



Ágnes Flóra

Symbols, Virtues, Representation. The Early Modern Town Hall of Kolozsvár as a Medium of Display for Municipal Government

A town hall, the most important public asset of the urban community, was at the same time the house of the community, the site of gatherings, and the symbol of town autonomy and privileges in the early modern period. As part of the humanist rediscovery of the antique tradition, a new wave of town hall constructions and renovations began in the second half of the sixteenth century in Transylvania. This essay seeks to determine how the new morality accompanying the Reformation influenced municipal leadership, and how the municipal elite projected its own image in the exterior and interior spaces of the town hall. This kind of civic ostentation, or, as the Protestant preacher Gáspár Heltai put it, “exhibitionism,” may also be ascribed to the emergence and development of early modern civic awareness.

“...the town is like a
great house, and a house is
like a little town...”
(Leon Battista Alberti:
De re aedificatoria. Libr. I. 9.)

The display of authority at individual, community or state level has always followed well-defined, observable canons regardless whether its source was the customary law or diplomatic protocol. A study of the symbolic spaces of early modern communities, despite the sparseness of written sources, can elucidate the ideals, principles, virtues and beliefs through which the municipal leadership attempted to demonstrate its power, legitimacy and strength.

The town hall, the local government’s most important building, was at once the central building of the community, the venue for council meetings, and a symbol of the town’s privileges and autonomy.¹ This symbol occupied a central position in senses that went beyond the spatial structure of the town. Vitruvius had already written of this.² Indeed it was the influence of the rediscoverers

1 Stephan Albrecht, “Das Rathaus – Ein bürgerliches Baukunstwerk,” in *Rathäuser im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit. VI. Symposium des Weserrenaissance-Museums Schloss Brake in Zusammenarbeit mit der Stadt Hörter vom 17. bis zum 20. November 1994 in Hörter*, ed. Vera Lüpkes and Heiner Borggreffe (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1997), 23.

2 Vitruvius, *Tíz könyv az építészetéről* [Ten Books on Architecture], trans. into Hungarian by Dénes Gulyás (Budapest: Képzőművészeti Kiadó, 1988).

of antiquity, the sixteenth-century humanists, which led to town halls being re-interpreted at this time. There followed a rash of town hall construction and renovation throughout Europe in the second half of the century.³ There could clearly also have been other, much more pragmatic causes behind the town hall erections, such as the rise of the urban bureaucracy and the broadening of civic rights. Substantial construction undertakings in this period are also known to have taken place in Transylvania. In 1545, the council of Nagyszében (Sibiu, Romania) decided to purchase a house formerly belonging to Thomas Altemberger and convert it into a town hall.⁴ Major works were also carried out on the town hall of Brassó (Braşov, Romania) in the sixteenth century.⁵ We know little of the early-modern form of Kolozsvár's (Cluj-Napoca, Romania) principal public building, but among the meager sources is some information on its decoration.

Given the prosperity of the town in the sixteenth century, it is reasonable to assume that the town hall on Kolozsvár's main square was an imposing building designed to present the public face of the municipal elite.⁶ This study seeks to determine how the new morality accompanying the Reformation showed up in municipal leadership, and how the municipal elite projected its own image in the exterior and interior spaces of the town hall. Furthermore, from the very few

3 Robert Tittler, *Architecture and Power. The Town Hall and the English Urban Community, c. 1550–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 14.

4 The council paid 1922 Rhine florins and 64 denars to the last owner of the Altemberger house, Markus Pempflinger. Arhivele Naționale ale României [Romanian National Archives], Sibiu County Archive. Magistratul oraşului Sibiu [The Collection of the Town Magistrate]. Konsularrechnungen Bd. 3. 175.; Petre Beşliu Munteanu, *Primăria veche din Sibiu. Casa, oamenii, muzeul* [The Old Town Hall in Sibiu. The House, the People, the Museum], (Sibiu: Biblioteca Bruckenthal, 2006), 58.

5 See Gernot Nussbächer, *Das Kronstädter Rathaus* (Brasov: Aldus, 1996), 1–26.

6 The political elite of sixteenth-century Kolozsvár seems to have been dominated by three main groups, each centered around a trade: the goldsmiths, the tailors and—to a lesser extent—the leather workers. This almost exactly matches a model that was widespread during the sixteenth century in European towns where merchants had not displaced craftsmen from political affairs. One important difference in Kolozsvár's case was that the butchers did not play a prominent role, initially because of the lack of a livestock trade and later because of state monopolies. The strong presence of goldsmiths and tailors also fits with economic and geographical realities: the proximity of precious metal deposits, the related presence of the money-changing chamber and the increasing demand for luxury goods which accompanied the rise of civic life all contributed to the development of these trades. Another reason for the prosperity of tailors and the related boom in the textile industry was the European-wide taste for Renaissance costume and fashion. See Ágnes Flóra, "A Portrait of the Urban Elite of Kolozsvár in the Early Modern Period," in *Studies in the History of Early Modern Transylvania*, ed. Gyöngy Kovács Kiss, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 455–56.

surviving sources, I will try to work out who could have been responsible for creating the public display of which the inscriptions were a part.

