

House Owners – Tenants – Lodgers: The Topography of Tenement Houses in Medieval Prague*

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The phenomenon of tenement housing in medieval Prague is as yet understudied. This study attempts to outline the character of tenement housing on the basis of extant written sources from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries using an interdisciplinary perspective and the prism of four select themes: 1. contracts of lease; 2. the town house and its layout from the viewpoint of history and construction history; 3. analysis of Old Town tenement books for 1427 and 1429; 4. the social structure of inhabitants of an average Prague house using the example of three persons: the owner, the tenant-conventor, and the lodger-inquilinus. It appears that the Prague agglomeration being the centre of the Czech lands and the residence of the ruling Luxembourg dynasty, it was an exclusive urban centre in which only the members of the urban upper and upper-middle classes could afford to own a house. Small craftsmen and tradesmen had to rent their living space and workspace. The metropolis experienced a construction boom throughout the fourteenth century. Building lots were much more densely covered and dozens of new houses appeared built for the purpose of tenement housing (as opposed to being the residence of the owner). It is clear that this development had a significant impact on the architecture and urban structure of the medieval city.

Keywords: Bohemia; Prague; Old Town of Prague; New Town of Prague; Urban space; Tenement housing; Rental market; Lease contracts; Space mobility; Migration; Middle Ages.

Introduction

In 1392, a citizen of New Town named Mařík (*Marzic*) rented out his house located on Charles Square in the New Town of Prague to two merchants who wished to take part in an event displaying relics of the saints held by the Corpus Christi chapel. This could be seen as a calculated decision (Fig. 1).¹ Ludvík Vidoch (*Ludwas Vidoch*) and Gall Paknyk (*Hawel Paknyk*) rented the house precisely because it was situated near the chapel, and thus offered an ideal spot from where to observe the celebration in comfort with a great view (Fig. 2).² Prague houses served as accommodation for various visitors, including noble guests attending special events of not only the city but also the country – Prague was the capital city of the Czech lands and thus hosted

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1 *Manuál radní většiny (1387–1399)*, fol. 83r. This contract was first discovered and commented upon by Bedřich Mendl in MENDL, *Hospodářské a sociální poměry*, vol. 5, p. 359.

2 Concerning the display of the relics of saints (so called *ostension reliquiarum*) see the newest study by HRDINA, *Kaple Božího těla*, 21–38; and HRDINA, *Relikvie, odpustky*, 11–33.

a wide variety of events, such as celebrations, coronations, pilgrimages, important political meetings and councils of various national institutions.³ During these events, the location and price of a rented building, as well as personal or family ties between the owner and the tenant, played a crucial role.

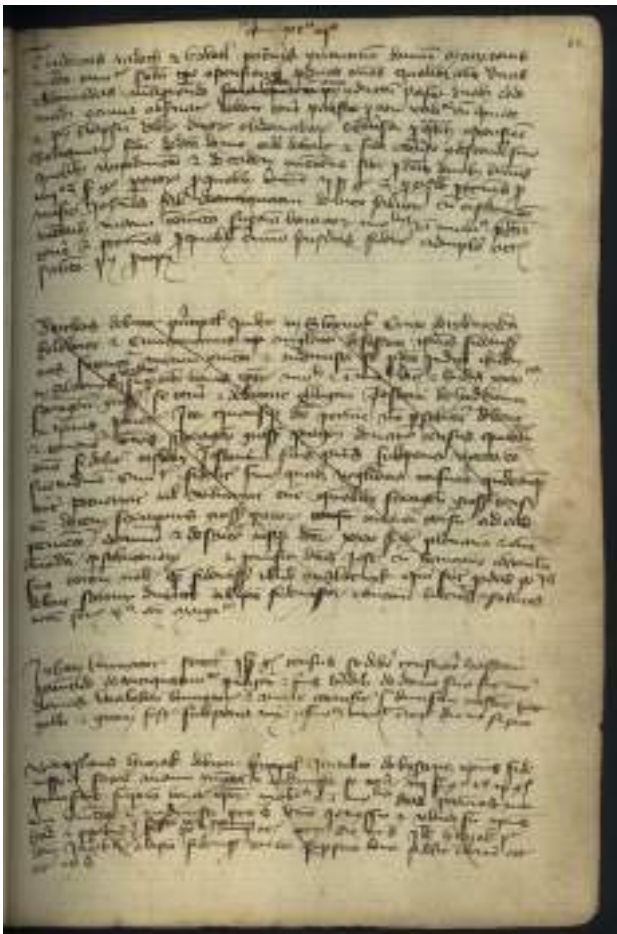


Figure 1: Lease contract by which the New Town citizen Mařík rented his house on Charles Square in the New Town of Prague to two non-resident merchants who aimed to take attend a display of relics of saints held in the Corpus Christi chapel. *Manuál radní většší 1387–1399* [The Large Council Manual 1387–1399], Prague City Archives, Collection of Manuscripts, sign. 2072, fol. 83r.

3 HLAVÁČEK, *Z každodennosti Karla IV.*, 33–42.



Figure 2: Corpus Christi Chapel on Charles Square in Prague (formerly the Cattle Market). Philipp van den Bossche / Johannes Wechter, so-called *Prospekt města Prahy* [Prospectus of the City of Prague] by Aegidius Sadeler, 1606, Prague City Archives, Veduta fund, sign. G 18.

Up until now, Czech medieval studies, including archaeology and construction history, have paid little attention to the issue of tenement housing in the medieval period.⁴ Czech scholarly literature has generally worked on the premise that for tenement housing of the given era, we only have sporadic written evidence, and that therefore it is difficult or even impossible adequately to tackle the topic. However, using the example of the city of Prague, we can show that this is not entirely true and that the sources we do have let us draw a rather clear picture of the situation of tenement housing in the Prague urban area in the late Middle Ages.⁵ Our main focus will however be the period approximately from the mid-fourteenth century until the mid-fifteenth century. Apart from preserved contracts of lease, a crucial source will be the Old Town tenement books from 1427–1434. These contain unique pieces of information about the numbers and social standing of the Old Town taxpayers. In reality, these municipal books are a series of topographically organized records of tax districts (for the years 1427, 1429 and 1433/1434). In 1429, these were combined and compared with tax records of owners, tenants and lodgers.⁶

4 One exception was the work of the social and economic historian Bedřich Mendl. He was the first (and so far only) researcher to have focused his scholarly attention on this topic. MENDL, *Hospodářské a sociální poměry*, vol. 5, pp. 358–359; MENDL, *Sociální krise*, 1–206. The theme was partly discussed by Karl Beer: BEER, *Zur älteren Bevölkerungsstatistik Prags*, 74–87; and Josef Macek: MACEK, *Hospodářský účet z 15. století*, 49–60. For the Moravian towns, ČECHURA, *Obyvatelé – zapomenutá vrstva*, 97–116. Overview and distribution of Jihlava taxpayers in the inner city and suburbs published by HOFFMANN, *Jihlava v husitské revoluci*.

