

Family Strategies of Opavian Burgher Elites in the Period of Religious Transformation

Irena Korbelařová – Radmila Dluhošová

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The study deals with the characteristics of Opava, the metropolis of one of the Silesian principalities in the period of completion of political and religious transformation (circa 1630 – 1660) and culminating transformation of the burgher society. Its elites are classified as people (and their families) with the highest extent of social prestige and political rights that shaped the public life of the locality in a fundamental way. It states that in Opava in the given period it concerned estimated 20 – 25 people/families out of circa 300 burgher families and 500 – 600 settled families. It perceives family strategies as intentional steps and activities aimed towards improving and strengthening of the positions of an individual and his or her family in the private, professional and public areas, and ensuring (improving) the status of the descendants in the town, respectively the country society. Based on the present micro-studies, it declares the initial theses for the consequent research considering the following strategies: 1. ensuring and enlarging of the real estates of municipal and free (nobility) character as a source of strengthening the social status and influence, as well as securing the family positions, 2. nobilitation as a source of achieving an exceptional position in the municipal society, 3. transitional rituals (marriage, christening, funeral) where the most substantial role is seen in the marriage policy and the choice of partners for the members of the elites and their children, or alternatively the closest relatives, 4. support of education and directing of the professional orientation of the descendants. The study also indicates further possible activities that may be included into family strategies that so far stand completely (or almost completely) aside from the interest of historical research of Opava in the given period (expansion of the family memory, marriages across the social classes, motivation and features of private bonds and contacts, relations of burghers and household members without blood and relative bonds, etc.)

Key Words: Opava. Religious transformation. Silesian principalities. Burgher elites.

There is no doubt that family strategies of the members of particular social classes belong to very interesting topics whose clarification may contribute to revealing (or at least partial revealing) of the mental world of the participants, which due to the lack of sources mainly of private character (written, iconographic, and for the latest period oral), usually remain completely hidden. In this respect, especially the aristocratic society of the modern period¹ remains in the focus of the interest of the Czech historiography, nevertheless the study of other societies is beginning gradually.

In the following study, we will attempt to briefly summarize the basic theses concerning the issues of the family strategies of the members of burgher elites of the town of Opava. It concerns the findings resulting from the ongoing research concerning the topic „Women in the Silesian burgher society of the Baroque period”.² The study does not claim to express conclusions and synthetic evaluation of the topic. It should rather be perceived as the initial contribution for more intense research not only of the burghers of Opava, but of the society in the towns of Silesia and the lands of the Bohemian Crown in the early modern period.

1 The newest overview of the studies BŮŽEK, V. et al. *Společnost českých zemí v raném novověku : Struktury, identity, konflikty*. Praha 2010; compare also: *Člověk českého raného novověku*. Eds. Bůžek, V. – Král, P. Praha 2007. Here also literature. Family strategies, especially those concerning nobility, are also dealt with in studies devoted mainly to modern period from the end of the 18th century. See: ŠVARČÍKOVÁ SLABÁKOVÁ, R. *Rodinné strategie šlechty : Mensdorffové-Pouilly v 19. století*. Praha 2007.

2 The presented study is related to the project of The Grant Agency of the Czech Republic No P405/10/0897.

Concerning Opava, not only in the Middle Ages but also in the observed modern period, the research of the issue is limited by the torso character of the surviving diplomatic sources and by the complete absence of the narrative and private sources (town chronicles, family chronicles, diaries, and correspondence). We have only fragments of written sources of town administration (administration and court books, land registration, marriage contracts, heritage records),³ of church administration (registers),⁴ of written sources of country provenance (land tables, personal data of heraldic burghers of the principality of Opava)⁵ and of central administration of the Czech lands, respectively of Habsburg monarchy (nobilitation records) at our disposal.⁶

When we take the family strategies of any of the social classes or of a group of inhabitants into consideration, it is necessary to define the areas of activities that may be characterised this way and that should be observed. The initial ideas about their composition may change in the course of research based on the detected facts, eventually with regard to the condition of the information sources and their information power.

In the given phase of the research, all the intentional steps, actions and activities that would point to the improvement or strengthening of the position of an individual and his family in private, professional and public areas are regarded to be family strategies of the burghers of Opava in the given period. Also all the intentional activities aimed at the ensuring (improvement) of the position of his descendants in the town, respectively country society are regarded to be family strategies.

