

The Position of Opava in the Context of Silesian Cities in the First Half of the 18th Century

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In the legal sense, Silesian towns and cities constituted as early as the 12th century. Up to the half of the 13th century, approximately 20 towns and townlets were established. After the Mongolian invasion in 1241, apart from the economic significance, it was also their defensive role of towns that was valued. During the Middle Ages and the early modern period a rather extensive network comprising altogether 165 towns and townlets was built in Silesia.

Key words: Opava. Silesian cities. Town. The 18th century. The Middle Ages.

The density of the town network in Silesia in the first half of the 18th century somewhat lagged behind the Czech Lands and Moravia.¹ The share of the town population made up only a bit over 17 % of the total population in Silesia at the time,² which was less than in Bohemia and in Moravia.³ The Kingdom of Bohemia had approximately 450 towns then, the towns were situated 115 square kilometres in the diameter on average and the extent of urbanisation was approximately 25 – 30 %.⁴ Moravia had about 240 towns they were a mere 97 square kilometres in diameter apart and the extent of the urbanisation was estimated at 21 – 25 %. In Silesia where about 165 towns were situated, there was one town per every 227 square kilometres on average. In the given case, the extent of urbanisation is estimated at 17 – 18 %⁵.

In the observed period, Silesian towns represented a group of localities varying in their size, character, importance and functions. Two thirds of the total number of towns were situated in Lower Silesia, approximately one third in the Upper Silesian region. The prevailing part was comprised of medium and small towns, and townlets. According to the register from 1726, there were 44 towns with the number of houses lower than 100 in Silesia, and 78 towns had between 100 and 250 houses. Altogether 26 towns had between 250 – 500 houses, 12 had between 500 – 1000 houses and only one – Wrocław,⁶ had more than 1000 houses. Out of the total 62 towns in Upper Silesia, 25 were in the category of towns with the number of houses up to 100 and 28 had between 100 and 250 houses. Only eight towns had more than

1 Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu, Kataster karoliński; Zemský archiv Opava, Karolinský katastr, continuously; ORZECZOWSKI, K. *Indykacja dominiów, poddanych i miast Śląska według „pierwszej rewizji” z 1726 roku. Materiały do statystyczno-geograficznego opisu Śląska z pierwszej połowy XVIII wieku*. Wrocław 1995. (here 161 localities in tables, other 2 in texts).

2 ŽÁČEK, R. Ekonomický a sociální vývoj. In *Dějiny Českého Slezska 1740 – 2000. I*. Opava 2003, 78; *Historia Śląska, I/III*, 13; *Śląsk w końcu XVIII wieku*; JANCZAK, J. – ŁADOGÓRSKI, T. *Atlas historyczny Polski I/III*. Wrocław; Warszawa; Kraków; Gdańsk 1976, 50-52, 105-110.

3 MAUR, E. Urbanizace Čech v raném novověku. In *Historická demografie* (25) 2001, 5-64; FIALOVÁ, L. *Dějiny obyvatelstva*. Praha 1996, 127.

4 NOVÝ, L. Městská síť v Čechách. In *Počátky českého obrození. Společnost a kultura v 70. až 90. letech 18. století*. Praha 1990, 33-43.

5 The total area of Silesia prior to its division in 1742 was 37 480 square kilometres. GRIM, T. Vývoj územního členění a kartografického zobrazení Slezska. In *Slezsko*. Eds. Bakala, K. – Koukal, J. – Urbanec, P. Opava 1992, 75; MILLER, J. *Uzavřená společnost a její nepřátelé. Města středovýchodní Evropy (1500 – 1700)*. Praha 2006, 23, 33, 45.

6 In the study, the contemporary names of town localities in the language of the country/state they belong to are used.

250 houses and only Opava documented over 500 houses.⁷ Wrocław, where an estimated number of 30 – 50 thousand people lived at the time,⁸ was informally regarded as the capital of Silesia. In the second half of the 15th century, after king Matthias Corvinus proceeded with building the bases of the central Silesian administration, the key position of Wrocław in Silesia became official. It was the seat of the sovereign bodies, the supreme office and the Silesian chamber as well as of the newly established institutions of economic and bank nature.

