

**CALL FOR PAPERS  
FOR ISSUE NO. 2/2009  
OF URBAN PEOPLE**

Issue No. 2/2009 of Urban People will deal with problems of myths about cities and myths in cities. We understand “myth” as a great narrative capable of molding the mentality of a society. In our journal, we will focus on mechanisms of the rise of myths and their bearers and on the importance of myths in individual periods of the modern and postmodern city. We wish to analyze the formation of myths as a way of building and fortifying the identity of a city. Central Europe is the focal point of our attention.

Authors are welcome to submit their articles in English. The deadline for submission of your draft article is December 31, 2008; the deadline for your final article is February 10, 2009.

**Jaroslav Miller:  
UZAVŘENÁ SPOLEČNOST  
A JEJÍ NEPŘÁTELE. MĚSTO  
STŘEDOVÝCHODNÍ  
EVROPY (1500–1700),**

Lidové Noviny: Praha 2006, 463 pp. In English **The Closed Society and its Enemies. Towns of Central Eastern Europe (1500–1700)** announced for March 2008 by Ashgate.

In the works of authors who have succumbed to the fascination of urban history, we frequently find various metaphors that present urban society and the town itself as an environment that concentrates basic social processes as a display case of social hierarchy and change. European towns and urban culture are unhesitatingly regarded as the criterion of identification and foundation stone of European cultural identity. Even so, in some European historiographies, urban history remains on the edge of the mainstream of scholarship and is sometimes reduced to the theme of individual towns. This applies to Spanish, Portuguese, Latvian, Russian, Slovak and, alas, Czech historiography, and it can be supported with reference to the very small number of overviews, the absence of syntheses, and also the lists of participants at the conference of the European Association for Urban History (EAUH) from its first conference in 1992 in Amsterdam to its eighth conference in 2006 in Stockholm. It is also the reason why all the synthesizing works on the development of European towns published so far by West European or American authors have essentially lacked properly founded chapters on the

development of towns in East Central Europe. This is the case with the books produced by Christopher R. Friedrichs, Alex Cowan, Jan de Vries, Paul Bairoch, Paul Hohenbergh and Lynn Hollen Lees. When Peter Clark was editing a book on small towns in early modern Europe, he asked the Hungarian historian Vera Bacsikai to put together the chapter on East Central Europe. The problem is always the same. The historiographies of the countries of East Central Europe include a number of works that have contexts and implications beyond the national perspective but are inaccessible because of language (e.g., the synthesis on the earlier development of Polish towns by Henryk Samsonowicz and Marie Bogucka, the analysis of the demographic development of modern Polish towns by Marie Nietyksza, or the older Slovak work of Anton Špiesz). There do, in fact, exist numerous studies with a narrower focus in accessible languages (e.g., articles by Gabor Sokoly, Györgyi Granasztói, many by Maria Bogucka or, among the younger authors, Markian Prokopovich), but, unfortunately, these accessible works have, for various reasons, remained outside the field of vision of the authors of the syntheses and, of course, they are too specialized to fill in the gaps in our knowledge by themselves. Despite all the research possibilities available today, the younger generation has not been interested enough in urban themes to embark on synthetic and comparative work in this area. In this context, the constant and systematic interest shown by Jaroslav Miller is exceptional and gratifying.

It would be extremely unfair and misleading to claim that the field was

untouched by scholarship before Jaroslav Miller entered it. On the contrary, among historians of East Central Europe (as they have defined it), there has always been great interest but interest of uneven intensity. In the Czech case, historians have tended to be attracted by the “life stories” of towns: their beginnings, the founding of towns and their early phases of growth or, later, the stage of rapid industrialization. The period of crisis, regression, conflicts and problems was, for a long time, left on one side, although even this period found its historiographers. Historical demography has also been providing us with extensive information about the towns of individual countries, or groups of towns. What has been lacking, however, is the systematic archival research and comparative analysis that would set the towns and urban society of East Central Europe in the context of European urban development. We did not have a work that would analyze and define Central European types of town, characterize the dynamics of their development, compare them and outline their place and specific features as contrasted with other European regions. In this context, Jaroslav Miller's book is the book for which urban historiography has been waiting for years. It has attracted a corresponding amount of interest not only from reviewers (Bůžek in ČČH 105, 3/2007, pp. 751–753 [Český časopis historický – Czech Historical Review]; Ďurčanský for ĎaS, 08/2007, <http://www.dejiny.nln.cz/archiv/2007/082007-45.html> [Dějiny a současnost – History and Present]) but also among students (it appears quite often in lists of literature studied).