The town hall on the south-east corner of Kolozsvár's main square, reminiscent of an Italian palazzo, was built between 1843 and 1845 to plans by municipal master builder Anton Kagerbauer (1814–1872).



Figure 1. The old town hall built by Anton Kagerbauer between 1843–1845.

Photo by Melinda Mihály

We know little of its predecessors.⁷ A council building, *domus consularis*, is first mentioned in a report by the Kolozsmonostor Convent in 1438.⁸ We

7 On the old town hall and its construction under Kagerbauer, see Jenő Pataki, “A régi tanácsház és főbírók” [The Old Town Hall and the Judges], *Kolozsvári Szemle* 4 (1943): 276–85; Margit B. Nagy, “Kagerbauer Antal és a romantika építésze Erdélyben” [Antal Kagerbauer and Romantic Architecture in Transylvania], in Margit B. Nagy, *Stílusok, művek, mesterek. Művészettörténeti tanulmányok* [Styles, Artifacts, Masters. Studies in Art History] (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1977), 69–93; Jolán Balogh, *Kolozsvár műemlékei* [The Monuments of Kolozsvár] (Budapest: Kolozsvári református Kollégium Öregdiákjainak Egyesülete, 1935), 10; Elek Jakab, *Kolozsvár története* [The History of Kolozsvár], vol. 2 (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1888), 709–13; vol. 3 (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1888.), 566–67, 925–39; László Debreczeni, “Az 1953. évi kolozsvári műemlék-összeírás építéstörténeti eredményei” [Architectural History Study Based on the 1953 Cadastral Survey of Monuments in Kolozsvár], in *Emlékkönyv Kelemen Lajos születésének nyolcvanadik évfordulójára* [Festschrift for the 80th Birthday of Lajos Kelemen], ed. András Bodor et al. (Bucharest–Cluj-Napoca, 1957), 242.

8 *A kolozsmonostori konvent jegyzőkönyvei (1289–1556)* [The Records of Kolozsmonostor Convent], vol. 1, ed. Zsigmond Jakó (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990), 102.

know nothing, however, of its layout or character. In the second half of the fifteenth century, the institution increasingly crops up in the sources not as an administrative centre but a place of assembly, referred to as the *consistorium*.⁹ It was referred to as such in the municipal statutes of 1537, too.¹⁰ It is reasonable to infer that the building stood on the south-east corner of the market place, in the Media district, the same site as the Kagerbauer town hall. The question of whether it was a converted town house or a purpose-built town hall remains unanswered. It is unlikely that a building for the purposes of municipal affairs would have been erected immediately after the construction of the town walls on a hitherto empty part of what was by then the most important space in the town. More plausible is the conversion of a large town house, guild house or ecclesiastical building.¹¹ It must certainly have been a spacious and suitably imposing building, with rooms capable of accommodating assemblies of the *centumviri* (“council of a hundred”), perhaps similar to the presbytery on the west side of the square.

In the wave of private building in what might be called the town’s golden age, the second half of the sixteenth century, the buildings in and around the main square were converted into two-storey houses.¹² This induced probably an extension to the council building in 1578, too.¹³

The only known representation of the building is in the background of an oil painting of the south-east side of the Kolozsvár market place, by the Austrian painter Franz Jaschke.¹⁴

9 The title *consistorium* first appears on the 1475 statutes of the tailors’ guild. “...in nostri senatus consistorio.” Elek Jakab, *Oklevéltár Kolozsvár története első kötetéhez* [Chartulary to the First Volume of the History of Kolozsvár] (Buda: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1870), 250.

10 Jakab, *Oklevéltár*, 380; Romanian National Archives, Cluj County Archive, Primăria oraşului Cluj [Town Archive of Kolozsvár] (henceforth: Town Archive of Kolozsvár), Acte și privilegii [Collection of Charters], no. 7.

11 See the examples of Nagyszében (Sibiu) and Brassó (Braşov). Munteanu, *Primăria veche din Sibiu*, 57–76; Nussbächer, *Das Kronstädter Rathaus*, 1–26.

12 András Kovács, “Kolozsvár városképe a XVI–XVII. században” [The Urban Landscape of Kolozsvár in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries], in *Kolozsvár 1000 éve* [Thousand Years of Kolozsvár], ed. Tibor Kálmán Dáné et al. (Cluj-Napoca: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2001), 53.

