

Piotr Okniński

<https://orcid.org/000-0002-3116-2120>
Faculty of History, University of Warsaw

RESEARCH ON THE CITIES OF PRE-PARTITION POLAND IN THE LAST DECADE (TRENDS, ACHIEVEMENTS, PERSPECTIVES): BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

Abstract

The article contains a synthetic review of the most important subjects and directions of research in the field of the history of cities and townspeople in pre-partition Poland (to the end of the eighteenth century) based on scholarly publications from the last ten years. The author characterises the attitude of contemporary historians of cities towards questionnaires and research methods worked out in the second half of the twentieth century in the area of socio-economic history. He also outlines the prospects for the further development of Polish urban historiography, emphasising the importance of taking inspiration from the achievements of cultural anthropology and the cooperation of historians with representatives of other humanistic disciplines.

Keywords: cities, townspeople, urban culture, Marxism, historical research methodology, history of historiography

Research on the history of medieval and early modern Polish cities began in the nineteenth century, primarily based on regional history and historical and legal studies. They only advanced to the rank of one of the leading trends in Polish historiography after the Second World War, in an era of the general progress of research in the field of economic and social history as well as the history of material culture. Despite the ideological pressures, manifested, among other ways, in the imposition of the Marxist methodology, Polish urban historiography of the second half of the twentieth century left behind an enormous and valuable scholarly legacy, partially codified by Maria Bogucka and Henryk Samsonowicz in the last grand synthesis

of the history of cities and burghers in pre-partition Poland.¹ A paper by Halina Manikowska, delivered in 2000 at a conference devoted to the prospects for the development of Polish medieval studies,² turned out to be a new opening in the study of medieval and early modern Polish cities. Assessing the achievements of research on cities to date, the author criticised the domination of socio-economic issues and the marginalisation, and even the omission of independent reflection in the field of social history, political history or cultural history. She also drew attention to the methodological shortcomings of the earlier historiography, shown, for example, in the infrequent use of the method of comparative analysis.

I

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY

Contrary to Halina Manikowska's postulates, the works published over the last ten years seem to testify to the attachment of Polish historians of cities to questionnaires and research methods developed in the past era. Among the most valuable new publications, at the forefront, are works tying into the tradition of studies in the field of sociotopography, that is, an area focused on the relationship between socio-economic phenomena and processes and the organisation and development of urban space.³ A representative example of this trend is the monograph by Krzysztof Mrozowski devoted to the inhabitants and the area of Old Warsaw between the late fifteenth and the second half of the sixteenth century.⁴ In the first part of the work, the author

¹ Maria Bogucka and Henryk Samsonowicz, *Dzieje miast i mieszczaństwa w Polsce przedrozbiorowej* (Wrocław, 1986).

² Halina Manikowska, 'Miasta i mieszczaństwo na ziemiach Polski w średniowieczu – postulaty i perspektywy badawcze', in Wojciech Fałkowski (ed.), *Pytania o średniowiecze. Potrzeby i perspektywy badawcze polskiej mediewistyki* (Warszawa, 2001), 99–127.

³ In Polish historiography, research on sociotopography was inaugurated by Aleksander Gieysztor, see Aleksander Gieysztor and Tadeusz Roslanowski (eds), *Miasta doby feudalnej w Europie środkowo-wschodniej. Przemiany społeczne a układy przestrzenne* (Warszawa–Poznań–Toruń, 1976), especially the text by Tadeusz Roslanowski, 'Zagadnienia socjotopografii porównawczej na przykładzie wczesnośredniowiecznych miast Europy środkowej', in *ibid.*, 9–33.

⁴ Krzysztof Mrozowski, *Przestrzeń i obywatele Starej Warszawy od schyłku XV wieku do 1569 roku* (Warszawa, 2020).

analyses the ownership divisions of urban space within the city walls and in the suburbs, recreating the hierarchy of various types of burgher property based, among others, on the amount of taxes paid and real estate prices. The second part of the work concerns the occupational structure of the inhabitants of Old Warsaw. Here, the author describes the organisation of the guilds and then interprets the property hierarchy and distribution of individual professional groups in the space. The third part shows the mechanisms and dynamics of the migration of new citizens to Old Warsaw between 1508 and 1569.