Readers will be engaged both by the formulation of the problem in the book and the offer of a comparative approach. The notion of towns as conservative closed societies contrasts with the generally accepted image of towns as associated with modernity. The expert on early modern towns, Peter Clark, has characterized towns, their populations the bearers of innovation since the Middle Ages, as the identifying mark of European society.<sup>1</sup> Some European areas have, at different times, been more open to new developments and changes and acted as a model for others. Gradually a particular area would lose influence and the innovative energy would move elsewhere. Thus the Mediterranean towns, which were the model from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, were replaced in this sense in the early modern period by the towns of the Netherlands and England and, later in the twentieth century, the model became Scandinavian. Is this characterization invalid according to J. Miller, or does it apply only to Western Europe? Was there such a major difference between Western and Central Europe? Or is it only a question of emphasis, the choice of angle of view? Are introversion and conservatism, as described by Jaroslav Miller, the general mark of the European towns of the early modern period? Can a socially conservative and closed urban society at the same time show itself to be technologically innovative? Jaroslav Miller has posed the whole question

<sup>1</sup> P. CLARK: *European Cities: Culture and Innovation in a Regional Perspective*, in Marjaan NIEMI & Ville VUOLANTO (eds.), *Reclaiming the City. Innovation, Culture, Experience*. Studia Fennica Historica, Helsinki 2003, pp. 121–134.

in a very provocative way and one that definitely entices the reader. For Miller, towns are, above all, living organisms. It is their inhabitants, structures, societies and communities that create them. Miller offers his analysis and comparison as the story of towns and their particular inhabitants, while demographic and social historical study is the foundation of the work. Conceived in this way, the book is addressed to the reading public with an interest in social history. The systematic way in which Miller sets his analysis in the Central European context and the example of the use of the comparative approach make the book particularly useful for students.

How does Jaroslav Miller present the historical comparative approach in his book? What does he compare and how? The historical comparative method has its followers in Czech historiography, but it is not one of the most widely employed methods and has not previously been employed in relation to urban themes in the early modern period. To help us with orientation here, let us take the clear guide to the use of the historical comparative method (approach) as formulated by Miroslav Hroch, who developed this methodology in Czech historiography and trained several generations of historians in its application.<sup>2</sup>

The theory of comparison demands that, first and foremost, we should distinguish between ordinary comparison, which is the prerequisite for any assess-

<sup>2</sup> He has most recently formulated his idea in the introduction to M. HROCH: *Comparative Studies in Modern European History. Nation, Nationalism, Social Change*, Ashgate: Aldershot (UK) / Burlington (VT–USA) 2007, pp. xiii–xiv.

ment of phenomena and processes or for the assessment of a personality, and the comparative method as a comprehensive procedure involving the targeted use of a whole range of techniques and methods. Jaroslav Miller, who studied comparative history at the Central European University in Budapest, identifies with this concept of comparison as an elaborated comprehensive method.

Hroch defined four basic steps or requirements that the researcher must fulfill when deciding on the use of comparison in any particular case. If we look at how Jaroslav Miller fulfills them in his book, we shall learn more about his methodology.

The first step is the proper and precise definition of the object of comparison; here it is necessary to choose comparable objects, i.e., objects that, without regard to the level of abstraction, belong to the same category. With Jaroslav Miller, the objects of comparison are towns as part of the corresponding regional network of towns, or certain groups, a type of town. For East Central Europe, he draws attention to the considerable regional differences in the density of settlement and occurrence of towns. The status of towns and their inhabitants typically differs depending on whom they legally belong to. Given the variety of types of town settlement, J. Miller has created a set of selected towns in which royal towns are strikingly predominant, for these represent a closed group that occurs throughout the region and so the examples are genuinely comparable. It can be assumed that their institutional life operated in a similar way and that, in view of their importance in their time, there is

enough accessible evidence about their development. The author has to define and characterize the region on which he concentrates. Miller decided to fill a gap in our knowledge of urban development in the lands of the Bohemian Crown, the Polish-Lithuanian Union and the Royal Hungarian Lands. These are neighboring countries that were in many respects close and similar, but also showed differences. Despite the differences, they can be defined as a region, as East Central Europe. This category is commonly used today, and sometimes covers an even wider territory.

Right at the beginning, the historian must also decide whether he or she will apply the comparative method to the development of a phenomenon, a specific process over time, or will use it to analyze the structure of phenomena. This is a very difficult decision when the researcher is interested in both. To which view should he or she give precedence? Might it not be possible to combine the two approaches? Jaroslav Miller's decision was for the structure of phenomena, which also involves the development.

