

Opava as a Part of the Medieval Communication Network

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At the beginning of 13th century, the city of Opava was formed on the right bank of the river of the same name. Although in the early days, it fulfilled a defensive function at the frontier of Moravia; in the subsequent years, it began to assume a role of an economic centre on the Moravia-Silesia border. The city has been situated on a traditional north-south connection, the Amber Road, which adjoined with the Jeseník Road and continued to Olomouc; it was in the proximity of the east-west road, „Hohe Strasse“, connecting Wrocław and Krakow. Opava had a function of an important regional centre, which was connected with an area of mining activities in Jeseník. In the first half of 14th century, the road, which led through Litultovice, Šternberk and to Olomouc, was known as „Public ducis Opawie strata“. The economic situation of the city was influenced by interventions of Czech and Polish kings, Moravian margraves and the lords of Opava.

Key words: Opava. Moravian-Silesian border. Roads. The Middle Ages. Merchant. City.

Roads are the oldest, human-made relicts throughout the country that draw our attention up to the present day. Since primeval times, roads have been exploited by groups of hunters. With later progress of society, pilgrims, soldiers, businessmen, messengers and people at the edge of the society, e. g. beggars and robbers, appeared on the tracks. They had sacral, political, strategic, economic and communicational function and were connecting several points in the country and therefore stabilized the economic and political situation. Compared to other artificially created objects, roads retained their appearance over long centuries. For that reason, it is possible to retrace some of the main roads from primeval ages until the Middle Ages. One of these was the Amber Trail, which connected northern and southern part of Europe. It began at the Baltic area and crossed Poland, Silesia, Moravia, Austria and finished in Italy.

Small territory on the border of Moravia and Silesia, Holasice province, prospered from the proximity of that road. The land was first mentioned back in the 9th century in a publication called Bavarian geographer. This relatively small territory was settled by a mysterious tribe of Holasic. They lived in an open landscape without bigger natural barriers, which did not amplify their power to strike. On the western side, a natural rampart was created by large woods on foot of the Jeseníky mountains, and in the east, beyond the wet area of Odra river, the Beskydy mountains formed another barrier. Natural conditions were suitable for year-round travelling over the hillocks of even altitude. Travellers did not have to climb the high hills, or wade through streams and wet areas.¹ It was known by the tribe of Holasic, which built their fortresses on these roads, for example Chotěbuz-Podobora, Ostrava-Koblov (hill Landek), and Hradec upon the Moravice river.² The latest kept its function of a supporting point on the road to Moravian city of Olomouc, that is why Boleslav II. Emprise tried to seize the fortress in 1060.

In the following years, armies used this road during a conflict between Bohemia and Poland, which plundered a territory in the northern Moravia (around the city of Olomouc)

1 ČAPSKÝ, M. Hospodářský obraz Moravsko-Slezského pomezí v době vlády Jana Lucemburského. In MAJER, D. et al. *Král, který léta : Moravsko-slezské pomezí v kontextu středoevropského prostoru doby Jana Lucemburského*. Ostrava 2011, 301; CENDELÍN, D. Postavení Uherského Brodu na raně středověké dopravní síti ve světle objevů reliktních zaniklých dopravních tras. In *Historická geografie* (35) 2009, 1, 59-94.

2 KOUŘIL, P. – PRÍX, D. – WIHODA, M. *Hradý českého slezka*. Brno 2000, 402-403.

and Raciborz and Kožle. No evidence of military actions was found on the roads, because an archaeological research was not yet carried out in the road network of Moravia and Silesia frontier. Individual points of contact were studied, however, such as fortress near Kylešovice, where military equipment, rider and horse gear,³ was found, especially horseshoes are typical representative of the archaeological finds on the road.

Both states have attempted to resolve the volatile situation diplomatically, but the breakthrough came only after the death of Boleslaw Wry-mouthed in the year 1138, which left the Polish state weakened. We can say, nevertheless, that up to the 2nd half of 12th century, the Polish state had a predominant influence over the province of Holasice, as the previously mentioned fortress in Kylešovice and the silver hoard from Opava-Komárov, which are of Polish origin, suggest.⁴ In 1155, a deed by pope Hadrian IV mentions the Holasice province as a castellany of Wrocław bishopric. Forty years later, on 26th December 1195, however, duke Vladimír of Olomouc issued another deed in Opava. Holasice province had to come under the sovereignty of the Czech state sometime in the 2nd half of 12th century⁵ and thus completed the military events of the early medieval states which weakened commercial potential of the Moravia-Silesia border.