In 2017, the subject of the migration and mobility of city residents in the pre-industrial era became the topic of the annual conference⁵ of the Commission for the History of Towns [Komisja Historii Miast] at the Historical Sciences Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences [Komitet Nauk Historycznych, KNH PAN]. The two-part study by Mateusz Goliński concerning the owners of burgher properties at the Market Square in Wrocław in the years 1345–1420 and 1421–1500 also contributes to considerations on the connection between ownership relations and the mobility of inhabitants of cities in the past. The author demonstrates the high turnover dynamics in the urban real estate market, treating it as one of the measures of the mobility of townspeople. In the years 1345–1420, a typical property in the frontage of the Wrocław Market Square changed its owner every fifteen years on average, while in the second analysed period (1421–1500), a slightly greater stabilisation of ownership and a slower rate of real estate turnover is observed.

The study of Marta Kuc-Czerep on German-speaking inhabitants of eighteenth-century Warsaw⁶ also fits in with the research on socio-topography and burgher mobility. The author analyses the mechanisms of immigration of newcomers and their distribution in the space of Warsaw. She also shows their participation in municipal self-government and religious life, as well as their contribution to the process of shaping the bourgeois intelligentsia of the Enlightenment. Similar issues were raised by Rafał Radziwonka in his monograph, in describing the impact of the Great Northern War (1700–21) on the functioning

⁵ 'Migracje w miastach Królestwa Polskiego, Pomorza i Śląska w epoce przed-przemysłowej na tle porównawczym', Wrocław, 2–3 June 2017.

⁶ Marta Kuc-Czerep, *Niemieckojęzyczni mieszkańcy Warszawy. Droga do obywatelstwa w osiemnastowiecznej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa, 2021).

of Warsaw's authorities and community.⁷ In turn, Katarzyna Wagner's comparative study is situated at the intersection of sociotopography, historical demography and economic history, which includes an analysis of the property stratification of the inhabitants of Cracow, Warsaw, Lviv, Poznań and Lublin in the seventeenth century.⁸ It is especially worth emphasising that the author refers to the Gini coefficient used to study wealth inequalities. On this basis, she proves that in the period analysed, in all five urban centres, there was a clear correlation between the overall increase in demographic potential and economic prosperity and the rise in inequality.

Strictly economic issues, rarely analysed in historiography, are dealt with in the study by Andrzej Klonder, devoted to the phenomenon of small trade and craftsmanship in the Commonwealth of Poland in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁹ The author, referring to the rich comparative material from the Holy German Empire, recreates the range of goods and services offered by small stallholders in the provincial cities of early modern Poland. At this point, the monograph by Jerzy Maik should also be mentioned, devoted to material and technical aspects of the functioning of one of the most important branches of urban craftsmanship in the Middle Ages, that is, cloth making.¹⁰ Krzysztof Boroda made many valuable observations regarding the economic diversification of the cities of the early modern Commonwealth in his historical and statistical study of the economic geography of the Kingdom of Poland in the sixteenth century.¹¹

The extensive work by Piotr Łozowski on the money market and real estate in Old and New Warsaw in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries fits into the area of historical and statistical studies.¹² The author recreates and compares the structure, dynamics and social

⁷ Rafał Radziwonka, *Warszawa i jej mieszkańcy w czasach wielkiej wojny północnej (1700–1721)* (Warszawa, 2019).

⁸ Katarzyna Wagner, *Mieszczanie i podatki. Nierówności majątkowe w wybranych miastach Korony w XVII wieku* (Warszawa, 2020).

⁹ Andrzej Klonder, *Prowincjusze i detaliści. Drobny handel i rzemiosło Rzeczypospolitej w XVII–początku XVIII wieku* (Warszawa, 2020).

¹⁰ Jerzy Maik, *Sukiennictwo w średniowiecznej Polsce* (Warszawa, 2021).

¹¹ Krzysztof Boroda, *Geografia gospodarcza Królestwa Polskiego w XVI wieku* (Białystok, 2016), 401–517.

