripts and stage directions for the performance of civic processions, pageants and plays appearing in civic registers, such as the texts of four cycles of Mystery Plays from northern towns which were written down from the 1470s so that civic officials could check the performance of the plays and control the speech of the actors.

This evolution of civic literacy from a relatively simple record of past events and speech, to the employment of records as active agents in the staging and manipulation of future civic processes and speech, is something that could be a very fruitful area of comparative study, and which should take account of both the content of the records but also the rhetorical forms and languages of record.

Sheila Lindenbaum has led the way in her article on 'London texts and literate practices' published in the *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature* (1998), and many literary scholars are now beginning to engage with the rich textual cultures of the city of London, in particular, in their exploration of the historical context and historical resonance of the writing of Geoffrey Chaucer and his near contemporaries in later fourteenth and fifteenth century London. Indeed there are good arguments for suggesting that London, because of its size, political influence, affluence and access to Europe enjoyed the most innovative civic culture in England from which other towns took their lead. However it would be wrong to allow preoccupation with London's outstanding literary output to entirely colour our view of English civic literacy.

The imagination of English culture as monolithic and centred on London has long been a dominant feature of English historiography and there is no doubt that over the course of the middle ages provincial cities adopted many aspects of London practice in their cultures of civic literacy. However, whatever the tendencies towards centralisation provided by a strong royal government in a small kingdom, there is no doubt that there were still widely disparate regional cultures in the language, form and use of civic writing. Caroline Barron has uncovered a rich culture of the informal use of writing in London politics, through the casting of bills written in English on the walls of city streets as early as the 1380s, but in York there is no evidence for such practices. While there is much evidence of concern with seditious *speech* in York there is as yet none of the casting of seditious *written bills* before the later fifteenth century. York thus appears to have enjoyed a more orally based political culture for longer than did London. It was among the last of the larger English cities to create formal custumals (in the 1370s) and it made but sparing use of them. York's civic clerks also persisted in using Latin and French to a greater extent and for longer into the fifteenth century than did London. The differences in local English civic cultures may well have been influenced by the ways in which provincial towns interacted with each other and there is a clear argument to be made for regional groupings in the cultures of English towns. But it is also possible that some of the varieties of English local culture might be explained in terms of the varying degrees of contact that different regions had with different areas of continental Europe, as well as with other non-English parts of the British Isles. English culture was not entire within itself, but peripheral to a number of different but intersecting European cultural networks. Norwich, for example, may have had more in common with Flanders than it did with Bristol, whose major trading contacts were with Ireland, south-west France and the Iberian peninsula.

My final question for exploring English archival culture is the degree to which changing practices of civic literacy intersected with the material cultures of cities. We can observe that the two periods in which we can detect a 'leap forward' in civic literacy coincided with significant

changes in the civic landscape. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with the creation of new civic marketplaces and the provision of what were often the first public civic buildings in the larger towns, and in the post-plague period with the construction of a much more elaborate range of civic buildings together with the first construction of public buildings in a larger number of smaller towns and even large villages in the countryside.

We are only just beginning to compile data on the extent of this new civic architecture but questions about the ways in which these buildings interacted with the burgeoning cultures of civic literacy are at an even more primitive stage compared to work in the early modern period. We need to know more about the location of record offices within developing town plans, about the design of buildings used to accommodate records as archival administration grew more sophisticated and we need to know more about the archival furniture in which records were kept and used. How many archival chests like the wooden archive chest of the Mercers of York, or the iron archive chest of the London Guildhall survive? (*Figs 1 and 2*) Answering such questions would enable us to understand better the changing cultures of secrecy and public access in both the generation and the use of civic records which the texts themselves have already begun to raise.

There has been much excellent work done on particular town archives but fewer studies which seek to study the development of civic literacy comparatively, and much of that comparative

Fig 1. Fourteenth-century archive chest, Merchant Adventurers' Hall, Fossgate, York.
http://picasaweb.google.com/xorgnz/2007061722York#5085280570285184690

Fig 2. London's Common Chest, formerly in the Guildhall, now in the Museum of London.
http://golondon.about.com/od/londonpictures/ig/Medieval-London/Common-Chest.htm

treatment has focussed on legal history, from Mary Bateson's compilation of *Borough Customs*, to Ballard and Weinbaum's work on *borough charters*, to a number of important articles by Geoffrey Martin on the registration of deeds of title, on borough court rolls and on the records of boroughs in the Domesday Book. Richard Britnell has added an important study of the range of pragmatic literacy in medieval England and conducted extensive work on the development of financial as well as court records in towns in both Essex and Durham. However, with the important exceptions of Geoffrey Martin and Richard Britnell, scholars have generally merely mined English civic records for data for studying urban history and we lack a comparative history of the broader significance of England's civic literacies. Developing that comparative context will require that we take account of English towns' diverse contacts with each other, but also with different regions of continental Europe.