5 In the Middle Ages, Prague consisted of four separate towns: Old Town (originally Major Town) and the New Town of Prague, The Little Quarter (originally Minor Town of Prague) and Hradčany – The Castle. They were united in 1784. Throughout the Middle Ages and the early Modern Era, the most populated as well as most important of the four quarters was the Old Town of Prague. ŽEMLIČKA, *Praha, paní Čech*, 172–174; compare *Dejiny Prahy I.*, 90–91, 130–137; or LEDVINKA – PEŠEK, *Praha*, 109–113.

6 This is the manuscript of the municipal book *Berní knihy Starého Města pražského (1427–1434)* [Tenement Books of the Old Town of Prague 1427–1434], Prague City Archives, Collection of Manuscripts, sign. 20; the data from this town book were in part made available to the current readers by Václav Vladivoj Tomek and

In the medieval era, in order to appear in town administration record books, one had to have a certain value of possessions, used in the given area as the basis for the collection of so-called *losunga*. This tax, sometimes called the town levy, collection or duty (*collecta, steura*) was collected by the town administration from its inhabitants.⁷ Sources originating in the various institutions of city authorities thus usually only cover the groups of town dwellers who had at least a certain amount of property and could be identified on the border between the lower-middle class and the poor. The truly poor inhabitants of medieval towns were not systematically recorded anywhere, even though we do have certain records of their existence, too. For example, in the order of Old Town goldsmiths from 1323, we can find three categories of servants who lived in the houses of their masters.⁸ In the painters' order from 1348, we find a notice on beggars (*almosner* and *almoszerin*) who lived in the houses of masters, and this was apparently so common that rules were created on the customs of their funerals.⁹ In the Middle Ages, the medieval town house was not inhabited only by the owner-housekeeper and his servants, or sometimes by beggars: houses and their parts were often commercially rented out to tenants (*conventores*) and to other lodgers (*inquilini*).

This leads us to a crucial question of terminology, with a need to differentiate between various persons that appear in written sources. A house owner usually carries the title of house master or housekeeper (*dominus domus, pater familias, hospes, hospitiar, Haupt der Familie* or *des Hauses*).¹⁰ During the Hussite revolution (1419–1434), in Prague we often see that small craftsmen and tradesmen appear as tenants in large town houses or as lodgers/inhabitants who pay the city tax.¹¹ In Latin original, they are either called *inquilini* or *conventores (Pächter)*. The editor of Old Town tenement books Hana Pátková uses two terms, "podruh" and "obyvatel"; the precise English equivalents would be "cotter" and "inhabitant".¹²

Without doubt, there was a clear difference between the mentioned groups of town inhabitants. The eminent nineteenth-century historian and specialist on Prague history Václav Vladivoj Tomek addressed the difference between the two terms in his topographically sorted series *Základy starého místopisu Pražského* [Foundations

Bedřich Mendl. TOMEK, *Základy I*; MENDL, *Z hospodářských dějin Prahy*, 162–172 and Supplement E, 279–390. The complete municipal book was prepared for print much later by Hana Pátková. PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*. The book became more widely known through BEER, *Über Losungsbücher*, 59–69.

7 PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, Introduction, XII–XIII; compare with HOFFMANN, *Středověké město*, 230–235.

8 PETERKA, *Das Gewerberecht Böhmens*, 103.

9 PÁTKOVÁ, *Cechovní kniha*, 9; *Das Buch der Prager Malerzucht 1348–1527*, 66.

10 TOMEK, *Dějepis 2*, 291, 327–328. The term house master is much broader semantically and in the Middle Ages, it was used to denote the house masters of aristocratic and church residences and homesteads as well as inn keepers. *Elektronický slovník staré češtiny*.

11 For František Graus, lodgers are people who do not have their own house but who keep a separate household. GRAUS, *Městská chudina*, 88.

12 PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, Introduction, XIII and XVIII. For Václav Vojtíšek, *inquilini* were typical urban dwellers, VOJTÍŠEK, *O vývoji samosprávy*, 11–13; similarly, in MEZNIK, *K otázce struktury*, 79–81. In accordance with the research by František Hoffmann concerning the town of Jihlava, he points out that lodgers living in town were often wealthy people who sometimes reached the status of full-fledged burghers. Therefore, they cannot be automatically listed among the urban poor, as was the case in former academic works. See HOFFMANN, *Jihlava v husitské revoluci*, 97. Using material from České Budějovice, Jaroslav Čechura has showed that *inquilini* were not always lodgers but sometimes they were house owners who did not accept the city law, and therefore were not *inquilini* – lodgers – but instead town "inhabitants". ČECHURA, *Poplatníci v berní knize Českých Budějovic*, 57–70; see ČECHURA, *Obyvatelé – zapomenutá vrstva*, 97–116.

of the Old Prague Topography].¹³ Lodgers-inquilini are only put on account, while tenants-conventores are listed with their full name. In the original source, lodgers are only listed with the sum levied by the town office, not with their real estate and other possessions. On the other hand, conventores are sometimes listed with the sum that was the basis for the levied tax.¹⁴ It is unclear however whether this was the sum of their complete property or their share in various pieces of real estate – for this, the sources are far too incomplete.

