

Places of Authentication in the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary

Recent Approaches Concerning the Fields of Ecclesiastical Society and Countrywide Competence

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Received 19 May 2025 | Accepted 1 October 2025 | Published online 22 December 2025

Abstract. Places of authentication (*loca credibilia*) were legal institutions regarded as specifically Hungarian. Due to the substantial volume of related documents—approximately one-third of the surviving diplomatic sources from medieval Hungary were issued by these institutions—, they have long been at the forefront of historical research. However, thanks to recent technological developments, particularly the DL–DF database of the Hungarian National Archive, researchers now have incomparably improved the opportunity to address both longstanding and newly emerging questions. For this reason, a thorough understanding of these institutions is crucial for the study of medieval Hungarian history. The first part of this paper summarises essential background knowledge on *loca credibilia* through a historiographical overview. The following sections explore three widely recognised and relatively new directions in current research, along with recent findings: 1. The application of place-of-authentication charters in the reconstruction of the personnel of the church institutions involved (cathedral and collegiate chapters, as well as convents); 2. The countrywide competence of some centrally located *loca credibilia*; these have been known for centuries, but have only recently become a subject of scholarly analysis due to previous difficulties in accessing the charters, and 3. An overview of the activities of the places of authentication at the beginning of the Early Modern era, a particularly turbulent period in Hungarian history marked by the double election of kings.

Keywords: place of authentication (*loca credibilia*), diplomatic sources, charter, pragmatic literacy, Kingdom of Hungary, church institutions

Introduction to research on a special institution

In 2022, Hungary commemorated the 800th anniversary of the Golden Bull of Andrew II (1205–1235). A range of academic conferences and informative public presentations were held, alongside the publication of several scholarly studies and

books exploring the historical importance of this document.¹ These events may help familiarise the public with the fact that the Golden Bull of 1222 is a charter confirmed by a *bullā aurea*. This distinction highlights the significance of non-narrative written sources in medieval Hungarian history. While chronicles, legends, annals, and biographies are more commonly referenced in educational settings and everyday discussions, they represent only the tip of the iceberg. Charters represent the largest, relatively unbiased, and most comprehensive body of source material, much of which remains unexploited in various respects. However, it is important to note that, within the broader Hungarian context and by definition, the term “charter” is applied to any document issued prior to the Battle of Mohács in 1526, provided it is non-narrative in nature.² This collective term encompasses not only privileges but also litigation and administrative documents, missive letters, economic records, and other related sources, with or without legal value. Altogether, approximately 300,000 diplomatic sources have survived and—this is absolutely unique—all of them have been available online (mostly) in high-resolution photocopies, free of charge, through the Hungaricana (so-called DL–DF) database since 2010.³ A simple search in the database reveals that approximately one-third of these documents were issued by places of authentication; indeed, their number slightly exceeds that of royal charters. Hence, it is essential to examine these special institutions in the context of research on medieval Hungarian history.

By definition—primarily based on László Solymosi’s article in the *Lexicon of Early Hungarian History* (1994)—places of authentication (Latin plur. *loca credibilia*, Hungarian plur. *hiteleshelyek*) were special institutions of pragmatic literacy in the Kingdom of Hungary. These institutions were operated by cathedral or collegiate chapters, as well as Benedictine, Premonstratensian, Templar, Hospitaller, and Stefanite convents, from the late twelfth century until 1874. They provided services comparable to those of public notaries elsewhere in Europe: drafting contracts at the request of natural or legal persons (*fassio*), issuing authentic copies of documents either preserved by them or presented to them (*transsumptum*), and accompanying a *homo regius* to witness legal acts on-site, acting on the mandate of the king or any other high-judge of the country (*relatio*). The authenticity of these documents depended on their confirmation by an authentic seal.⁴ Public notaries co-existed in Hungary as well—primarily associated with ecclesiastical matters—, but society generally preferred the services of the *loca credibilia*. What is considered particularly

1 For the most detailed English synthesis, see Zsoldos, *The Golden Bull of Hungary*.

2 Érszegi, “Oklevél,” 504–05.

3 <https://archives.hungaricana.hu/hu/charters/> (Accessed: 5 May 2025) Cp. Rác, “Collectio Diplomatica Hungarica,” 423–44.

4 Solymosi, “Hiteleshely,” 263–64.

special in this context is that the principal institutional framework for pragmatic literacy was constituted by ecclesiastical bodies (corporations). These institutions not only recorded and authenticated transactions, but also fulfilled judicial and administrative functions.

In order to understand this unusual phenomenon, it is essential to first examine its historical origins. On the one hand, cathedral chapters served as the settings for ordeals as early as the eleventh century. These were predominantly trials by fire, in which the defendant's wound was bandaged and sealed for a designated period after touching a hot iron. Such ordeals marked the first instances in which the members of secular society encountered the seals of the chapters. Furthermore, the church institution was required to produce a brief written record of the ordeal's outcome, thereby establishing its influence in secular justice in Hungary at an early stage.⁵ On the other hand, until the reign of Béla III (1172–1196), the majority of Hungarian society functioned in a culture defined by orality. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the *pristaldi* (bailiffs) served as persons of public trust. For a specified fee, they acted either as delegates of a judge or as witnesses at the request of the parties involved. Their legitimacy was signified by a badge worn around the neck, which closely resembled a seal. The problems are obvious: the knowledge of a single *pristaldus* was limited to one (life)time, and they were corruptible. Consequently, the renewal of the mentioned Golden Bull in 1231 sought to regulate and restrict the role of the *pristaldi*: as stated in Article 21, "because many people suffer harm from false bailiffs, their summons or testimony shall not be valid without the witness of the diocesan bishop or the chapter."⁶ From this point onward, the *pristaldi*—increasingly referred to as *homines regii* from the mid-thirteenth century—were required to be accompanied by a member of a chapter or, somewhat later, a convent. The secular authority continued to bear primary responsibility; however, when the learned cleric was present as a *testimonium*, he was required to submit a written report. Additionally, around the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, societal demand for charters grew significantly, while the royal chancery—newly established during the reign of the aforementioned Béla III—proved insufficient to meet the needs of a vast kingdom.⁷

Although Hungary takes pride in its distinctive institutions and unique systems, the disadvantages inherent in the operations of *loca credibilia* must also be recognised. The first concern is the absence of professionalism. The members of these ecclesiastical institutions were not as educated and professional as public notaries

5 The records of the cathedral chapter of Várad (Oradea) have survived from the period 1208–1235 in a printed version from the sixteenth century, see Solymosi and Szovák, eds, *Regestrum Varadiense*.