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LITERATE MENTALITIES IN FRENCH AND BELGIAN TOWNS
IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

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Over the past decades, research on medieval urban literacy has generally focussed on the institutional aspects of pragmatic literacy, that is, the ways in which towns and cities generated and used written records on the one hand, and the way they kept and organized their archives on the other. In this paper, we will take a different approach, looking at early traces of what Michael Clanchy and others have called 'literate mentalities'.[1] The emergence of such a mentality within a community or a social group can be measured by the growing importance attached to literate modes of communication. Rather than giving a general survey of current knowledge about the use of literate practices in towns in present-day Belgium and France during the twelfth century, we have chosen to elaborate on a few examples from the county of Flanders (Ghent) and Capetian France (Tours and the Paris region).[2]

1. THE GHENT SCHOOL DISPUTE

Shortly before 1179, a dispute arose between the town and the burghers of Ghent on the one hand and the count of Flanders and the local St. Peter's Abbey on the other about the right to open schools in the town and its suburb. According to a charter of William, archbishop of Reims, who had been informed of this by Count Philippe of Alsace, the burghers of the town, arrogant as they were because of their wealth and their stone houses that resembled fortified towers, had usurped the *regimen scholarum*. In the town of Ghent this had traditionally belonged to the church of St. Pharahildis in the count's castle. The benedictine monks of St. Peter's also complained about what they called 'lay violence' in this matter and asked Pope Alexander III to restore their monopoly on schools in the suburb under their jurisdiction. The dispute began after a disastrous fire had ravaged Ghent in 1176. During this fire, the church of St. Pharahildis and its archives had been destroyed. In the eyes of the burghers this apparently meant that the church no longer had written proof of its rights over the schools. A few months later, the count departed on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which lasted for most of 1177 and 1178. Advantage was taken of his prolonged absence not only to open schools, but also to change the administrative regime he himself had imposed on them in the early 1170s – presumably because the original of the so-called Great Borough Charter ('Grote Keure') was also lost in the fire. On his return in 1178, Philippe of Alsace vigorously reasserted his authority. The Great Borough Charter

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[1] M. CLANCHY, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1983), pp. 185 ff.
[2] Georges Declercq is responsible for the first part of this paper, Walter Ysebaert for the second.

was reissued as the norm for criminal law and procedure in the city, and a separate legal text, with new and severe additional provisions, was promulgated by the count. Moreover, a new and imposing castle, a landmark that still dominates modern-day Ghent, was built next to the church of St. Pharahildis in order, as a contemporary chronicler put it, to restrain the arrogance of the burghers. As for the schools, however, the Flemish count seems to have worked towards a compromise to end the dispute. He bestowed the direction of the schools in Ghent on one of his clerics, the notary Simon, and stipulated that from now on no one be allowed to open schools in Ghent or its suburb without Simon's approval. In this way, the burghers obtained the right they had claimed, even if conditionally, whereas the church of the count's castle, in the person of the notary Simon, also saw its rights assured. This solution clearly did not satisfy the town authorities, for after the death of Philippe of Alsace in 1191 they forced his widow Mathildis and the new count of Flanders, Baldwin VIII, to recognize in a great charter of liberties that if someone wanted to open a school and he had the knowledge and the means to do so, he was allowed to proceed without any precondition.

This so-called Ghent school dispute is well known ever since Henri Pirenne used it as the basis for a classic article on the education of merchants in the Middle Ages. From the perspective of urban literacy, it is indeed a remarkable and interesting case. It shows that by the 1170s the urban elites in this town not only had a positive attitude towards the use and keeping of written records (as we also know from other sources), but that they were keenly aware of the importance of education and literacy skills. They were, however, clearly not satisfied with the curriculum on offer in the ecclesiastical schools. This explains their insistence on the right to open their own schools. What was on the curriculum in these early urban schools and who taught there is unknown, but we can make an informed guess. As Pirenne has stressed, merchants in Ghent as elsewhere needed a practical or functional kind of literacy. What mattered to them was acquiring the elementary skills of reading, writing, and – let us not forget it – reckoning. That the count appointed not a magister, but his notarius in Ghent, Simon, to supervise the educational system in the town is an indication that he understood the needs of the merchants. In the Flemish context of the twelfth century, a notary was not primarily someone who could write charters and letters, but first of all an official in the financial administration of the count. Each town in Flanders had at least one notary who acted as receiver of the count's revenues in the area. A notary was also a bookkeeper, who had to record receipts and expenses on behalf of the count; once a year he had to render his account at the so-called 'redeninge', i.e. the Flemish equivalent of the English Exchequer. The account of Simon, notary of Ghent, for the year 1187 is preserved as part of the general account of the count's domains for that year, the so-called 'Gros Brief'. We have therefore reason to think that the lessons Simon gave at the schools attached to the church of the count's castle in Ghent were of a practical nature. This was probably also the case in the urban schools which were founded subject to his approval. The teachers in these schools must in all probability be sought among the clergy of the town's parish churches. These churches may have been allies of the town authorities in another dispute taking place in the same period, which led the burghers all the way to the papal court of Alexander III.

The example of the Ghent school dispute illustrates, perhaps more than anything else, that the development of a literate mentality among the urban elites was already well advanced in this town by the second half of the twelfth century. Using and keeping written records, which can be documented in Flemish towns from the early twelfth century onwards, is one thing; realizing the importance of schooling to develop literacy skills, as in Ghent in the 1170s (and somewhat later possibly also in Ypres), is a different matter. Other indications also show that

literate practices were gaining ground in the town. In 1175, the burghers of Ghent sent an envoy to the pope to complain about the fact that the dean, the local representative of the bishop, had excommunicated some of them for their refusal to attend the episcopal court at Tournai. The envoy came back from Rome with two bulls of Alexander III. The first was a letter confirming the custom that no burgher of Ghent could be forced to appear before an ecclesiastical court outside Ghent; the second was a mandate ordering the archbishop of Reims and the bishop of Tournai to bring all ecclesiastical cases involving burghers of Ghent before the local dean, or, if necessary, to send special judges to the town. These two letters show that the town authorities were aware of the possibilities offered by the rapidly evolving papal court, and, what is perhaps more important, that they were acquainted with the procedures involved in obtaining the documents they needed: not only a privilege confirming their rights, but also a mandate ensuring the privilege's application. This suggests interaction with the parish clergy of the town, who may have inspired or perhaps even advised the urban authorities in this matter. In the 1160s and 1170s, the priests of the urban churches were themselves involved in several disputes, either against the local abbeys or against the bishop, in which the intervention of Pope Alexander III was invoked.