With regard to the chronological specification, the study is defined by the period of „religious transformation“, namely by the period of transformation of the burgher society of Opava into strictly Catholic society. This process may be positioned approximately into the period between 1630 and 1660 with necessary overlapping both sides. At the same time, it is also the period closely preceded by political and administrative transformation of Opava (and the principality of Opava) when the transformation of cultural and social milieu began in connection with a wide public effect of the Jesuit college as it commenced its activities.

Firstly, let us characterize Opava in the given period in the context of its development. Opava had the status of the royal, respectively ducal town (depending on whether the duchy of Opava, to which it belonged, was immediately in the hands of the ruler or of the feudal duke). Opava was one of the oldest towns on the Moravian-Silesian borderline. The first mention dates back to 1195, town privileges were received between 1213 and 1220. Since 1318, Opava was the metropolis of an independent duchy belonging to the Czech state. Since the Middle ages Opava featured a high extent of administration and court independence, it was an important economic (trade and production) centre of the wider region. Opava kept contacts with Silesian Wrocław, Polish Kraków, Moravian Olomouc, and naturally Prague – the capital of the Czech state.

Opava gradually established itself as an important centre of religious life. Since the middle of the 16th century, the importance of Lutherans was increasing in Opava as well as in other Central European cities. From the point of view of religion, the burgher society was highly diversified – although at the end of the 16th century the majority was comprised of Lutherans, yet Catholics retained certain economic and political positions. The turn of the 16th and 17th century in Opava could be characterized by the religious unrest in which the

3 The records are deposited mainly in Státní okresní archiv in Opava, fund Archiv města Opavy.

4 Zemský archiv Opava (ZA Opava), Sběrka matrik of former Northern Moravian region.

5 ZA Opava, funds Slezský stavovský archiv, Hejtmanský úřad knížectví opavsko-krnovského and others.

6 Národní archiv in Praha (NA Praha), funds Česká dvorská kancelář, Česká dvorská komora, Salbuchy and others.

bishop of Olomouc (Opava region belonged to his diocese) and also the rules were involved – in the year 1604 imperial anathema was declared over the city. Only the edition of Rudolf's religious imperial charter in 1608 eased the situation.

The turn of 1613/1614 is connected with fundamental political changes: the duchy of Opava, as a part of Silesia, was granted into the feudal possession of the family of Lichtenstein (their property bonds retained until 1945). Until that time Opava region held a somewhat indifferent position between Moravia and Silesia. Nobility insisted on keeping the bonds with Moravian (especially the law) system. Nevertheless, bonds with Silesia were more beneficial for Opava.

After the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War, the internal social conditions (and not only these) repeatedly escalated especially under the external stimuli. In 1621 the city was plundered by the armies of anti-Habsburg opposition, and in 1626 – 1627 the city was occupied by the Danish Army. That brought new hopes for the possibility to keep certain religious freedom for Lutherans. On the contrary, the intervention of the army under the command of Albrecht Wallenstein and the victory of the Imperial troops brought the beginning of (or the continuation of the so far underwhelming) re-Catholisation and basically also of certain restructuring of power of the burgher society. An important role in this process was played by the executory commission established to punish the nobility and burghers supporting the anti-Habsburg side in 1629. The majority of inhabitants submitted to the necessity to convert under the threat of strict punishments. When loyalty and obedience were promised, the inhabitants were granted the so called general pardon by the emperor in 1630.

A new unrest, probably even more fundamentally influencing the inner conditions and relations of individual burghers and families, affected Opava in the spring of 1634 when the rebellion of Wallenstein's supporters broke in town and some burghers were involved in it. After its suppression accompanied even with capital punishment, the town was affected severely by penalties and army accommodation. The last glimmer of hope for the non-Catholics of Opava appeared in 1642 when the town was occupied by Swedes but it was just a short episode. Re-Catholisation was confirmed and the absolutisation tendencies of the state authorities began to assert themselves more potently.⁷

