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**Medieval Nobility  
in Central Europe:  
*The Himfi Family***

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# Acknowledgments

This monograph is an improved version of my doctoral thesis *Medieval Nobility in Central Europe: The Himfi Family Case*, defended at the Medieval Studies Department, at Central European University in 2004. I became interested in the history of the Himfi after I defended an MA dissertation on the formation of the Romanian nobility in the Banat, in 1999, at the same university. While I was somewhat aware of the importance of the Himfi nobles in that region in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, their history did not become a subject of interest until I started to examine the edited and unedited medieval sources of the Banat region most of which originated in their archives. Professor Martyn Rady, from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, sparked my interest in a collection of manuscript copies of medieval documents regarding the Banat region preserved in the Hungarian National Archives. That collegial and friendly communication, for which I remain grateful to him, launched me in a long journey of examining those copies of documents and even, for some time, hoping (in vain, as it turned out) to find the original lost documents. In fact, as I discovered, a significant part of the documents of the Himfi, a family which flourished from approximately 1270 to the beginning of the sixteenth century was published in various publications from Hungary and Romania, while many other unpublished documents remained scattered in various archives. During the research dedicated to the reconstruction of the Himfi genealogy, the growth of their wealth and upward mobility of its members, I have also attempted to expand the theoretical and methodological tools available to me at that time. The Central European University has supported my efforts by generously offering me a Doctoral Research Grant in 2000–2001, which allowed me to spend six months as an affiliate of the Department of History of the University of California at Los Angeles. The time spent at UCLA allowed me to become familiar with the truly exceptional resources offered by the North American research universities and brought me also the benefit of working

with Professor Patrick J. Geary, who then supervised my doctoral research and became a cherished and much-appreciated friend ever since. I enjoyed, both his wisdom, extensive historical aptitude, and human warmth while being separated from my family doing research in preparation of my thesis. Professor János M. Bak, my thesis supervisor at the CEU has always been supportive and helped me a lot, both during the preparation of my MA and doctoral dissertations at CEU. The ideas of the research projects about the medieval nobility that I have designed and tried to launch have been germinated during the courses, seminars, and discussions with Professor Bak and other medievalists from Central Europe that I met during my studies at the CEU and afterward. I remain grateful to all these three professors for their unabated support offered during the preparation of the doctoral dissertation and for their advice for turning it into a book. During the defense of the doctoral thesis, Adrian Andrei Rusu, a Romanian archaeologist and experienced scholar of the history of medieval elites gave me useful advice and assessment of my work and kept urging me to publish it. However, this project kept being pushed aside by unending larger and smaller tasks typical for academic life. My work as a teacher of medieval history at the University of Alba Iulia has provided me plenty of reasons to push aside the project of publishing the Himfi book. Teaching obligations took their toll on the time that I could give to finalizing my long involvement with the Himfi. Growing demands regarding research have also made me look for funding for new projects that took me into other fields of interest and further contributed to the delay of the publication. All these real and persistent demands of an active academic life, filled with teaching obligations, research projects, have kept me from returning to the Himfi in a fashion satisfactory to my taste. That task was further made difficult (and entertaining) since from the later years of the 2000s, more primary sources and secondary literature became accessible through electronic form. Thus, the examination of Latin charters and their integration into the original thesis became a time-consuming part of the work of revision. However, I have published a couple of studies or articles based on the thesis in Romanian and those came to the attention of the interested scholars. A section of the second part of the thesis dealing with some aspects of the spread of literacy was published in 2004 (“Scrisorile private și răspândirea scrisului în mediul nobilimii din Ungaria (secolele XIV-XV)” [The private letters and the spread of literacy among the nobility in Hungary (fourteenth-fifteenth centuries)], *Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Series Historica* 8 (2004): 19–23); A modified version of the chapter dedicated to *familiaritas* has been published in Romanian under the title

“Despre *familiares* și *familiaritas* în cazul familiei Himfi” [On *familiares* and *familiaritas* in the case of Himfi Family]. *Apulum*, XLIV (2007): 363–382. Also, a slightly modified version of the Appendix 1, namely an analysis of the way the account book of Master Nicholas was composed was published in Romanian in 2006 (“Practica scrisului în mediul familiilor nobiliare. Registrul de socoteli al magistrului Nicolae (mai-iunie 1372)” [The practice of writing among the noble families. The account-book of Master Nicholas], *Apulum* XLIII/2 (2006): 63–70.

In the meantime, based on some new evidence, the chapter on *familiaritas* was modified to include the new information. Several other observations and additions were made to the genealogy of the Himfi as afforded by the new primary sources that I found in the archives after the defense of the thesis. However, while the book received various additions, the updating of the bibliography, as concerns the secondary literature, was only marginally done by mentioning those recent contributions that dealt with the Himfi. Some contributions of Ligia Boldea on the social history in the area of the Banat, published since 2008, have come to describe events, phenomena, and individuals dealt with in this book. I have mentioned those contributions in the introductory section of the book but did not have the time and energy to integrate them into the narrative as most of the book was written in 2004.

Two more colleagues have helped me while working on this book. I am grateful to Péter Banyó, my colleague in the programs of MA and Ph.D. at the Department of Medieval Studies, at CEU, in 1998–2004, for his support and advice in things archival while we were both working with Latin charters in the National Hungarian Archives in Budapest. His good-natured attitude and friendliness is very much appreciated. András W. Kovács, my colleague in the MA program in Medieval Studies at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca in 1997–1998 not only became a long-time friend but also lent his support to me in all sorts of medieval social and institutional history questions and a constant source of news regarding the publications in Hungarian medieval historiography. I am grateful to him for his constant collegial and scholarly support.

This book is ultimately the result of my own curiosity. It became a subject at an early stage of my doctoral studies when I realized that I could not find much about the history of the Himfi in the historiography. While the Romanian and Hungarian historiography presented Benedict Himfi, the most prominent member of this family, as a powerful magnate of King Louis I of Anjou, there was little about the roots of the family and how the Himfi family rose to prominence and what happened to them afterward.

Earlier genealogical works were confused and misleading, proving that no systematic examination of this family was conducted. Thus, embarking on the quest of their primary sources was the first step in a painstaking effort to collect as many as possible bits of information about them. Much of this book is informed and written in connection with the primary sources and less interested in addressing some broader theoretical questions and issues. For this reason, some readers might find its approach insufficiently developed at a theoretical level and without conclusions for some overarching arguments. It was not designed to propose a new grand theory of social history, but rather to reconstruct as reliably as possible the history of a noble family in close connection with the primary sources. What is exceptional in the case of the Himfi, is the richness of the archival material that survived. During this project, I have received generous support and competent advice from my supervisors, colleagues, and many friends. To some extent, I have tried to apply their suggestions, but in many cases, I could not, thus, I take full responsibility for the mistakes remaining in the book as well as for the English language errors, which in spite of all my good intentions, remains a second language for me. Alice Choyke, from the Department of Medieval Studies at CEU worked on the correction and improvement of the English of the thesis. However, since I made changes and additions to the text, I am aware that new mistakes were introduced, and I take full responsibility for them.

I owe to my wife, Cornelia, and to my children, Iulia and Cosmin Ioan, deep gratitude for their patience with my long absences during the quest of the Himfi history. They were fully supportive and understanding of my research efforts.