

## Der Thurzo-Kodex – eine einzigartige Quelle zum europäischen Bergrecht und Münzwesen um 1500. Edited by Miroslav Lacko and Erika Mayerová.

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The so-called Thurzó Codex, a German-language codex preserved by the Bavarian State Library in Munich, is well known to urban and mining historians. It was referred to as early as the nineteenth century, and some parts were published in Hungary and abroad. Most recently (in 2021), Renáta Skorcka, from Hungary, published and interpreted Hungarian-related legal texts from the codex. However, the publication of the entire codex still needed to be undertaken. Although the document collection was already available online in a digitised form, there was also a demand for a transcribed and printed variant. Therefore, we cannot but welcome the fact that the two Slovak researchers, Miroslav Lacko and Erika Mayerová, have transcribed and edited the whole text so that it can be published, which is a considerable achievement.

The first known owner of the codex was György Thurzó. The text can be divided into two major units. The first part (fols. 1r–81r) was completed by the scribe on 25 September 1500. It was, therefore, prepared before this date or, according to the editors, before 1501. In this large unit, we can find texts related to the town and mining law of Jihlava (Iglau, now in the Czech Republic) and documents associated with mining in the Kingdom of Hungary. The transcription of this part was carried out by Mayerová. This text was originally written in two columns, and Mayerová has retained this solution in the edition.

In contrast to the texts with legal content, the second major unit (fols. 82r–163r) edited by Lacko received little attention earlier. This is the later part, written by a different hand than the first one. It specifically served the purpose of helping the count of the chamber, as it contains information about, among other things, mint coinage,

the fineness of European gold coins, the technology of cementation, the exchange prices of gold and silver, as well as the *pisetum* payable to the archbishop. It can rightfully be linked to Kremnica (Körmöcbánya, now Slovakia).

While Kurt Rein, who analysed the codex in detail,<sup>1</sup> believed that the second part was made in the mid-1510s, Lacko dates it to between 1500 and 1506. In his opinion, it can be connected to the activities of the father, János Thurzó, rather than the son. He argued that János Thurzó became the count of the chamber of mines and mints in Kremnica in 1498 and introduced new measures, and he also took the cementing office in 1505. Cementing was regarded as a secret, and he could have hardly learnt about it earlier. The importance of the text recorded in the codex is enhanced by the fact that it was the earliest description of the technique used in Hungary. We can add to this point that the following two sources from which the method can be learnt were written in Transylvania (in 1541 and sometime in the second half of the sixteenth century).

Mayerová has briefly presented the German language used in the codex, preparing a highly useful vocabulary for the chapter she authored.

The longer introductory study was authored by Lacko. The paper, which is almost as long as a book, primarily focuses on the person of János Thurzó, but it also summarises the history of the family up to the 1520s. The activities of the Thurzós have been explored by numerous volumes and studies in a variety of languages. Of the scholars, special mention should be made of Marian Skladaný from Slovakia. Lacko's knowledge of the scholarly literature is truly impressive: he has relied on all the relevant Slovak, Hungarian, Polish, German, Austrian, and Czech works. Furthermore, he was not content with using secondary sources; he carried out archival research as well.

The length of the present review does not allow us to discuss all the details of the introductory study, which is rich in data. We can only highlight a few major findings here. The author discusses the origins of the family, among other things. While the German-language research considers them to be the descendants of Austrian nobles who immigrated to *Scepusium*, Lacko regards the ancestors to be lance-bearers from *Scepusium*, adhering to the view held by Hungarian and Slovak historians. This is a fact based on written evidence. It can be added that the personal name 'Turzó' itself also occurs (in the forms 'Turuzo' and 'Turso') in Hungarian sources dated to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Nearly every detail of the activities undertaken by János Thurzó (1437–1508) can be read in the work. The burgher of Levoča (Lőcse, now Slovakia) became a citizen of Cracow and was also a member of the municipal council between 1477 and 1508. Lacko rightly emphasises Cracow's importance. As a busy, prestigious

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1 Rein, "Der Münchner Thurzo-Kodex, 1966"; Rein, "Der Münchner Thurzo-Kodex, 1967"; Rein, "Der Münchner Thurzo-Kodex, 1968."

merchant town, it created a solid basis for Thurzó's wide-ranging activities. We learn about his relatives living there and the history of the family properties. Lacko's study reflects the image of a large entrepreneur with broad international connections who was in contact with the citizens of many cities (Nuremberg, Augsburg, Leipzig, Gdańsk, and Toruń, etc., in addition to the Hungarian towns) and founded companies with them that existed for a longer or shorter period. The author also discusses in detail the family background and relationships of his business partners.