The same period also saw the first example of 'public lettering' in Ghent. In 1180, an inscription was engraved above the gate of the count's castle, which had been constructed in the aftermath of the rebellion of the burghers in 1177/1178. The inscription stated for all to see that Count Philip of Alsace was responsible for building this stronghold. The very fact that an inscription – as far as we know the first 'civic' one in the town – was placed on a building intended to restrain the pretensions of its citizens, means that the count and his entourage were confident that the message would be understood by those who should. In other words, it is another indication that a literate mentality had taken root at least among some groups in the town, and that literate modes of communication were from now on taken for granted.

Often the so-called 'long thirteenth century', which begins sometime in the twelfth century and continues until sometime in the fourteenth century, is seen as a decisive period in the growth of literate mentalities. Based on the available evidence for Belgium, northern France and the adjacent Rhineland, it may be argued that in those regions the 'long twelfth century', which begins in the second half of the eleventh century and continues until sometime in the thirteenth century, may have been far more important for the development of literacy not only in towns, but in society generally. During this period rapid changes occurred in society on different levels, from the supranational papal court with its growing bureaucracy and the development of a procedure stimulating the production and use of written records, via the creation and extension of state institutions in principalities such as the county of Flanders (which led to an increasing use of the written word in government), to the rise of towns as economic and political powers, with their own communal institutions, from the early twelfth century onwards. Towns seem to have adopted from the outset a positive attitude towards the production, use and keeping of written records. Seen from this perspective, the twelfth-century growth of literacy in towns such as Ghent was not an isolated, typically urban phenomenon. On a local level, the use of written records was not limited to towns. We see that during the 'long twelfth century' also several villages – in other words rural communities that doubtless were composed of people who were illiterate in the strict sense of the word – also received (and anxiously preserved) their charter of liberties (so-called 'keuren' in Flanders and 'chartes-loi' in neighbouring Hainaut). Just like urban charters of liberties, these village charters obtained the status of what Franz-Joseph Arlinghaus has called 'autonomous texts', which could serve as a 'point of reference'

for all members of the community.[3] We should therefore ask the question what was specifically urban about urban literacy. Even if the chance of being confronted with writing was for a long time greater in towns than elsewhere, this apparently had to do with the fact that there were more people in towns, that relatively more of these people were literate, that there were also more institutions that used writing in towns, both civic and religious, and that this concentration of individuals and institutions created more potential for disputes, which in turn, as is well-known, greatly stimulated the production and use of written records.

2. ROMAN-CANON LAW PROCEDURES IN TOWN AND COUNTRYSIDE IN CAPETIAN FRANCE

Considering the situation in the Capetian region in the twelfth century, one has to conclude that as yet no extended research on urban literacy has been done. It is generally accepted that only the clergy and possibly some individuals within other layers of the population (nobility, merchants) were literate, but that there was nothing like an 'urban literate mentality', and that lay (eventually urban) administration really developed only in the thirteenth century. The lack of sources is often mentioned as a major sticking point for this kind of research.

In what follows, these general assumptions will be questioned by focusing on a particular issue, that of disputes and dispute settlement using the legal procedure of Roman-canon law. This issue has not been studied yet from the point of view of literacy, literate people, so-called urban and rural literate mentalities, and the similarities and differences between these mentalities. It has to be stressed that what follows has a provisional character. We are merely suggesting a different way of approaching the sources and pointing at some questions which may be interesting for the general issue of pragmatic (urban) literacy in the twelfth century.

The following two examples may serve as a starting point for the questions to be asked; they relate to two disputes arising in and around two different cities.

(1) In 1164, a conflict arose between the burghers and canons of Tours, in which the pope, the king of France and the count of Anjou became involved. It concerned the administration of a part of the bourg Saint-Martin. The dispute seemed to have been settled in the 1170s, but in 1180 tensions were mounting again, as the bourgeois wanted, according to the canons, to establish a commune in the bourg of Châteauneuf. The case was brought before the curia, papal judges were appointed at several successive stages of the conflict, and the case was delayed because the bourgeois proved that the exigences of the judicial procedures were not followed by the judges. A solution was only found in 1185 (by papal decision, to the advantage of the burghers).

(2) The second illustration is the case of the so-called 'serfs of Rosny-sous-Bois', a case well known to historians interested in 'feudal' and socio-economic history. Rosny-sous-Bois was a village belonging to the royal abbey of Sainte-Geneviève of Paris; it came into the possession of the abbey around 1163/1164 through a donation by king Louis VII. In 1179, a long and obstinate struggle started between the abbey and its men at Rosny. The whole village of Rosny denied its serfdom, declaring that they where not *servi* but *coloni* and *hospites ecclesie*, and the

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[3] F.-J. ARLINGHAUS, "Point of reference: trust and function of written agreements in a late medieval town", in: *Strategies of Writing: Studies on Text and Trust in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. SCHULTE *et al.* (Turnhout, 2008: *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 13), pp. 277-299, at pp. 277, 298.

affair was brought by the canons before the king's council. After the king's decision that the people of Rosny were indeed the abbey's *servi*, the case was brought before the papal curia by the villagers. In successive stages, the canons and the villagers went to the pope; papal judges delegate were appointed, and over the years several, sometimes contradictory, sentences were pronounced. The struggle continued for some sixty years; the village was formally enfranchised in August 1246.