It does not mean that the road was not used during the years of war, as indicated in the deed by Otto, duke of Olomouc, for monastery in Hradisko by Olomouc from the 3rd February 1078, which refers to a duty collected in Hradec upon the Moravice river and then the deed of Czech king Vladislav I. as of 16th June 1160 repeating the previous regulation.⁶ It is not possible to talk about an economic growth in the region of the time, because there was no significant point which would attract business coming from Głubczyce to Olomouc or further to the south to Hungary. The city of Opava became such a point, as was established on the right bank of the river Opava at the beginning of 13th century. The city was established on a site of an older settlement with a tavern near the ford. The first written record comes from the year 1224. This deed by Přemysl I. Otakar included a mile law restricted to taverns and an exemption from customs duties for the wine exported to Poland through Głubczyce.⁷ The king attempted to include the new city to the network of long-distance roads, so it would fill the empty space between Moravia and Silesia. The fame of Opava was reflected in the 1st half of the 13th century, when the name of province of Opava began to spread and completely overshadowed the older Holasice province.

Incorporation of the territory did not mean only economic and political growth of the region, but also a division of the zone of control into three parts, Cieszyn, Opava and Otmuchów province, because the Wrocław bishopric was involved in the colonization effort on the north part of the Holasice province. In the 13th century, they managed to transform their domain with the centre at Otmuchów castle into the principality exempt from the sovereignty of Wrocław dukes. Later, the administration of principality transferred to the town Nysa, which was established at the beginning of 13th century.⁸ Nysa has grown very quickly like Opava,

3 KOUŘIL, P. – PRIX, D. – WIHODA, M. *Hrady...*, 402-403.

4 KOUŘIL, P. – PRIX, D. – WIHODA, M. *Hrady...*, 412.

5 BAKALA, J. Holasické pomezí v 11. a 12. století. In *Časopis Slezského muzea, Série B, Vědy historické, Acta Musei Silesiae* (13) 1964, 105-117. The author connect to the discussion between L. Peřich and M. Vach.

6 BAKALA, J. *Holasické pomezí...*, 106.

7 BAKALA, J. Nástup emfyteutické kolonizace a její úloha při stabilizaci feudální společnosti v českých zemích. In *Časopis Slezského muzea, Série B, Vědy historické, Acta Musei Silesiae* (33) 1983, 97-104.

8 ČAPSKÝ, M. *Hospodářský obraz...*, 301. Although the list of location is unknown, we can assume that the city was founded before the year 1223, when we know Nysa's reeve. In the year 1245 the city acted as a „civitas“.

because it was situated on a business road between east and west adjoining to the Jesenik road going through Bruntál and finishing in Olomouc. The road was defended on the border by castle Edelštejn near Zlaté Hory.

During the 13th century, Opava became the main market centre of the region. To the west of the city the road led to the mining centres in Jeseníky mountains. Horní Benešov was one of them – it received urban rights from Margrave Přemysl, and later king Přemysl II. Otakar in 1253.⁹ Mile law was also restricted only to taverns,¹⁰ and therefore can be assumed, that this town was a transit shelter connected with mining activities. Horní Benešov started building the character of a mining town in 1271, when it got the mining rights. An influence of Opava's citizens was in this town from the start of the existence of the settlement, but it developed fully in 1340, when the town was acquired by a Duke of Opava. Some other mining centres in this region were the following: Bruntál,¹¹ which was founded before 1223,¹² and Zlaté Hory, with castles Edelštejn, Koberštejn, Drakov, Quinburg and Freudenštejn nearby patrolling the road between Nysa and Bruntál, because this part of region suffered from robber barons because of its remoteness.¹³

Krnov, adjacent to the nearby castle Cvilín (Schellenburg), filled the space between Jeseníky and the city of Opava. Business character of the road passing through Krnov, Albrechtice and Prudník, which was established during the third quarter of the 13th century,¹⁴ was confirmed by the deed of 1316 giving the annual market to the town Krnov. In another direction, the road continued to Hlučín and Moravská Ostrava, which followed the border line in the region and partly taken over the role of the castle Landek. This road was not so significant because of a changing riverbed of Ostravice river and wet area along the Odra river,¹⁵ that is why the most of the merchants from Opava travelled to the south through the towns Odry and Fulnek and finished in Bělotín. The road branched from there further to Olomouc and to the north to the Novojicínsko, where was another toll station,¹⁶ through Příborsko and in the area of Frýdek-Místek it crossed the Ostravice river.