It is clear that tenants-conventores were usually wealthier than lodgers-inquilini, because they usually rented the whole house from their owner. In both cases, these “tenants” were inhabitants of the city who did not own their own houses, yet managed their own household. All inquilini cannot be considered as simple lodgers – even when we take into account that in the pre-Hussite era, those who did not own a house in the city were inferior politically, legally and socially: those who lived with their employer were represented by him in court, while those living in their own household stood in court by themselves.¹⁵ It is hard, however, to define the level of inferiority in this respect. In Prague judicial books (*libri judiciarum*), we can find numerous entries where “servants” represented themselves in court, and, on the other hand, entries that testify to instances where they were represented by their employers. Moreover, in the tenement book of 1429, we can find persons who accepted the city law (*ius civium* or *Stadtrecht*).¹⁶ As opposed to Hana Pátková, I would prefer to call inquilini in the Czech urban contexts lodgers or roomers, or alternatively, in accordance with Čechura’s research, inhabitants.¹⁷ This short discussion on terminology clearly documents the fact that the social structure of townspeople was highly heterogeneous. It also proves that based on the limited sources preserved up to this day, we can reconstruct only a small part of most of medieval urban societies.¹⁸

In medieval and early modern towns, most of the houses were inhabited by families. In accordance with international scholarship, we cannot use the modern, narrow definition of a family consisting only of parents and their children. We need a broader concept of family as a community living in the same space of a town house, the medieval *familiam*.¹⁹ In many cases, it consisted of the family of the owner, including children and grandparents, but also servants, maids, housemaids and journeymen who shared the house with their masters while serving/learning the trade.²⁰

13 TOMEK, *Základy I*.

14 PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 20 etc.; see also MUSÍLEK, *Hostince, krčmy a šenky*, 65. In her inspirational review of the tenement books, Ludmila Sulitková pointed out again that lodgers could accept the city law. SULITKOVÁ, *Hana Pátková ed., Berní knihy* [review], 455, 458. For more on vocabulary and terms, see *Slovník středověké latiny v českých zemích* 17, 208–209; and *Slovník středověké latiny v českých zemích* 1, 920; similarly, MENDL, *Z hospodářských dějin*, 162–163, considered them to be inquilini-lodgers.

15 GRAUS, *Městská chudina*, 104.

16 For example, shoemaker Nicolas, lodger in house no. 480a/I (*Nicolaus sartor habet ius civile*), and many others. PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, XX–XXI, 123–125, 127, 266, note 39 etc. From the tenement books data, it is clear that these lodgers had varying amounts of possessions and the city tax amount was probably defined according to their movable assets. For example, “Sokol sartor habet ius civile, summa huius 10 gr.”, or “Nicolaus sartor habet ius civile, summa columpne 34 gr.”, PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 123, 124.

17 Compare the edition *Nájemníci na Starém Městě pražském roku 1608*.

18 MEZNÍK, *K otázce struktury*, 73–91; for the situation in the Holy Roman Empire see ISENMANN, *Die deutsche Stadt*, 690–775; or SCHOCH, *Die Bevölkerung*; and KOCH, *Neubürger in Zürich*.

19 Compare with articles in the volume *Haus und Familie in der spätmittelalterlichen Stadt*.

20 GRAUS, *Městská chudina*, 62–63.

As opposed to in some former research, the town house is lately understood as a complex of a variety of functional buildings. It contained the living quarters of the owner, but also a set of service buildings and other structures.²¹ Frequent changes in the ownership and lease of Old Town houses brought along numerous adjustments that were aimed at making the interior suit the needs and sometimes even aesthetics of the new inhabitants. Thus, over the centuries, town houses underwent complex architectural and construction changes.²² Today, to discover something truly new about the medieval town house it is pertinent to focus on interdisciplinary research of history, archaeology, construction history, art history and a number of other academic fields.

Within the framework of this study, we do not have sufficient space to address all the facets of tenement housing. We shall focus on four selected issues: 1. the lease contracts; 2. the town house (*Stadthaus*) and its construction from the perspective of construction history and construction/architectural research; 3. the analysis of Old Town tenement books for 1427 and 1429; and finally 4. the social structure of inhabitants of a common Prague town house demonstrated through the examples of three different persons: 4.1 the house owner, 4.2 the tenant-conventor, and 4.3 the lodger-inquilinus. The topic of the rented dwellings cannot be observed without discussing urban topography and the distribution of the tenants within the city. The rented dwellings did not have a stable value in the dynamically developing capital city of Prague which, in addition, experienced the Hussite revolution between the years 1419 and 1434. On the contrary, in the first decades of the fifteenth century, due to economic, social and political events, the character of the tenement houses transformed.

1. Contracts of Lease in the Prague Agglomeration at the Turn of Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries

In the medieval era, lease was commonly arranged verbally – both between the owner and the tenant-conventor and between the owner and lodger-inquilinus. Many of the small craftsmen and tradesmen who usually rented their space were illiterate, so it is not surprising that they did not sign a written contract. However, the situation was different when the lease was arranged between wealthy burghers. In such cases, the contracts were entered into municipal books. This served as an insurance for the owner that the agreed lease would indeed be paid, while the tenant could be certain that the owner would not cancel the contract prematurely.²³ The desire for such reassurances is not surprising – in some cases, we were looking at substantial sums of money, i.e. several dozens of threescores of groschen. For example, in one of the Old

21 From works on construction history, we must mention the monograph by Jiří Čarek. He focused on the development of the Prague agglomeration in the early Middle Ages. Although his book focuses on earlier days than those of our interest, his work is in many ways universal and unsurpassed in many aspects. Čarek was the first researcher who perceived the medieval house as a complex of a variety of functional buildings. ČAREK, *Románská Praha*. Jiří Čarek focused not only on brick/stone-built roman core; he explored the medieval house as a complex of all the buildings gathered in a single lot. His drawings always contain the Roman tower in the centre surrounded by a set of various buildings. The house is the whole set of these. Compare with DRAGON – ŠKABRADA – TRYML, *Románské domy v Praze*.

22 Today, this topic is an important and well-covered issue in a great variety of books and materials. To name but a few, we shall mention in the Czech context the volumes *Forum urbes mediævæi* 3; and *Forum urbes mediævæi* 4; and publications and studies by MENCL, *Měšťanský dům*, 161–192; HAUSEROVÁ, *Vývoj středověkého*; LÍBAL – MUK, *Staré Město pražské*; and VLČEK, *Umělecké památky Prahy* 1.