Both cases are examples of disputes lasting for years, which were fought out on various levels, and in which several parties were involved. Especially the papal authority, by delegation of legates and judges delegate, played a crucial role. Both cases found their settlement within the Roman-canon law judicial procedure. This procedure was complex, technical and expensive; it was partly oral and partly written. The two cases are not unique: in diplomatic and legal sources from the late twelfth century hundreds of similar examples can be found. What is particularly important, is that the procedure of papal judicial delegation, which evolved during the twelfth century and which became extremely successful from the 1170s onwards, was quite complex on several levels. It emerged in the process of contemporary rationalisation and codification of Roman and canon law procedure. It was partly dependent on written texts (this in contrast with contemporary civil procedure and customary law), and it required a sound knowledge of canon law, legal techniques, and the written word. Putting both examples against this background leads to several sets of questions and remarks.

A first set of questions concerns the abilities of the subjects to read and to use the formal procedures. Is it possible that lay people who did not belong to the nobility, but to different 'lower' social levels – villagers, merchants – knew the finesses of this kind of procedure? If not, how were they aware of these procedures and techniques? Here we can refer to the example of Tours, where the merchants argued against the canons and judges that the right procedure had not been followed. Could they know the procedures themselves, or were specialized and trained people – clerics? – involved or engaged? And how could they finance these procedures – and pay the wages of hired specialists? Could they they themselves read and understand texts such as papal letters or mandates?

Even if the answer to some of these questions were to be negative, we can affirm that the people involved were at least very conscious about the importance of the written procedure, or at least of the fact that official written documents were extremely important. If so, does one have to accept that something similar to what Michael Clanchy called a 'literate mentality' developed?

One may also wonder if the procedure of papal judicial delegation might not have been an incentive for the use of written documents and for the awareness of their use, interest and importance. The second half of the twelfth century shows an enormous proliferation of disputes resolved by this procedure. This implies that, gradually, ever more people became involved and that in the end they must have become acquainted with this procedure. Our own research shows that, during the second half of the twelfth century, Parisian masters and intellectuals were increasingly appointed as papal judges (instead of the older practice of appointing local ecclesiastical prelates). This may have led to the spread of cultural and intellectual 'urban' mentalities in the countryside.

Comparing both examples raises questions concerning similarities and differences between the city and the countryside regarding the use of the written word and the development of 'literate mentalities'. Rosny-sous-Bois was a village: it was just one of many villages which became involved in the general movement towards the enfranchisement of the serfs. The example shows

that villagers knew the importance and value of legal, written procedures. One therefore has to consider how 'different' villages were from towns. One might raise the issue of centres and peripheries and ask whether a village such as Rosny, near Paris, might have felt the economic and possibly cultural influences of this urban centre earlier than other villages.

Although more questions could be put, we will stop here. It is important to be aware of the fact that the cases we alluded to were not unique. The abbey of Sainte-Geneviève, for example, in the 1170s and 1180s encountered similar problems with three other villages in their possession. And our research on Parisian masters and intellectuals shows that in one third of all disputes in which Parisian judges delegates were appointed, lay people from different social layers were involved. Both illustrations are therefore not unique – on the contrary. In the cartularies of ecclesiastical institutions, in the collections of decretals, in letter collections and in the papal registers, one can find hundreds of documents dealing with similar disputes – i.e. with disputes settled according to the Roman-canon law procedure. These documents have not yet been studied systematically; moreover, up to now no inventory has been made of these sources. However, these disputes, which surpass the local level and which reflect a highly technical, complex and partly written procedure, can offer an interesting approach for questions concerning the issue of 'medieval urban literacy'.

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BYZANTINE (URBAN) ARISTOCRACY AND ITS ATTITUDES TOWARDS LITERACY

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The following remarks emerged during my project on the image of the Byzantine aristocracy from the tenth through the thirteenth centuries. The main focus of my study was on social markers of the Byzantine upper class. The term 'social marker' was originally used by sociologists; it was introduced to medieval studies by Timothy Reuter. In his article "Nobles and others: The social and cultural expression of power relations in the Middle Ages", he writes:

> One aspect of the way in which élites maintain their dominance is today quite well understood and theorized: they equip themselves with a whole series of social markers which express and actualize that dominance. In particular they use the social markers of appearance, speech, dress, food, and rituals of social interaction.[1]

It turned out that this concept is adaptable to Byzantine society as well, and I will concentrate on one aspect in this short presentation: education and literacy.

Education played and plays an integral and essential role in every society, and the Byzantine period was no exception. The interest in education was not simply an enjoyment of learning or a desire of knowledge, although statements of Byzantines indicate these attitudes. Other important motifs, such as social demands, can be detected as well.

1. LITERACY AS JOB ENHANCEMENT

The first aspect of these social demands is a practical one. It concerns a major group of society, because education was an important step to follow a career in civil, ecclesiastical, military or imperial service; in a few cases, an excellent education even opened the way to get a position at one of the famous educational institutions in Constantinople. There is still discussion about the so-called patriarchal school, but this seems to have been a modern construct.

We may assume that there was free access to school and learning for everybody who was able to find and pay a teacher. No real changes happened since Late Antiquity, as Raffaella Cribiore stated in her thorough study on the school of Libanios (fourth century):

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[1] T. REUTER, "Nobles and Others", p. 89.

Learning, however, was not restricted to children or juveniles, as even persons beyond the 'normal' school age went to teachers or grammarians. We may not be wrong in noticing that parents wanted their offspring getting a better starting point to obtain more attractive jobs in line with their higher qualifications. There appears to be no difference between Late Antiquity and Middle Byzantine times in this respect.