¹² Piotr Łozowski, *Kredyt i dom. Rynki obrotu pieniężnego i nieruchomościami w Warszawie okresu XV i początków XVI wieku* (Białystok, 2020).

reach of both types of markets, confronting his observations with comparative material from other Polish and Central European cities. He proves that the loan and real estate markets of Old Warsaw were characterised by greater dynamism and value than the corresponding markets of New Warsaw, which is probably due to the stronger economic position and greater wealth of the Old Town bourgeoisie. The author also shows that money and real estate markets in Old and New Warsaw were characterised by 'capital self-sufficiency', which means that despite the close proximity of these cities, their citizens only sporadically invested in the neighbouring market.

Piotr Łozowski's studies are complemented by his shorter historical and demographic study devoted to family structures in Old and New Warsaw in the same period, in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.¹³ The author discusses the objective factors determining the demographic shape of the burgher family and then recreates the average duration of professional activity of Warsaw merchants and craftsmen. In the last chapters, he also introduces the naming customs in force in the period analysed in Old and New Warsaw. As he proves, the primary criterion influencing the duration of a career by a hypothetical townsman was his social and financial position, which was usually higher in the case of citizens of Old Warsaw. Another manifestation of this centre's general economic and demographic advantage over the New Town was a greater diversity of onomastic customs.

The work of Cezary Kardasz, who analysed the money loan market in the fifteenth century in several selected cities of the southern Baltic coast,¹⁴ also fits into research on the economy and urban financial culture. The author discusses the legal conditions of the functioning of the credit market and the social range of credit activities, as well as the relationship between credit and other forms of economic activity and the general economic situation. In this work, one should also appreciate the detailed source observations dedicated to various forms of medieval official documentation used for the bureaucratic management and control of municipal credit transactions.

¹³ *Id.*, *Rodzina w Starej i Nowej Warszawie w XV i początkach XVI wieku* (Białystok, 2021).

¹⁴ Cezary Kardasz, *Rynek kredytu pieniężnego w miastach południowego pobrzeża Bałtyku w późnym średniowieczu (Greifswald, Gdańsk, Elbląg, Toruń, Rewel)* (Toruń, 2013).

II MUNICIPAL INSTITUTIONS, URBAN CHANCERIES AND PRAGMATIC LITERACY

Studies on the communal apparatus of power, official literacy and bureaucratic culture have been developing in recent times. At this point, a new work by Janusz Tandecki, containing a synthetic summary of the research conducted so far on the pragmatic literacy of Prussian and Livonian cities in the Middle Ages, is worth noting.¹⁵ Among exhaustive studies, Marcin Grulkowski's detailed work on the oldest official books of the Main City of Gdańsk stands out.¹⁶ It is worth emphasising that this work's central, analytical part is preceded by a comprehensive introduction, which includes an erudite discussion of European traditions and research methods on registers produced in municipal offices in the past. It is also worth noting the monographic study by Janusz Bonczkowski of the Grudziądz city office at the threshold of the sixteenth century, based on an analysis of the land register from 1502–16 and containing an edition of the content of this code,¹⁷ as well as the work by Mateusz Superczyński, dedicated to the history of the urban chancery and archives of Kulm [Chełmno] in the thirteenth–eighteenth centuries.¹⁸

Efforts to edit historical sources related to the history of cities and townspeople contribute to the deepening of the specialisation of source studies on urban literary culture. Among the most interesting new publications is the book of indulgences from Wrocław from the end of the fifteenth century, published by Halina Manikowska,¹⁹ and registers of proscribed people in Jawor (1381–1450) and Świdnica (1367, 1375, 1380–1485) compiled by Mateusz Goliński.²⁰ In recent

¹⁵ Janusz Tandecki, *Piśmienność pragmatyczna, pisarze i kancelarie wielkich miast pruskich i inflanckich w średniowieczu* (Toruń, 2021).

¹⁶ Marcin Grulkowski, *Najstarsze księgi miejskie Głównego Miasta Gdańska z XIV i początku XV wieku. Studium kodykologiczne* (Warszawa, 2015).