23 TOMEK, *Dějepis* 2, 327–328.

Town memory books (*liber memorabilis*), we find two entries on lease contracts from 1418. The first notes the lease of a certain house for three years for 24 threescores of groschen. The second lease will be analysed later, but it concerned house no. 490/I "U Pávů" (Peacocks House) in Železná street for three years, with the exception of one room, for 23 threescores of groschen.²⁴ As we said earlier, some contracts entered into municipal books specified the precise conditions (*conditione*) of who was eligible to pay the city tax (whether the owner or the tenant-conventor), or what the conditions of use were of other parts of the house, such as non-residential spaces or the garden.²⁵

From the estimated great number of the lease contracts signed in the Prague agglomeration in the late Middle Ages, only very few examples were preserved. For example, when scribe Wenceslas of Bítov (Václav z Bítova) from the Lesser Town of Prague (Malá Strana) lay on his deathbed in 1426, his under-aged son Jacob (Jakub) inherited significant wealth: a house on Malostranské náměstí, a country estate in Unhošť (nowadays a small town 21 km to the west of Prague), three large vineyards and two hop fields in the close surroundings of the city. Wenceslas' wife died, too, so the property was to be handled by two guardians, Simon of White Lion (Šimon od Bílého lva) and Thomas of Lesser Town (Tomáš z Malé Strany). However, these two were to be supervised by the Old Town city council. They were obliged to show all accounts to the council. For good record, these accounts were listed in Old Town memory books from 1417 to 1480.²⁶ The structure of entries is simple. For 1426–1432, a bill of revenues and expenses of the orphan's estate arrives, sometimes with a record of a hearing in the city council. The bills give us a detailed glimpse into the everyday activities of the Prague citizens towards the end of the Middle Ages and thus serve as a unique type of source. The bills show sums received by Simon of White Lion from the lease of the Lesser Town house no. 55/III. This leads us to believe that the orphaned Wenceslas of Bítov probably lived in the household of his guardian, while the inherited house was rented out by Simon, a good manager. The lease was collected twice a year – on the days of St George and of St Gall. The above-said is supported by another sum seen in the accounts – regular payments for the boy's nanny, noted here as the "old woman" (*domina antiqua*). Her yearly salary varied from one threescore (1431) to 3.5 threescores (1428) of Prague groschen.²⁷

In the above-mentioned entry of the same municipal book, the innkeeper Ulrich Ellend (Oldřich Ellend) and his wife Kunigunda rented house no. 490/I "U Pávů" (Peacock House) in Železná street, for 23 threescores of groschen. The entry states that they rent the whole house with the exception of one room, kept by the widow of the original owner John Merenstein (Jan Merenstein). She lived here together with her children; she also kept a small storage room where the orphans kept their possessions.²⁸ This gives

24 *Kniha pamětní / Liber memorabilis 1417–1480*, fol. 16v, 21v; compare TOMEK, *Základy I*, 118.

25 *Manuál radní větší 1399–1412*, fol. 33r, 66r, 232r.

26 *Kniha pamětní / Liber memorabilis 1417–1480*, fol. 97r–98r, 127v–128r; 135v. This source was analysed and first published in Czech by MENDL, *Příspěvek k dějinám*, 85–96; latest contribution to the theme by MUSÍLEK, *Šimon od Bílého lva*, 2–27.

27 *Kniha pamětní / Liber memorabilis 1417–1480*, fol. 135v.

28 *Kniha pamětní / Liber memorabilis 1417–1480*, fol. 21v. Similarly, the house no. 13/I originally belonged to the widow of Martin Špitálský; later, it was bought by the saddle maker John Špaček (Jan Špaček); in 1429, Martin Špitálský's widow is listed as a lodger there. PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 61, 108, 140.

us an idea about the two most common models of orphan care in medieval cities.²⁹ Orphans either stayed in the house of their parents (most commonly with their mother-widow), and, if necessary, they lived in one part of the house and rented out the rest. Or, orphans who lost both parents like the son of the burgher of Lesser Town Vitus of Bítov (Vít z Bítova), moved to the household of their guardian, where they lived up until they reached the legal age. The guardian managed their property, deducting the costs of food and clothing for the given orphan.

Table 1 shows the average rents as documented in the Prague agglomeration. The data shown here are truly unique. Some of it was found in the unedited municipal books. Several entries were lost in May 1945, towards the end of WWII, in the great fire of the Old Town Hall, but they had previously been collected at the beginning of the twentieth century by Bedřich Mendl.³⁰ We must not forget that in most cases, we have no idea about the size and quality, i. e. value, of the rented dwellings. We may assume that rent was generally higher in central locations and in squares, though this was not a universal rule and also depended on a number of other factors (size and quality of the rented space, needs, demands and purposes of the tenant, etc.).³¹ So, rent depended on the location, state of the building, amenities and more.³² The documented rent in Prague varied from 2 to 17.5 threescores of groschen annually. It is clear that not all inhabitants could afford the rent in the capital city. This proves a logical assumption that rents were higher in the Old Town of Prague than in the New Town or in Lesser Town.

OLD TOWN OF PRAGUE					
House no.	Square / Street	Year	Annual rent (in threescores of groschen)	Rented space / lease length	Source / Manuscript no.
490	Železná	1418	8	House with the exception of one room	992, fol. 21v Tomek ed. <i>Základy I</i> , 118
?	?	1418	8	House	992, fol. 16v
NEW TOWN OF PRAGUE					
House no.	Square / Street	Year	Annual rent (in threescores of groschen)	Rented space / lease length	Source / Manuscript no.
?	Charles sq.	1392	2	House	2072, fol. 83r
877	Wenceslas sq.	1395	5.5	Smallapt. (room and storageroom)	2072, fol. 135r
802b	Wenceslas sq.	1395	2	House	2072, fol. 137v
556a	Charles sq.	1399–1401	12	House	2100, fol. 7r

29 The latest contribution to this by NODL, *Na hradech a v podhradí*, 107–112; or ZELENKA, *Dítě a dětství*, 587–613. City regulations on the treating of underaged orphans were preserved in so-called Soběslav law from mid-fifteenth century. SCHRANIL, *Die sogenannten Sobieslaw'schen Rechte*, 73–75.