13 Jolán Balogh, *Kolozsvári kőfaragó műhelyek. XVI. század* [Stonemason Workshops in Kolozsvár. Sixteenth Century] (Cluj-Napoca: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1985), 128. The relevant accounts book has since been lost, and so we do not know the items of work for which payment was made, or their amounts.

14 Oil painting, 76 × 51.5 cm. Bruckenthal Museum, Sibiu. MNB 2171. The painting records the buildings as they were around 1810, which is when Jaschke was in Transylvania in the retinue of Archduke Ludwig of Habsburg.



Figure 2. Franz Jaschke, The market square of Kolozsvár around 1800. Oil painting.
Source: Bruckenthal Museum, Nagyszeben (Sibiu)

This shows a building which differed from contemporary town houses, whose frontage was generally not more than 10 meters wide and had a 2+1 layout.¹⁵ As in most European towns, its cellar had several functions, but was primarily a jail. In 1580, at the request of the tax collectors, the *centumviri*¹⁶

15 Kovács, “Kolozsvár városképe,” 51.

16 The *centumviri* was an elected body of a hundred men drawn from a broader section of the population, representatives of the city’s districts and members of the guilds. They elected the 12 members of the inner council headed by the judge and the second (royal) judge, and they formed the highest legislative body of the city. The municipal government of Kolozsvár applied the principle of parity. This was a conflict prevention or management system, an administrative and judicial regime based on equal or proportionate representation. It was a common system in towns with more than one ethnic group or a substantial presence of outside merchants in local trade. Similar municipal administrative systems in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary were in Zagreb, Zsolna (Žilina, Slovakia) and Buda, as well as elsewhere in Europe. The essence of the parity system, known as *unio*, was that the first judge was alternately a Saxon and a Hungarian, and the two ethnic groups were equally represented in every major office. Places were also reserved in equal numbers for Hungarian and Saxons around the table of the lower, inner council “of twelve” and the upper council of a hundred, the *centumviri*. See András Kubinyi, “Németek és nem-németek a középkori magyar királyság városaiban” [Germans and non-Germans in the Towns of the Medieval Hungarian Kingdom], in

decided to transfer the male prisoners to the tower of the Közép utca gate and to keep the women in the council cellar.¹⁷

The décor of the town hall served the function of official display, as is very clear from the inscriptions that formed part of it. We can form an impression of its scheme from a list drawn up in 1734 and appended later to the council minutes of 1624.¹⁸ This description is almost certainly in the hand of the town notary of the time, György Füzéri, and formed part of the first Latin description of Kolozsvár, written the same year.¹⁹ That is because Füzéri, co-author of *Descriptio civitatis* (Description of Kolozsvár in 1734), was by virtue of his post the keeper of the town archive and so was familiar with the minutes of the past council meetings. The sweeping, characteristically eighteenth-century script also points to a practiced man of letters, which proves again Füzéri's authorship. Füzéri's recording of the inscriptions must therefore have been carried out originally for the *Descriptio* book, whose authors, the town councilors of the time, stated their intention that the inscriptions on the town's walls and buildings should be written down.²⁰ What is more, the authors mentioned that they were omitting the long list for lack of space, and would write it in "a certain book".²¹

There also exists a later description, much shorter than the first list, in a multi-volume manuscript collected under the title *Egyveleg* (Miscellany) from the Sándor Mike collection.²² This was written in 1826, possibly after the earthquake, and recorded inscriptions adorning the façade and the vaulted entry passage. The

Verfestigung und Änderung der ethnischen Strukturen im pannonischen Raum im Spätmittelalter (Eisenstadt: Amt der Burgenländischen Landesregierung, 1996), 145–58; Flóra, "A Portrait of the Urban Elite," 452–53.

17 Town Archive of Kolozsvár Protocoalele adunărilor generale [Minutes of Council Meetings], I/3. (1580), 223 (henceforth CouncilMin). Town halls were universally multifunctional. Thomas Weller, "Der Ort der Macht und die Praktiken der Machtvisualisierung. Das Leipziger Rathaus in der Frühen Neuzeit als zeremonieller Raum," in *Machträume der frühneuzeitlichen Stadt*, ed. Christian Hochmuth and Susanne Rau (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2006), 285.

18 The description was added to the end of the minutes of 1606–1624, and at a later date. Elek Jakab wrongly proposed that it was written in 1650, when the inscriptions were made, and might have been an extract of the 1650 minutes. Jakab, *Kolozsvár története* vol. 2, 713.

19 *Kolozsvár leírása 1734-ből* [Description of Kolozsvár from 1734], ed. Pál Páter et al., trans. Albert Márkos (Kolozsvár: Minerva, 1944).