6 Article 21 of 1231, DRMH I, 38.

7 Engel, *The Realm of Saint Stephen*, 122–23.

elsewhere.⁸ This discrepancy is evident in both the text and the layout of these charters, particularly during the early period, before the set of *formulae* became fixed.⁹ The second issue concerned the minor convents. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, numerous monasteries—likely Benedictine—were founded in Hungary. However, it later became apparent that society, due to its distinctive inheritance system in which all male relatives were entitled to inherit, was unable to sustain such a large number of institutions, both in terms of land and human resources. It was challenging for minor convents to provide services comparable to those of the larger houses. Furthermore, in privately founded monasteries, the substantial influence exerted by the patron family heightened the risk of document forgeries. Finally, Louis I (1342–1382) regulated this issue. In 1353, he requested the seals from all places of authentication and—pursuant to the laws enacted two years earlier¹⁰—returned them only to the larger and more reliable institutions. The seals of minor convents were withdrawn and broken to prevent further misuse. Two places of authentication within the same settlement were operated only in the most important pilgrimage sites: in Székesfehérvár (the collegiate chapter and the Hospitallers’ convent) and—with a longer interruption—in Várad (the cathedral chapter and the Premonstratensian convent; the latter became later a collegiate chapter as well); these cities were the burial places of Kings St Stephen and St Ladislaus.¹¹

Following the definition, the *loca credibilia* issued two types of documents. The contributions for requests of natural or legal persons outside of litigations are the *fassiones* (Hungarian: *bevallások*). These documents include contracts, deeds, records, testaments, protests, and the issuance of authentic copies (*transsumpti*), which is a subcategory of the confessions as well. The other principal category of documents produced by places of authentication resulted from external fieldwork. In the case of a *relatio* (Hungarian: *jelentés*), a member of the chapter or the convent was required

8 Concerning the activity of the public notaries and other institutions of public authenticity in different regions of Europe, see Hunyadi, “Administering Law,” 26–27.

9 The first *formularium* used exclusively by a specific place of authentication—the Hospitallers’ convent of Székesfehérvár—has been revealed only recently in Kassa (Košice). The fragmented text of sixty folios contains more than seventy examples from the first quarter of the sixteenth century. The edition of this formulary is in progress by Gábor Mikó, Bence Péterfi, and András Ribí. Cp. https://abtk.hun-ren.hu/images/2024/naptar/kozepkori-estek_20241211.pdf (Accessed: 5 May 2025). Other formularies—which are mostly related to certain notaries—also contain examples of place-of-authentication charters. See Szovák, “Formularies in the Medieval Hungary,” xvii–xl; Dreska, *Magyi János közjegyző formuláskönyve*, xvi.

10 “Minuti etiam conventus ab emanatione litterarum suarum super perpetuatione possessionum conficiendarum cessent et eorum sigilla omni careant firmitate.” Article 3 of 1351, DRH I, 131.

11 For the list of the places of authentication operated until the Turkish occupation, see Engel, *The Realm of Saint Stephen*, 123.

to travel with one or more secular *homo regius* to the location of a legal act, pursuant to a mandate issued by the king or any other high-judge of the country (e.g., the palatine, the judge royal, the ban in Slavonia, and the voivode in Transylvania). The mandate letter was usually copied into the body of the report, giving these documents a framed structure. As a result, many royal charters were preserved within these texts, even though their originals were lost during the Turkish conquest and the subsequent destruction of the Royal Archive in Buda. The *relationes* may be further divided into two subcategories. The first includes legal procedures, such as inspections, inquiries and summons—that is, actions of a non-definitive nature. The second comprises introductions into property or rights. In the case of the latter, if no objections were raised, the places of authentication issued a charter in the form of a privilege, as these proceedings were considered final.

Historiography and new research possibilities

The first and, thus far, only comprehensive monograph dedicated to the places of authentication in the Middle Ages was written by Ferenc (Franz) Eckhart and published in 1914 as part of the *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* series.¹² Although Eckhart primarily relied on edited sources, many of his conclusions have remained valid and have been confirmed by subsequent scholarship. As his work was accessible exclusively in German until 2012, it occasionally happened that scholars—citing it without a thorough reading—unwittingly “rediscovered” findings he had already presented.¹³

During the middle decades of the twentieth century, several significant studies on the places of authentication were published by scholars such as Imre Szentpétery, Lajos Bernát Kumorovitz, György Bónis, László Mezey, and László Solymosi, among others. However, the decades of communist rule in Hungary were not conducive to historical research on the Middle Ages, particularly in the field of church history.¹⁴

A turning point came in the 1990s, when László Koszta established an academic school and research group known as *Capitulum* at the University of Szeged.¹⁵ He assigned the topic of places of authentication as thesis subjects to his talented

12 Eckhart, *Die glaubwürdigen Orte*. For the Hungarian translation by Gábor Dreska, see Eckhart, *Hiteleshelyek*. In the following pages, the references were prepared for the German version, and both the page numbers of the special edition and the (original) edition were indicated as well.

13 Cp. Dreska, “Fordítói megjegyzések,” 164.

14 For a detailed bibliography, see Dreska, “Fordítói megjegyzések,” 164–82.

15 Koszta’s first related studies date back to the turn of the 1980s and 1990s and are about the chapters of Pécs and Pozsega. For the summarising articles, see Koszta, “A pozsegei káptalan hiteleshelyi tevékenysége 1353-ig,” 3–46; Koszta, *A pécsi székeskáptalan hiteleshelyi tevékenysége*.

students, thereby fostering the emergence of a new generation of church historians. Koszta recognised that this field provided an ideal training ground for young scholars to develop their skills in collecting, reading, and analysing medieval sources.¹⁶ Today, many of his former students are part of the cohort of mid-career medievalists throughout Hungary (e.g., Zsolt Hunyadi¹⁷ and Tamás Kőfalvi¹⁸ in Szeged, and Tamás Fedeles¹⁹ in Pécs). The only critique of the project is that the upper chronological limit of these studies was typically set by the aforementioned seal revision initiated by Louis I in 1353. As a result, our understanding of the earlier period is disproportionately extensive compared to the later one, even though the latter is incomparably richer in available sources.

