

# REVIEWS

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BOOK REVIEW: ROSE, ELS – FLIERMAN, ROBERT – DE BRUIN-VAN DE BEEK, MEREL (EDS). *CITY, CITIZEN, CITIZENSHIP, 400–1500: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH*. CHAM: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2024, 500 PP. ISBN 978-3-031-48561-9.

*City, Citizen, Citizenship, 400–1500: A Comparative Approach* is a collected edition of sixteen articles, divided into an introduction, epilogue and three main sections. As per the title, the articles cover themes stretching from the very end of the ancient era right up until the late medieval period. Although the papers are greatly varied, they can be divided into two broad topics: The first is work on the material sources we are left with – monuments and structures. The second, in my opinion more complicated, tries to give us a spark of understanding as to how those people of the past viewed the fact of being in a city and internal to its society.

Significant space is given to city water supplies, two articles providing information on this. “Water Provision in Early Islamic Cities: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Urban Water Governance” by Peter J. Brown and Maaïke van Berkel takes a closer look at the physical structure of water supplies in Muslim medieval cities. On the other hand, “Pleasing God, Serving the Citizens: Charity and Water Supply in Cairo and Baghdad” by Josephine van den Bent and Angela Isoldi looks at those structures through the social phenomena of charity and divine instructions included in the Quran.

Another question looming large across many papers is when a settlement can appropriately be called a city? And accordingly, “Places of Love and Honour: Cities and Almost-Cities in the Carolingian World” by Sam Ottewill-Soulsby focuses on cities in the manner of meaning, showing the problematic distinction between *castellum*, *urbs*, *civitas* and *palatium*. In response, the author points out a significant distinction. The cities in medieval ages could be viewed as physical structures with walls, gates and impressive buildings or, as mentioned, *civitates*, unions of people sharing a specific area, bonded with similar goals, such that the phenomenon of the city can be interpreted according to a material or sociological meaning.

With that follows the paper “Thinking about Urbanity, Urban Settlements, Literacy, and Exclusion: The Case of Medieval Scandinavia” by Marco Mostert, where the author points out that despite there not being so many great cities in medieval Scandinavia, the real determinant of the city is the opportunities it can give to people, in this case, education: Schools are mostly present in urban settlements, where townspeople or aristocracy might want to become literate.

Finally, clear importance regarding cities is the people themselves, as shown in “Doing the Dirty Work: Ribalds, Armies and Public Health in the Southern Low Countries, 1100–1500” by Claire Weeda. This paper brings up the fascinating social group of ribalds, often feared and despised people whose job was mostly to keep the city streets clean. These folk were treated almost like lepers by the rest of cities societies, as they were in constant touch with dirt, corpses and death. Ribalds were also used in the military as looters or pillagers, fulfilling tasks deemed unsuitable for knights. From today’s perspective, the amount of work done by ribalds to keep the cities healthy and clean is remarkable, but despite of this, they were still treated like outcasts.

Another important social influence is shown in “Civic Commitment in the Post-Roman West: The Visigothic Case Study” by Javier Martínez Jiménez. It shows in turn another example of social commitment, but in a different meaning than mentioned in connection with ribalds. It points to the continuity of Roman city traditions. In early medieval ages there was a constant need of influential people to take care of the city and invest in it, to propel the city’s development and inspire its inhabitants. Those traditions evolved and developed over time, as we also saw in the article written by Josephine van den Bent and Angela Isoldi.

To sum up, this collected edition is a valuable source of knowledge, helpful in trying to define the complicated phenomenon of the medieval city. Whilst not mentioning all the articles included, I hope to have conveyed that no matter the topic, there are threads that bind the narratives to one specific point in medieval historiography: The city’s purpose is to connect. Whether it is bricks, peoples, traditions, education or higher purposes, when we mention *urbs*, we should also have *civitates* in mind, and this is what this book shows perfectly.

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BOOK REVIEW: LUDWIG, ANDREAS (ED.). *NEUE STÄDTE: VOM PROJEKT DER MODERNE ZUR AUTHENTISIERUNG*. GÖTTINGEN: WALLSTEIN, 2021, 191 PP. ISBN 978-3-8353-5030-4.

Under the editorship of Andreas Ludwig, *Neue Städte: Vom Projekt der Moderne zur Authentisierung* presents an interdisciplinary perspective on the phenomenon of new towns that emerged as the material realization of utopian ideas and modernist projects in the post-war world. This volume contains contributions from experts in urban planning, architecture, history and social anthropology, analysing the planning, construction and social life of these towns from the Second World War to the present day.