In the next phase, the researcher must clearly formulate the goal of the comparison, because as a method it can produce different kinds of results. One can look for similarities or differences, interpret causal relations, or use the results as a basis for an overall typology. At the same time the comparison can be conceived symmetrically or asymmetrically, i.e., when the comparison is between several objects only one of which is considered to be central. Although Miller knew that he would not have an identical set of sources for all the towns studied and,

in many cases, would be dependent on the secondary literature, he decided for a wide-angle approach and a basically symmetrical comparison.

The third prerequisite for this method is clarification of the relationship of comparison to the time access. The historian must decide and make clear whether his or her interest is in a synchronic or diachronic analysis. Tracing development over time is of course the procedure most proper to historians, and so one of the forms of comparison focuses on comparison of the transformation of phenomena or processes in time, i.e., establishing what about them changes before and what after. Synchronic analysis makes possible a comparison of historical processes or particular social phenomena as they appear in more than one country in the same period of time. Through comparison we can discover whether these processes were independent of each other or whether certain links and connections can be uncovered here. In Miroslav Hroch's view, the most interesting thing about this procedure is that it enables us to ascertain whether the objects compared have gone through the same stage of development, and thus, by extension, enables us to explore these analogical situations (or analogical stages of development) even when they occurred at different times from the point of view of absolute chronology. Jaroslav Miller decided for a synchronic analysis of urban society in selected countries in what is known as the early modern period, which he defined for his purposes as 1500–1700, with necessary overlaps into the earlier and later periods. In this case, we do anticipate dramatic lack of uniform-

ity within the region, but the comparison with Mediterranean or North-Western Europe would be interesting.

The fourth essential step in formulating the tasks of comparative study and concrete methods is to define the criteria of comparison, which must be the same for all the objects chosen. The choice of these criteria is crucial. They must be relevant, they must provide an effective picture of the phenomenon studied, and they must make it possible to compare the objects investigated in accordance with these criteria. It is recommended that the more objects an author is studying, the fewer criteria of comparison he or she should use. Picking these criteria is also a very difficult decision. In the case of the comparison of the town networks in three countries, what is too many, what is appropriate and what is too few?

The first criterion of comparison in Miller's study is the regional town network. Miller offers a situation report on the urban map of East Central Europe. He draws attention to the situation and changes in each individual country and shows differences in the intensity and in the type of urbanization; for some people these may seem obvious, but they will be revealing in European comparative perspective, above all on the West-East axis. The second criterion is the problem of migration to the towns. Connected with this are the status of the town population and the attraction of a specific group of towns. These factors necessarily show up via immigration. Carrying on from this issue, Miller raises the question of the identity of the town and town community and its relationship to "others." We can consider these factors to be another two

criteria of comparison. A town community can preserve its identity by closing up, guarding its borders and controlling immigration. These tendencies may be expressed in the policy towards integration of migrants and in attempts to defend town autonomy in relation to the state. The "others" were most often Jews, who themselves wanted to preserve their identity and spontaneously separated themselves off, but were at the same time segregated by the majority society which, however, also needed them and exploited their commercial skills and financial services. Miller presents another type of "other" in the form of the nobility, who settled at court for reasons of prestige and politics, and in the major towns for economic reasons, and who, in some cases, developed or even built their own towns. We expect to find tension between the townspeople and nobility, but mutual cultural influence is also evident. The life of the urban community was governed by fixed rules, regulations, legal norms. Conflicts that occurred between the community and council tell us a great deal about the way the town councils functioned and the way the town operated. For this period, conflicts can typically be expected over the church in the context of reformation and re-catholicization and over the centralizing policies of the state. The final two criteria are first the estates monarchy in Central Eastern Europe, the struggle between the estates and the state in the *Rzeczpospolita*, the Royal Hungarian Lands and the Bohemian Lands as a political issue on the one hand, and the town economy on the other. The analysis of these themes involves a broadening of the comparative

focus to include not only royal towns but the private tributary towns, whose economic growth based on exploitation of traditional economic instruments (economic liberties and rights) strongly characterizes the type of urban network in all three compared countries. The account of the legal framework and fundamental features of town economies and hinterlands on the basis of these criteria represents the starting point for a concluding summary. Jaroslav Miller agrees with Ch. Friedrichs and A. Cowan that, in the early modern period, towns appeared outwardly much the same as they had in the late medieval period. Neither with respect to the running of the town or the social structure within which internal communication took place were there dramatic changes underway. The family or individual who moved from one urban environment to another, his parents or, a couple of generations further on, his children or grandchildren would have been living in an environment that essentially functioned in the same way. Considering England at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Peter Borsay saw a change in the life style of the urban population, in the discovery of leisure, but above all in the transformation of the functions of the town and the development of towns with a specialized function.<sup>3</sup> From Jaroslav Miller's analysis it follows that the society of the not particularly populous towns of East Central Europe was not just very close to its agri-