Significant change in this attitude can only be observed since the end of the first decade of this millennium.²⁰ In this regard, the contributions of Gábor Dreska deserve special recognition. Between 2007 and 2013, he edited and published *in extenso* the entire corpus of charters—more than 1,000 documents—issued by the Benedictine convent of Pannonhalma, spanning from the beginnings until 1526. This accomplishment is acknowledged as unique and most likely will continue to be regarded as such.²¹

Another turning point in the research occurred in 2010, when the National Archive of Hungary launched the aforementioned DL–DF database. This development significantly expanded our research capabilities, making the process incomparably easier and faster while enabling us to compile a comprehensive collection of surviving material from various perspectives. Given the large volume of place-of-authentication charters, this is a field of study in which comprehensive questions can only be answered through the analysis of a substantial body of sources.²² The exploitation of this opportunity has already begun over the last decade and a half; however, there are obviously many unresearched topics (e.g., the diplomatic characteristics of late medieval place-of-authentication documents).

16 The old (and due to the early death of Koszta, non-updated) website of the research group is: <https://www.staff.u-szeged.hu/~capitul/capiteng.htm> (Accessed: 5 May 2025).

17 In English, see Hunyadi, “How to Identify a 600 Year-Old Forgery?,” 87–94; Hunyadi, “Regularities and Irregularities,” 137–49; Hunyadi, “The *Locus Credibilis* in Hungarian Hospitaller Commanderies,” 285–96.

18 With an edition of documents see Kőfalvi, *A pécsváradai konvent hiteleshelyi oklevéltára*. In English by the same author, see Kőfalvi, “Places of authentication,” 27–38; Kőfalvi, “Written Records at Place of Authentication,” 229–41.

19 E.g. Fedeles, “A pécsi székeskáptalan hiteleshelyi vonzáskörzete,” 9–22.

20 For a notable example from 2009, see Fedeles and Bilkei, eds, *Loca credibilia*.

21 Dreska, *A pannonhalmi konvent hiteleshelyi működésének oklevéltára*, Vol. I–IV.

22 “Regarding the details of the operation of places of authentication, we should not look for information in the laws, but primarily in the charters themselves.” Szentpétery, *Magyar oklevéltan*, 218.

New approaches—the personnel

In addition to the traditional use of the *chirographum* and the later widespread adoption of authentic seals, many *loca credibilia* employed the *series dignitatum* as a supplementary method of authentication. While originally functioning as witness lists, these gradually evolved into standardised lists of officials or dignitaries of the respective ecclesiastical institutions. After a considerable period, these became increasingly difficult to forge, as not only did the names differ, but also the listed officials. For instance, the cathedral chapter of Várad included only the provost and the columnar canons (*lector, cantor, custos*).²³ In contrast, the cathedral chapter of Eger additionally listed the archdeacons, the two archbishops of the country, the local bishop, and the king.²⁴ In the fifteenth century, the collegiate chapter of Székesfehérvár listed the provost, the columnar canons, and the two deans.²⁵ However, in the same period, the collegiate chapter of Óbuda never listed the provost and the dean; instead, it included the columnar canons and several other canons.²⁶ In addition, even within the convents, the titles of the officials varied depending on the religious order.

These lists, and the names of the sent out members, were included in the *relationes*, and are excellent sources for researching the personnel of ecclesiastical institutions functioning as places of authentication. They easily enable the collection of numerous canons, choir members, or brethren, which in turn facilitates the construction of the archontology and, subsequently, the prosopography of the respective chapters and convents. However, several challenges exist in this area of research, including the absence of “family” names or information regarding the origin of the clerics until the mid-fourteenth century for chapters (and even later for convents), as well as the limitations of the available data.²⁷ However, aside from the documents of the Roman Curia, the most important sources for understanding medieval ecclesiastical society in Hungary are the place-of-authentication charters. Recent research has significantly enhanced our knowledge in this area: in the footsteps of the mentioned László Koszta, József Köblös²⁸ and Tamás Fedeles²⁹ many new studies

23 E.g., *Transsumptum* from 7 January 1432, MNL OL DL 104 770.

24 E.g., *Fassio* from 29 June 1371, MNL OL DL 5947.

25 E.g., *Relatio* from 23 June 1451, MNL OL DL 86 378.

26 E.g., *Relatio* from 7 October 1448, MNL OL DL 14 197.

27 Obviously, we have information about promotion in ecclesiastical benefices, university degrees, and sometimes the place of origin or family background of a given cleric. However, with the exception of some extraordinary cases, the place-of-authentication charters do not inform us about everyday life or material culture.

28 Köblös, *Az egyházi középréteg*.

29 Fedeles, *A pécsi székeskáptalan személyi összetétele a késő középkorban*.

and books have been published, especially by Norbert C. Tóth,³⁰ who aims to present a revised interpretation of ecclesiastical society, challenging the outdated views put forward by Elemér Mályusz.³¹ In addition, in 2019, a research group was established by the Hungarian Research Network (HUN-REN), the University of Pécs (PTE), and Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) to—among other tasks—compile a comprehensive list of all members of the Hungarian church from the period 1000–1387, marking the end of the Angevin period. The mass database that has already been published will play a significant role in the future synthesis of this topic.³²

New approaches—the countrywide competence

The countrywide competence of some places of authentication is typically a phenomenon long recognised by scholars; however, until 2018, no paper had been written on the subject. Even the most basic questions had not been addressed; not because the topic had not attracted interest, but because it could only be properly examined with access to all surviving documents issued by the relevant *loca credibilia*.