A central objective of the book is to document the decline and transformation of these towns. While initially conceived by their designers as symbols of progress, industrialization and social justice, many have experienced more rapid aging and degradation than traditional towns. The authors of each chapter examine these processes through specific examples from France, Great Britain, Poland, Hungary, Albania, Israel and China.

The book commences with a foreword by the Ludwig, who introduces the book's structure and content and the conceptual framework of the new town, along with its historical background, development and dissemination. For the conceptualization of the new town, he draws on the comprehensive definition of the International New Town Institute (INTI) in Rotterdam, which was originally oriented towards the European model of the town but has been extended to other continents. This extension is also contained in the chapters of the book.

The book under scrutiny places significant emphasis on the notion of authenticity within the context of these emerging urban centres. The term *Authentisierung*, which is embedded within the book's title, signifies the way these settlements give rise to or reshape their own historical narratives. This dynamic process is identified as a pivotal factor in ensuring their social and cultural sustainability. The publication meticulously intertwines historical and cultural contexts with the practical ramifications of urban policy and architectural choices.

Among the most noteworthy contributions is the analysis provided by Miles Glendinning, who examines the Israeli new towns with keen insight. The author delves into the processes of establishing new towns and public housing in Israel, which have contributed to the formation of the country's "new geography". Glendinning's analysis demonstrates the influence of modernist principles not only on urban design but also on the political and social dynamics of the newly established communities.

In their chapter, Matthias Bickert and Daniel Göhler explore the subject of communist new towns in Albania. They emphasize the spatial and cultural dimensions of these towns, which were constructed in a context marked by the nation's isolation and stringent political control. Their study underscores the repercussions of ideologically motivated urbanism and the function of architecture as a means of wielding power.

In his chapter, Sándor Horváth examines the Hungarian town of Szálinváros (subsequently renamed Dunatúrváros), a communist-era industrial project, and its subsequent adaptation in the aftermath of the collapse of socialism. The chapter offers a fascinating perspective on the interplay between local memory and historical narratives, and their influence on the social and cultural identity of the town's inhabitants.

The subsequent chapter, authored by Jonathan Bach and Mary Ann O'Donnell, examines the phenomenon of "ghost towns" that have emerged as a consequence of rapid industrialization and disproportionate construction. The authors analyse the economic and social factors that have led to this phenomenon and discuss the possibilities for revitalizing these abandoned areas.

The book provides a comprehensive collection of material for understanding the dynamics of new towns and their place in the contemporary world. Thematic coverage includes, but is not limited to, subjects such as urban revitalization, urban planning, social inclusion and the impact of historical events on urban spaces. In addition to the above-mentioned chapters, the book does not neglect the cases of France (L. Vadelorge), Poland (H. Postawka-Lech – on Nowa Huta) or Great Britain (L. Pikó – on Milton Keynes's epistemological foundations of new towns). The book concludes with an interview by the editor with Michelle Provoost and Simone Rots on the future of new towns and the future of new town research.

The book *Neue Städte: Vom Projekt der Moderne zur Authentisierung* is of particular interest to students, urban planners, historians and those with a general fascination for the evolution of the urban environment in the context of modernity and authenticity. The work provides a comprehensive and critical perspective on the current state and prospects of the towns, while also offering a vivid account of their historical development.

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BOOK REVIEW: NOSKOVÁ, JANA (ED.). "KDYBYCH MĚLA DOPODROBNA VŠECHNO VYPISAT...": PRVNÍ POLOVINA 20. STOLETÍ VE VZPOMÍNKÁCH ČESKÝCH OBYVATEL BRNA ["IF I HAD TO LIST EVERYTHING IN DETAIL...": THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY IN THE MEMORIES OF CZECH RESIDENTS OF BRNO]. BRNO: STATUTÁRNÍ MĚSTO BRNO – ARCHIV MĚSTA BRNA, 2023, 372 PP. ISBN 978-80-86736-72-3.

As the main author and editor Jana Nosková states in the introduction, the monograph *"If I Had to List Everything in Detail...": The First Half of the 20th Century in the Memories of Czech Residents of Brno* is a complement to two other works dealing with the memories and everyday life of Brno residents, with the difference that those previous publications were on German residents. The new publication was produced within the framework of the AV21 Strategy's research programme *The City as a Laboratory of Change; Buildings, Cultural Heritage and Environment for a Safe and Valuable Life* and is divided into two main parts. The first mainly introduces the theoretical-methodological background of the researched issue with regard to urban ethnology or anthropology and the use of (auto)biographical method, going on to describe the obtaining and processing of the specific selection of memories.