30 MENDL, *Hospodářské a sociální poměry*, vol. 5, pp. 259–360.

31 Compare *Manuál radní větší 1399–1412*, fol. 7r, 26r, 33r etc.

32 MUSÍLEK, *Svědectví písemných pramenů*, 202–209.

557a	Charles sq.	1401–1403	5.5	House with the exception of one room and a stable	2100, fol. 26r
673	Charles sq. / Vodičkova	1401–1402	10.5	House	2100, fol. 33r
673	Charles sq. / Vodičkova	1403–1405	8	Baths (<i>balneum</i>)	2100, fol. 66r
838	Wenceslas sq.	1404	13	House with brewery, fully equiped	2100, fol. 78v
501	Charles sq.	1409–1414	2.5	House	2100, fol. 232r
838	Charles sq.	1411	14	?	2079, fol. 2 deperditum
?	Dláždění	1411	5	Flat (one streetside window)	2100, fol. 306v-307r
368	Podskalí	1411	5	Storage room, part of the main room	2100, fol. 291v
838	Wenceslas sq.	1411	14	?	2079, fol. 2 deperditum
836	Wenceslas sq.	1412	17.5	?	2079, fol. 11 deperditum
LESSER TOWN					
House no.	Square / Street	Year	Annual rent (in groschen)	Rented space / lease length	Source / Manuscript no.
271	Malostranské sq.	1428	59 groschen	Period from St George to St Gall	992, fol. 98r
271	Malostranské sq.	1430	30 groschen	St George period	992, fol. 127v
271	Malostranské sq.	1430	40 groschen	St Gall period	992, fol. 127v
271	Malostranské sq.	1431	80 groschen	x	992, fol. 135v
271	Malostranské sq.	1432	1 threescore and 40 groschen	Period from St George to St Gall	992, fol. 149v

Table 1: Overview of rental prices in Prague at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (put together from records from municipal books and data collected of Bedřich Mendl. MENDL, *Hospodářské a sociální poměry* 5, 359–360).

The vivid Prague rental market is indirectly documented in the resolutions of the regulating town council. In the New Town of Prague, rules for eviction were set by the common aldermen as early as 1389. The owner of the house had the right to evict the tenant at any moment without stating the reason. But, if the tenant was evicted through no fault of his own, the owner had to return the so-called *censum obsessum*, i. e. the rent paid in advance. On the other hand, if the tenant caused a disturbance or damage of the owner's property, the owner had the right to ask for the whole rent for the previously agreed period of lease. And, if the tenant had a rightful complaint against the owner, he could move out without paying the rent.³³

33 TOMEK, *Dějepis* 2, 327–328.

Often, houses were places of accommodation for various visitors, including as temporary accommodation for honourable guests during various celebrations (feasts, coronations, fairs, important political meetings, meetings of state institutions, etc.).³⁴ During these events, the location of the house was crucial, as in the case of Mařík's house mentioned in the introduction.

As early as the Middle Ages and the early modern period, non-residential premises were also rented in Prague. Among the newcomers who sought temporary or longer-term accommodation in Prague, there were both independent merchants and partners of companies, most often business representatives, the so-called lagers, or factors who were in a position of service to a foreign company.³⁵ In practice, however, these functions often overlapped for one person, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish individual relationships in the sources. Lieutenants or factors and representatives of trading companies (from Nuremberg, Reich, Wrocław, etc.) were most often settled in Prague's Old Town or Lesser Town, where they rented apartments, cellars, warehouses and goods transshipment points in the houses of townspeople. For example, the Prague merchant Arnošt Hybner of Kyčina was in 1534 simultaneously a factor of three Nuremberg and one Wrocław firm.³⁶ Official documents of the city administration (e.g. the Old Town Instructions of 1503 concerning the revenue from the city weighing scales) repeatedly complain about the illegal weighing scales in these premises, and illegal retailing was repeatedly practiced not only by foreign merchants but also by Prague burghesses.³⁷

2. The Town House and Its Layout: Different Points of View from Historical and Construction History Perspectives?³⁸

In the Old Town of Prague, construction history has shown that some houses served here as accommodation of a single family and servants as well as having buildings where the layout permitted to accommodate several families of tenants. For example, house no. 509/1 at Havel market (*novo foro*) was organized in a way that did not easily allow several families to live together, but still, seven tenant families are mentioned as having lived here (Fig. 3).³⁹ On the other hand, the large house no. 234/1 on the corner of Karlova and Jilská streets had several separate quarters, yet there was a single tenant-conventor and two lodgers living there (Fig. 4).⁴⁰

34 HLAVÁČEK, *Z každodennosti Karla IV.*, 33–42; MORAW, *Über den Hof*, 77–103; and PATZE, *Die Hofgesellschaft*, 733–773.

35 BUŇATOVÁ, *Obchod*, 663, 666.

36 JANÁČEK, *Dějiny obchodu*, 272.

37 MUSÍLEK – TAIBL, *Pražský Týnský dvůr*, 34.

38 Most recently, construction history of Prague agglomeration was explored by CYMBALAK – RYKL – SEMERÁD, *Nejstarší pozůstatky*, 14–44; compare for example with MENCL, *Měštanský dům*, 161–192; HAUSEROVÁ, *Vývoj středověkého*; or LÍBAL – MUK, *Staré Město pražské*; compare with *Metodika stavebněhistorického průzkumu*.

39 RYKL, *Výpověď stavební historie*, 298–322.

40 RYKL – BERÁNEK, *Výstavny středověký dům*, 3–34.



Figure 3: House no. 509/1 (at the centre of the illustration) in Havel street, Langweil's model of Prague, 1826–1837, © The City of Prague Museum, KITdigital company, 2007.



Figure 4: Old Town of Prague, Northwestern face of house no. 234/I on the corner of Jilská and Jalovcová street, Antonín Alexander, 1936, © Prague City Archives, Collection of Photographs, sign. I 9164.