¹⁷ Janusz Bonczkowski, *Kancelaria miejska Grudziądza do początku XVI wieku. Działalność kancelarii i jej produkty na przykładzie księgi czynszowej z lat 1502–1516* (Toruń, 2020).

¹⁸ Mateusz Superczyński, *Kancelaria i archiwum miasta Chełmna w okresie przedrozbiorowym (XIII w. – 1772 r.)* (Toruń, 2021).

¹⁹ Halina Manikowska (ed.), *Księga odpustów wrocławskich* (Warszawa, 2016).

²⁰ Mateusz Goliński (ed.), *Późnośredniowieczne spisy wywołanych z Jawora i Świdnicy* (Kraków, 2020).

years, there have also been editions of selected series of official books of the Main City of Gdańsk from the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries,²¹ court registers of Old Warsaw from 1453–1535,²² and several books from Cracow and Kazimierz from the fifteenth century.²³ The *Fontes Iuris Polonici. Seria: Prawo Miejskie* [*Fontes Iuris Polonici. Series: Municipal Law*] (vols 1–7), including, among others, editions of early modern crime registers from Cracow,²⁴ is also worthy of mention.

Parallel to the research on the bureaucratic culture of cities, studies on the history of municipal law and urban institutions of the past are progressing. One of the most important works in this area is the monograph by Maciej Mikuła, devoted to the evolution and adaptation of the Magdeburg law norms in Poland from the fourteenth to the beginning of the sixteenth century.²⁵ This work, based on a deep knowledge of Polish and German research and on a thorough analysis of numerous manuscripts, not only brought many detailed findings on the history of sources and municipal law on Polish lands but also contributed to a broader discussion on the mechanisms of spreading of medieval legal culture. A comparative study by Piotr Okniński concerns the genesis of the municipal self-government system in Poland, showing this issue in the example of thirteenth-century Cracow.²⁶ An important title in the legal and political history of cities of the later Middle Ages, is the monograph by Paweł Artur

²¹ Marcin Grulkowski (ed.), *Najstarsze księgi kamlarskie Głównego Miasta Gdańska z XIV–XV wieku* (Warszawa, 2016); id. (ed.), *Księgi małoletnich Głównego Miasta Gdańska z XV wieku* (Warszawa, 2017).

²² Agnieszka Bartoszewicz et al. (eds), *Księgi ławnicze Starej Warszawy z lat 1453–1535* (Warszawa, 2020).

²³ Marcin Starzyński (ed.), *Acta consularia Casimiriensia. Fragmenta inedita de annis 1378, 1394–1396* (Kraków, 2014); Marcin Starzyński and Patrycja Wiencierz (eds), *Księgi ławnicze krakowskie z lat 1408–1417. Księgi wójtowskie krakowskie: fragmenty z lat 1411–1412* (Warszawa, 2020).

²⁴ Waław Uruszczak, Maciej Mikuła, and Anna Karabowicz (eds), *Księga kryminalna miasta Krakowa z lat 1554–1625* (Kraków, 2013); Waław Uruszczak et al. (eds), *Księga kryminalna miasta Krakowa z lat 1589–1604* (Kraków, 2016); Waław Uruszczak, Maciej Mikuła, and Krzysztof Fokt (eds), *Księgi kryminalne miasta Krakowa z lat 1630–1633, 1679–1690* (Kraków, 2016).

²⁵ Maciej Mikuła, *Prawo miejskie magdeburskie (Ius municipale magdeburgense) w Polsce XIV–pocz. XVI w. Studium o ewolucji i adaptacji prawa* (Kraków, 2018).

²⁶ Piotr Okniński, *Narodziny miasta komunalnego. Struktury ustrojowe, ramy przestrzenne i podstawy gospodarcze Krakowa w XIII wieku* (Warszawa, 2018).

Jeziorski on the punishment of proscription and banishment in Prussian cities.²⁷ It should be mentioned that increasingly important support for research on city systems in pre-partition Poland are the subsequent volumes published as part of the *Spisy Urzędników Miejskich z Obszaru Rzeczypospolitej, Śląska i Pomorza Zachodniego* [Registers of City Officials from the Commonwealth, Silesia and Western Pomerania] series.