The centres of Silesian principalities, whose number climbed to fifteen in the Baroque period, belonged to important Silesian cities. Ten of them were situated in Lower Silesia (Wrocław, Legnica, Świdnica, Głogów, Jawor, Brzeg, Ziębice, Olesznica, Wolow and Żagań) and five in Upper Silesia (Opole, Bytom, Cieszyn, Racibórz and Opava). Until the beginning of the 17th century the Upper Silesian Opava belonged to Moravia, which was confirmed also by the affiliation of the principality of Opava (Opava-Krnov) with the authorities of the Olomouc diocese.⁹ The towns of provincial importance prevailed completely. Most prominent of them were the centres of so-called „vikpildas”, the seats of the estate administration bodies with regional scope of authority. As early as the 13th century, they developed on the level of lower territorial administrative districts (vikpilda/Weichbilde) which were denoted also as regions in Upper Silesia. Although the seats of the regions did not have a formal statute, the fact that regional councils and administrative boards met there increased their prestige. In Silesia in the early modern period, 44 regional towns existed that were not concurrently the seats of principalities, out of them 32 were situated in Lower Silesia.¹⁰ These included relatively large towns, among others rapidly growing centres of textile production such as Lower Silesian Zielona Góra and just a bit smaller Jelenia Góra (both towns already had more than 750 houses) as well as quite small localities with several tens of houses such as Upper Silesian Strzelce Opolskie (76) or Stawęcice (60 houses) and even one village.¹¹

Certain private towns that in the consequence of the development especially of the textile production became the centres of areas characterised by quick or even rapid development were a new phenomenon among Silesian towns. For example, the Lower Silesian Kowary was found in connection with ore mining and processing; in 1513 it was became a city. After the ore depletion the inhabitants started to concentrate on linen and they exported the products to Hamburg, Spain, Italy and overseas.¹² Apart from the already mentioned Zielona Góra and Jelenia Góra, also for example Upper Silesian Bílsko belonged to similar localities. This situation always concerned an extensively developing settlement adapted to social composition of inhabitants and to the demand for cheap accommodation. Only small original historical centres kept a town character.¹³ The majority of the remaining Silesian towns were

7 MALECZYŃSKI, K. *Historia Śląska do roku 1763, część III. od końca XVIIW. A do roku 1963*. Wrocław 1963, 189.

8 Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu, Akta miasta Wrocławia, 310, 2132; SCHILLING, H. Die Stadt in der frühen Neuzeit. In *Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte*. Oldenbourg 1993, 4, 7; KORBELÁŘOVÁ, I. K velikosti měst Opavského knížectví v 1. polovině 18. století. In *Slézský sborník* (90) 1992, 153-170; BUŠKO, C. – GOLINSKI, M. – KACZMAREK, M. – ZIAŃKOWSKI, L. *Historia Wrocławia I*. Wrocław 2001, 246.

9 Unlike Moravia, Upper Silesia is considered a transitional region between the Western and Eastern Europe. ŠMERDA, M. *Slézsko - země na rozhraní kultur a regionů*. In *Slézská společnost v období pozdního baroka a nástupu osvětenství (na příkladu Těšínska)*. Eds. Korbelařová, I. – Šmerda, M. - Žáček, R. Opava 2002, 10-40.

10 KORBELÁŘOVÁ, I. K územně správnímu členění Slézska před rokem 1740. In *Slézský sborník* (100) 2002, 61-81, 135-148.

11 KORBELÁŘOVÁ, I. *K velikosti měst...*, 165-168.

12 KAPALCZYŃSKI, W. *Kowary*. Wrocław 1993, 13, 20-28.

13 KORBELÁŘOVÁ, I. *Města na Těšínsku v 18. století*. Český Těšín 2005, 106.

predominantly quite small localities. The smallest towns included Upper Silesian Opavice (31 houses), Nová Cerekev (37 houses) and Dolní Benešov (38 houses). A considerable uncertainty about the town character of the locality had to be caused for example by the name of the Lower Silesian townlet Psie Pole itself.

So much for a brief overview about the general characteristics of the town network in Silesia in the first half of the 18th century. When we attempt to determine the position of Opava among the Silesian towns of that time, it is necessary to set a few basic criteria that enable the comparison and setting the position of Opava with regard to the extant sources. These criteria undoubtedly include its size expressed mainly by the number of houses in the town and its suburbs, the role of the town in the defence system of Silesia, the extent of tax burden, the role of the town in the area of political and church administration and the potential residential function or the educational institutions situated in a given town. A significant role in the evaluation of the importance of the town is undoubtedly played also by traditions which tie in with its history.