The administrative system granted special favours to well-trained employees, which is already attested by an edict of Theodosius. In general the high appreciation of education was continued throughout the Byzantine period. Several emperors did not favour rhetoric and learned culture (e.g. Basil II [976-1025], who is said to have been an averagely educated ruler detesting rhetorical style and literary works).

Especially the expansion, sophistication and centralization of the administrative system from the tenth to the twelfth centuries offered and opened up many positions, ranging from those of simple scribes to those of highly qualified senior clerks. An enlightening example illustrating the widespread and thorough-going rhetorical training of young persons is preserved in a letter written by John Tzetzes and addressed to John Smeniotes, who served as a tax collector in the middle of the twelfth century (ep. nr. 47 Leone). He was responsible for the administration of monastic estates in the region of Thessalonica. Tzetzes apologized for a young scribe, certainly one of his former pupils, who wrote some iambic verses at the end of an official document, which could seriously infringe upon the validity of a legal document.

One section of Byzantine society that is often neglected in focusing on the history of education, is the military apparatus. The abilities to read and write letters, and to deliver and perform a speech were essential to successful leaders in military campaigns. We know at least two famous persons of the middle Byzantine period, who served as *strategoi* and were authors of works which are still preserved: Nikephoros Uranos and Kekaumenos. Uranos, flourishing in the second half of the tenth century, was a fortunate *strategos* in different areas of Byzantine influence; besides a military handbook on strategy he left a couple of letters and a menologion. Kekaumenos (middle of the eleventh century) composed the so-called *Strategikon* (or "*Vademecum des byzantinischen Aristokraten*" in the German translation) for his children, which might have been categorized as "*Hausväterliteratur*" or "*Hausbuch*" in later medieval times. Kekaumenos' text is one of the core sources for understanding the organization and function of a Byzantine aristocratic household in the provinces, from which we may draw conclusions about urban aristocratic culture as well. Besides practical advice, he gives insights into his own education and attitudes towards rhetorical skills. He judges himself an average reader and writer (Cecaumenus § 191 [228, 25-37 Spadaro]). It is remarkable that Kekaumenos gives the impression that education was judged by society. Kekaumenos highlights the purpose of his piece by emphasizing his broad experience during his lifetime, which should be preserved for the world after him. But he provides even more evidence concerning his attitudes towards education. He recommends the reading of texts (military handbooks, historiography and

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[2] R. CRIBIORE, *The School of Libanius*, p. 111.

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theological works) (Cecaumenus §54 [88, 13–25 Spadaro], § 113 [158, 29–160, 2 Spadaro] and § 142 [190, 8-15 Spadaro]).

Kekaumenos understood education primarily as acquiring the ability to read and write. In his opinion education enables one to communicate and to make small-talk as well. But how did a person like Kekaumenos achieve a proper education? Were there institutions (even in the provinces)? Did he go to Constantinople or was it necessary to take private lessons? As I have mentioned before, there seems to be no real change in the organisation of education between Late Antiquity, the early Byzantine and the middle Byzantine period. A number of scholars is known who earned their living by educating pupils from different social strata.

In tenth-century Byzantium the so-called *Anonymous Professor* or *Anonymus Londinensis* ran a school which is well attested in his letter collection. 51 of his 122 letters are devoted to matters of education. His pupils can be divided into two groups. Some of them had jobs and served as high officials, and some were young persons sponsored by their uncles. The professor was interested in the later career of his students and tried to give them support wherever possible, because a successful pupil continued to be of interest to his former teacher. (This may be the reason for many letters of recommendation.)

In the eleventh century John Mauropus and Michael Psellos were stimulating teachers, but let us move to the twelfth century. One of the most famous poets and teachers of the twelfth century was Theodoros Prodromos. He wrote monodies, poems, epigrams (on objects, such as icons) and a romance (*Rodanthe and Dosicles*). He taught a couple of pupils, but only a few are known by name. There was for instance Niketas Eugeneianos, who adored his teacher Prodromos and wrote a monody dedicated to him. In poem nr. 44 (Hörandner) Prodromos gives a description of the education of Alexios Komnenos, son of the *sebastokrator* Andronikos and the *sebastokratorissa* Eirene. Theodore Stypiotes, another pupil of Prodromos, became the highest official in the empire during the reign of Manuel, but he was expelled through the intrigue of colleagues. Traces of the relationship between Stypiotes and Prodromos can be found after Stypiotes had left the teaching class. Prodromos tried to activate the old relation between teacher and his pupil by emphasizing the good old times. He wrote at least two letters to Stypiotes, sending along and recommending a certain Constantine. Prodromos recalls the *syllogos* (the learned gathering) and deplores that he is cut off from Stypiotes. Prodromos asks Stypiotes to look after Constantine and to offer him a job. Beyond these letters of recommendation, Prodromos produced three poems for the family of Stypiotes (nos. LXXI, LXXII, LXXIII Hörandner [Eudokia Stypiotissa sponsored an *enchirion* (a textile decorating icons) for the Theotokos Hodegetria]).

The case of Prodromos is remarkable, because it shows the existence of a lasting, indeed life-long bond between teacher and pupil. The relation changes, but if it works, it constantly provides benefits. A gifted (and well-treated) pupil is one of the best investments.

2. ARISTOCRACY AND THE NEED OF LITERATURE FOR REPRESENTATION

Byzantine aristocracy highly esteemed education and learning, and there is much evidence showing that *paideia* was used for representative purposes. The leading aristocratic and imperial families, especially those of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, could afford sponsoring and ordering literary works and purchasing precious objects such as richly decorated books.

