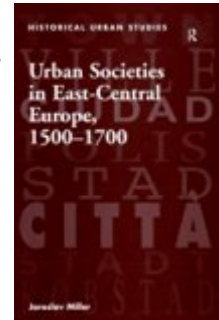


Jaroslav Miller. *Urban Societies in East-Central Europe, 1500-1700*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. xxii + 292 pp. \$99.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7546-5739-2.



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Commissioned by Alexander Vari (Marywood University)

Jaroslav Miller's book, *Urban Societies in East Central Europe, 1500-1700*, is an ambitious work that compares early modern urban development in Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Hungary. Empirically rich and filled with countless case studies based on a wealth of archival research and excellent mastery of secondary sources, the work should become an instant classic in the field of early modern East Central European urban history. By adding a mountain of demographic data and information on over one hundred towns in East Central Europe, Miller's book can be used as a companion volume to Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen Lees's *The Making of Urban Europe, 1000-1994* (1995), Christopher R. Friederich's *The Early Modern City, 1450-1750* (1995), and Alexander Cowan's *Urban Europe, 1500-1700* (1998).

Urban Societies in East Central Europe is divided into six chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. It begins with a detailed study of the demography of East Central European towns, moves to focus on the integrity of urban societies

and power struggles within the towns, devotes detailed attention to the impact of the Reformation and the relationship of the early modern state and towns, and closes with a discussion of the urban economy. In the introduction, Miller states that he has devoted a decade to this book, and the richness of facts he brings to each chapter is a testament to a young scholar who will no doubt make great contributions to the field of early modern East Central European history in the future.

The most complete and empirically important chapters are on urban immigration and urban integration. In these two chapters, it is evident that Miller has spent a lot of time in the archives and is able to work with records in German and Latin. The author shows in these chapters that East Central European towns saw considerable arrivals of new burghers annually. He provides a useful table (table 3.1., p. 42), which contains a brilliant summary of the number of new burgher arrivals in al-

most fifty towns in Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary between 1500 and 1700.

The chapter on new burghers is followed by chapter 4, "Integrity of Urban Society Challenged I: Unassimilated Groups." This is the longest chapter in the book, spanning sixty pages, and, in my opinion, it is the most exciting. A significant portion of the chapter deals with ethnic diasporas in the towns, and it offers a brilliant discussion of the role played by Jews in early modern East Central Europe. The last part of the chapter focuses on the conflict between nobles and towns. Miller shows that nobles were not always trying to subordinate towns to their own private will. And, while I think Miller could have written more on how towns and nobles supported one another, he makes some very important points about why nobles in East Central Europe worked to suppress urban autonomy. The case study of the Polish nobility's attitude to towns is noteworthy here. Miller focuses on the writings of proponents of Sarmatism like J. Ostroróg, L. Górnicki, S. Zaremba, and S. Orzechowski, who considered towns the "nest of corruption and the embodiment of deceit and dishonesty" (p. 109). He also notes the speech of Jan Zamoyski in 1575, in which he argued that the wealth and opulence of Western European towns came at the expense of the nobility, and that Poland must fight to avoid such a fate.

The book could have been improved in several areas. Miller does not devote much attention to the impact of the Reformation on East Central Europe. Miller writes that he does not want to go into detail about the theological debates involved with the Reformation, and that is understandable. Nevertheless, since there is so much information regarding sectarian conflict in the archives, it is surprising to find that this chapter is not the largest one in the book. For many towns of East Central Europe, the Reformation came to represent the essence of their identity. And, while the author offers some great information on when internal revolt engulfed towns, the work relies too

heavily on one article by Maria Bogucka. It might have been stronger if Miller had incorporated elements from George Hunston Williams's *Radical Reformation* (1962), or, at least, touched more on revolutionary evangelists and how many found sanctuary in East Central Europe. It would also have been helpful to see empirically the number of towns that converted to Lutheranism and the number that were re-Catholicized.

Both the introduction and conclusion are far too short for such an important monograph. In particular, it would have been useful to see Miller round home the significance of his work in a long and elaborate conclusion. Second, the book should have included more maps. Even a specialist in the field will get lost at times regarding the exact location of each town Miller discusses. In addition, the book uses an unorthodox and, at times, contradictory way of labeling town names. Most towns in East Central Europe have multiple names; Miller has decided to adopt the early modern names of these towns, except in the case of important towns.

It is unclear why he made this decision, because there is no standardized table that allows for the labeling of towns based on what they were called in the early modern period. The biggest problem, however, is that he does not follow his own system. Most often towns of Upper Hungary (today's Slovakia) are written in their Hungarian names (instead of their proper early modern names, which would either be in German or Latin), while most towns in Bohemia are identified in Czech, instead of their early modern German or Latin names. I see no reason why Bratislava is called Pozsony in the text, instead of Pressburg. It would have been much easier to use current names of these towns with possibly the early modern names in brackets.

Some observations are also in order regarding the statistical information used in the book. For example, the chapter on urban demography contains some provocative numbers that will

raise eyebrows among some urban historians. Miller estimates that in 1600 approximately 27 to 35 percent of the population of Bohemia was living in cities or towns. For Moravia, he estimates that approximately 20 to 27 percent were living in towns in 1618, while for Silesia it was around 20 percent (pp. 12-13). Further, Miller estimates that 15 to 17 percent of Poland's population lived in towns in 1600, and, when excluding Ukraine, Volhynia, and Podolia, it could be as high as 25 percent (p. 18). Miller explains that he uses a broad definition of towns and cities; nevertheless, the numbers are so high that they will inevitably lead some historians to question his sources and methodology.

These areas for improvement, however, do not take away from the fact that Miller has written the most important work on early modern East Central European urban development in English. His work should become standard reading in any Eastern European PhD program. It is exemplary in its use of archival evidence, supported by secondary sources. I strongly recommend it.

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