When we attempt to evaluate the position of Opava in the structure of Silesian towns of corresponding importance, we have to start from its perception in a wider context of Moravian, Bohemian but also Silesian history.¹⁴ Opava was established during the first wave of town settlement and it featured town privileges already in the first half of the 13th century. It was a free royal town in that time which (among others) meant that its inhabitants were endowed with a range of important political rights. Before the middle of the 14th century, after the Duchy of Opava was established, Opava lost its statute of the royal town. Nevertheless, after the castle of Opava was built, Opava became the seat of the representatives of the secundo-geniture Přemyslid dynasty – the Dukes of Opava. Even after the extinction of the Přemyslids of Opava, the town retained its position of the political and administrative centre of the principality and it became the possession of many important personalities connected with Bohemian as well as Silesian history. We can mention, among others, the Bohemian king George of Poděbrady and his son Victor, John Corvinius – the son of the Hungarian king Matthias, the Duke of Cieszyn Casimir – a long time supreme Landeshauptmann („land captain“) of Silesia, or the Prince of Liechtenstein Karl – the vice-regent of Bohemia in the service of the Emperor Ferdinand II. The aforementioned indisputably shows that Opava has to be primarily compared with the group of those Silesian towns that have the position of the principality centres and comprise the most significant localities of the Silesian town network. The only exception might be Wrocław, which came in the unrivalled first position with a wide margin in all of the given criteria. Due to its exceptional position, Wrocław is usually left aside from the more detailed process of comparison.

Originally, all the principality towns had a residential function. But many of them gradually lost this function in connection with the extinction of the Dukes of the Piast and Přemyslid dynasties. In the case of the largest towns, such as Legnica, Nysa, Brzeg, Cieszyn, and others, their position was so strong that it outlasted even the termination of their residential function. A certain exception was Krnov, where the loss of the residential town position had an impact on the decrease of its prestige and the town did not exceed the importance of a narrower region any more.¹⁵ Out of all the principality towns, only Olesznice kept its residential character (it was the seat of the Württemberg family from 1647). Nysa remained the seat of the feudal principality administration (from the 13th century the bishops of Wrocław), and gradually other towns gained this function, i.e. Opava (from 1613 the Liechtenstein family), Cieszyn

14 MÜLLER, K. - ŽÁČEK, R et al. *Opava. Historie. Kultura. Lidé.* Opava 2006.

15 BLUCHA, V. *Historie města Krnova.* Krnov 1969.

(from 1722 the Lothringen family), Żagań (from 1646 the Lobkowicz family) and Ziębice (from 1654 the Auersperg family). Although most of the princes did not reside in these towns immediately, the castles of princes, later usually rebuilt into palaces, remained the seats of administration and often also of the estates offices of the principality.

The Silesian evangelic society naturally preferred the Protestant schools. Hence, the elite knight academy established in 1708 in Legnica which was intended exclusively for the students of noble birth could have been a certain counterpart to the Jesuit university in Wrocław established by Leopold I in 1702.¹⁶ The knight academy in Legnica that was accessible to the noble youth of Catholic as well as Protestant origin soon gained a very good reputation. Before 1740 more than 400 highborn young men graduated from this Academy, out of them about one fifth were of foreign origin. Considering the protestant schools of the gymnasium type, for example the humanist gymnasium in Brzeg belonged to universally appreciated ones and it was regarded as one of the best in Silesia. At the beginning of the 18th century, Cieszyn reinforced its position among the towns with educational institutions. In a certain connection with the foundation of the so-called gracious church built as the consequence of the Altranstädt Treaty between the Emperor Joseph I and the Swedish king Carl XII, besides an older Jesuit gymnasium also a Protestant gymnasium was established there.