The discussions about aristocratic psalters will not be summarized here. Suffice it to say that much research has been done on these representative objects. I just want to emphasize the aspect of display. It goes without saying that these books were a status symbol *per se*, and it seems that these manuscripts were visible in the private chapels or households of the aristocrats. Books were precious and rare objects. If we have a look into the last wills, such as that of Eustathios Boilas dated to the year 1059, where he describes his books and their physical condition, we get an idea of their appreciation and value.

An interesting case of book donations in the eleventh century was investigated recently by Marie-Thérèse Le Léannac-Bavavéas. At different stages of his life John, *logothetes tu dromu*, delivered manuscripts to the monastery of the Theotokos at Skutari. According to the margins in the last manuscript, John entered the monastery at the end of his life (around 1055). It is remarkable that he steadily delivered (the following) liturgical and theological manuscripts to *his* monastery:

- A tetraevangelion (Athen Ethnike Bibl. Nr. 56),
- Homilies of Basileios of Kaisareia (Mosqu. Bibl. Syn. 14 [Vlad. 128]),
- Works of John Chrysostomos (Ven. Marc. Gr. 567),
- Works of Gregory of Nazianz (Scorial Ψ. I. 11 [Gr. 431]),
- and the first part of the menaia (September/October) (Sin. Gr. 556).

This list reflects the chronological order of the donations to the monastery: two manuscripts can be dated to the tenth century (Atheniensis and Venetianus), all others were produced in the eleventh century.

What was the idea behind these donations? Did John want to show his career? Was it a sort of memento? Were they just a transfer of precious objects to a monastery – or even to his monastery? Did he try to obtain a safe harbour in difficult times?

Literature was not restricted presentation and display in precious copies, the written and spoken word also served propagandistic and self-imaging purposes. Aristocrats owned well-equipped palaces in the capital, and there existed enough areas for decorative and representative elements in their dining halls or in entrance halls. The problem is, that so far no archaeological material enriches the knowlegde of such palaces (as in Late Antiquity), and we we have to rely almost solely on written sources. The famous *Codex Marcianus Graecus* nr. 524 edited by Spyridon Lampros preserves many epigrams that accompanied mosaics and frescoes in aristocratic houses. In my opinion the poems were collected to be re-used or to serve as models for similiar inscriptions. The need for epigrams/metrical inscriptions was not restricted to the 'private' sector, because aristocrats were interested to mark their foundations as well. Nr. 81 of the collection is an epigram that was written on the doors of the *oikos* of Andronikos Kamateros, the *eparch* (mayor) of the city. Andronikos is a well-documented person: he received letters from various scholars and sponsored many icons that included verse inscriptions. In the epigram the anonymous poet describes the iconography of the painting. The title in the manuscript runs as follows:

> On the gate of a house, whereon was represented the Emperor, and above him the most-holy Mother of God having Christ in her bosom in the act of crowning the Emperor, an angel preceeding him, St. Theodore Tiron handing him the sword, and St. Nicholas following behind (translation by C. Mango).

At the end of the epigram Andronikos speaks to the emperor and he possibly was depicted performing *proskynesis*:

> These things are proclaimed by the *sebastos* Andronikos, a Kamateros by his father, a Doukas by his mother, who has painted you, slave as he is, before the gate thate he may lovingly adore even your picture.

Such an epigram at the entrance of an aristocratic palace informs about the inhabitant(s) and provides orientation for passers-by. It also demonstrates the close relationship between the aristocrat and the emperor.

A confirmation of the primary function of this epigram comes from two Genuese charters, which are dated to the years 1192 and 1202 – the first one written in Latin the second one in Greek – providing us with information on a palace situated in the quarter of the Genuese, which they got in 1192. The complex, which cannot be localized, belonged to the family of Kalamanos, who was of Hungarian origin (Kalman). The documents still call the palace *oikos tou Botaneiatou* – palace of Botaneiates, which shows that even in Byzantine times topographical names or house-names survived over a long period. At the time of preparing the inventory the palace was in a state of decay, and nobody lived there. One could argue that the severe reign of Andronikos I (1183-1185) may have caused the fall of this aristocratic family. After the twelfth century the family vanished. The detailed inventory lists all parts of the palace and all precious materials used for furnishing floors, walls and ceilings. Even the function of certain rooms or halls is recorded. The Latin version of the inventory indicates that the doors were decorated with paintings ("*cum duobus ostiis depictis*") (Miklosich-Müller XIII, 7ss.).

3. ARISTOCRATS AS AUTHORS OF LITERARY WORKS

Education and rhetorical skills were very important to aristocratic persons, as we mentioned at the beginning. It is apparent that some highly educated and talented officals were willing and able to compose (literary) works of their own. The *parakoimomenos* Basileios, flourishing in the second half of the tenth century, wrote a work on naval battles which is preserved in a manuscript kept in Milan (Cod. B119 sup.). The author was responsible for the decoration of the manuscript as well. The *Strategikon* of Kekaumenos was meant to be used as a simple manual by his relatives; it therefor lacks rhetorical refinement.

