

GENIUS LOCI

LASZLOVSZKY 60

edited by
Dóra Mérai
and

Ágnes Drosztmér, Kyra Lyublyanovics,
Judith Rasson, Zsuzsanna Papp Reed,
András Vadas, Csilla Zatykó



ARCHAEOLINGUA

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Healthcare in Cluj in the Sixteenth Century: Overlapping Professions

ANA-MARIA GRUIA*

The process of medicalization was long-drawn-out and complicated in Transylvania. In the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, several categories of people were involved in healthcare, sometimes with overlapping designations: monks, doctors (including the city's *physicus*), surgeons, barbers, midwives, public bath attendants, pharmacists, and folk healers. Women could also be listed as they certainly administered (at least basic) treatments at home. The relative importance of these practitioners in Cluj, their interaction, cooperation, and conflicts, their particular and shared attributions, their degree and time of institutionalization, their ambitions and actual social status are topics to be clarified and woven into the fabric of the city's late medieval and early modern history as part of the history of healthcare, medicalization, modernization, and mentalities.

In the sixteenth century, the doctors of Cluj were the only ones among the healthcare practitioners who possessed theoretical education in the field and had supervision rights. The city's public doctors, their studies and careers, are known for this period: the Saxon Bernád Jacobinus, and the Hungarians Ferenc Bálasfi and János Hertel (son of Ferenc Dávid, the founding father of Unitarianism).¹ They enjoyed high status in the city, occupying other positions as well, supervising all internal treatments and the administration of medicine – conferring with barbers and surgeons if needed, inspecting public pharmacies, and providing instructions for the preparation of composite drugs. The doctors were part of the special group of liberal arts practitioners and thus not subject to guild regulations.

The guild of barbers was established in 1568, a bit later than those in the Saxon towns, and certainly later than the other guilds of the city.²

The statutes of the barbers' guild—renewed repeatedly until the eighteenth century, which attests to the trade's prosperity—listed their activities as “shaving, hair cutting, washing, and oiling, tending wounds, producing unguents for the eyes and the teeth, teeth-pulling.”³ As elsewhere in the province, they were the main specialists for wounds suffered in accidents and wars.⁴ The city's registry records several barbers among its citizens, some newly arrived from other Transylvanian cities, which is a possible indication of the guild's appeal in the region.⁵

More detailed descriptions of the organization and attributions of barbers are available in the statutes of their guilds from the Saxon towns. They state that apprentices had to know how to perform bloodletting, pull teeth, dress wounds, and set bone fractures.⁶ Their master's piece entailed performing a series of operations such as preparing a new wound dressing and a concoction for wounds or a simple dry dressing and an ointment; performing hemostasis (staunching a wound); preparing a powder treatment or dressing for burns; or setting a leg fracture. Some of these activities clearly overlapped those of bath attendants, pharmacists, and surgeons.

Detailed descriptions of some barbers' tools can be found in the 1589 inventory of goods compiled at the death of Magister Egidius from Cluj. Besides specialized books, utensils of uncertain function, and specific barber's tools, Egidius also owned a urinal, several tooth-pulling tongs, phlebotomy tools, sieves and glasses for mixing drugs, a chair with a backrest, cupping glasses made of different materials, a pump (syringe?), containers with Latin inscriptions, and various medications (several dozen). The latter included both local and exotic products, among which some of the more interesting ones are two types of theriac (a universal drug and pain killer), mummy powder (an old cure-all remedy), Gum Arabic,

* National History Museum of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca

bay laurel fruits, long pepper, and saffron.⁷ The surgeon was thus not only able to prepare remedies himself for his surgical practice,⁸ but also to administer a wide array of medicine of vegetal, mineral, animal, and even human origin, being well stocked with an impressive array of substances, such as oils, powders, resins, confections, electuaries, plasters, unguents, tinctures, aromatic waters, and extracts. Judging by the other items listed in this inventory (money, precious stones, gold items, books), it is reasonable to suggest that Egidius was rich and that his trade was very profitable, possibly due to his providing healthcare and pharmaceutical activities.

The import of medicine, spices, and health remedies seems to have been common practice in the cities of Transylvania (Cluj, Bistrița, Brașov, Sibiu) in the sixteenth century.⁹ In the last decade of the sixteenth century the merchants of Cluj imported “apothecary stuff” from Cracow and also spices (ginger, cloves, pepper, oranges, lemons, sugar, cinnamon), some of which may have also been used for medicinal purposes.¹⁰ As noted above, for example, the *materia medica* in Egidius’s possession included long pepper and saffron, which had certain curative properties but were listed as colonial goods in contemporary commercial records. Cluj was thus provisioned with all kinds of imported goods, used both as culinary spices and as medicine. It is important, however, that Cluj was a transit point for commerce and not all of these apothecary-related imported goods were locally consumed. Medicine and colonial goods were also exported via Bistrița towards Moldavia at the end of the sixteenth century.¹¹

Another important healthcare provider in the city was the public bath, which is known to have existed in Cluj around the middle of the sixteenth century. Parallel to the activities of the barbers, bath attendants also specialized in treating wounds.¹² In 1557 the city council decided to have a public bath erected, which was done through voluntary work by the citizens. It had two sections, one for male and one for female clients, and was staffed by both male and female attendants.