III URBAN CULTURE: ARCHAEOLOGY, RELIGIOSITY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Scholarly publications from recent years also testify to the advancement of urban archaeology. The main trends in developing this new discipline are set out in the monographs published as part of the *Wratislavia Antiqua* and *Origines Polonorum* series. On the other hand, a comprehensive comparative study by Jerzy Piekalski, showing the mechanisms of formation, management and use of public and private space in Prague, Wrocław and Cracow in the twelfth–fourteenth centuries,²⁸ deserves its mention. Two new works on urban housing culture are of high value, namely Małgorzata Chorowska's monograph, dedicated to the residential houses of medieval Świdnica,²⁹ and the study of residential architecture in Cracow (until the mid-seventeenth century) by Waldemar Komorowski.³⁰ Recently, studies on water management and sanitary infrastructure in past cities have also been deepened, as evidenced by the monographs of Paweł Cembrzyński³¹ and Jacek Laberschek.³²

²⁷ Paweł Artur Jeziorski, *Proskrypcja i banicja w miastach pruskich późnego średniowiecza* (Warszawa, 2017).

²⁸ Jerzy Piekalski, *Praga, Wrocław i Kraków. Przestrzeń publiczna i prywatna w czasach średniowiecznego przełomu* (Wrocław, 2014); English edition: *Prague, Wrocław and Kraków. Public and Private Space at the Time of the Medieval Transition*, transl. Anna Kinecka (Wrocław, 2014).

²⁹ Małgorzata Chorowska, *Kamienica mieszczańska w Świdnicy. Karczma i mieszkanie w XIII–XVIII w.* (Wrocław, 2013).

³⁰ Waldemar Komorowski, *Średniowieczne domy krakowskie (od lokacji do połowy XVII wieku): kamienice, pałace miejskie i rezydencje kanoniczne. Trwałość gotyckiego modelu w nowożytności* (Kraków, 2014).

³¹ Paweł Cembrzyński, *Zaopatrzenie w wodę i usuwanie nieczystości w miastach stref bałtyckiej i sudecko-karpackiej w XIII–XVI wieku* (Wrocław, 2011).

³² Jacek Laberschek, *Sieć wodna średniowiecznego Krakowa i jej gospodarcze wykorzystanie* (Warszawa, 2016).

The successive volumes of the *Atlas Historyczny Miast Polskich* [Historical Atlas of Polish Towns] also play an important role in developing research in urban archaeology and historical geography.

In the field of studies of urban culture, there has been clear progress in detailed studies of testaments, treated by Polish historians as a source for research on civic religiosity and urban social life. Here, it is worth mentioning monographs devoted to the wills of the townspeople of Elbląg, Gdańsk and Kraków by Rafał Kubicki,³³ Beata Możejko³⁴ and Jakub Wymułek.³⁵ Further volumes of catalogues of medieval and early modern wills from Polish, Lithuanian and Ruthenian cities, published as part of the series *Katalogi Testamentów Mieszkańców Miast z Terenów Korony i Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego do 1795 Roku* [Catalogues of Testaments of Town Dwellers from the Crown Territories and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to 1795, vols. 1–8], also serve to deepen the knowledge of the history of municipal wills. The conference of the Commission for the History of Towns of KNH PAN, held in 2019, was devoted to the issues of wills and the foundational activities of the townspeople of the former Polish Commonwealth.³⁶ A significant contribution to the research on the participation of church institutions and clergy in the life of past urban communities are the in-depth prosopographic studies devoted to the lower clergy in medieval Toruń [German: Thorn] and Nysa [Neisse], by Marcin Sumowski³⁷ and Ewa Wólkiewicz.³⁸

However, studies on historiography and urban literature remain the leading trend in research on the intellectual culture of the burghers of pre-partition Poland. The meticulous work of Roland Czarnecki,

³³ Rafał Kubicki, *Testamenty elbląskie. Studium z dziejów miasta i jego mieszkańców w późnym średniowieczu* (Gdańsk, 2020).