Letters are signs of literacy, but next to the letter collections of scholars and rhetoricians almost no corpora of 'average' or 'normal' letter writers exist. This is extraordinary, because we know from Byzantine scholars that they received letters from their patrons. Almost none of these letters survive. One exception is the above-mentioned Nikephoros Uranos, whose letters are preserved. He was not an epistolographer *par excellence*, but his letters follow rhetorical standards. An indicator of the appreciation of letters from scholars are the attempts to get collections of their *epistolai*. John Dukas thought about editing the letters he received from Michael Psellos, which implies that Michael Psellos sent *grammata* to him. That letters were important to create a self-image is attested by Isaakios *sebastokrator*, who founded the monastery of Kosmosoteira in Pherrai. Apart from philanthropic institutions he installed a library where he deposited his books, and also his own works. One volume included his poems in heroic, iambic and political verses and ekphraseis and letters. It should be kept in a safe place, but learned readers should have access to it (Typikon of the monastery of Kosmosoteira

at Pherrai, Thrace §106 [69, 5–12 Petit]). A few other of his works are known: a short poem on the Theotokos with her child, a paraphrasis of the letter of Aristeas and maybe two other works concerning Homeric matters.

Other high officials of the eleventh and twelfth centuries can be be mentioned, who produced literary or even theological works:

- Andronikos Kamateros wrote an ἱερὰ ὁπλοθήκη ("holy armoury");
- the *logothetes tu dromu* Michael Hagiotheodorites composed a poem on chariot-racing;
- Stephanos Meles tried to become a writer and his attempts were applauded by Michael Michael Italikos;
- Alexios Aristenos got positive remarks from Theodoros Prodromos (see letter Nr. 7);
- Theodoros Stypiotes ist he author of a poem which is preserved in Marcianus gr. 524;
- and last but not least Michael Attaleiates, who was born around 1020 and did after 1085: he became a judge and received the title of *proedros*.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Literacy is connected with Byzantine aristocratic culture and life on various levels. Literacy provided access to higher positions in the administration for all Byzantines, but it must be taken into consideration that literacy was linked to the reception and appreciation of the written word especially by the upper class. Rhetorical pieces (e.g. speeches, epigrams) allowed the creation of a self-image visible to one's own or to other *strata* of Byzantine society. Aristocrats sought after poets/scholars and *vice versa*. Their relation started at an early stage of primary education and lasted to their participation in private *theatra* (gatherings of *hommes de lettres* and their patrons in imperial and aristocratic households).

Especially the twelfth century saw an increase in monastic foundations, where the need of metrical inscriptions praising their donors was apparent. In a few cases we get an idea of the interaction between word and viewer due to preserved epigrams or inscriptions. There is no doubt that a kind of competition existed between the powerful families. They were anxious to get prominent places in the urban topography and to engage famous poets for their rhetorical furnishings.

In Byzantine culture literacy played an important role on various levels. Although we detect traces of learned culture outside the capital, the centre of literary communication and networking was Constantinople (especially after the loss of the Eastern and Western provinces). And Byzantines even had an 'urban' expression for the peak of literary refinement: *asteiotes* (*urbanitas*).

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FINAL REMARKS

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We have had an opportunity to listen to eight papers, and to the discussions which were sparked by them. The papers covered several areas of medieval *Latinitas* (Switzerland, England, Northern France and Flanders, the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, the medieval Kingdom of Poland and the State of the Teutonic Knights) as well as areas of medieval Byzantium and the Arabic world. Together, they created an opportunity for putting into comparative perspective not only the phenomenon of urban literacy but also of the different scholarly traditions in approaching the subject.

From the papers and their discussion, the existence of some general features and questions may be concluded. I will briefly summarize them.

1. There is much ambivalence, not only concerning the concept of 'urban' literacy, but also that of the concept of the medieval town itself. In the papers, the 'legalistic' concept of the town is still visibly predominant. According to this notion, one can talk of a 'town' when a settlement has a concrete law system setting it aside from the surrounding countryside; it possesses a foundation charter and is ruled by a town council. From the papers and discussions one can also conclude that the predominant way of investigating urban literacy remains the study of pluriform institutional (or 'civic', *Sarah Rees Jones*) literacies, such as those represented by well-organised town chanceries. The uses of literacy by individual town dwellers, on different levels and in different registers of professional and private life, until now inspired much less interest. It used to be connected especially with the phenomenon of numeracy, seen as an integral part of merchant, and therefore 'urban' literacy skills.

2. The essential problem, approached in one or another way by all speakers, is how to describe and how to explain the phenomenon of 'urban' literacy. The difficulties stem in great part from a general conviction about the exceptional role and exceptional extent of the uses of the written word in the urban milieus of medieval Europe. However, any measure of the extent of urban literacy can only be made by the comparison between literacy in urban and non-urban, especially rural milieus (*Walter Ysebaert*). Another question is that of 'identity', the concept which has been given so much attention by medievalists in recent years. How can an 'urban' literate mentality contribute to the formation of an 'urban' identity? Did the collective will of using the written word ("*der kollektive Wille zu Schriftlichkeit*") result in the growth of

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the reasoning faculties ("*Rationalisierungsprozeß*"), as the German scholar Thomas Behrmann wanted to convince us?[1]

3. The problem of the chronological boundaries of research on medieval urban literacy is clearly connected to the generally known development of the 'urbanisation' of medieval Europe. As far as the dynamics of the process are concerned, in *Latinitas*, the beginning of the intensification of this development differs from one region to another, from the middle of the twelfth century (for Italy, Flanders and England) to the later thirteenth century (for Bohemia, Poland, Hungary and the lands on the southern shores of the Baltic), and even to the late fourteenth century (for so-called Red Ruthenia). A decisive period remains the 'long thirteenth century' (*c*. 1160-1340, *Georges Declercq*). According to some scholars (*Katalin Szende, Michael Jucker*) the awareness of this phenomenon should result in shifting of the *terminus ante quem* of our study far into Early Modern Times, even to the end of the Ancien Regime. If this chronological perspective were adopted, one might expect new views on phenomena which until now were hardly considered by medievalists interested in urban literacy.[2] The obvious example is the 'revolution' brought about by the printing press.