It is evident that each place of authentication operated within a defined geographical area. In the case of the confessions (*fassiones*), the most important point of view was the knowledge of the parties. However, in several cases—like protests and *transsumpti*—it was not required, since the place of authentication did not take any responsibility for the content of the charter.³³ It was not so simple in the case of reports (*relationes*), since the members of the chapter or the convent had to travel for proceedings according to the written mandate, thus their spatial coverage had to be defined. The country was not strictly divided into districts, and jurisdictions often overlapped, as—in contrast to the general practice in Europe—no one could issue a charter concerning their own case. The typical jurisdictional limit was one or two counties; however, in Eastern Hungary, where the number of such institutions was lower, the limits extended further.³⁴ However, István Verbóci's *Tripartitum* (1514) highlights that four places of authentication possessed countrywide competence *in executionibus*: the collegiate chapter of Székesfehérvár (Virgin Mary), the collegiate chapter of Óbuda (St. Peter), the cathedral chapter of Bosnia (St. Peter),

30 E.g., C. Tóth, *Az esztergomi székes- és társaskáptalanok archontológiája*; C. Tóth, *A váci székeskáptalan archontológiája*; C. Tóth and Horváth, *A győri székeskáptalan archontológiája*, etc.

31 Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom*. For the critics, see C. Tóth, “A »mályuszi modell« érvényessége,” 11–34.

32 Ribi and Thoroczkay, eds, *A középkori magyar egyház intézménytörténeti és archontológiai kézikönyve*, Vol. I–II.

33 Dreska, “A pannonhalmi konvent hiteleshelyi tevékenysége,” 20, 31–32.

34 Eckhart, *Die glaubwürdigen Orte*, 62 [454].

and the Hospitallers' convent of Székesfehérvár (King St. Stephen).³⁵ According to Ferenc Eckhart, there was a dual need for such institutions. On the one hand, this concept was brought into being by the demand of the people affiliated with the court, because they had some places of authentication in the vicinity where they could conduct their litigations. On the other hand, in cases of large, scattered land donations, this arrangement enabled faster, more cost-effective administration. It was faster, as for issues involving estates located in different counties, there was no need to visit multiple competent places of authentication one by one, and more cost-effective, as only a single privilege fee needed to be paid.³⁶

Among the institutions of the Hungarian Middle Ages that dealt with institutional legal literacy, those ecclesiastical institutions that could act throughout the entire territory of the country were in a special position.³⁷ This privilege—as it involved significant income for the *loca credibilia* concerned—was first mentioned in a letter by Esztergom canon Péter Palicsnai in 1460. According to his account, the collegiate chapters in Óbuda and Székesfehérvár had acquired such a licence through customary law; thus, it must have been in a similar manner to that of the Hospitallers' convent, particularly in the context of investigations and inhibitions.³⁸ The cathedral chapter of Bosnia, in an effort to address its poor financial situation, joined this long-standing trio as a result of the laws of 1498 and, most probably, the lobbying activities of the locally influential Keserű family.³⁹ It is not surprising that a case-by-case assessment proved that the place of authentication based in Diakóvár (Đakovo) could not develop a genuine countrywide competence due to its modest number of personnel and peripheral situation.⁴⁰ This stood in contrast to the three

35 “[...] demptis testimoniis capitulorum Albensis, Budensis et Bosnensis ecclesiarum, atque conventus Cruciferorum de Alba, qui in quibuscunq[ue] executionibus per totum regnum Hungariae et partes sibi subiectas procedendi habent auctoritatem” *Tripartitum*, II. 21 [280–83].

36 Eckhart, *Die glaubwürdigen Orte*, 66–67 [458–59].

37 For a detailed study of this topic, see Ribi, *Az országos hatáskörű hiteleshelyi tevékenység*. Short, selected sections of the previous monograph concerning the Hospitallers' convent of Székesfehérvár are also available in English, see Hunyadi and Ribi, *The Knights Hospitaller in Medieval Hungary*, 230–41.

38 “[...] quia nec capitula nec conventus extra comitatum possunt mittere homines suos ad inquirendum vel inhibendum demptis paucis capitulis Weteris Budensis et Albe Regalis, et est de consuetudine regni Ungarie.” Letter of Péter Palicsnai from Siena, 6 May 1460; C. Tóth, *Az esztergomi székeskáptalan*, II. 142.

39 “[...] item de capitulo Boznensi, quod ex quo totaliter destructi esse dinoscuntur, pro reformatione ecclesie illius, que in honorem sancti Petri constructa est, habeant facultatem ubique per totum regnum pro testimonio capitulari ambulare ad instar capituli Budensis [...]” Article 12 of 1498, DRMH IV, 94–95.

40 Ribi, “Miért működött,” 94–95; Ternovác, “A szerémi és boszniai latin püspökségek története,” 124–28.

wealthy, centrally located institutions founded by the monarch, which succeeded in managing such responsibilities more effectively.

Regarding the antecedents of the activity of the places of authentication with countrywide competence, Hungarian historiography is faced with two phenomena in the Angevin period. On the one hand, the public literacy operation of the *Comes Capelle* in the royal court may seem a similar amenity,⁴¹ but barely a tenth of the remaining documents issued by this office can be classified among the proceedings, which are more important from the point of view of countrywide competence. The office operated in Visegrád, except for the period between 1347 and 1355. Its dissolution in 1374 imposed significant additional tasks on the chapter of Óbuda, particularly in cases of confessions. After the seal revision, this chapter functioned as the sole place of authentication in the capital area, even though the court itself did not settle permanently in Buda until around 1385. A closer examination of the charters of the royal chapel also reveals that, even when parties made preliminary agreements before the *Comes Capelle*, proceedings benefiting those at court were typically carried out by the regionally competent places of authentication.⁴²

On the other hand, following the findings of Imre Hajnik, scholars have regarded the continuous presence of members of the chapter of Székesfehérvár at the general congregations of the palatines as a precursor to the countrywide competence later attributed to this ecclesiastical body.⁴³ The newly released study, focusing on the collection of all testimonies from places of authentication at the palatinal congregations, demonstrated that, until the mid-fourteenth century, territorially competent churches were involved in these proceedings. However, the palatinate of Miklós Kont (1356–1367) proved decisive in this regard: during his tenure, the delegates from the chapter of Székesfehérvár accompanied the *congregationes generales* by order of the king. However, their exclusive role in this context only emerged following the civil war in the early fifteenth century. By 1435—a year considered a turning point due to the spread of proclaimed congregations—⁴⁴ representatives of the chapter of Székesfehérvár, most of them secular persons (*litterati*) who, in the traditional sense, could not have served as delegates of a place of authentication, had participated in general congregations held in a total of thirty counties.⁴⁵

41 Gárdonyi, “A királyi titkos kancellária,” 174–96; Kumorovitz, “A királyi kápolnaispán,” 460–64; Solymosi, “Hiteleshely,” 264.