In the given context, it can be stated that with respect to the possibility to provide higher education, Opava was a part of a wider group of the most important Silesian towns where a gymnasium existed (often in connection with the Jesuit college). At the same time, gymnasium in Opava together with a similar school in Nysa belonged to the oldest in the country. In Upper Silesia, the already mentioned Cieszyn somewhat outstripped the position of Opava as it then featured two educational institutions of the given type (Catholic and Evangelic). It is difficult to compare the position of Opava from the point of view of the church administration as the town remained to be a part of the Olomouc diocese, whose administration was organised differently from the administration of the Wrocław diocese. The significance of Opava as the seat of a church institution or rather its church political character increased, although only for a short time, by the fact that Opava became the seat of Papal nunciature for Poland for the period of several years.¹⁷

In different historical periods, most of the Silesian centres of principalities belonged to a more or less important town fortresses. From the time of its establishment Opava was also considered to be a fortress important for the defence of the country. It was predetermined for this role by its position on an important route to Silesia that belonged then to Piast Poland. First written record of the Opava fortification date back to the first half of the 13th century.¹⁸ A certain sense of safety provided by the town fortification enabled the burghers of Opava to attempt to ignore the anti-reformation actions of the bishops of Olomouc and even of the Emperor Rudolf II. Habsburg from the beginning of the 17th century.

Even after the Thirty Years' War Opava belonged to the most important Silesian fortresses defending the entrance into Silesia from the Polish side and then mainly from Hungary. After a certain hesitation within the reduction of the numbers of the Imperial Army immediately

16 CONRADS, N. *Gründung und Bedeutung der Ritterakademie Liegnitz in habsburgischer Zeit 1708 – 1740*. Hofheim 2009, 269-290.

17 KOPIEC, J. Opava schronieniem papieskich nuncioszy w Polsce w latach 1705 – 1709. In *Polská papežská nunciatura v Opavě*. Ed. Jirásek, Z. Opava 2009, 7-15.

18 MÜLLER, K. – ŽÁČEK, R. *Opava...*, 45-46.

after the Thirty Years' War,¹⁹ Opava was relied on in the plans of the country defence, which mirrored in the dislocation of the military units and supplies. The reduced garrisons of the Imperial Army in Silesia should have been deployed in Głogow, Namysłów, Oława, Legnica and Brzeg, others then in Świdnica and Nysa, and finally also in Opava, Krnov and Głubczyce.²⁰ Opava's fortified position was reinforced by the fact that at the time of the Swedish-Polish conflict in the 1650s the army supplies were gathered there.²¹ Under the influence of the increasing danger of the Turkish attack, the obsolescent fortification of Opava was rebuilt into a then relatively modern Baroque fortress. Opava fulfilled the fortification role together with Głogow, Brzeg, Namyslow, Nysa and others until the Silesian wars between Maria Theresa and Frederick II, the King of Prussia.

The last to review is the position of Opava among the Silesian towns with respect to its economic importance. Opava kept its position of an important centre of business, especially the regional and non-regional, with a certain decline of its role in long-distance business in the eastern direction, which dominated until the Thirty Years' War. The absence of the enterprises of the manufacture type which was typical especially for the towns of Lower Silesia was a sign of the progressive development delay of the proto-industrial production. Their formation can be connected only to the period after the division of Silesia. On the other side, it is obvious that the size of the towns which was usually expressed by the number of houses, or as the case may be by the imposing architecture of the urban house building was a serious indicator of the economic position in the area. It can be stated that in the first half of the 18th century the number of 581 houses placed Opava with more than 500 houses among the ten largest localities in Silesia.²² In terms of size, Opava occupied the eighth position while the second and third positions were taken by the new proto-industrial centres featuring primarily simple buildings of rather rural character that were situated mainly on the outskirts. Regarding the traditional historical towns, Opava was exceeded in size by Wrocław with 2133 houses and also by Nysa which was fourth in line (699 houses), and then Legnica (643), Świdnice (638) and Brzeg (593). Opava was followed by Cieszyn (539), Głogów (520) and Jawor (501).²³ Only two of the relatively large metropolises of the principality were situated in Upper Silesia on the very borderline with Moravia. These were the eighth Opava and the tenth Cieszyn.²⁴ The smaller centres of the principality with less than 400 houses included apart from Opole also Żagań (387 houses), Olesznica (330) and Ziębice (290). Wolow that comprised mere 183 houses was the smallest of the metropolises. Hence, in terms of size it can be stated that regarding the total number of houses Opava occupied the eighth position, yet by the number of houses inside the walls it was the tenth position. Opava was definitely the largest town in Upper Silesia, ahead of Cieszyn and Raciborz. At the same time Opava belonged also to the

19 In 1655, even the cancellation of Opava as a country fortress and the demolition of the walls were considered. Nevertheless, later this intention was abandoned MÜLLER, K. – ŽÁČEK, R. *Opava...*, 183.