<sup>3</sup> P. BORSAY: *History of Leisure: The British Experience Since 1500*, Palgrave 2006, pp. 1–35 and especially his earlier work on the renaissance of English towns.

cultural hinterland, but fairly impervious to change. Naturally, aspects of urban life take different forms viewed through the eyes of old inhabitants, immigrants who can and wish to immigrate, and those who wish, at all costs, to preserve their difference. They are seen one way by a town council and another by a nobleman or other feudal or ecclesiastical authority. Jaroslav Miller refers to differences in the average figures for density of population and the size of the towns of Western Europe, especially France (p. 33). We should not forget that the picture was far from homogenous, for small towns were very numerous and close in their relationship to the countryside. The average figures have been distorted by the great ports, provincial centers and capital cities. It is no accident that Peter Clark and Bernard Lepetit devoted a collaborative project to the small towns of Europe.<sup>4</sup> In France there is an association for the history of small towns and a whole range of studies on the theme.<sup>5</sup> The continuing importance of the small towns, the traditional character of their populations and their close relationship to the countryside was pointed out as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Eugen Weber, and later by Fernand Braudel.<sup>6</sup> Despite this,

<sup>4</sup> B. LEPETIT: In search of the small town in early nineteenth-century France in P. CLARK: *Small towns in early modern Europe*, Cambridge 1995;

<sup>5</sup> E.g. J.-P. POUSSOU (ed.): *Les petites villes du sud-ouest de l'antiquité à nos jours*, Mamers 2006.

<sup>6</sup> E. WEBER: *La Fin des Terroir. La modernisation de la France rurale 1870–1914*, Paris 1983 (first in Stanford 1976); F. BRAUDEL: *L'Identité de la France I. Histoire et environnement*, Paris 1986.

the pre-industrial period is considered important for the urbanization of European society.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion it must be said that the theme of the book is a fascinating one, and that Jaroslav Miller has put together and organized marvelous material which can be used for future research and the enlargement of the comparative perspective to include other European regions. Miller's comment on and responses to international discussion on the problems concerned are very interesting and readable. His bibliography and catalogue of sources is admirable, and will be appreciated by any researchers wanting to pick up his themes. In this book, Miller also shows that the unit of comparison need not necessarily be the state, but can be a social phenomenon, and that quantification can be combined with the qualitative analysis needed to draw attention to the actors in the processes explored and in some cases to compensate for a lack of official records providing for statistics. Of course, from the point of view of the historiography of events, this approach is misleading and comparative analyses involve inadmissible simplification and schematization. This tension between the comparative and narrative is classical, long familiar and useful. By means of his definition of the six levels of comparison, Jaroslav Miller, on the one hand, follows basic criteria that he exploits for the regional typology of the town network

<sup>7</sup> E. MAUR in Pavla HORSKÁ – Eduard MAUR – Jiří MUSIL: *Zrod velkoměsta. Urbanizace českých zemí a Evropa* [The Birth of the Metropolis. The urbanisation of the Czech Lands and Europe], Paseka: Praha/Litomyšl 2002, pp. 80–120.

and, on the other, gives readers an insight into the town environment, its mechanisms, and urban stories. By characterizing the urban societies of East Central Europe as conservative and closed, he inspires us to carry on looking for the relationships between an innovative approach to social problems and urban environments.

*Ludá Klusáková*

**Peter Salner: MOZAIKA ŽIDOVSKÉJ BRATISLAVY (Mosaic of Jewish Bratislava).**

Bratislava: Albert Marenčin Vydavateľstvo PT, 2007, 199 pp., photographs, ISBN 978-80-89218-37-0.

“The city is the world,” wrote Marc Augé, a French urban ethnology classic.<sup>8</sup> In his new monograph, however, Peter Salner, a Bratislava ethnologist, presents the capital of Slovakia in its past appearance: during the First Republic and the Second Republic and at the time of the Slovak State. His main interest, nevertheless, does not capture the city as a whole, but, primarily, so-called Jewish Bratislava.

During the first leafing through this charming book with its numerous historic photographs from the time of the Hungarian monarchy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Czechoslovak Republic and partly also the Second World War, the reader is already seized by nostalgia: that is, we often look at a Bratislava that

<sup>8</sup> Augé, M. (1994). *Pour une anthropologie des mondes contemporains*, Paris, Aubier.