The burgher society of Opava bore similar features as the societies of comparable Central European localities. Burghers were considered inhabitants who enjoyed full political, legal and economic rights. Their basis was formed by those settled in the inner city (owners of privileged/unprivileged houses). Non-settled town inhabitants, if awarded burgher right, were also classed here. This refers to people „beneficial to the town” (specialised craftsmen, merchants, and members of intelligentsia – doctors, lawyers, clerks). Inhabitants settled in the outskirts featured lower extent of rights (especially the political ones). The other inhabitants were divided into several groups, i.e. economically independent people without formally declared town privileges (Czech „podruh”), people with certain economic privileges (possibility to take positions in some craftsman guilds), non-settled economically dependent people (journeymen, servants, workers), or the so called people „on the edge”, and other hard- to-define individuals.

As far as the burgher elites in the given period are considered, burghers with the highest extent of the social prestige and political rights (the possibility to sit in the Municipal council and become burgomaster, to sit in court consortium, to hold the post of Vogt, etc.) definitely belonged to this group. They shaped the public life of the locality, its cultural nouveau,

⁷ To the history of the town in the given period most recently MÜLLER, K. – ŽÁČEK, R. et al. *Opava. Historie, Kultura, Lidé*. Praha 2006, 159-177, here also further literature.

and everyday life in a fundamental manner. In the given period, it was a relatively small group, formed by the estimated 25 burghers and their families (out of circa 300 settled burgher families and the total number of 500 – 600 settled families). The elites may be understood in the sense of old settled burgher families with exceptional (and based on tradition) status of their members in the preceding generations in political, intellectual, and professional areas with no regard to their current property situation and religious-political background (especially in the period of tense events of the Thirty Years' War). Elites may also be understood in the economic/business and administrative/intellectual sense. In the present state of knowledge, it is not possible to define the role of religion, respectively of religious roots more precisely (as we deal with the re-Catholised society), for the period understanding of personal and family exceptionality in the social world of Opava. We do not really bear in mind the formal accessibility of administration offices but rather the extent of acceptance when forming private relations and family networks.

As has already been indicated, we have to understand family strategies as the activities aimed towards maintaining and strengthening private and public positions of an individual and his closest family. It is understandable that the effort to secure and increase the property, mainly the immovable one, was primary. Although the antiquity and the credit of the family, if need be supported by respectable deeds of the ancestors and contemporaries, were good contributions for cementing the position among the burgher elites, but they would hardly be sufficient on their own. The property basis played a significant role in the evaluation of the individual significance.

Historically, the turning points such as the monitored decades (war events, re-Catholisation) created preconditions for essential restructuring of real estate even in the conditions of the town of Opava. Consequently, this later enabled the social rise of newcomers to the towns including the possibility to rank among the burgher society and its elites as well as the transfer of individuals between the social classes.

In the area of property, the members (and prospective members) of the elites of Opava struggled for consolidation of the family position most frequently by purchasing town houses with a propination right, namely the more valuable and more profitable ones (through tapping beer and wine) for themselves. At the same time further (even several) houses were purchased and these were intended either for children or were acquired for the purpose of speculation in future.⁸ The wealthiest burghers invested into purchasing suburban farmyards/folvarks or specific businesses, for example mills.⁹ Somewhat aside the interest of the burghers of Opava the purchase of „table“/aristocratic homesteads remained, perhaps due to financial demands, perhaps as the result of the absence of offer. Although there were heraldic burghers among the members of the elites in Opava in the given period who could take part in the trade with table homesteads, in contrast to some other comparable towns we do not encounter such phenomenon here. Burghers (so far we have one case documented) did no more than rent the table homestead.¹⁰

Nobilitations became a popular means to confirm the social rise. Traditionally the old settled Catholic families in Opava remained mostly outside this process in the given period.

8 ZUKAL, J. Das Stadtgebiet von Troppau am Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts. In *Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kulturgeschichte Österreichisch-Schlesien* (6) 1905, 1, 12-13; *Beiträge zur Häuser- und Bürgerchronik des Oberringes von Troppau, Separatabdruck aus dem Jahresberichte der k. k. Troppau 1898.*

9 ZUKAL, J. O svobodných dvorech a mlýnech kylešovských. In *Věstník Matice opavské* (20) 1912, 16.

10 KORBELÁŘOVÁ, I. Dominační z Karlsbrunnu. K osudům a životnímu stylu slezských erbovních měšťanů barokní doby. In *Acta historica Silesianae Opaviensis* (4) 2011, 51-75.