20 "Descriptio civitatis ab origine repetita cum inscriptionibus, in moenibus et aliis notabilibus aedificiis undique conspicuis, pro augmento et varietate incolarum ac religionum, vicissitudinibus factorum, directione item politica, usque ad modernum statum, continuata et compendiose concinnata." *Kolozsvár leírása 1734-ből*, 7.

21 Ibid., 32.

22 Sándor Mike, *Egyveleg* [Miscellany], vol. X, Mike Sándor-gyűjtemény a kolozsvári Román Akadémiai Könyvtár kéziratárában [Sándor Mike Collection at the Romanian Academy Library in Cluj-Napoca] Ms. 45, 607–13.

description does not cover the visual composition of the scheme, and it would probably be inappropriate to attempt a reconstruction. Nonetheless, the content, purpose and possible sources of the inscriptions, and above all what they reveal about the milieu responsible for them, merit careful consideration. The scope of this study does not permit discussion of all of the details.²³



Figure 3. Detail from Franz Jaschke's painting with the renaissance town hall in the background

The coats of arms of the seven free royal towns were—according to our chief source, the Füzéri description—emblazoned above the windows of the main frontage of the town hall. This was a clear message that Kolozsvár was the equal of these towns in terms of rank and prestige. This kind of representation was not necessarily a “local invention” even though we know of no similar painted façade adornments elsewhere in Transylvania. The inclusion of coats of arms as decorative elements of town hall frontages and internal spaces was a widespread practice in Europe, an expression of the town’s status and

23 Since Elek Jakab published only extracts of the description, the full Füzéri text and the description in the Sándor Mike collection are given in full as an appendix to the Hungarian version of this study, to facilitate further research. See Ágnes Flóra, “Jelkép, erény, reprezentáció. A kora újkori Kolozsvár tanácsháza mint a városvezetés egyik reprezentációs színtere” [Symbol, Virtue, Representation. The Town Hall of Cluj as a Space for Official Display in the Early Modern Period], in *Liber discipulorum. Tanulmányok Kovács András 65. születésnapjára* [Essays in Honor of András Kovács on His 65th Birthday], ed. Kovács Zsolt et al. (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület – Entz Géza Múvelődéstörténeti Alapítvány, 2010), 159–65.

loyalty to the sovereign. The addition of the royal insignia, marking the time of construction, also turned the building into a monument for future generations.

Despite the presence of two coats of arms of Transylvanian princes, there is a problem in dating the painting of the town hall frontage. This arises from the interpretation of a phrase in one of the inscriptions on the front: *renovatio per pictorem*.²⁴ Was it a complete repainting or reconstruction? Since none of the surviving sources tell of any major building or painting between 1648 and 1650, we may infer that it was a renovation of, or addition to, existing decorations. Otherwise, we would have to imagine that the sixteenth-century work on the town hall, which certainly involved great emphasis on its windows and furnishings, left the façade and internal spaces without colored painted decoration. This would have been a curious departure from the prevailing custom, in the very period regarded as the town's golden age.²⁵

We find a clue in the coat of arms of Prince György II Rákóczi of Transylvania (1648–1660) which was almost certainly painted during the renovation, as is confirmed by the inscriptions.²⁶ It follows logically that the other princely coat of arms dates the previous renovation, or perhaps the first painting. The notary who recorded the inscriptions stated that Gábor Báthori's arms stood beside Rákóczi's.²⁷ This entry requires some caution. First of all, the surviving sources do not tell of any major town hall renovation during the reign of Gábor Báthori (1608–1613), and an event of such financial and indeed symbolic consequence would inevitably have left a mark in the municipal accounts. The fact that the town had somewhat tense relations with Prince Báthori²⁸ also casts doubt on

24 Domus Haec Consultoria Renovata per Pictorem pro Privilegio ejusdem A 1648 eo 1650. CouncilMin. I/6. 397.

25 In 1585, green Barazla woolen cloth was put on the windows. Town Archive of Kolozsvár Socoteli [Municipal Accounts], 7/XII, 3/XVIII. 24a. (henceforth Municipal Accounts). In 1591, Lőrinc Tölcséres put clear glass made by István Kakas into the window frames. Endre Veress, *Zalánkeményi Kakas István* (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1905), 41. In 1597, tin-founder Ádám Tölcséres was again paid to install clear glass windows. Municipal Accounts, 7/XII. 23.

26 Two inscriptions record the renovation. One is on the ground floor with the year 1648: "Haec Domus Consultoria Renovata per Pictorem pro Privilegio ejusdem A 1648 eo 1650", the other with the year 1650: "In summitate vero superioris contignationis scribitur. Renovata est hoc Domus Senatoria Regnante Illustrissimo ac Celsissimo Principe D.D. Georgio Rákoczi Dei gratia etc. A 1650", CouncilMin I/6. 397–98. The renovation was therefore completed in two phases between 1648 and 1650.