In the case of urban ethnology or anthropology, Nosková offers a cross-section of research on the city from the perspective of ethnology in German, Czech and Slovak historiography, with an emphasis on the time frame of the twentieth century. However, in opening up the subject, she also presents the actual transformations in the research of the people, which at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries terminologically covered only the category of the rural population. In Bohemia at that time, under the influence of romantic and nationalist tendencies, the people were identified with "an original, pure national culture, which other layers of society (especially the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie) had already lost" (p. 10). It was only during the twentieth century that the concept of the people began to be understood in a broader context and began to apply to the urban population as well. In this context, the author then describes the historical-sociological research on the city and its inhabitants in world and Czech historiography in the twentieth century from the time of the so-called Chicago School, which distinguished itself in the 1920s and 1930s mainly by its empirical research and use of quantitative methods. At the same time, contemporary discourse regarding the proper use of the terms *urban ethnology* / *anthropology* and *ethnography in the city* is also brought into focus, for which the author refers to the discussion of Katarína Popelková and Peter Salner. The focus is then shifted to the post-1948 period, when the notion of the people already included the working class, miners or people who worked in factories. Related to this is the important role of the institution of the Institute for Ethnography and Folklore Studies of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, whose staff were forced to establish a separate department for working-class ethnography during the period of the so-called normalization. The author then moves on to the situation after 1989, when research on the city was largely anthropologized and expanded to include other topics, such as multiethnicity and multiculturalism. At the end of this chapter, the author also presents the state of current research on cities in the Czech and Slovak Republics, as well as a selection of other projects and publications related to ethnological

research on cities (especially the city of Brno), in which she had participated together with other colleagues.

The next chapter of the first part of the monograph focuses on the (auto)biographical method and its use in historical-sociological research. Right in the introduction the author aptly points out that the very development of the use of autobiography as such was shaped in parallel with the development of the bourgeoisie, literacy and the increased attention towards the human being and their individuality. However, it was not until the 1970s that this method became a relevant resource in the context of scientific research, especially in America and in the environment of Western Europe, while in the Czech Republic it was not until after 1989. This also created the space for a departure from political history and the emergence of the so-called history of everyday life, which was also related to the need for further cooperation between history and psychology, sociology, ethnology or anthropology. Space was also gradually given to themes such as the history of mentalities, the history of mass culture, childhood, the family, old age, death and religiosity. The author goes on to describe the ways in which memories can be obtained from people, mentioning in particular the launching of a competition with a precise theme or requirements, to which willing memoirists would send their memories. The memories that make up the second part of the monograph were also obtained in this way, and in the context of this the author outlines the advantages and disadvantages of such a method of obtaining memories. The main advantage is that it is possible to obtain recollections from up to several hundred respondents in this way, without the need for further transcription, as is the case, for example, with recorded interviews in the oral history method. However, the basic limitations may include the fact that not everyone is able to write down their memories to the required level. In the case of recollections in general, it is also a problem that, due to the sheer volume of recollections, they are often incorrectly or inadequately organized or archived. In this case, the author refers to the collection *Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen* (Documentation of Life Notes), housed at the Institute of Economic and Social History at the University of Vienna and consisting of material from more than 4,000 people. The equivalent of this collection in the Czech Republic is the Archive of the History of Everyday Life at the Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, which currently contains more than 500 so-called ego-documents. However, it can be assumed that it is very important to look critically at such documents when taking information from them, as they can often be subjective and inaccurate. It is also necessary to take into account the period in which they were recorded.

As already outlined, the third chapter of the first part deals directly with the method of selection and further processing of the memoirs, which are a direct part of the monograph. All of these memoirs had been submitted to a competition launched by the Institute for Ethnography and Folklore Studies of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in Brno back in 1986.

The call had appeared on 4 February 1986 in the periodical *Brněnský večerník* and read as follows: "Will you help too? A monograph on Brno is being created" (p. 24). Its other request was for photographs and memories from private social events, such as weddings, balls and feasts and from participation in associations, but also from everyday life in various neighbourhoods and suburban areas of Brno. In this context, the institute was interested, for example, in how people had lived there, what had been cooked, how individual houses and apartments had been furnished, etc. However, under the influence of the political regime of the time, they did not forget to emphasize that they were interested in memories of working-class life in particular. Description of the competition is followed by another chapter devoted to the author's editorial notes on the selection and preparation of sources in the form of memoirs for the publication. Thirty-two manuscripts survive from the original response to the call, of which the author has selected only 14 of these for publication, chronologically arranged according to the dates of birth of the individuals who submitted the memoirs. The memoirs themselves, or excerpts from them, are published in their original form, with only the names of the individual people to whom the memoirs belonged, as well as those of the people who were mentioned in the memoirs, being changed. This was done mainly to preserve anonymity and discretion. The publication also includes a list of streets that appear in the memoirs, as well as a glossary that Nosková compiled

together with other colleagues – Lucie Kubová, Jana Čermáková and Markéta Jančíková. The glossary serves to explain some terms from the texts of the memoirs that might be unclear to readers, especially those from the younger generation.