There are several possible explanations for this. First, town houses were often rebuilt to the needs and tastes of their new owners.⁴¹ This changed the interior layout and functionality of the houses. While in some buildings, we are able to trace their gradual progress, in others, we can only rely on the limited testimonial value of written sources. Besides, in the Middle Ages, this is usually restricted to the limited period covered by the given municipal book, charter or other document. Sources for the Prague agglomeration are insufficient. For some decades, we have very limited, fragmentary pieces of information about individual buildings and their inhabitants, and worse, about most houses we know nothing at all.

Another reason that written sources often disagree with the findings of construction research is that similarly to in the nineteenth century, lodgers and their families often rented the rear wings of the house, spaces on top floors or various courtyard outbuildings, while the main, street side building served as the accommodation and workshop of the owner (or tenant-conventor). Compared to these days, the living standards and intimacy were very different and inhabitants dwelled in very modest living arrangements, as we will show below through the example of the New Town citizen Zdenka. Less privileged craftsmen and tradesmen thus paid for the fact that

41 MUSÍLEK, *Svědectví písemných pramenů*, 203.

they lived in the capital city of the kingdom, although they did not have enough money to purchase their own house. Large numbers of tenants and lodgers who accepted the city law suggest, however, that even some full-fledged citizens could not afford to buy their own house, or may have had personal reasons not to do so.⁴² The social mobility of some individuals who succeeded in achieving high status within the town society suggests, however, that it may have paid off to suffer a little discomfort in exchange for the opportunity.⁴³ Tenement books give us much evidence on tenants-conventors of Old Town houses who, over time, became the owners of the houses they originally rented.⁴⁴

3. Analysis of Old Town Tenement Books from 1427 and 1429: A Unique Insight into the Town's Society

The oldest tenement books from the Old Town date back to 1427–1434, to the period of the Hussite uprising, when the town's society changed dramatically.⁴⁵ They give us an idea about a city that went through a huge shock and a shift in power, ownership and legal status. The town lost a great part of its Catholic townsmen and the situation was ripe for a new order in politics, power and property.⁴⁶ Entries in the tenement books are divided according to four town quarters: Týnská (in the sources, it carries the title St Mary's, based on the title of the main Church of Mother of God before Týn); Havelská (Gall's quarter), Linhartská [(Linhart's quarter) and Mikulášská (St Nicholas' quarter). Tax collectors were systematic and went from house to house in the street or around the square, so we can use their records to carefully draft the social and topographic image of the town. In detail, we analysed the data of the tax registry from 1427 and the registries from 1429, as they are in many ways unique. The tax records from 1429 not only cover owners and tenants-conventores, but also lodgers from the Old Town homes owned by Prague citizens (for the purposes of city tax, noble, royal, ecclesiastical, university and city properties were exempt, as were the houses and buildings serviced by the so-called Six Masters Office (*officium sex dominorum*), or by the representatives of the town council. These sources even quote the sum they were to pay to the treasury.⁴⁷

Tenement books are one of the most important sources for social-topographic research.⁴⁸ Until now, research has shown without doubt that even the most complete data from this type of municipal books does not offer comprehensive answers to our

42 MUSÍLEK, *Svědectví písemných pramenů*, 204, 207; MENDL, *Hospodářské a sociální poměry 5*, 357–358.

43 MUSÍLEK, *Patroni*, 180–192.

44 Compare with the example of cutler George Polonus. First, he is listed as tenant-conventor in the large house no. 194/I by the Charles bridge (*domus magna circa pontem*) to later become its owner. PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 50, 104.

45 PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*; compare with NODL, *Elity*, 35–36.

46 MUSÍLEK, *Patroni*, 40.

47 The source does not provide us with the precise numbers of lodgers, as tenants/lodgers are not listed by name in every case. In some cases, the tenement book from 1429 contains notes such as "inquiline ad pueros, omnes 3 gr." (no. 189/I), or it states that the owner paid "pro inquilini suis 3 gr." (čp. 87/I) or "Iacobus mercator cocus pro inquilinis omnibus 3 gr." (no. 88/I). Sometimes, lodgers are listed by the amount they paid but not by their number (for example no. 349b/I). PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 136, 137, 138, 139 etc. Since the scribe uses the plural here, we are counting at least two persons, yet we must consider the possibility that more lodgers could have stayed there.

48 To find out more about the basic concept of social topography, see DENECKE, *Sozialtopographie und sozialräumliche Gliederung*, 161–202; DENECKE, *Soziale Strukturen*; or DENECKE, *Die historische Dimension*,

questions. Given their elementary purpose, they only mention persons who owned certain property within the town subject to city tax. When we look at the numbers of inhabitants and family structures, they only give us information about a certain part of the town population. Unless we combine them with other types of written sources, we cannot use them to draft a complex picture of families or households.⁴⁹ In the case of the Old Town of Prague, this is the first moment we can look at the majority of the wealthy male population of the town.

As the basis for my research, I used the latest issue of the tenement books edited by Hana Pátková.⁵⁰ Already Bedřich Mendl has convincingly shown how difficult it is to uncover the topographic structure of the Old Town plan based on the preserved municipal books, because the number of houses in 1427 and 1429 fluctuated.⁵¹ Some houses were destroyed, while others were rebuilt from scratch or extended. Lists of houses and taxpayers were updated constantly, so in tax registries from 1429, we find houses that were not listed in 1427, and vice versa. Tenement books were written in the middle of the Hussite uprising; many original owners had to leave their houses at the beginning of the turbulent era. These houses were sold or endowed as a gift (to the new, Hussite elite as an award for loyal services) only after the war, i.e. after 1421. At the beginning of the Hussite revolution, tenement books remained empty. This improved from the mid-1420s, but the Old Town office resumed its full operation only in the second half of the 1430s.⁵²

Old Town houses were divided and united based on the individual needs of the current or new owner. While one group of house-owner masters lived there only with their family, others rented out their houses or their parts, for a variety of reasons. Wealthy members of the new Hussite town ruling elite purchased their new property easily and cheaply. Then, they rented the property generating significant revenue, although this was not a universal rule. Again, it depended on the character and other qualities of individuals. The value of some houses shifted, as noted in the tenement books from 1427 and 1429, but also when compared to the tenement book from 1433. When we look at other housing markets documented in the Prague judicial books of real estate contracts (*libri judiciorum*), we can see how dynamic changes take place within the Hussite urban society.