42 Ribi, “Az udvari hiteleshelyként működő királyi kápolna eljárásai,” 247–68.

43 Hajnik, *A magyar bírósági szervezet és perjog*, 71; Istváni, “A generalis congregatio,” 68; Solymosi, “A székesfehérvári káptalan,” 191–94; Ribi, “Miért működött,” 83.

44 Tringli, “A kikiáltott közgyűlés,” 575–604.

45 There were no palatinal congregations in Slavonia, Transylvania, and in several southern counties. See Istváni, “A generalis congregatio,” 191–205.

This extensive involvement significantly contributed to the chapter's familiarity with the kingdom and enhanced the institution's overall credibility.⁴⁶

In the case of the three ecclesiastical institutions that acquired their country-wide competence without explicit legal regulation, a comprehensive analysis of their approximately 9,000 extant records—focusing primarily on the *relationes*—proved necessary. With respect to the chapters of Óbuda and Székesfehérvár, as well as the Hospitallers' convent of Székesfehérvár, this research made it possible to identify the “larger core areas”⁴⁷—comprising between five and nine counties in Central-Hungary—which, when considered alongside other significant factors, laid the groundwork for distinguishing between countrywide competence and ordinary cases.⁴⁸ Moreover, it became evident that this form of privilege certainly did not develop in the case of any institution during the Árpáadian Era.⁴⁹

Regarding the beginnings of countrywide competence, the Angevin period posed several challenges, even though the donation of large estates across multiple and diverse counties was not a defining characteristic of the era. Although the places of authentication in Székesfehérvár rarely operated beyond their core area in the fourteenth century—typically in cases that can be attributed to specific other factors⁵⁰—the number of reports issued by the chapter of Óbuda increased significantly following the relocation of Charles I's (1301–1342) court to Visegrád. Moreover, until the laws of 1351 and the closely related seal revision two years later, the delegates of the church left the core area on numerous occasions. Although this was largely dependent on court decisions or annual mandates,⁵¹ the vast majority of beneficiaries were linked to the royal court. It is therefore not surprising that participation in distant missions became more common during the period when Louis I had his seat in Buda, much closer to Óbuda. After 1353, however, and during the remainder of the Angevin period, the number of such distant missions declined. From that point onward, delegates (*testimonii*) of the chapter of Óbuda left the central regions of the country in cases of legal disputes involving clergymen or ecclesiastical institutions.⁵²

46 Ribi, “A nádori közgyűléseken közreműködő hiteleshelyek,” 745–66.

47 Cp. Kubinyi and Fügedi, “A budai káptalan jegyzőkönyve,” 9; Dreska, “A pannonhalmi konvent hiteleshelyi tevékenysége,” 121.

48 Ribi, *Az országos hatáskörű hiteleshelyi tevékenység*, 37–48.

49 For earlier literature on this question, see Kubinyi and Fügedi, “A budai káptalan jegyzőkönyve,” 10–11; Solymosi, “A székesfehérvári káptalan,” 191–94; Hunyadi, *The Hospitallers*, 110, 203; Zsoldos et al., *Székesfehérvár története*, 82, 126, 241; Kertész, *A székesfehérvári káptalan*, 182–86.

50 E.g., neighbouring ecclesiastical institutions (AOKlt. XLVI, no. 172.), personal relations (AOKlt. XII, no. 394, AOKlt. XLIV, no. 150.), or the scenes of the cases were close to the properties of the given place of authentication (MNL OL DL 42 154).

51 About the concept of annual mandates, see Dreska, “Az éves parancsra adott hiteleshelyi jelentések,” 115–21.

52 For numerous examples, see Ribi, “A budai káptalan,” 373–88.

A significant turning point occurred with the establishment of Buda as the royal seat and the coronation of Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437). Thereafter, the chapter of Óbuda functioned as the place of authentication for the royal court.⁵³ Additionally, the value of the donated properties increased, which, in turn, led to a rise in the number of land donations during the final decades of the fourteenth century.⁵⁴ For some of them, the chapter of Óbuda carried out the introductions, sometimes also in remote locations.⁵⁵ At the same time, Sigismund's plan to establish a university in Óbuda, along with his lost decree dated to the spring of 1397, significantly impeded further development. The former greatly constrained the church's capacity,⁵⁶ while the latter—similarly to litigations—required that introductions be carried out by territorially competent places of authentication. In some individual cases, until the Council of Constance (1414–1418), certain *loca credibilia* were permitted to act differently than usual, but only if the king specifically ordered it.⁵⁷ The system reflects the fact that, during the early part of Sigismund's reign, there were no places of authentication with countrywide competence in the Kingdom of Hungary at all.

The situation began to change slowly in the 1420s with the monarch's return home after several years. Although the energies of the smaller chapter of Óbuda were still tied up with university affairs and issuing the documents taken over from the *Comes Capelle's* office, members of the chapter of Székesfehérvár appeared more and more frequently around distant estates as delegates of the place of authentication, but in fact, this did not require special permissions. Between 1424 and 1437, the members of the chapter of Székesfehérvár appeared in the counties of Bars, Bodrog, Győr, Hont, Pozsega, Sopron, Valkó, Varasd, Vas, and Zaránd in connection with such prominent figures as palatine Miklós Garai (1425),⁵⁸ the Ban of Macsó Péter Lévai Cseh (1428),⁵⁹ and the Master of the Horse Lőrinc Hédervári (1433).⁶⁰ The demand

53 “[...] eo quod capitulum vestrum memoratum (Budense) propinquior locus testimonialis pre aliis locis capitularibus et conventualibus ad nostre specialis residentie regalis habitationis locum fore dinoscitur situatum [...]” King Sigismund's mandate to the chapter of Óbuda, 24 June 1397, MNL OL DL 8234.