³⁴ Beata Możejko, *Rozrachunek z życiem doczesnym. Gdańskie testamenty mieszczzańskie z XV i początku XVI wieku* (Gdańsk, 2010).

³⁵ Jakub Wymułek, *Testamenty mieszczan krakowskich (XIV–XV wiek)* (Warszawa, 2015).

³⁶ *Testamenty i fundacje mieszczzańskie w XIII–XVIII wieku* (Kraków, 25–26 June 2019); post-conference materials published in *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, lxxviii, 1-2 (2020).

³⁷ Marcin Sumowski, *Duchowni diecezjalni w średniowiecznym Toruniu. Studium prozopograficzne* (Toruń, 2012).

³⁸ Ewa Wólkiewicz, *Proletariusze modlitwy? Drogi karier, finanse i kultura materialna niższego kleru w średniowiecznej Nysie* (Warszawa, 2020).

devoted to the chronicle of the city of Namysłów in the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries by the city scribe Johannes Froben,³⁹ and the book by Julia Możdżeń, describing the strategies of presenting the world in five Gdańsk chronicles from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries,⁴⁰ deserve special mention. The second of these works illustrates a more general tendency in the methodology of contemporary urban historiography, which puts an increasing emphasis on the cultural determinants in the perception of social reality in relation to the achievements of cultural anthropology. In 2018, the issue of the perception of past cities was the subject of the conference at the Commission for the History of Towns of KNH PAN.⁴¹ In this context, an ingenious book by Andrzej Tadeusz Staniszewski on the popular literature market in Cracow in the sixteenth century⁴² also deserves attention. The author refers to the tradition of research on the history of literature and reading, as well as studies in the field of literacy and social communication, analysing the dimensions, social range and dynamics of the functioning of the bookseller market in early modern Cracow. At the same time, he reflects on the place of popular literature in everyday life of an average burgher and on the ‘physiology of reading’, that is, the influence of reading habits and the material form of the early modern Polish book on the possible ways of its use.

CONCLUSIONS

The presented considerations do not discuss all valuable, new publications from the last ten years. Instead, it was meant to highlight the most insightful works and, at the same time, fit them into certain broader canons of contemporary historiography and the humanities. On the one hand, this review shows that Polish historians have become accustomed to research questionnaires developed in the field

³⁹ Roland Czarnecki, *Kronika Namysłowa autorstwa Johannesa Frobena jako utwór dziejopisarstwa miejskiego* (Warszawa, 2015).

⁴⁰ Julia Możdżeń, *Przedstawianie świata przez kronikarzy gdańskich na przełomie XV i XVI wieku* (Toruń, 2016).

⁴¹ ‘Obraz miasta na ziemiach polskich’ (Toruń, 7–9 June); post-conference materials published in *Zapiski Historyczne*, lxxxiii, 4 (2018); lxxxiv, 1 (2019), 3.

⁴² Andrzej Tadeusz Staniszewski, *Historyje krakowskie. Funkcjonowanie narracyjnych tekstów popularnych we wczesnonowożytnej aglomeracji krakowskiej* (Kraków, 2020).

of socio-economic history in the second half of the last century. On the other hand, in the works published over the last decade, one can observe the broadening of the traditional formula of socio-topographical research to include social mobility issues, as well as a more systematic and conscious application of statistical and comparative analysis methods. The specialisation of source studies on urban literary culture, especially on official literacy as well as legal and bureaucratic culture, combined with the editing of historical sources for the history of cities and townspeople, such as official books of records or burgher wills, is becoming increasingly clear. Undoubtedly progress is being made in the field of research in the history of material culture of cities, mainly in urban archaeology and historical geography. One of the most significant transformations of contemporary Polish urban historiography is the increasing independence of research on the history of culture, made possible thanks to appeals to cultural anthropology and ever-closer cooperation with literary history.

transl. Krzysztof Heymer

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Piotr Okniński – medieval urban history, comparative history of towns and cities in Central Europe; research assistant at the Department of Medieval History at the Faculty of History, University of Warsaw; e-mail: p.okninski@uw.edu.pl