27 "Supra haec visunt Insignia duorum Principum, unius nempe Illustrissimi Transilvaniae Principis Gabrielis Bathori in cujus medio seu Campo tres Dentes Lupini. Alterius Illustrissimi Principis Georgii Rákoczi. Rota scilicet currus pars dimitia." CouncilMin I/6. 398.

28 See András Kiss, "Kolozsvár és a Báthoryak: Zsigmond és Gábor" [Kolozsvár and the Báthorys: Zsigmond and Gábor], *Szabolcs-Szatmár-Beregi Levéltári Évkönyv* XVII (2006): 330–32; András Kiss,

the account by the eighteenth-century “chronicler”, whose historical perspective might have led him to attribute the dragon-tooth Báthori arms to the last reigning member of the dynasty. A much more logical inference is that the dragon’s teeth represented Kristóf Báthori (1576–1581) and were the result of the 1578 renovation. If we accept this, then the work done in 1648 and 1650 was a *renovatio* in the literal sense, preserving an existing tradition, which—as Füzér’s account shows—was upheld and nurtured until the eighteenth century. Indeed, most of the quotations in Sándor Mike’s manuscript appeared in the list recording the status of 1650. The word *renovatio* as applied to the works in the second half of the eighteenth century may thus be interpreted in the strict sense, a reconstruction of what was there before, even if inscriptions which had become damaged and illegible were replaced or substituted with new ones.

The words of wisdom for new council members above the portal of the town hall—“every councilor, upon entry to this town hall on taking up his office, leaves his personal affairs outside the door”²⁹—evokes the fashion for mottos on Renaissance architectural sculpture. This was a trend that may be traced to the text-ribbon slogans painted or carved in medieval church interiors or to ancient Roman (grave)stone inscriptions, although it was also standard practice to greet visitors to a public building with a message conveying the values it represented and demanded. Thus the same text greeted councilors as they entered the town halls of Regensburg, Görlitz and even Tallinn.³⁰

Another interesting element, admittedly not directly connected to the frontage, was a device for setting moral examples, a chair the chair standing in front of the building for litigants.³¹ A Sallust quotation on the left of the chair and a Latin proverb by an unknown author on the right exhorted the parties to recognize their errors.³² The “chair of shame” certainly stood in front of the town hall in 1612, and probably well before that, because the stewards of the

“Báthory Gábor és a kolozsvári református eklézsia megalakulása” [Gábor Báthory and the Establishment of the Calvinist Church in Kolozsvár], in *Báthory Gábor és kora*, ed. Klára Papp et al. (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi Intézete, 2009), 298–99.

29 “Quisquis Senator curiam hanc Officii causa ingredieris, Ante hoc ostium privatos affectus omnes abjicito.” CouncilMin. I/6. 398.

30 *Collection of Voyages and Travels*, vol 6, ed. Awnscham Churchill and John Churchill (London: T Osborne, 1732), 472; Harald Kleischmidt, *Perception and Action in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), 13.

31 “...in qua litigantes sedent.” CouncilMin. I/6. 399.

32 “Concordia res parvae crescunt, discordia maxime dilabuntur.”; “Nobile vincendi genus est patientia; vincit qui patitur: si vis vincere, disce pati.” Jakab, *Oklevéltár*, II. 711; CouncilMin I/6. 399.

town paid a builder for repairs to the chair and the stone wall in front of the town hall.³³ The chair of shame was a different kind of moral contrivance from the pillory or the stocks or the cage, serving to deter rather than actually shame. The pillory was for proven transgressors, while those seated on the chair of shame could hope to clear themselves in front of the law.

Most inscriptions, as might be expected, relate to the council's judicial competence, its chief point of contact with the citizens of the town. Impartiality,³⁴ thoroughness,³⁵ endeavor to reach agreement³⁶ and—above all else—respect for the law³⁷ were the moral precepts to be adhered to by council members as they made their judgments.

The moralizing inscriptions dealt at great length with the role and obligations of the head of the local judiciary, the judge. They stressed the general virtues demanded by the prevailing Christian value system, such as protection for paupers, orphans and widows, even-handedness, fairness and confidentiality.³⁸ The same principles are apparent in the oath sworn by the judge and councilors at the election of the new council in December of each year. The oath was rooted in German urban law, and had come to Kolozsvár via the Buda town law.³⁹ The inscriptions thus served to warn the town elders of what would be demanded of them when they took up their offices.

The other main category of the mottos were those referring to municipal administration. These were extracts from works by ancient authors and from Biblical allegories concerned with good and just government, highlighting the responsibilities, but also the supremacy, of persons in authority.⁴⁰ Other

33 Municipal Accounts. 12b/I. 135. It has not been possible to identify the function of the wall mentioned in this accounting item.