The first part of the monograph, which is described in more detail, is also translated into German, which can be evaluated as a very positive step, as it offers a space for expanding the awareness of the researched issue to foreign historiography as well. At the same time, it opens up a platform for international discussion on where historical research using the (auto) biographical method could go and what its benefits and limits for further research are in the context of the significant interdisciplinary overlaps that the issue offers.

The second part of the monograph is devoted to specific memoirs, the first of which belongs to “Anna”, who in them returns mainly to the period of her childhood and youth. From the historical point of view, this is the period of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the First and Second World Wars, but in a short section the memoirist also describes life after 1945. It is in this section that the ideological influence of the then regime is noticeable, as Anna highlights the contemporary television programme *A léta běží*, which was Marxist and regime-oriented. As a result, however, the memoirist concludes her narrative with interesting anecdotes, such as memories of the so-called “Brno figures”, represented by the distinctive and in various ways interesting people who moved around Brno. As an example, we can mention a lady called Donauepi, whose name, as Anna states, comes from her suicide attempt when she could not find a man because of her excessive height and therefore jumped into the Danube (pp. 106–107).

Other selected memoirs, belonging to “Mrs Barbora”, deal mainly with feasts such as Easter, the Feast of Corpus Christi and the Feast of St Lawrence. The memoirist came from Komin, and as a result, her memories mainly concern life in this part of Brno, which was still an independent municipality until 1919. The memories selected for the monograph are mainly those that took place at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in the interwar period. Other of her memories are mainly devoted to everyday life in Komin, such as laundry and dressing, but also leisure time in the form of sports and other social activities. For example, the description of the funerals in Komin, which, unlike today, were a social event attended by the whole village, with each citizen playing a role in the process and observing various traditions, can be considered an interesting part. The memoirs of another memoirist, “Cecilia”, charted a similar time period in her life in the Brno-Husovice district, with the author also mentioning the problem of Germanization. “Mrs Dobromila” also mainly maps the events of her childhood and youth, but in her memoirs she also moves to the period after 1948, within which a strong Marxist overlay is noticeable: “Chaos still reigned until 1948, when Klement Gottwald took over the government. All power passed into the hands of the people, and that was good.” (p. 160) This too shows that memoirs, as a form of primary source, must be subjected to critical scrutiny and the selection of which information from memoirs is relevant and correct.

The rest of the memories (from “Eva”, “Františka”, “Gustav and Hubert”, “Irena”, “Josefa”, “Karel”, “Ladislav”, “Mária” and “Naďa”) were also in a similar vein, and in the conclusion we can point out the same features that all of the above mentioned memories possessed. Although they are different stories, there are common elements in all of them, such as the optimism of the memories, which mostly referred to the period of the memoirists’ childhood. Although they recalled situations connected with difficult living conditions, such as the bombing of Brno or other war damage, they did not forget to find in this also nice memories that evoked nostalgia in them. At the same time, it is also true, as the author herself states, that most of the memoirists, when recording their memories, were afraid that they were not important, and that they were not only for the competition, but also for the researchers themselves, completely useless and uninteresting. In many cases, the influence of the contemporary context on the memories was similar, as most of the memoirists expressed themselves positively towards the ruling regime – communism. In conclusion, however, these memoirs are a fruitful historical source which, in addition to the everyday way of life in times past, also provides information about important economic milestones, such as the introduction of sewage systems or the construction

of strategically important buildings and factories, as well as the post-war reorganization of infrastructure.

In terms of the overall impression of the monograph, it can be stated that raising awareness of historical sources of this type can be beneficial and inspiring for their further institutionalization, preservation and subsequent processing or use for historical, as well as sociological, anthropological and ethnological research. However, the publication is beneficial not only for scientific research but also for the general public, as the history of everyday life processed through the prism of memories is an attractive form of learning about the past – notwithstanding the need to look at them critically.

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