Problems of periodization should also be taken into consideration when we stress the comparative character of our studies. Is the chronology of the development of urban life and urban literacy within *Latinitas* applicable to the social history of medieval Byzantium or the Islamic world?

4. The most visible feature of our approach to the study of medieval urban literacy promises to be its comparative and multidimensional character. First of all, it may be fruitful in the context of medieval *Latinitas* itself, especially if one wishes to investigate such phenomena as the diffusion of an urban law system or the uses of literacy within supranational structures such as the Hanse. But the comparative research also leads one to set about studying such subjects as the interactions and contacts between *Latinitas* and the neighbouring civilizations of Byzantium, Islam and the Slavia Orthodoxa (which should certainly be included in our studies in the future).

The comparative character of the study of medieval urban literacy goes hand in hand with its interdisciplinary character. It presupposes a sharing of the results of research which has been done until now in the fields of the many separately operating disciplines which deal with urban history, such as the history of institutions, of education, of literature, diplomatic, the history of art and archeology. For it seems that, if the study of urban literacy is to bring anything new into medieval studies, it will be that, through putting new questions, new light will be shed on materials which are usually analysed by individual scholarly disciplines, which are not as much in contact with each other as is necessary.

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[1] Th. BEHRMANN, "Einleitung: Ein neuer Zugang zum Schriftgut der oberitalienischen Kommunen", in: *Kommunales Schriftgut in Oberitalien: Formen, Funktionen, Überlieferung*, ed. H. KELLER and Th. BEHRMANN (München, 1995: *Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften* 68), pp. 1-18.

[2] Recent publications concerning urban culture in the early modern period might be inspiring. I am thinking in particular of: *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, 2, *Cities and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400-1700*, ed. D. CALABRI and S.T. CHRISTENSEN (Cambridge, 2007).

A SHORT LIST OF WORKS ON MEDIEVAL URBAN COMMUNICATION

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This following list is the result of work undertaken for the revised edition of my "A bibliography of works on medieval communication", in: *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. M. MOSTERT (Turnhout, 1999: *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 1), which will be published as M. MOSTERT, *A Bibliography of Works on Medieval Communication* (Turnhout, 2012: *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 2). It represents the state of play of 2009. Titles which will appear under the headings 'Town dwellers' and 'Rituals of rule: The towns' have all been included, as have any titles which included the nouns 'città', 'city', 'town', 'Stadt', 'stad' or 'ville', or the the adjectives 'cittadino', 'urban', 'städtisch', 'stedelijk' or 'urbain'.

In the list, general works dealing with urban literacy and communication come first. Next come publications on non-verbal communication, then publications on oral communication, and finally publications on written communication. Clearly, there is much overlap. Some sections may seem surprisingly short. This is not necessarily due to an absence of scholarly attention. Rather, it witnesses to to the failure on the scholars' part to show, in the titles of their publications, the relevance of their topics to the general debates on literacy, orality and communication.

Needless to say, any additions to the list are more than welcome.

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29. TORTI, A., "Londra: La corte, i mercanti, gli 'Inns of Court' " in: No. 148, pp. 809-845.

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2. Theory of Urban Literacy and Communication

Apparently, no publications deal with this topic.

3. Forms of Non-Verbal Communication

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3.3 Noise

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16. Miscellanies on Medieval Literacy and Communication Generally, Containing Two or More of the Publications Listed Above

142. "Öffentlichkeit und Schriftdenkmal in der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft: Ein Kolloquium des Teilprojekts A 1 "Urkunde und Buch in der symbolischen Kommunikation mittelalterlicher Rechtsgemeinschaften und Herrscherverbände" im Sonderforschungsbereich 496: Münster, 27.-28. Juni 2003", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 38 (2004), pp. 277-491.
143. *Pragmatic Literacy, East and West, 1200-1330*, ed. R. BRITNELL (Woodbridge, 1996).
144. *Pragmatische Schriftlichkeit im Mittelalter: Erscheinungsformen und Entwicklungsstufen (Akten des Internationalen Kolloquiums 17.-19. Mai 1989)*, ed. H. KELLER *et al*. (München, 1992: *Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften* 65).
145. *Riti e rituali nelle società medievali*, ed. J. CHIFFOLEAU and L. MARTINES (Spoleto, 1994).
146. *Die Rolle der Stadtgemeinden und bürgerlichen Genossenschaften im Hanseraum in der Entwicklung und Vermittlung des gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Gedankengutes im Spätmittelalter*, ed. J. TANDECKI (Toruń, 2000).
147. *Schrift im Wandel–Wandel durch Schrift: Die Entwicklung der Schriftlichkeit im Mittelalter*, ed. F.-J. ARLINGHAUS, M. OSTERMANN, O. PLESSOW and G. TSCHERPEL (Turnhout, 2003: *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 6a) (with CD-rom).
148. *Lo Spazio letterario del Medioevo*, 2, *Il Medioevo volgare*, ed. P. BOITANI, M. MANCINI and A. VÀRVARO, 1, *La produzione del testo*, 2 (Roma, 2001).
149. *Strategies of Writing: Studies on Text and Trust in the Middle Ages: Papers from "Trust in Writing in the Middle Ages" (Utrecht, 28-29 November 2002)*, ed. P. SCHULTE, M. MOSTERT and I. VAN RENSWOUDE (Turnhout, 2008: *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 13).
150. *Transforming the Medieval World: Uses of Pragmatic Literacy in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2006: *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 6b) (with CD-rom).
151. *La ville et la cour: Des bonnes et des mauvaises manières*, ed. D. ROMAGNOLI (Paris, 1995).
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