34 "Audiet alteram partem." CouncilMin I/6. 401.

35 "Festina lente"; "Ad Judicem spectat secreta rimari et mature discutere nec debet in ferenda sententia praeceps aut subitus esse. Alioquin voluntas ejus praecipitata est noverca Justitiae dicitur." CouncilMin. I/6. 402.

36 "Concordia res parvae crescunt, discordie maxima dilabuntur."; "Patientia discors, concordia legum." CouncilMin. I/6. 399, 401; Jakab, *Oklevéltár*, II. 710, 711.

37 "Justitia tantum"; "Legem nudam"; CouncilMin. I/6. 401, 403; Jakab, *Oklevéltár*, II. 711, 712.

38 "Commune bonam, defendere innocentem..."; "Judices oportet esse justos in sententiis. In verbis veraces. In actionibus honestos, In exercenda Justitia mites. Ante omnia in accipiendis donis abstinentissimos." (Seneca) CouncilMin. I/6. 402.

39 See Jakab, *Oklevéltár*, II. 189–90; *Das Ofner Stadtrecht. Eine deutschsprachige Rechtsammlung des 15. Jahrhunderts aus Ungarn*, ed. Karl Mollay (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1959).

40 "Ubi nulla severa Judicia exercentur, ibi etiam bona ingenia corrumpuntur." Jakab, *Oklevéltár*, II. 710; CouncilMin. I/6. 398. "Inferiorum ordinum culpae ad nullos magis referendae (sunt) quam ad desides rectores." *Corpus Iuris Canonici 2. Decreta Gratiani LXXXVI. C.I.*, red. Aemilius Ludwig Richter and Emil

quotations from the Bible, canon law and classical authors, allegories of strong governance, were aimed at elected or appointed holders of authority. Town elders were held to possess a primacy over other town-dwellers by virtue of their authority and wealth. This principle was stated in the basic text of Kolozsvár's municipal government, the Buda town law, which in turn drew on various German town rights. A poor man was not suited to be a judge because he "sees need".⁴¹

Legitimacy was based on more than just these practical principles: the medieval tradition that the town council was chosen by God unmistakably survived into the modern age. In 1592, when the councilors sought to be paid for their work, the *centumviri* refused their request on the grounds that if the council was a body summoned by God, it should look to God for its remuneration.⁴² This may look like cynicism from today's perspective, but there was a genuine conviction in the sixteenth century that the twelve members of the highest body of municipal government were doing their duties as a mission for God. We find confirmation of this in one of the inscriptions, which states that whoever is elected for the task should not desire gold and silver, i.e. monetary returns.⁴³

The number of councilors was also a religious symbol: the council members carried out their earthly mission as the twelve apostles. Although this religious legitimation is not substantiated by any surviving pictorial clue from Kolozsvár or anywhere else in Transylvania, it was a common phenomenon in towns elsewhere in Europe, including the Kingdom of Hungary.⁴⁴ It is by this approach that the community of townspeople, the *ordinum inferiorum*, can best be interpreted.

It was common during the era of humanism to allude to a town as a *respublica*, prompted by the contemporary enthusiasm for antiquity. The ideal was the social and political regime of the independent state of classical times, the *polis*, even though the early modern form of the town did not correspond

Friedberg (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1879–1881), 298. "Sapientibus Reipublicae capessendae necessitas causa est, ne inprobis relicta Gubernacula[!] pestem bonis inferat" Boethius, *De consolatio Philosophiae*. Libr. I. Pros. IV; Jakab, *Oklevéltár*, II. 710; CouncilMin I/6. 399.

41 *Das Ofner Stadtrecht*, 66.

42 CouncilMin I/5. 1592. 90.

43 "Is, in quorum tutelam atque fidem Respublica relinquitur, auri et argenti cupido nulla sit." Jakab, *Oklevéltár*, II. 710; CouncilMin I/6. 399.

44 Dietrich W. Poeck, "Zahl, Tag und Stuhl. Zur Semiotik der Ratswahl," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 33 (1999): 413; Dietrich W. Poeck, *Rituale der Ratswahl. Zeichen und Zeremoniell der Ratssetzung in Europa* (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), 10–13; István H. Németh, "Pre-Modern State Urban Policy at a Turning Point in the Kingdom of Hungary: The Elections to the Town Council," in *Urban Election and Decision-Making in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800*, ed. Rudolf Schögl (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009), 287–88.