The major importance of Opava was its function as a traditional communication connecting the towns of Silesia and Moravia. This road went from Olomouc through Bělotín, Fulnek, Odry, Opava and Głubczyce, where the merchants were able to continue on the Hohe Strasse, which connected Wrocław with Krakow. From Wrocław, it was possible to travel to the market in the Baltics or to the east to Görlitz. From Opava to the south, the track went through Uherské Hradiště

9 BAKALA, J. Počátky těžby kovů v Nížkém Jeseníku a vznik Horního Benešova. In *Časopis Slezského muzea, Série B, Vědy historické, Acta Musei Silesiae* (21) 1972, 161-179. Author assumes the creation of the city on the green turf, because the city got the privilege in the year 1271.

10 BAKALA, J. Monopolizace tržních vztahů a milové právo v městech severní Moravy a Opavska do počátku 15. století. In *Časopis Slezského muzea, Série B, Vědy historické, Acta Musei Silesiae* (22) 1973, 114-133.

11 ČAPSKÝ, M. *Hospodářský obraz...*, 312. Besides the mentioned customs in Hradec and Głubczyce existed one customs in Bruntál in the 13th cent.

12 Locational deed of town is recorded in the location deed of the town Uničov from the year 1223.

13 KOUŘIL, P. – PRIX, D. – WIHODA, M. *Hrady...*, 71. After the death of King Přemysl II. Otakar Mikuláš the duke of Opava gave in the year 1281 the castle Edelštejn to the pledge of Wrocław's bishops for losses maden by raids by Ota from Linava and his brothers, owners of the castle.

14 ČAPSKÝ, M. *Hospodářský obraz...*, 302.

15 *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris Moraviae* (V) 1850, 73, 72-74. About situation on the rivers Odra and Ostravice is written in the adjustment between Olomouc bishopric and Cieszyn dukes from the year 1296: „...quod fluius idem Ostrauia, qui deberet metas Polonie et Morauie distiguere, non perpetuo cursu per unam via ducitur, sed fluctuans aliquando, antiquum loch sui transitus deserens, inuenit nouum cursum.“

16 ČAPSKÝ, M. *Hospodářský obraz...*, 302. Jan Lucemburský give the payment from the toll to the town in the year 1313.

and continued to Hungary, from where lead for silver mining was imported.¹⁷ The town Opava tried to monopolize the business on the road, as is apparent in the privilege from 1224, which severely restricted construction of new taverns and even orders to demolish the older tavern, which could thus divert merchants from the town.¹⁸ Nevertheless another road existed next to the main road. The track went out of the Opava gate through Litultovice, Moravský Beroun, Šternberk and ended in Olomouc. In the 14th century it was known as publica strata ducis Opawie.

Although the main road through Opava served continuously for mercantile purposes, it was used for military campaigns too, but this time, offenders had to clash with a network of towns, among which Opava was one of the strategically most important points. The city was surrounded by a moat already in 1224 and at an early time complemented by walls with several gates.¹⁹

Sovereigns and lately landlords did not forget about the economic importance of the city and about the revenues, which they generated. For this reason, they were trying to patronize it, but also to control. The initial business plan of citizens was wine and beer selling as already seen in the mile law, but the city was still not focused enough on primary production and failed to meet the demand for these beverages, and therefore they were imported into the city. It can be assumed, that the supply of beer was not as difficult to maintain as wine, which became a popular commodity, as the privilege of the statutory warehouse from the King Wenceslas II from 1296 showed.²⁰ The citizens, who created their capital in wine trade, tried to protect their business by privileges, which meant a number of duties to their landlord.²¹ The owners of the houses with wine law appeared in later years in the ranks of the patricianship. The importance of taverns and other town houses with the wine law did not base on the attractiveness of this trade with those commodities,²² but at a social environment, which was created in a certain place between certain people.²³