20 KLAWITTER, W. *Geschichte der schlesischen Festungen in vorpreussischer Zeit*. Breslau 1941, 163.

21 REZEK, A. *Dejiny Čech a Moravy nové doby, kniha první Od míru Westfalského až do smrti císaře Ferdinanda III. (1648–1657)*. Praha 1982; REZEK, A. *Dejiny Čech a Moravy nové doby, kniha druhá, Vladaření císaře a krále Leopolda I.* Praha 1892, 476.

22 All the data regarding the size of the towns in the stude (if not given otherwise) refer to the years 1723–1725 when extensive visitations connected with the preparation of the Karolin cadastre were carried out in the towns. In more detail KORBELÁŘOVÁ, I. *K velikosti měst...*, 153–170.

23 KORBELÁŘOVÁ, I. – ŽÁČEK, R. *Slezsko v církevních statistikách olomoucké diecéze (arcidiecéze) z 2. pol. 18. – 1. pol. 19. století*. In *Časopis Slezského zemského muzea (44-45) 1995-1996*, 21-214; KORBELÁŘOVÁ, I. *Města na Těšínsku...*, 83; GROSCHE, W. *Schlesisches Städtebuch*. Stuttgart 1995, 212-215, 384-387.

24 KORBELÁŘOVÁ, I. *Města na Těšínsku...*, 281-283.

towns with the most impressive architecture with respect to the quality of housebuilding as the complete 40% of the buildings were already then comprised by the brick houses while in Opole it was only 34% and in Cieszyn only 14 %.

The evaluation of Opava's position within the scope of the Silesian economy in the monitored period would request a special extensive study for which there is not enough source data with verifiable information power. Still, there is no doubt that after Wrocław the leading positions in terms of importance would start to be taken by the already mentioned proto-industrial centres of the textile areas (Jelenia Góra, Zielona Góra, Kowary, and probably also Bielsko, etc.) Most of the other towns did not usually substantially exceed the boundaries of the traditional, mostly craft production. What can be compared without greater problems is the importance of Opava in terms of the tax revenue provided to the then Habsburg state. Among the comparable Silesian towns, Opava was ranked disproportionately higher than it would correspond for example with the number of houses, i.e. to its size. With the obligation to pay 55000 thalers, Opava found itself already in the fourth position after Wrocław, Głogów and Nysa. Considering the Lower Silesian metropolises, Wrocław was followed by Głogów (indiction in the amount of 77 thousand thalers),²⁵ and then Nysa (73 thousand). Lower than Opava, Świdnica (45 thousand), Zagań and Legnica (43.5 thousand each), Jawor (38.8 thousand), and then Brzeg (21.6 thousand but it occupied only the 15th position), Olesznica (16.4 thousand/16th position), Ziębice (14.2 thousand/18th position) and Wolow (7.6 thousand/circa 30th position) were ranked. Considering the taxable sources regarding the towns located in Upper Silesia, areas situated on the Moravian-Silesian borderlands were the most economically efficient, namely the already mentioned Opava (55 thousand), Cieszyn (21.9 thousand), Krnov (18.7 thousand), Racibórz (14.2 thousand) and Opole (9.3 thousand).

According to the account of most of the monitored sources, Opava belongs to the ten most important Silesian towns. It belonged to the system of the most significant Baroque Silesian fortresses. With respect to the number of houses, Opava was the eighth largest town in Silesia and the largest one in Upper Silesia. The amount of the ordered tax put Opava on the fourth place among the Silesian towns. Together with most of the other comparable localities, it remained an economic centre of regional importance. After the establishment of the Jesuit gymnasium in the 20s of the 17th century, Opava found itself among the first Silesian towns enabling this type of education. Moreover, the representation of monastic institutions in Opava was significant. The position of Opava in the system of Catholic Church was confirmed also by the temporary relocation of the Papal nunciature for Poland in the beginning of the 18th century. After the division of Silesia between Prussia and the Habsburg monarchy in 1742, Opava justifiably gained the position of the capital city of so-called Austrian Silesia.

²⁵ Individual taxes were calculated from the indiction after the percentage quota was determined on a yearly basis once it had been approved by the general Silesian Council. The sums have been rounded up.

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