to the Aristotelian *politeia*, one of the ideal forms of state, where the public exercises the highest power.⁴⁵ The early modern European town models were not true republics, even if certain elements of their governance can be traced to that type of state.⁴⁶ The primacy of the public, and service to the public, the common people of the town, even if not realized in practice, were much mentioned in the sources and in the refined rhetoric of the council minutes. The classical word *respublica*, repeated several times on the wall of the town hall, may be interpreted in a similar context: it applied to the service which the wise men of the town rendered to the public. These virtues were fused with the concept of council membership. The aldermen's title *prudens et circumspectus* advertised a kind of guarantee that these principles would be adhered to and enforced, and also signified the town elders' distinctive status, the basis for their exercise of authority. After Kolozsvár's privileges were curtailed,⁴⁷ the word *respublica* lost its meaning and was dropped from official rhetoric. This phenomenon shows up in the inscriptions: only the word *civitas* appeared in those painted on the frontage when the town hall was refurbished in 1775.⁴⁸

The inscriptions also referred to specific bodies of the municipal administration. The inscription above the entrance to the hall of the *centumviri*, "Odium senile, privatum commodum, juvenile consilium Republicam evertunt", apart from its strict moralizing, is a fine allegory for the significance of old and young councilors. The elevated authority possessed by senior members of municipal bodies, particularly when it came to passing on customary law and traditions, derived chiefly from their experience. It was common for the council to solicit the elders' opinion in regard to a major event.⁴⁹

45 Wolfgang Mager, "Respublica und Bürger. Überlegungen zur Begründung frühneuzeitlicher Verfassungsordnungen," in *Res publica. Bürgerschaft in Stadt und Staat*. Tagung der Vereinigung für Verfassungsgeschichte in Hofgeismar am 30./31. März 1987, ed. Dilcker Gerhard (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1988), 68.

46 Heinz Schilling, "Gab es im späten Mittelalter und zu Beginn der Neuzeit in Deutschland einen städtischen Republikanismus? Zur politischen Kultur der alteuropäischen Stadtbürgertums," in *Republiken und Republikanismus im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Koenigsberger (München: Oldenbourg, 1988), 143.

47 In 1660, after Várad (Oradea, Romania) fell to the Ottomans, Kolozsvár lost its royal free town status and was put under a county ispán, who became the captain-general of the town. This marked the end of autonomous municipal government in the town until 1703, and the settlement of nobles there changed the structure of its political elite.

48 Mike, *Egyveleg*, 609–10.

49 Ágnes Flóra, "From Decent Stock. Generations in Urban Politics in Sixteenth-Century Transylvania," in *Generations in Town*, ed. Eliassen Finn-Einar and Katalin Szende (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009), 214–18.

The walls of the stewards' room were adorned with admonitions pertaining to their financial duties: "Exact no more than that which is appointed to you"⁵⁰ and "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor".⁵¹ Inscriptions concerned with mortality formed the third major category.⁵² Perhaps the most interesting of these was the inscription above the judge's head, "Sic transit gloria mundi", not so much for the message of this old aphorism as its history: it was originally enunciated at coronations of popes, and later of kings.⁵³ In the municipal context, written above the judge's chair, it served to designate its occupant as the supreme holder of municipal authority.

The description concentrates on the inscriptions and only sporadically mentions carvings and sculptures on the building. The Renaissance window frames of the neighboring Wolphard-Kakas house, some Renaissance features of buildings that still stand today, and the carvings in the stonework collection of the History Museum provide some points of reference for the sculptural work on the town hall, if we consider that the houses of wealthy burghers could not have been permitted to outshine the seat of municipal government.

The description mentions only a few statues. There was a statue of naked Justitia holding sword and scales, representing pure justice, a pipe-playing cherub, and a male figure holding a sword, representing *ius gladii* which adorned the interior of the town hall. The latter was in all probability a statue of Roland, a customary fixture in German towns or towns with a large German population, symbolizing judicial authority and often municipal autonomy.⁵⁴ Besides these, a painted representation of death reminded the councilors of their earthly mortality, and a siren symbolized earthly joys. Although the description was mainly concerned with recording the inscriptions, it would probably not have omitted to mention other pictorial or sculptural images had there been any.

Aesthetics could only have been secondary among the purposes of decoration with inscriptions, even though people of the time loved color

50 (Luke 3:13). CouncilMin I/6. 403.

51 (Rom. 13:7) CouncilMin I/6. 403.

52 "Omnis hora per tacitos et fallentes cursus nos applicat fato."; "Omnis dies, omnis hora, quam nihil sumus, ostendit."; "Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas."

53 *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. János Bak (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 187–88.