Presumably, as well as on other occasions and at other places, „loyalty is not awarded” was usually valid. Although exceptions existed, they were awarded for exceptional deeds, for example performance of loyalty to emperor with risking one’s life.¹¹

More often we meet the enjoyment of coat of arms and nobiliary particle with the new coming state or landlord officials who settled in Opava and reached social career very quickly. It is rather interesting that some of them boasted about the coat of arms and nobility particle without having the necessary documents at their disposal and even, as showed during the formal settling of the application for nobilitation, really without the formal award. It will probably remain a mystery whether this was caused because they were cheaters and imposters to some extent, or whether they did it only „bona fidae”.¹² The most obvious way to identify the family strategies is in the frame of so-called transitional rituals. Perhaps the most important role among them belonged to marriages and choice of marital partners whether they concerned the member of the elites himself, or his children or his siblings. Social, property and professional viewpoints, or their „mix” played an important role when choosing the possible husbands and wives.

The present (yet partial) studies indicate that the newly establishing members of the elites of Opava in the given period, which means grooms with the place of origin „elsewhere” (immigrants), took the programme choice of brides from old resident families „with roots”, ideally pro-Habsburg engaged. Their children then got married to partners regardless of the fact whether their families had deeper roots in Opava. Their current social and political status and property conditions were more important. Heraldic burghers kept the tendency to establish mutual family relations. What will deserve attention in the future is, among the others, the clarification of the importance of religion of burghers and women burghers (not only the elites) actively behaving in the marriage market in the monitored period of transformation and prior to re-Catholisation period. Also the role of the professional profile of the marrying ones, respectively the male members of their families deserves attention.¹³

As far as the other transitional rituals are considered, probably the least information is provided by documents about births, respectively about christening of the burgher families descendants regardless of their social origin. Broadly speaking, considering Opava, we have only the registry records giving evidence about godfathers and godmothers at our disposal.¹⁴ Research in this direction is only in its beginning. So far, we can only state that there were always two people, a man and a woman, regardless of the child’s gender. In relation with the elites, it seems that we can accept the following initial premises. When at least one of the parents (usually the father) was an immigrant, the godfather as well as the godmother were the members of the old settled families, socially equal but not always equal in property and political status. On the other hand, parents from the traditional Opava’s families chose godfathers and godmothers regardless of their place of origin but they preferred people socially equal or of a higher status. The issue in the question remains the religious consequences (Catholics, converts based on belief, formal converts with latent tendency to return to the original religion in the case of suitable social milieu).

11 NA Praha, Česká dvorská kancelář, IVD1, 463, 494; ZA Opava, Inheritance fund of J. Zukal, 221, 224, 240 and others.

12 NA Praha, Česká dvorská kancelář, IVD1, 752; NA Praha, Salbuchy, 101; ZUKAL, J. *Paměti opavské neboli : Črty kulturní a místopisné. Opava 1992, 40-42.*

13 Marriage registers for Opava have survived since 1626, nevertheless the records are very brief and they usually do not give neither social, nor professional or local origin of the married ones for the beginning decade. ZA Opava, Sbíрка matrik of former Northern Moravian region, Op18.

14 Catholic christening registers are available from 1627. ZA Opava, Sbíрка matrik of former Northern Moravian region, Op1, Op2.

The burghers of Opava paid great attention to the next transitional ritual, i.e. the funeral. If we can judge from the fragments of the documents, the funeral ceremonies for the deceased members of the social elites of Opava were very expensive with ceremonies of complicated scenarios. Imitating the festivities of nobility including the conducts of the closest bereaved and co-burghers is evident.¹⁵ The most prominent burghers and their wives chose the main churches of Opava as the place of the eternal rest. The most honourable, the most expensive and – in contemporary terminology – somewhat snobbish was burying in the decanal church of the Assumption of Virgin Mary (directly in the cathedral or in its chapels, not in the cemetery) and in the churches of the most important monastic orders, mainly in the church of the Holy Spirit belonging to Friars Minors Conventual.¹⁶