Thurzó's most important field of activity was related to mining. It was in this field that he developed his greatest engineering innovations. One of these was the process of copper refining that he invented in Mogiła, and it was a closely guarded secret. In this way, the black copper of Banská Bystrica (Besztercebánya, now Slovakia) could be prepared for the extraction of silver in trickle furnaces. The lead required by this procedure was imported from Ołkusz (Poland). He was also engaged in the extraction of water from mines. His other invention was a high-performance water extraction machine (*Kehrrad*), built in Baia Mare (Nagybánya, now in Romania) towards the end of his life. With this equipment, he was able to bring subsoil water to the surface from a greater depth than ever before.

The chapters of the introductory study discuss where and what János Thurzó did. We obtain a comprehensive picture of his activities in Ołkusz, Kutná Hora, and Rammelsberg, for example. The latter two settlements are famous for their copper mining, where Thurzó built furnaces, including a trickle furnace, together with his business partners.

The Fugger-Thurzó company was established in 1494, and the book details its operation. Thurzó built a trickle smelter in Moštenica (now Slovakia), which, according to Lacko, started working in 1496/97. From the beginning of 1498 (from 2 February, based on Lacko's data), János Thurzó and his son, György, leased the mining and minting chamber in Kremnica. The author calculated the scale of gold and silver mining. However, according to the more recent calculations by Oszkár Paulinyi,<sup>2</sup> only 1,075 (rather than 1,254) marks of gold were produced annually in Kremnica in the 1480s and 1490s, and production later stabilised at around 1,000 marks. Additionally, the country's silver production was not 17,000 marks, as the book says, but considerably more than that. Together with mining in Baia Mare and Transylvania, it must have exceeded 30,000 marks. Thanks to Banská Štiavnica (Selmecebánya, now in Slovakia), the largest amount of silver in the kingdom was brought to the surface in the mining region of Kremnica.

Lacko has presented János's last will, which was drawn up in favour of his wife in Cracow, in January 1507. However, it would have also been worth touching upon

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2 Paulinyi, "Kimutatások a körmöcbányai bányakamarai körzet nemesfémtermeléséről," 334, 346.

his last will made in Buda on 28 February 1507, which unfortunately has only been preserved in a secondary copy.<sup>3</sup> In this latter document, János Thurzó arranged, among other things, the fate of his mines and furnaces in Hungary and elsewhere.

János Thurzó involved his son, György, in his businesses early on, and they became the counts of the chamber in Kremnica together. Research has so far assumed that it was this György who married Anna Fugger in 1497 and died in Augsburg in 1521. However, from a Cracow document, Lacko has inferred that it was another person. In his view, János's son György married a woman from Cracow and died in 1515. The other György, in fact, was his son, who married the Fugger girl and died in Augsburg (and not the father). So this latter György must have been very young at the time of his wedding. At the same time, it is a fact that the person mentioned in the marriage contract with Anna Fugger (1497) is György, son of János, who referred to Anna as his spouse. Lacko's finding, therefore, requires further supporting data.

Overall, it can be said that after a comprehensive introduction the authors have published a document the second part of which has been overlooked by research until now, even though it provides valuable information regarding economic history and engineering history, among other things. Their volume, therefore, responds to a long-felt need.

## Literature

Paulinyi, Oszkár. Kimutatások a körmöcbányai bányakamarai körzet nemesfémtermeléséről a 16. század első felében [Accounts on the Precious Metal Production of the Kremnica District of Chamber of Mines in the First Half of the Sixteenth Century]. *Századok* 112 (1978): 326–46.

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3 National Archives of Hungary, *Collectio Diplomatica Hungarica*, DL 21 672. [https://archives.hungaricana.hu/hu/charters/21\\_672](https://archives.hungaricana.hu/hu/charters/21_672)