At this time, the *officium sex dominorum* already had an impact on the process of tax collection. In some instances, it suggested to decrease the tax, or, more precisely, the value of the house that served as the basis for the tax. The main reason was the poor state of the building and officers tried to use it as an incentive for owners to invest in reconstruction – some houses were a threat to passers-by.⁵³ Since Old Town houses were

211–252; The possibilities of this method in the Czech context were outlined by MUSÍLEK, *Městská společnost a prostor*, 23–41.

49 SCHOCH, *Die Bevölkerung*, 19–30, 35–40; compare IGEL, *Zwischen Bürgerhaus und Frauenhaus*; and SCHULER, *Die Bevölkerungsstruktur*, 167–176.

50 PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*.

51 MENDEL, *Z hospodářských dějin*, Příloha E.

52 Most recently ČORNEJ, *Praha – hlava království*, 108–113; compare MUSÍLEK, *Formy komunikace*, 151–162; KEJŘ, *Konfiskace majetku*, 9–58; or NODL, *Vítězové a poražení*, 121–141.

53 In this work, we used the tax registry from 1427 as the basis for the real estate value estimate. To learn more about the Six Masters Office (*officium sex dominorum*), its evolution and duties, see an excellent article by KRATOCHVÍL, *Šestipanské úřady*, 149–264. Concerning the poor condition of some houses in the Old Town of Prague, PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 70 etc.; and also MUSÍLEK, *Svědectví písemných pramenů*, 202–209.

sometimes divided into several parts, sometimes we do not have enough information about all parts of the building located on one building lot. Several outbuildings might be a part of the house, such as *domus anterior*, *domus posterior*, *domuncula*. Sometimes, these outbuildings were considered a part of the house, sometimes they were listed as separate living spaces with a different owner. Furthermore, there were baths, mills, breweries and malt houses located in the town.⁵⁴ Sometimes, mistakes and omissions were made by the tax collectors themselves. In the given period, houses were not only sold, but also inherited from a deceased house master by his children and other relatives (brothers, sisters, orphans, etc.). The large number of widows and orphans mentioned in municipal books was already noticed by earlier scholarship and it may be attributed to the war events of this particular era.⁵⁵

Several hundred houses left by runaway owners were either sold (*emit erga communitatem*) or donated (*data per communitatem*) by the city administration to a variety of those interested. Although the original owners who left the town after 1419 are listed in the tenement book, their ownership rights were transferred to the direction of the town. Town representatives passed them on only later, after 1421, when they either sold them or donated them as a reward for loyal services to the revolution.⁵⁶ It is clear that these houses were sold much cheaper than their real value, or were donated for free. Together with the surplus of available real estate and with the uncertainty of the war period, this led to a drastic drop in prices on the Prague housing market.⁵⁷ It appears that some individuals who received houses for free from the city government did not have sufficient resources to care for a house. They would thus try to sell them immediately or give them to other, wealthy citizens.⁵⁸

Not all the changes were caused by shifts in power and religious situation in the town. Even in Hussite Prague, elementary economic rules continued to work. As usual in medieval towns, some houses were forfeit to creditors due to unpaid debts. For example, Martin the Saddler was listed as the owner of house no. 135/I; in reality, the house was surrendered to Erasmus of Moravia for unpaid census and he leased it to new tenants.⁵⁹ It is clear that even in the tenement books, not all the changes in ownership between 1419 and 1434 were reflected. Often, old owners who left the city around 1419 were listed still, because the house had no new use or owner yet so was listed under the original owner.

As we said before, noble, royal, ecclesiastical, university and town real estate was exempt from the municipal tenement books. Sometimes, such properties are listed in the inventory of houses in the given street, but no price or names/numbers of tenants are noted here. Some former ecclesiastical buildings were sold or given to citizens,

54 Compare HOFFMANN, *Bydlení chudých vrstev*, 17–25.

55 BEER, *Über Losungsbücher*, 67; PÁTKOVÁ, *Ženy ve středověkých*, 47–56.

56 KEJŘ, *Konfiskace majetku*, 9–58.

57 Concerning the hundreds of houses confiscated by the urban authorities (311 in the Old Town, 106 in the New Town), compare TOMEK, *Dějepis 4*, 168, namely footnote no. 16; MENDEL, *Z hospodářských dějin*, 161–166. VLK et al., *Dějiny Prahy I*, 261; ČORNEJ, *Velké dějiny V.*, 380; or most recently ČORNEJ, *Šest statečných?* 83, note. 39.

58 MUSÍLEK, *Formy komunikace*, 151–162.

59 There is a notice on one tenant-conventor, John of Ovenec (Jan z Ovence), and three lodgers-inquilini, TOMEK, *Základy I*, 36; PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 37, 99.

while others were kept by Hussite pastors.⁶⁰ When we consider the incomplete and unsystematic character of the medieval records of citizens' names and surnames, it is clear that the Old Town tenement books have limited testimonial value in terms of exactness. Unsurprisingly, Václav Vladivoj Tomek, Bedřich Mendl and later Hana Pátková came to different numbers of Old Town houses, owners and tenants.⁶¹ Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that despite all these specifics and limitations, the Old Town tenement books paint a unique picture of the Old Town in the tumultuous Hussite era. Some disparities in the absolute numbers of houses or tenants cannot hamper the elementary testimonial value of the source in terms of the situation and its development in time.⁶²

From the analysis, it appears that in 1427–1429, there were 987 houses in the Old Town of Prague in total.⁶³ These houses were owned by 949 house-owner masters (some owning two or more houses), and inhabited by 80 tenants-conventors and 770 lodgers-inquilini (Chart 1). Therefore, this analysis operated with the total number of 1,813 people. Owing to the known troubles with identification of medieval citizens, i.e. their names were transcribed in several ways, our list is not exhaustive. It is uncertain whether a person marked as, for example, Peter the baker, is a single person or several different individuals.⁶⁴ We should also take into account that there were many more lodgers-inquilini living in town. The source lists only economically active “heads of the family”, but the *familiam* had many more members – women, children, grandparents, servants etc.