The fundamental viewpoint, when considering and realising the family strategies, was the protection of the social status of the descendants. We have already mentioned the enlargement of the family estates with the aim to secure not only the oldest heir but also the other sons and daughters. In this connection, we cannot ignore a whole range of related consequences. Not only this was a way to increase their value on the marriage market fundamentally (regardless the gender and succession among the children) but it was also a possibility to open the way to more prestigious role of women in the burgher society. Women-widows, who kept properties inherited from their parents, could handle them in many cases more freely than in common cases when they married into houses with movable dowry. They could also keep the right of independent economic activities in adulthood of their sons, respectively children (mother and daughter of Achzenit).

A part of the fundamental parent strategy was a specific allocation of the property among children when dealing with the property settlement of the heirs through the testament or through the record of the property into the municipal market register.¹⁷ With regard to the absence of written records of testamentary and inheritance nature from the given period, it cannot be stated whether some generally respected rules (such as the priority right of the oldest son) existed in this respect. We do not have in mind the numerically expressed value of the shares, there we can suppose equality or adequacy, but rather the preferences when handing over the only house, trade connected with property, etc. within the family.

When dealing with these initial considerations, we should note that completely in accordance with so-called old demographic regime probably further supported by specific conditions of war and post-war decades, despite the high birth rate only a part of born children lived to the adulthood. Even among the elites of Opava there are documented cases when out of the several children only a few verifiably lived to claim the inheritance settlement, or sometimes even no one.

Another family strategy is connected with the above, namely aiming the children, or rather sons, at a particular profession. They either apprenticed and then took the trade or craftsman business over, or pursued higher education. Also due to the lack of information sources no

15 Death registers are available only for the period after 1665. Information giving evidence of special equipment of mourners etc is very expressive, though only fragmentary. ZA Opava, Sbíрка matrik of former Northern Moravian region, Opl12; ZA Opava, Hejtmanský úřad knížectví opavsko-krnovského, 327, kat. 54.

16 Also Karl, Prince of Liechtenstein should have been buried in the church of the Assumption of Virgin Mary after his death in 1627, however as Opava was occupied by the Danish Army he was buried in Vranov u Brna. He is commemorated by late-Baroque epitaph by Johann Georg Lehner from 1765. The church of the Holy Spirit was a burial place of the Přemysls of Opava. To burgher funerals ZA Opava, Sbíрка matrik of former Northern Moravian region, Opl12.

17 We have in mind the inheritance of children, not of widows, respectively of widowers. Their claims were usually given by the marriage agreement, respectively by town privileges and statutes. Opava was a town constituted on Northern Germany law but no later than from the 17th century it was under the influence of Koldín's code of law.

dedicated researches have been conducted in this area. It seems that the members of elites – at least in the monitored period of transformation when the society of Opava was rearranging in a principal way – handed over their professions especially when they were involved in socially highly appreciated and at the same time profitable branches.¹⁸ Perhaps – but this is only a speculation – a common profession might have been handed over to younger sons.

The oldest sons (but more than once even their younger brothers) of the most prominent families of Opava were increasingly more often sent to study. This practice was intensified not only by the overall increase of interest in culture and education in the Baroque period but especially by two more particular aspects. Most importantly a Jesuit gymnasium was established already in the 1620s in connection with re-Catholicisation similarly as in many other Silesian towns.¹⁹ Hence, the boys of Opava did not have to leave for Olomouc or other further places like in the period before the battle of White Mountain.

Moreover, the study at the Jesuits was considered by burgher (undoubtedly a bit snobby) elites to be the sign of social status. Thanks to it a way to further university education – basic bachelor and then especially law education – opened for young men. Its graduation became a prerequisite for a good employment in appreciated (and sometimes even highly profitable) offices – landlord or state ones. The positions of various customs collectors, employees of board of customs, or others were especially popular. It is rather understandable that the performance of these professions was often connected with the first and second generations of immigrants, eager pro-Habsburg oriented Catholics. If a newly settled inhabitant of Opava and consequently a member of the burgher elite originally found employment in the army service, it became a family tradition.