54 There is a surviving Roland statue in Nagyszeben, probably the same as was drawn on an engraving which records the execution of royal judge Johannes Zabanius (Sachs von Harteneck), and there is a Roland relief in Nagybánya (Baia Mare) on the south wall of St Stephen's Tower.

and pomp.⁵⁵ We might rather look upon such a presentation of the values of municipal government as the communication of power. Although most of the mottos of the town hall décor clearly had a moralizing aspect, alluding to good government, justice, law and harmony, they also carried a significant symbolic force as displays of authority. The quotations from classical authors inevitably raised the rank and prestige of council members of the town in the eyes of anyone entering any part of the building, be they high-ranking envoys or statesmen, or thieves, fraudsters or rogues sitting on the accused bench. The purpose in each case was the same: to present a coherent system of values to the outside world. The image they conveyed was of course an idealized one, and we should not naïvely imagine that the council and the ruling elite fully internalized this rhetoric or practiced it in their everyday administration. The artificial image-building phrases in many cases say more about the literacy of those who chose them than about the town leadership itself.

Which authors provided the texts used to adorn the chief symbol of municipal government, and what inspired their use? They were, not surprisingly, classical authors whose work was greatly in vogue in the age of humanism and was even commended by the great reformers as reading material for monarchs.⁵⁶ The texts fell into three main subject areas: the Bible, classical theories of the state, and classical history. These are the main themes of the quotations on the walls of Kolozsvár town hall, among which we can identify words of wisdom by Sallust, Seneca, Plato and Cicero.

We have no reason to doubt that the person who devised the scheme had read and was familiar with these authors, because they all had a place on school and university syllabuses and their work was also collected by citizens of the town.⁵⁷ The variety of the inscriptions and authors, however, suggest that rather than selecting the quotations individually, the designer of the decoration drew from a *florilegium*, a thematic anthology concerning good and bad government. The humanist (Germanic) canon unavoidably suggests itself as the chief

55 See Zsigmond Jakó, “Az otthon és művészete a XVI–XVII. századi Kolozsváron. (Szempontok a reneszánsz kori művelődésünk történetéhez)” [Home and Its Art in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Kolozsvár], in *Emlékkönyv Kelemen Lajos születésének nyolcvanadik évfordulójára* [Festschrift for the 80th Birthday of Lajos Kelemen], ed. András Bodor et al. (Cluj-Napoca, 1957), 361–93.

56 Susan Tipton, *Res publica bene ordinata. Regentenspiegel und Bilder vom guten Regiment. Rathausdekorationen in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1996), 27.

57 See Gyöngy Kovács Kiss, “Könyvek a kolozsvári polgárok 16–17. századi hagyatékaiban” [Books in the Legacies of 16–17th Century Burghers in Kolozsvár], in Gyöngy Kovács Kiss, *Rendtartás és kultúra* [Rules and Culture] (Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 2001), 48–59.

inspiration for the inscriptions, acquired from the sights and experiences of peregrinations and trading journeys, even though the first person to (partially) publish the inscriptions, Elek Jakab, almost cautioned his readers against seeing in them a simple imitation of this. In fact, such a “transplant” was more of a virtue than a vice. By echoing messages commonly expressed in other European towns, inscriptions such as “This house loathes indolence, loves peace, punishes sin, observes the laws and respects the good”,⁵⁸ served to display the openness of the Kolozsvár municipal government and its espousal of European municipal principles based on the Christian ethics of the time.

It is not difficult to identify the persons responsible for compiling the decorative scheme. The only municipal administrative officials who had the requisite literary, legal, theological and linguistic abilities for such a project were the notaries.⁵⁹ It cannot be a coincidence that the first (1592) inventory of town privileges taken by the notary Gergely Diósy⁶⁰ bears many similarities with the mottos on the town hall: quotations by Plato, Sallust and Aristotle were both allegories of good government and devices of self-display.

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In summary, the inscriptions on the walls of the early modern town hall of Kolozsvár were both decorations and messages to citizens entering the building, informing them of the high moral standards of their local government. The decorative scheme, with sentences lifted from the Bible and works by classical authors, attests above all to the cultural background of its designer, but also reflects the demand of civic society—as in other European towns—for a building which displayed the virtues of their town in the spirit of contemporary traditions. This kind of civic ostentation or, as Gáspár Heltai, the Lutheran pastor of Kolozsvár put it, “exhibitionism”, may also be ascribed to the emergence and development of early modern civic awareness.

58 “Haec domus odit nequitiam, amat pacem, punit crimina, conservat jura, honorat probos.” Jakab, *Oklevéltár*, II. 711; CouncilMin I/6. 401.

59 They were also mainly responsible for similar visual compositions for public display in towns throughout Europe. Tipton, *Res Publica*, 51–61.

60 Town Archive Kolozsvár, Index privilegiorum (Diósy-index) 1–2. See András Kiss, “A kolozsvári városi levéltár első levéltári segédlete (Diósy Gergely nótárius 1592-beli magyar nyelvű mutatója)” [The First Inventory of the Town Archive in Kolozsvár. The Hungarian Index of the Notary Gergely Diósy from 1592], in András Kiss, *Más források – más értelmezések* [Other Sources—Other Interpretations] (Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 2003), 129–59.

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