In a document from 1296 other commodities like cloth, which became the dominant commercial commodity in the Middle Ages were mentioned.²⁴ Communication, going through the border of the Moravian-Silesian and connecting to the Hohe Strasse, was a solid base of prosperity for Nysa, Opava, and Raciborz. For comparison we can note, that in Wrocław there were 40 stuffs with cloth, in Opava 26, in Raciborz 24 – 26 and in Nysa 24. One of the most famous merchants, John from Opava, probably built his fortune in doing business with cloth. He was one of the Wrocław patricians and had contacts in Bruges, Ghent and Ypres,

17 SOMER, T. Význam olova pro český stát ve 13. století. In *Časopis Slezského zemského muzea, Série B, Vědy historické* (59) 2010, 2, 113-125.

18 BAKALA, J. *Monopolizace tržních vztahů...*, 114-133

19 PRIX, D. Opava vrcholného středověku. In MÜLLER, K. – ŽÁČEK, R. et al. *Opava*. Praha 2006, 83. We know three gates in the year 1253.

20 *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris Moraviae* (V) 1850, 56, 56. „quod in ipsa civitate Opavia plumbi, vini, pannorum, salis et aliarum omnium medium.“

21 BAKALA, J. Příspěvek o vývoji měšťanského patriciátu v Opavě. In *Časopis Slezského muzea, Série B, Vědy historické, Acta Musei Silesiae*. Opava 1974, 20-37. In 1494 there is the first-mention of the houses with the wine law, which was derived from the older privileges. Obligations of owners with certain property and with the wine law are written in the deed of Opava's Duke Zikmund Jagiello, later King of Poland, from the 2nd May 1505. WIHODA, M. Opava first century. In MÜLLER, K. – ŽÁČEK, R. et al. *Opava*. Praha 2006, 53. In the year 1260 Přemysl II. Otakar gave the tithe from taverns to Opava's citizens.

22 BAKALA, J. *Monopolizace tržních vztahů...*, 117. It is not possible to exchange the function of market and tavern.

23 LINDENAU, K. „Bürger und gastwirth allhier“. Gastlichkeit an der via regia am Beispiel Görlitz. In *Menschen unterwegs. Die via regia und ihre Akteure*. Dresden 2011, 82-89.

24 GOLINIŃSKI, M. *Podstawy gospodarcze mieszczaństwa wrocławskiego w XIII. wieku*. Wrocław 1991, 165. In the 13th cent. was dominant business with cloth in Europe.

from where he brought the cloth. The career path of the Opava's citizens led up to the north to Krakow or Nysa and the most attractive was Wrocław, because it opened up the way to the markets in western and northern Europe.²⁵

Another outstanding article passing through the gates of the city was lead, which probably did not originate in domestic production, but in Malopolsko (Olkusz) or Upper Silesia (Slavkov and about the 14th century in Bytom). Because of its weight it had to be transported on vehicles to Uherské Hradiště, which is mentioned in the deed by King Přemysl II Otakar in 1271.²⁶ Such heavy load needed good quality and stable roads, which were probably maintained by citizens.²⁷ Modernization also affected Opava – a new wooden bridge was built in place of an old ford behind the Ratiboř gate in the 13th century and was later rebuilt in stone in the third and fourth decades of the 14th century. Bohumil Sobotík supposes that there were actually two separate bridges, according to the names in the register *ad pontes civitatis Opaviae*. The second bridge should be situated somewhere behind Jaktář gate, where foreign citizens from Nysa, Szybowic, Prudnik and Głubczyce paid bridge tolls, as is written in *urbarium* of the city Opava from the year 1594. We do not know where exactly it was situated as historical and archaeological sources stay quiet on that point.²⁸

Finally, we are brought by the trade route to Oświęcim, where the main warehouse with salt was situated. In 1368, Kazimír the Great summed up the salt trade rules, which applied probably in older times. Foreign merchants had to drive off into the salt warehouse in Krakow and only the citizens from the selected cities with some tradition of visiting the salt mine were allowed to go to Wieliczka and Bochnia. Żary, Raciborz, Głubczyce and Opava were among these cities.²⁹

