

THE IMAGE OF THE TOWN IN THE CULTURE OF THE SIXTEENTH-EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

On 6–7 November 1991 the Commission for the History of Towns at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences organized a national conference in Warsaw entitled: *The Image of the Town in the Culture of the Sixteenth-Eighteenth Century*. Ten papers were read in the course of the debates which lasted two days; three of them referred to European towns while the others dealt with the urban centres of the former Polish Commonwealth.

The debates were inaugurated by Andrzej Wyrobisz (Warsaw) who spoke about: *Towns in Geographical Descriptions of Poland in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century* and compared information contained in the works by the Polish historians of three eras: the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Baroque. A. Wyrobisz also demonstrated the mutual dependencies of the works under discussion and the fact that with the course of time they offered increasing numbers of detailed information, testifying to the gradual development of knowledge. The presented evolution led to a conception of the town as a seat of the feudal secular and lay authorities, typical for medieval chroniclers (Jan Długosz), and towards its perception as an element of the cultural landscape and the centre of various domains of economic, social, political and religious life (Marcin Kromer, Szymon Starowolski). Transformations in the definition of the place held by the town in geography and history were proportionate to the growth of the collected information. The latter influenced the shaping of the consciousness of the Polish society of the gentry, in which urban issues became an ever indispensable component of reality.

The paper presented by Ryszard Szczygiel (Lublin) entitled *The Image of Lublin Created by Renaissance Writers* cited the numerous opinions of men of letters from the period concerning the location of the town, its trade and political functions, the everyday life of its inhabitants etc. The author drew attention to the general domination of positive evaluations, a fact which, considering the well-known anti-urban attitude of the gentry, from whom the majority of the observers originated, is somewhat astonishing. It is possible that this vision of Lublin, perceived as a large commercial, political and religious centre of the Commonwealth was to a great measure affected by the selection of descriptions and opinions mostly borrowed from the works of a burgher Sebastian Klonowicz, closely connected with the town.

A detailed analysis is the base of the paper read by Lilianna Kranz-Domasłowska (Poznań) entitled: *Kwidziń — a Spatial Image of a Medieval Town*, in which she discussed the changes of the topography of this urban centre from the first half of the thirteenth up to the seventeenth century. Much space is devoted to the localization of particular town quarters; attention is also drawn to the role played by the local chapter in the layout of

places of trade and religious cult, which decidedly influenced the spatial behaviour of the Kwidzyń population.

In an erudite lecture on the most famous Polish fountain (the Neptune Fountain in Gdańsk) Mariusz Karpowicz (Warsaw) deliberated on its ideological message and models. He proved that this outstanding, Manneristic object was inspired by a similar one in Messina while the figure of Neptune, personifying the benevolence of the seas, is patterned after one of the sculptures by the Venetian artist, Alessandro Vittoria. The fountain in Gdańsk is proof of the fascination with Italian art in a town which was one of the more important Northern European centres, especially closely linked with the cultural influences exerted by the Low Countries; it was an exception for the local art to have adopted Italian-style sculpture.

The successive three papers pertain to European problems. Juliusz Chrościcki (Warsaw) outlines a picture of early modern Rome as seen by travellers and pilgrims. The latter included a sizeable group of artists who in their diaries sketched the appearance of the "Eternal City" during the violent architectural town planning transformations which took place at the end of the sixteenth and during the seventeenth century. The author stresses the significance of the tourist guidebooks of the period which contained numerous information about secular buildings and sanctuaries worthy of visiting. It is interesting that the routes proposed by them are identical to those of medieval pilgrimages. The voyagers and tourists also included Poles and foreigners permanently connected with the culture of the Commonwealth. For the majority, regardless of the concrete destination of their travels, the latter took on the nature of a pious pilgrimages.