54 Engel, *The Realm of Saint Stephen*, 200.

55 E.g., introduction into Keselőkő (Podhradie) castle in Nyitra County, 10 February 1388 (ZsO I, no. 430.); summon in Szatmár County, 4 April 1388 (Géres, *A Károlyi-család oklevéltára*, Vol. I, 428–29); introduction into some estates in Tolna County, 6 December 1392 (Tringli, *A Perényi család levéltára*, no. 166–67); perambulation of the boundaries of several estates in Borsod County, 13 June 1396 (ZsO I, no. 4443).

56 Font, “A siker reménye,” 85–88.

57 C. Tóth, “Zsigmond királynak a hiteleshelyekről szóló elveszett rendelete,” 49–64.

58 17 May 1425, ZsO XII, no. 527,

59 13 December 1428, ZsO XV, no. 1324.

60 3 November 1433, MNL OL DL 88 076; 10 November 1433, Radvánszky and Závodszy, *Hédervári oklevéltár*, Vol. I, 177–78.

for countrywide competence, which began to solidify in the second half of the 1430s, was undoubtedly articulated by the court and the aristocracy. Behind the implementation of this reform, which can be considered rather administrative, one can discern the influence of one of Sigismund's most important diplomats and advisors, Benedek, provost of Székesfehérvár (1410–1439).⁶¹ Consequently, the prelate secured significant additional income for his church in the following decades, precisely when the opportunity to participate in the general congregations came to an end.

In the period following Sigismund's death—except for a brief interval during the civil war—the chapter of Székesfehérvár retained its countrywide competence. However, due to the increasing number of cases and, most probably, the influence of Bishop Simon Rozgonyi, a key advisor of King Władysław I (1440–1444), the chapter of Óbuda was also granted the licence and frequently participated in distant proceedings.⁶² It was not accidental that Péter Palicsnai noted in 1460 that, in effect, these two places of authentication were capable of operating throughout the entire country.

The development of the Hospitallers' convent, which became the third institution to acquire countrywide competence, occurred in several stages. From the 1450s onwards, a preliminary territorial expansion of competence can be observed—closely linked to the capacity limitations of the other two churches⁶³—which was eventually replaced by genuine countrywide competence in the final third of the 1460s. In addition to the favourable geographical conditions and the royal foundation, the positive relationship between the leaders of the preceptory and the Hunyadi family certainly played a significant role, as did the personal connections linking the convent to the neighbouring chapter of Székesfehérvár.⁶⁴

The reconstruction of the activity of the places of authentication with countrywide competence provided an opportunity to analyse the relevant charters and documents from multiple perspectives. With regard to the characteristics of the proceedings, the data confirmed Ferenc Eckhart's earlier observations on the subject, which he articulated more than a century ago. Overall, considering the institutional characteristics, 60–70 percent of the proceedings were introductions, while the proportion of cases involving more than one county ranged from 26–39 percent. Slightly more than half of the beneficiaries belonged to baronial families or the prelate faculty; however, individuals of lower rank who were in some way connected to the royal court also appeared among them. Among the beneficiaries were the most

61 For further details on his life, see Ribi, *Az országos hatáskörű hiteleshelyi tevékenység*, 74–76.

62 Ribi, *Az országos hatáskörű hiteleshelyi tevékenység*, 77–79.

63 The problems of the chapter of Székesfehérvár were summarised in the letter of Pope Sixtus IV in 1480, see Köblös, *Az egyházi középréteg*, 72. For the complaint of the provost of Óbuda due to the lack of professional personnel in 1485, see Eckhart, *Die glaubwürdigen Orte*, 73 [465].

64 Hunyadi and Ribi, *The Knights Hospitaller in Medieval Hungary*, 232–33.

prominent secular and ecclesiastical leaders of the Kingdom of Hungary, including members of seventy baronial families (e.g., Alsólendvai Bánfi, Battyányi, Corvin, Cudar, Enyingi Török, Ernuszt, Frangepán, Garai, Gúti Ország, Hédervári, Hunyadi, Kanizsai, Kinizsi, Pálóci, Perényi, Rozgonyi, Szapolyai, Szécsi, Szentgyörgyi and Bazini, Thurzó, Újlaki or Vingárti Geréb), as well as many bishops from ten dioceses (e.g., Tamás Bakóc, archbishop of Esztergom, Zsigmond Ernuszt, bishop of Pécs, Gábor Matucsina, archbishop of Kalocsa, Simon Rozgonyi, bishop of Veszprém, Dénes Szécsi, archbishop of Esztergom and István Várdai, archbishop of Kalocsa). Castles and their dependencies were particularly frequently involved, so it is not a coincidence that the delegates of the places of authentication appeared in forty-six to fifty-seven counties across the country (out of a total of sixty-seven). As might be expected, property relations and geographical factors also played a significant role in this context; in fact, regions in closer proximity were visited more frequently by the delegates. Nevertheless, it can be affirmed that centrally located places of authentication with countrywide competence were capable of operating effectively throughout the entire territory of the late medieval Kingdom of Hungary.⁶⁵

Over time, beginning in 1438, the chapter of Óbuda increasingly participated in the proceedings requiring countrywide competence, gradually expanding its involvement in a relatively balanced manner. By the end of the 1470s, roles had changed in Székesfehérvár. This meant that a shift had occurred there: in the sixteenth century, the chapter of Székesfehérvár scarcely undertook distant missions, and its charter-issuing activity declined both relatively and in absolute terms.⁶⁶ Simultaneously, the number of *relationes* issued by the Hospitallers' convent increased significantly in both countrywide and non-countrywide cases. Two places of authentication with countrywide competence operated quite intensively at the same location in the country, in Székesfehérvár, for only a brief period, in the 1460s and 1470s. Since the countrywide competence of the chapter of Bosnia had minimal consequences in practice, the underlying reasons were more strongly related to personal and personnel problems. On the one hand, the conflict between King Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490) and Miklós Györgyi Bodó, provost of Székesfehérvár (1444–1474),⁶⁷ and on the other hand, the king's favourable relationship with *preceptor* István Simontornyai (1468–1490) likely contributed to the shift. Additionally, the collegiate chapter faced increasing staffing difficulties in the second half of the fif-

65 Ribi, *Az országos hatáskörű hiteleshelyi tevékenység*, 83–108.

66 The final recorded introduction into the possession of a castle was conducted in Körös County on 13 June 1511, MNL OL DL 26 077. The last truly remote proceeding concerning the estates of the collegiate chapter of Szepes (Spišská Kapitula) in Abaúj County took place on 2 May 1501, MNL OL DL 22 536.