The earliest mentions of pharmacists active in Cluj also come from the sixteenth century. Wolfgang Theke, a Saxon pharmacist from Buda, is mentioned as active in several cities in Transylvania before he finally settled in Cluj.¹³ Other

documents mention several *pharmacopoli* or *apotecari* in town shortly after the middle of the sixteenth century.¹⁴ In 1567 the city of Bistrița asked for a pharmacist from Cluj to help organize their municipal pharmacy, which confirms the existence of such specialists in Cluj.¹⁵ Elsewhere, the import of apothecary tools from Vienna is recorded between 1599 and 1637.¹⁶ Despite such indications, the opening date of the first municipal pharmacy in this town remains debated.¹⁷

Although healthcare in medieval and early modern Cluj merits further research, analysis of the barbers’ guilds in the Saxon towns of Transylvania has revealed a certain reticence about the activities of barbers and surgeons. There are several possible reasons for this, ranging from the medieval mentality that all trades involving contact with dirt and blood were impure and illicit due to the fact that the quality of their services was difficult to evaluate clearly. In these towns the barbers attempted to improve the public perception of their trade by dissociating themselves from bath attendants, who were denied access to their guilds—especially since the baths were closely associated with prostitution.¹⁸

Overall, in Cluj, like elsewhere, the line between the different kinds of health providers, and between medicine and foodstuffs, was still blurry in the sixteenth century. Medical professions only emerged separately with the Habsburg reforms of healthcare and sanitation implemented at the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁹ I shall continue this incipient research with questions related to the number and status of each group of healthcare providers in Cluj to determine their relative importance. Further, comparing their number per inhabitant with the situation in other cities of Transylvania and Hungary may reveal if Cluj specialized in such services, as some researchers suggest, or whether it serviced a wider area than other urban centers. Finally, future avenues of research also include estimating the total number of health-related establishments (barber shops, pharmacies, baths), their locations in the city, their marketing activities and strategies (shop signs, attracting customers), as well as an analysis of the impact of the Reformation on their activities, especially the rules and regulations pertaining to social discipline and morality.

Notes

- ¹ Pál Mátyás, “Kolozsvári orvosdoktorok a XVI-XVII. század fordulóján” [Physicians of Cluj at the turn of the sixteenth century], *Communicationes de Historia. Artis Medicinae* 100 (1982): 61–68.
- ² Ștefan Pascu, *Meșteșugurile din Transilvania până în secolul al XVI-lea* [The crafts in Transylvania until the sixteenth century] (Cluj: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1954); Ștefan Pascu, ed., *Istoria Clujului* [History of Cluj] (Cluj-Napoca: Consiliul popular al Municipiului Cluj, 1974).
- ³ Pascu, ed., *Istoria Clujului*, 142.
- ⁴ András Kovács, *Fejedelmek gyógyítói: Gyógyítók, gyógyszeres és gyógyítás az erdélyi fejedelmek udvarában a 17. század első felében* [The princes’ doctors: Doctors, remedies and medicine in the court of Transylvanian princes in the early seventeenth century] (Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2018), 35. The book contains a longer discussion of the different medical professions in Transylvania during the sixteenth but mostly the seventeenth century.
- ⁵ Samuil Goldenberg, “Contribuție la istoria medicinei din Transilvania în secolul al XVI-lea. Inventarul unui bărbier-chirurg din 1589” [Contribution to the history of medicine in Transylvania during the sixteenth century: The inventory of a barber-surgeon from 1589], in *Din istoria medicinei românești și universale*, ed. V. L. Bologa (București: Editura Academiei RPR, 1962), 95.
- ⁶ Alexandru Ștefan, “Corporația bărbierilor din Brașov în a doua jumătate a secolului al XVI-lea” [The barbers’ guild in Brașov during the second half of the sixteenth century], *Buletinul Cercurilor Științifice Studentești 17-18* (2011-2012): 76–77.
- ⁷ Goldenberg, “Contribuție,” 99–104.
- ⁸ Istvan Budaházy, *Contribuții la istoria farmaciei orădene* [Contribution to the history of pharmacies in Oradea] (Oradea: Editura Muzeului Țării Crișurilor, 2007), 39.
- ⁹ Samuil Goldenberg, “Aprovizionarea și politica de prețuri a unor orașe din Transilvania în secolele XVI-XVII” [The supply and price policy of some cities in Transylvania during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries], *Acta Musei Napocensis* 17 (1980): 202.
- ¹⁰ Mihail Dan, “Schimbul de mărfuri Cluj-Cracovia” [The Cluj-Krakow exchange of goods], *Acta Musei Napocensis* 11 (1974): 167.
- ¹¹ Francisc Pap, “Comerțul transilvănean al Clujului” [The Transylvanian trade of Cluj], *Acta Musei Napocensis* 11 (1974): 177.
- ¹² Kovács, *Fejedelmek gyógyítói*, 34.
- ¹³ Eva Crișan, *Materia Medica de Transilvania* (Cluj-Napoca: Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei, 1996), 202. *Istoria Clujului*, 144.
- ¹⁴ Crișan, *Materia medica*, 19.
- ¹⁶ Francisc Pap, “Comerțul Clujului cu Viena între 1599-1637 (pe baza registrelor tricesimale)” [The Cluj-Vienna trade between 1599 and 1637 (based on the thirtieth customs ledgers)], *Acta Musei Napocensis*, 18 (1981): 176.
- ¹⁷ Ana-Maria Gruia, “Farmaciile din Clujul Epocii Premoderne” [The pharmacies of Cluj during the early modern era], in *Cluj – Kolozsvár – Klausenburg 700*, ed. Mária Lupescu Makó (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2018), 511–512.
- ¹⁸ Maria Crăciun, “Cultural Capital and Social Networks: The Saxon Community in Early Modern Transylvania,” *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Historia* 56, no. 1, (2011): 101–104.
- ¹⁹ Teodora Daniela Sechel, “The Emergence of the Medical Profession in Transylvania (1770–1848),” *Cultural Dimensions of Elite Formation in Transylvania (1770 – 1950)*, eds. V. Karady and B. Zs. Török (Cluj-Napoca: EDRC Foundation, 2008), 95–114.