

Civitas nostra Bardfa vocata. Správa mesta Bardejov v stredoveku (1320–1526) [Civitas nostra Bardfa vocata. The Administration of the Town of Bardejov in the Middle Ages (1320–1526)].

By Mária Fedorčáková.

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The city of Bardejov (Bártfa; Bartfeld) is located in the northeast of Slovakia. This territory was part of the Kingdom of Hungary until 1918. In the late Middle Ages, Bardejov belonged to the group of leading Hungarian royal towns with well-developed trade and crafts and had a population of around 3000 inhabitants. To a large part, the town owed its modest prosperity to its location near the Polish border. Nowadays, Bardejov is exceptional from the point of view of historical research. It is one of the few towns of the former Hungarian Kingdom whose medieval archives have been preserved in almost complete condition. Several Hungarian, Slovak, and Polish historians have already noted this fact. However, despite a large number of written sources, or perhaps because of the latter, the city archives have not yet been fully utilized in research into the medieval history of the town. In recent years, this has been the task of the historian Mária Fedorčáková, currently working at the Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice (Slovakia), who, according to her profile, is a specialist in medieval Bardejov. The book under review here is her first monograph (in Slovak).

Despite the existence of several studies and books on medieval Bardejov, there still needed to be a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of the functioning of the local urban administration. The documents preserved in Bardejov enable us to expose all levels of such an organisational structure, including the lower-level employment positions to which little attention had been paid. Fedorčáková defines this goal in the introduction of her book, where she explains the research objectives, written sources, and literature on the given issue.

Bardejov turned from an inconspicuous border market settlement into a rapidly growing town in the fourteenth century. The legal stimulus for this

transformation was the privileges granted by King Charles I in 1320. The charter was actually also a kind of contract with the settling agent who was supposed to populate Bardejov and who assumed the office of hereditary judge then. Most of the Hungarian royal towns enjoyed the privilege of the free election of judges, so the much smaller number of towns with the office of hereditary judge were of a lower-level legal category. In the case of prosperous Bardejov, however, the king paid off the hereditary office in 1376 and granted the urban community additional privileges following the example of the country's two leading towns, Buda (Ofen) and Košice (Kassa; Kaschau). As a result of this act, Bardejov entered the circle of fully-fledged Hungarian royal towns with autonomy, self-government, and the free election of the magistrate. Fedorčáková describes this path of Bardejov in the first chapter of her book, entitled "From a Schultheiss to a Judge (1320–1376)." She also points to testimony from the fifteenth-century town book, according to which the king dissolved the hereditary office after complaints by the citizens that they were being oppressed by representatives of the hereditary judge. However, she urges caution when interpreting this report in detail since it was recorded almost half a century after the described events.

The most extensive part of the book is the second chapter, "Municipal self-government in the years 1376–1526." It describes the structure of town offices and their competencies. The author starts with the judge, town council, and deputy judge, examining their activities in judiciary affairs and administration. For a thorough explanation, she cites selected cases, mainly judicial ones, to illustrate how the town authorities proceeded. Besides the legal framework, she also focuses on the careers of chosen members of the urban political elite in one of the book's subchapters. A similar approach is used to characterize the notary's office. First, the scope of work of this town employee is described. Then, the focus turns to the origin, education, and activities of notaries known by name in Bardejov. And finally, attention is paid to the overall production of the town chancery and the usage of town seals. The following subchapter explains the functioning of the outer council, whose members were called elders (*seniores*). This body elected the judge and the town council annually and controlled their economic as well as political activity. In 1467, a town statute was adopted, which specified the course of elections. Despite this, it was not a widespread custom for other Hungarian towns of this legal category to put the circumstances of elections in writing for their own needs because, in this respect, the former (more or less) followed the content of a pre-existing everyday legal collection. Therefore, adopting such a statute in Bardejov could have resulted from some local specifics, but according to Fedorčáková, nothing more is known about it. Otherwise, the naming process of the outer council in Bardejov was shortly adapted and applied to the contemporaneous changes in the capital Buda. While in

the 1430s, the assembly of Bardejov's elders was called 'fifty men,' from the 1450s onwards, it was (as in Buda) called 'one hundred men,' although the real number in Bardejov remained at around 50-60 persons.

Subsequently, the book focuses on town employees such as lawyers, craftsmen, servants, messengers, and spies. Thanks to the meticulous archival research, much valuable data is presented here, a lot of which we usually do not know of in such quantity for other towns. Here, in my opinion, an analysis of the total town's income and expenditure would also have been beneficial for learning about the development of individual segments of Bardejov's economy. Such a topic remains open for further research.

Key aspects of the local "Church Administration" are introduced in the book's last chapter. The town held the right of patronage over the parish, which also resulted in the practice of the free election of the town priest. The autonomous circumstances of handing over the tithe to the diocesan bishop were employed. The town council oversaw the finances and assets of church institutions in Bardejov through the office of administrators (*Kirchenväter*). However, Bardejov's autonomy had its limits. In 1391, King Sigismund of Luxembourg, a lord of the town, convinced the council to accept a chaplain under his patronage as the town priest. Another subchapter gives information about individual church positions (parish priest, chaplains, preachers). Citing the town statutes and other sources, Fedorčáková here presents a vivid picture of the town parish with legal and personal relations among clerics living in late medieval Bardejov. The chapter closes with information about the rest of the church institutions that existed under the patronage of the town: the Augustinian friary, town hospitals, and school whose glory days otherwise occurred mainly after 1526, under the work of humanist teachers.

The book concludes with appendices that are valuable for further research into the careers of members of the Bardejov urban elite in the Middle Ages: lists of judges and members of the town council until the 1520s with other sporadically known lists of the outer council, administrators of town offices, and employees. The comprehensive Slovak conclusion is completely translated into English, which serves foreign readers equally well.

The reviewed monograph provides a detailed synthesis of the legal status and administrative structure of the medieval town of Bardejov. It is the result of several years of thorough archival research. It is noteworthy that Fedorčáková usually places her findings in the broader context of Hungarian towns. She has meaningfully complemented the facts about administrative affairs with exemplary court cases and details on the careers of chosen judges, senators, and clerics, thus providing deeper insight into the life of the urban community. A pleasant bonus is the graphical layout

of the printed work, with many photographs of archival sources and the historical center of Bardejov. It is thanks to this that the reader of the monograph receives not only a beneficial scholarly case study about an important town in the medieval Hungarian Kingdom but also a book of aesthetic quality.

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