Huissite Prague in Political Literature and Propaganda is the theme of a paper by Wojciech Iwańczak (Warsaw). The author chose those fragments of the complex ideological and religious polemics between the Bohemian Catholics, Taborites and Calixtists which referred to the estimation of the role and place ascribed to the capital of the Bohemian state in the Hussite times. Prague was depicted by Catholic priests predominantly as a condemnable nest of heresy, a negation of the former, magnificent metropolis from the times of Charles IV. The attitude of the Hussites was more complicated. At the beginning of the revolution they glorified the victorious capital but later on, the more radical branch began to criticize it ever harshly, condemning the opportunism of the Prague burghers as contrasted with the admirable stand taken by the population of other towns such as Tabor. The most vehement critics even proposed projects for a total destruction of Prague.

In discussing the vision of the town in the works of thinkers from the Enlightenment era, Jerzy Wojtowicz (Toruń) indicated that its source was composed i.a. of the traditions and currents dating back to antiquity. A permanent topos was, for example, the rustic myth of the "carefree village" as opposed to the "evil, wicked town", and the utopian idea of the town of the future, which should be organized in a collectivistic manner. On the other hand, the Enlightenment considerably expanded knowledge about the town by launching the historical role of trade and the crafts as the prime factors of civilizational development. The efforts of the Polish reformers from the time of the Four Years Sejm went in the same direction, by appreciating the significance of towns and their population and attempting to thoroughly reconstruct social structures of the Commonwealth.

Three of the authors concentrated their attention on Warsaw. Teresa Zarębska (Warsaw) discusses the Renaissance and Baroque eras and the town-planning and architectonic reconstruction of the capital in the sixteenth-seventeenth century. The author characterizes i.a. the location of the town, its squares, streets, gardens and palace complexes. The latter were regarded by travellers of the period as the great attraction of Warsaw; the high bank on the Vistula, depicted in many panoramas and engravings, were another one. The descriptions of Warsaw edifices and curiosities are presented by the author against the background of the achievements of modern town planning, stressing the novelty of certain solutions (the composition of Krakowskie Przedmieście or the Vasa Forum with the column of Sigismund III).

The oldest known plan of the election camp in Warsaw (1587) was discussed by Maria Brykowska and Juliusz Chrościcki. The analysed sketch by Garcia Alabiano, a Jesuit from Vilno, makes it possible to reconstruct the site of the camps of the gentry and magnates; it also indicates that their localization was planned in detail to prevent eventual armed conflicts near the town. In the light of the above source material it is possible to comprehend better the events of 1587 which, however in consequence, led to a civil war in the Commonwealth. The authors propose an interesting hypothesis about the close connection between consecutive election camps and the localization of new suburban settlements.

Marian Marek Drozdowski (Warsaw) presented the appearance of Warsaw during the reign of Stanisław August as seen by foreigners. He outlined a broad range of problems which interested arrivals from Western Europe: alongside architecture and town planning they also observed the conditions of the daily life of the local population, the religious attitudes of the Poles, their political controversies and discussions. One is struck by the aptness of the cited statements, concurrent with social reality; the majority were critical both towards national features and the state of the economy, culture and hygiene. The foreigner visitors also noticed elements of the progressing Europeanization of the capital, and regarded the King Stanisław August Poniatowski to be their motor force.

The presented papers met with great interest; over twenty participants of the session voiced their opinions in the ensuing discussion. Janusz Tazbir drew attention to the different perception of a concrete town by representatives of different creeds, while Henryk Rutkowski voiced his reservations as regards the reliability of geographical descriptions of Poland, and recognised the work by Kromer as a *sui generis vademecum* of knowledge, intended exclusively for the foreign reader. Teresa Zarębska, on the other hand, recalled that during the Enlightenment the only successful attempt at creating a town of the future was made in Nancy by Stanisław Leszczyński, the King of Poland and Lorraine.

In a summary of the debates, Maria Bogucka emphasized the wide range of the chronological and territorial boundaries of the reflections and the diversity of the exploited sources; she also underlined the noticeable correlation between the reception of the phenomenon of the town and the psychosocial and cultural preparedness of the people who viewed it.

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