67 Ribi, "Az utolsó Fehérvárra temetett prépost," 253–54.

teenth century due to the large proportion of non-residential canons. By that time, charter-issuing activity had become the primary focus of the convent, in contrast to the chapter, which was burdened with multiple other responsibilities and relied on several distinct forms of income.⁶⁸

By examining the texts of the reports, one gains insight into the daily operations of places of authentication that obtained an extended licence. One of the most notable features of these *loca credibilia* was their high degree of flexibility, as they adapted to the specific needs of distinguished beneficiaries. During the implementation of the proceedings, the beneficiaries and their representatives—who were typically responsible for organising the process and selecting the contributors (such as *homines regii* and places of authentication)⁶⁹—were often confronted with more demanding tasks than usual, due to the considerable distances involved and the large number of estates concerned. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the rapid resolution of many cases, they frequently succeeded in overcoming these challenges. For example, during the introduction of János Corvin into the possessions of the town of Debrecen and the castle of Munkács (Mukacsevo), the delegates of the Óbuda chapter were in Debrecen on 13 January 1485. Five days later, they appeared in Munkács—approximately 165 kilometres away—and their return journey to Óbuda, covering around 350 kilometres, took ten days. This indicates that, under winter conditions, they likely travelled 30–35 kilometres per day, most probably on horseback—obviously, in favour of the king’s natural son and designated heir.⁷⁰ The chapter of Székesfehérvár had to resolve a more complex proceeding in 1494. Following the order of King Władysław II (1490–1516), the delegates were required to travel across nearly the entire southern region of the Kingdom in favour of László Geréb, bishop of Transylvania, and Zsigmond Ernuszt, bishop of Pécs. Between 11 April and 25 July, they visited eleven castles, ten towns, and two other possessions located in the counties of Baranya, Körös, Zala, Valkó, Bács, Csanád, and Fehér, as well as in the district of Fogaras. The entire journey covered more than 2,000 kilometres.⁷¹

Obviously, there are examples of slower-progressing cases as well. The division of the estates of the Garai and Szécsi families in 1478 extended—across multiple stages—over nearly a year. In response to the palatinal order issued on 1 December 1477, the delegates of the Székesfehérvár chapter conducted surveys at various locations: Somló castle and its dependencies (Veszprém County) in January, Csesznek

68 Hunyadi and Ribí, *The Knights Hospitaller in Medieval Hungary*, 162–63.

69 Dreska, “A pannonhalmi konvent hiteleshelyi tevékenysége,” 100; Tringli, *Hatalmaskodások*, 365, 369, 443.

70 *Relatio* of the chapter of Óbuda, 28 January 1485, MNL OL DL 37 661.

71 *Relatio* of the chapter of Székesfehérvár, 18 August 1494, MNL OL DF 208 535. For more similar examples with maps, see Ribí, *Az országos hatáskörű hiteleshelyi tevékenység*, 140–60.

castle (Veszprém County) in April, Simontornya castle (Tolna County), as well as Gara and Vicsadal (Valkó County) in May, Szentlőrinc (Valkó County), Cserög (Szerém County) and several possessions in Bács and Csongrád Counties in June, some villages in Pozsega County and the domain of Siklós (Baranya County) in July, and additional possessions in Temes County in October. Given the nature of the task, which required their physical presence at each estate, it is understandable that the resulting report took the form of a forty-six-page booklet.⁷²

In such cases—and during the early period of their countrywide activity—the places of authentication often relied on the services of royal court envoys rather than local *homines regii*.⁷³ However, a high degree of agility was also expected from the delegates of the places of authentication. Although dignitaries also appeared in this role in the early period, following the consolidation of countrywide competence, one mainly encounters the names of the simple members of the convent (*cruciferi*) and canons in the charters. Some individuals demonstrably spent most of the year carrying out missions of countrywide competence for the places of authentication.⁷⁴

After Mohács—directions for future research

Regarding the daily operations of church institutions, political changes did not necessarily have any real significance. However, the loss of the Battle of Mohács against the Ottomans on 29 August 1526 had serious consequences for the existence of several places of authentication. On the one hand, many ecclesiastical institutions were destroyed in 1526 (e.g., the chapters of Bács, Bosnia, Pécs, and Titel, as well as the Benedictine convent of Szekszárd), and even the *loca credibilia* with countrywide competence ceased their activities following the fall of the Buda area (1541) and Székesfehérvár (1543).⁷⁵ On the other hand, the places of authentication were important participants in administration and justice. It is well known that after the death of Louis II (1516–1526), the Hungarian aristocracy elected and crowned two kings: John I (1526–1540) and Ferdinand I (1527–1564). The medieval kingdom was divided into two parts, but the boundary between the spheres of influence was unstable: aristocratic families and town councils frequently altered their political alignment, and both kings led several campaigns against each other. The civil war affected the places of authentication as well: parallel appointments to ecclesiastical

72 Relatio of the chapter of Székesfehérvár, 24 November 1474, MNL OL DL 18 145. See more Kubinyi, “A nagybirtok és jobbágysai,” 197–226.