Thanks to the north-south junction, which started in one point by Uherské Hradiště and continued along the slopes of the Moravian Gate, through Fulnek, Odry, Opava to Głubczyce, Opava's citizens could visit the European markets, where they could pursue ample career paths. Their efforts were facilitated by legal provision and provided by a sovereign or landlord who tried to eliminate all kinds of economic and political barriers to increase their potential profits. Opava was roped into the customs war between the Polish and Czech states in the 14th century.³⁰

Other groups of travelers passing through Opava are difficult to find and to distinguish their purpose of the journey clearly in written or archaeological sources. In the material sources the trace of extraordinary group was found which constituted a small fraction of the mobilities and pilgrims. In the cultural layer on the courtyard of town house on the Ostrožná street, archaeologists found a pilgrim badge of lead with Virgin Mary and Jesus on the throne portrayed on it. It is possible to date it to the 13th century. The place of its origin was situated in Aachen, out of where the pilgrims usually travelled through Prague or through Wrocław.³¹

25 About the Opava's citizens in foreign cities. PRIX, D. *Opava vrcholného...*, 78-79; *Wrocławskie księgi szosu z lat 1370-1404*. Hrsg. Goliński, M. Wrocław 2008, 137, 158, 181, 187, 231; ČAPSKÝ, M. *Hospodářský obraz...*, 305.

26 ČECHOVÁ, V. *Geneze středověké Opavy a tržní sítě na Opavsku do konce 13. století*. Ostrava 1970, 88. „*quod currus eorum plumbum, deferentes in Brod circa metas Ungarie,*“; SOMER, T. *Význam olova...*, 113-125.

27 PRIX, D. *Opava vrcholného...*, s. 77. The 2nd May 1505 confirmed Zikmund Jagiello rights associated with the maintenance of bridges.

28 SOBOTÍK, B. *Opavský rejstřík mostného z roku 1349 (dokončení)*. In *Časopis Slezského muzea, Série B, Vědy historické, Acta Musei Silesiae* (7) 1963, 30-38, 79-90.

29 ČAPSKÝ, M. *Hospodářský obraz...*, 304.

30 MYŚLIWIKSI, G. *Wrocław w przestrzeni gospodarczej Europy (XIII-XV wiek)*. *Centrum czy periferie?* Wrocław 2009, 288-324.

31 KOUŘIL, P. *Život v raně středověkém městě ve světle archeologie*. In MÜLLER, K. – ŽÁČEK, R. et al. *Opava*. Praha 2006, 41.

The last group consists of the messengers, who carried news, information and innovation. From the random entry in the Wrocław city book we know, that in 1367, Opava's town clock broke down. This was the first mechanical clocks in the country, and two prominent citizens of Opava had to be sent to Wrocław, Heynlin Scribe and Hanman Gardener, to negotiate a contract for repair. A year later, they returned with master Swelbelin, who liked the city, and settled down with his son John. In the 1380s, John moved to work to Banská Bystrica.³² Although the time was already close to the mechanical clock in Flanders, it cannot be assumed, that the same progress was made in the 14th century on the Moravia-Silesia border. Opava's citizens perceived their clock as a symbol of luxury and economic prosperity, which could demonstrate their privileged position in the region.³³

Thanks to the achievements of military stability and social progress which influenced new legal standards on the Moravia-Silesia border, the city of Opava could be established. The city quickly became one of market centers of Europe. Due to its location it was never an extremely attractive environment to the European merchants, but it would be a mistake to think that the city was not able to reach outside of its region. Opava's citizens turned out to be ambitious people, who purposefully used all their advantages to progress in the economic and political fields, which often meant fostering contact with the landlord. The most important aspect of their growth was the main road, which connected them with the outside world, from where the goods and innovation flowed to the city. Of course the connection with the world posed risk from certain wandering armies. The roads used for spiritual cleansing (pilgrims) created a new group of people, who lived from it (such as innkeepers, merchants).

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32 PRÍX, D. *Opava vrcholného...*, 79, 95.

33 About mechanical clock: ČAPSKÝ, M. Opava v pozdním středověku. In MÜLLER, K. – ŽÁČEK, R. et al. *Opava*. Praha 2006, 96-98.

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Fig. 1. Opava province in the 14th century