In connection with the education of children as a form of family strategy, it is necessary to mention that many burgher families took care to cultivate and expand knowledge in girls beyond the skills of common housewives. We can suppose this tendency when we take into consideration incomplete information about the life stories of the women burghers of Opava, especially in the families of husbands and fathers associating with the intellectual milieu (including the office one). The education of girls was usually carried only at home (we do not have references about a school for girls in Opava from that time) but it was conducted at a rather high quality and it was widely sought. Parents' models probably played their role in it. As wives and especially then as widows, some women proved successful in business, looked after their property and even enlarged it as the members of the elites of Opava indicated.

We would surely find many other activities that might be evaluated as family strategies from a certain angle. In Opava around the middle of the 17th century, which means in the period that is in the centre of our interest, some of them are documented, others can be anticipated or supposed, and yet with others we miss the reference.²⁰

Expansion of the family memory spread especially among the nobility if it took the form of written (chronicle or genealogy) or iconographic (portrait) pieces of work, special furniture or funeral architecture belong to the group of first named. We know that the nobilitated burghers acquired representative kitchenware and tableware provided with coat of arms,

18 We abstract from the realisation of the propination rights, i.e. the right to brew and tap beer, and to tap wine. In the monitored period, particularly the first of the given rights was presumably carried out (at least by the biggest brewers) by putting-out system and centralisation of production in one brewery.

19 In the overview of Silesian Jesuit colleges for example ČORNEJOVÁ, I. *Rekatolizace ve Slezsku v 17. a na počátku 18. století (na příkladu jezuitského řádu)*. In *Slezsko - země Koruny české. Historie a kultura 1300-1740*. Eds. Dáňová, H. – Klípa, J. - Stolárová, L. Praha 2008, 60-76.

20 Some such activities are indicated especially in the relation to the nobility milieu in BŮŽEK, V. et al. *Společnost českých zemí...*, 275-295.

they decorated the interiors of the drawing rooms in their houses with spectacular symbols. We can also add building of family archives with documents ensuring their exceptional status; these are mentioned, not only in Opava, in inheritance records.²¹ In spite of the absence of the Baroque evidence, it is indisputable that churches and cemeteries in Opava were decorated by many epitaphs and tombstones reminding of the lives and actions of important burghers.²²

In connection with the marriage policy of the burghers of Opava, a more detailed probing research concerning so called *mésalliance* marriages realised between the members of burgher and nobility societies, their reasons and social consequences would be worthy of attention. The basic input has been made,²³ yet the fact whether the sources in this respect are sufficient cannot be evaluated yet.

Activities connected for example with the study stays of burgher sons, or alternatively with their educational tours, and bonds and contacts established there remain unknown, if they existed at all. We can only speculate about the motivating factors of various individual and family bonds between „neighbours“, about forms of private family contacts and many other activities resulting from the collective and of course also from individual mentality of the incoming Baroque period.

If we think about the early-modern period burgher society, including its elites, it is necessary to take into consideration one more fact: the family of that period was a community significantly different from the contemporary one. It included not only blood-relatives of two and even three generations (parents, children, grandparents) living under one roof but basically all the members of the household including servants, domestic staff, and craftsman youth. Hence, building of interpersonal bonds, private and public ones, not only inside the burgher society, i.e. basically on the horizontal level, but also on the vertical level, i.e. across the social classes if they met on the level of family everyday life, should be included into family strategies.

There is no other way than state that in the area of the research of family strategies of burgher elites in Opava (and not only in Opava), respectively of the whole society, historiography stands on its very threshold, moreover limited by an irreplaceable loss of sources and by the fragmentation of the surviving information sources.

21 KORBELÁŘOVÁ, I. *Dominačtí z Karlsbrunnu...*, 51-75.

22 The losses are results of devastating disasters (the fire in 1689 destroyed, among others, also the interior of the parish church), of closing of cemeteries in Josephin period as well as of war events of the modern period. Only torsos of several renaissance epitaphs in the church of Virgin Mary survived.

23 The list of marriages of this character based on the analysis of the registers of Opava was published by STIBOR, J. *Nerovné sňatky na Těšínsku*. In *Slezsko v dějinách českého státu*. Ed. Borák, M. Opava 1998, 230-231. Just singularities are registered here for the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, in some cases the classification as *mésalliance* marriages seems to be problematic (heraldic burghers).

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