73 Eckhart, *Die glaubwürdigen Orte*, 41 [433].

74 Ribi, *Az országos hatáskörű hiteleshelyi tevékenység*, 132–35.

75 Papp, *A hiteles helyek története az újkorban*, 7.

offices, internal divisions, and looting characterised this era, all unfolding in the shadow of the Turkish occupation.⁷⁶

In addition, only a very limited amount of scholarly literature addressing the history of places of authentication in the Early Modern period is available. The most comprehensive work is László Papp's short book from the 1930s; however, it offers a general overview rather than an in-depth analysis.⁷⁷ Fortunately, in recent years, the Hungarian National Archive has launched a new project to supplement the aforementioned DL–DF database up to 1570 (“The Age of Reformation”), which significantly facilitates future research by making a large number of additional charters easily available.⁷⁸

Overall, while the most recent research is still forthcoming—conducted under significantly improved conditions compared to earlier studies—several partial findings have emerged over the last decades. It appears that in the first fifteen years following the Battle of Mohács, the operations of the places of authentication remained largely uninterrupted, as this served the interests of both parties. Ecclesiastical institutions acted in accordance with the directives of the reigning authority, adapting to the current political climate; however, the number of proceedings diminished considerably.⁷⁹ Notably, contemporaries sought to address the issue within a broader legal framework: according to Ferdinand's 1536 laws, if the competent place of authentication was under John's influence, the proceedings of institutions “in close proximity” were also deemed valid and legal.⁸⁰

From the perspective of the places of authentication with countrywide competence analysed in Section 4, the situation during these turbulent times was particularly complex. Both the area around the capital and Székesfehérvár changed hands several times due to the rivalry of the kings.⁸¹ As a result of the double election, the number of legitimate recipients of property donations doubled, and the medieval royal court in Buda—the primary beneficiary of the privilege under discussion—also ceased to exist in its original form. The situation was often similar to that in other parts of the country. First, at the turn of 1529 and 1530, both places of authentication in Székesfehérvár acted in favour of the same families or institutions, but on the

76 Papp, *A hiteles helyek története az újkorban*, 14–16; Barta, “Illúziók esztendeje,” 1–30; Pálffy, *A Magyar Királyság és a Habsburg Monarchia*, 50–76.

77 Papp, *A hiteles helyek története az újkorban*.

78 <https://adatbazisokononline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbazis/reformacio-kora-mnl-ol-1526-1570> (Accessed: 5 May 2025). Cp. Laczlavik, “Záró beszámoló,” 157–64.

79 Jakó, *A kolozsmonostori konvent jegyzőkönyvei*, I, 79–80; Bilkei, “A zalavári és kapornaki konventek hiteleshelyi tevékenységének néhány sajátossága,” 49.

80 Article 58 of 1536, CJH IV, 36.

81 Ribi, *Az országos hatáskörű hiteleshelyi tevékenység*, 163.

order of the other king within one year.⁸² Second, it frequently occurred—an issue even addressed in the laws of 1543⁸³—that proceedings were obstructed because the defendant had pledged allegiance to the opposition king. For example, the chapter of Székesfehérvár acted in favour of the Hospitallers' convent at Söréd—located only 18 kilometres from Székesfehérvár—on the authority of a mandate from King John; however, the action was ultimately in vain, as the members of the local noble family had declared themselves followers of King Ferdinand.⁸⁴

However, traces of countrywide competence can still be observed in certain proceedings of the chapter of Óbuda during the relatively peaceful period between 1537 and 1540, when the majority of Hungary was under the control of King John.⁸⁵ In the summer of 1537, the chapter of Óbuda assisted in the introduction of John's judge royal into the castle of Simontornya (Tolna County),⁸⁶ and two years later, in the introduction of the Podmaniczky brothers—who were, incidentally, protestants—into several castles recently regained from supporters of the Habsburg party: Várpalota, Bátorkő (Veszprém County), Lednic, and Ricsó (Trencsén County).⁸⁷ These proceedings represent typical activities of places of authentication with countrywide competence: the estates involved were extensive and situated far from Buda, included castles, and were granted to prominent aristocrats loyal to the king.

All in all, despite the fragmentary nature of the data, it suggests that the consequences of the Battle of Mohács affected the activity of the *loca credibilia*. If the scope of the research is narrowed to the places of authentication with countrywide competence, it can be stated that the double election of the kings, the civil war, and the destruction and disintegration of the royal court in Buda led to the relegation of this type of privilege to the background during these decades—despite the fact

82 *Relatio* of the chapter of Székesfehérvár by the mandate of János Thurzó, judge royal of King Ferdinand in favour of the Hospitallers' convent, 29 April 1529 (MNL OL R302. 2.11.114), and *relatio* of the chapter of Székesfehérvár by the mandate of King John in favour of the Hospitallers' convent, 25 February 1530 (Érszegi, "Fejér megyére vonatkozó oklevelek," no. 327). *Relatio* of the Hospitallers' convent of Székesfehérvár by the mandate of King Ferdinand in favour of the Héderváry family, 6 March 1529 (Radvánszky and Závodszy, *Héderváry oklevéltár*, Vol. II, 14), and *relatio* of the Hospitallers' convent of Székesfehérvár by the mandate of King John in favour of the Héderváry family, 19 April 1530 (Radvánszky and Závodszy, *Héderváry oklevéltár*, Vol. II, 22–24).

83 Article 29 of 1543, CJH IV, 116.

84 26 February 1536, MNL OL R302. 3.14.9.

85 Fodor and Oborni, "Két nagyhatalom között," 120.

86 10 August 1537, Lukinich, ed., *Podmaniczky-család oklevéltára*, Vol. II, 612–16.

87 3 September 1539, Lukinich, ed., *Podmaniczky-család oklevéltára*, Vol. II, 92–96; 13 September 1539, Lukinich, ed., *Podmaniczky-család oklevéltára*, Vol. II, 97–102; 15 September 1539, Lukinich, ed., *Podmaniczky-család oklevéltára*, Vol. II, 102–05.

that the laws of 1556 continued to acknowledge the matter.⁸⁸ However, many questions remain unanswered in the research of the special Hungarian legal institutions known as places of authentication during the post-Mohács period and the Early Modern era. Therefore, further contributions to this field are warmly encouraged.

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88 Due to the fall of Székesfehérvár (and Buda), the cathedral chapter of Esztergom—operating in the town of Nagyszombat (Trnava)—became the place of authentication with countrywide competence of the Habsburg-ruled Kingdom of Hungary. Cp. Article 39 of 1556, CJH IV, 416.

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