60 Such is probably the case of the vicarage of the Church of St Stephen in the Wall, PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 41; compare TOMEK, *Základy I*, 101. Some former vicarages and monasteries were confiscated by the town's authorities and lodgers were accommodated on their premises (for example in the pre-Hussite Dominican monastery of St Clementine, no. 190a/I were accommodated 9 lodgers-inquilini, PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 137), while others were managed by Hussite preachers. Thanks to the character of the source, however, we often only know that a certain vicarage existed, as it was noted within the street house list, but we know no further details about it.

61 For example, in house no. 349b/I, the scribe only listed *inquilini* without stating their exact number. PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 41, 136; compare TOMEK, *Základy I*, 102. Since the scribe uses the plural, we can expect at least two lodgers, but there may have been more of them. Unfortunately, these examples are quite rare in the given source.

62 In cases where two or more lodgers are listed together (for example *Gira, Waniek et Procopius*, or *Roman cum Mlynkone* etc.), all the persons listed by name are accounted separately. PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 137, 138.

63 In this period, Tomek counts a total of 1,182 houses. TOMEK, *Základy I*, Preface, 2. Bedřich Mendl came to the conclusion that between 1427 and 1433/1434, there were 1,001 houses in the Old Town of Prague, owned by a total of 845 owners/house masters. (Mendl was aware that some owners owned multiple houses, but he did not take this into account in his list). In a total number of 283 houses, he counted 720 lodgers-inquilini. MENDL, *Sociální krise*, 120–121. The great difference in numbers accounted by Tomek and Mendl was caused by Tomek adding data from other Prague municipal books with real estate contracts, while Mendl used tenement books as his sole source. Compare with BEER, *Zur älteren Bevölkerungsstatistik*, 81. In 283 houses, Beer lists 757 lodgers-inquilini. He was the first to correctly note that since his source has certain specifics, the true correlation between house numbers in 1427 and 1429 remains unclear. BEER, *Über Lösungsbücher*, 67. The difference between this study's and Mendl's conclusions spring from the fact that in this research, I did not take into account the part of the tenement book covering 1433 to 1434 (with a few exceptions), because this part does not bring too many new pieces of information about tenement housing because it cannot be directly related to the tenement book of 1429.

64 All examples that are unclear or impossible to determine were accounted as two different owners. There are only a few examples of this though, and the final analysis is not significantly altered by these.

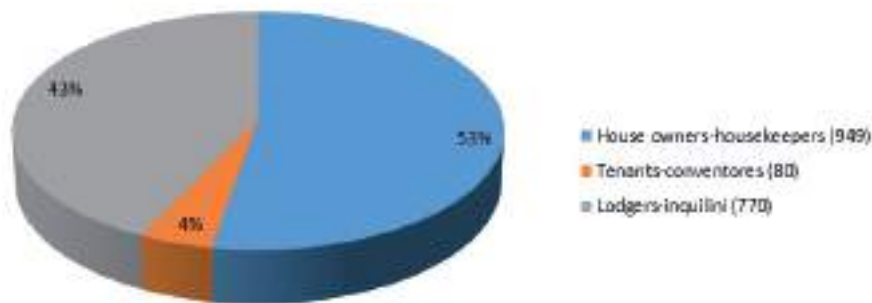


Chart 1: Old Town of Prague 1427–1429: Inhabitant structure. Created by the author (2018).

The dynamic character of the real estate market can be seen from the fact that over the course of a mere three years (from 1427 to 1429), the owners of 257 houses changed. This constitutes 26% of the total number of 987 houses, i.e. over a quarter of houses in the Old Town area. Some of these changes in the records were only catching up with changes of ownership that had happened earlier, so the final number will be lower than this. Even so, the tax registry from 1427 and the registries from 1429 show yet unexpected changes of real estate ownership in Hussite Prague. This is even more apparent when we compare the books with the registry from 1433/1434. By then, most of the transfers caused by the breakout of the Hussite uprising had finished, but despite that, many houses again changed ownership between 1429 and 1433/1434.⁶⁵

Old Town houses were divided into five price categories, based on the classification of Bedřich Mendl. This division helped us track which houses had the most tenants (Tab. 2). Table 2 shows that when compared to the period before the start of the Hussite revolution, only very few luxurious houses were left in 1427–1429, their estimated value over 100 threescores of groschen (only 5% of the total number of houses).⁶⁶ The most tenants are documented as having lived in houses reaching in value from 21 to 100 threescores. In sum 47% of all houses were priced within this range, and the highest number of tenants lived there (63% in total). From the data it is clear that tenants were interested in cheaper housing up to 50 threescores of groschen. Individuals, some of them women, sometimes rented large, luxurious houses with value over 100 threescores of groschen.⁶⁷ A large number of tenants is documented in large merchants' houses, valued from 101 to 200 threescores of groschen. Here, the numbers are caused by the greater size of the houses and building lots, permitting

65 Concerning the earlier era before the Hussite uprising (1419–1434), see MUSÍLEK, *Patroni*, 53–69. House owners changed, but some of these changes were natural / generational. For example in case of house no. 167/I Nicolas Parrot (Mikuláš Papoušek) was replaced by his son Simon Parrot (Šimon Papoušek). PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 51, 104.

66 MUSÍLEK, *Patroni*, 69–73; compare with MENDL, *Z hospodářských dějin*, 160–166. Mendl states that before 1419, there were 56 houses in the Old Town of Prague with value over 200 threescores of groschen; ČAREK, *Plán rozložení domů*, 101–105; ČAREK, *K vývoji cen*, 39–49.

67 For example, house no. 611,612/I was rented by Anna (*Anna conventrix*), or house no. 604a/I by Ondráčková (*Ondraczkowa conventrix*), no. 675 by Manda Weikardova (*Manda Weikerdi conventrix*) etc. PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 5, 8, 15 etc.

to accommodate several tenants/lodgers at once. However, tenants did not shy away from renting homes of value smaller than 20 threescores of groschen.

House price (in threescores of groschen)	Number of houses	Houses %	Tenants-conventores	Tenants-conventores %	Lodgers-inquilini	Lodgers-inquilini %
1. up to 20	414	42	19	24	95	12
2. 21–50	324	33	26	32	255	33
3. 51–100	141	14	19	24	230	30
4. 101–200	41	4	7	9	116	15
5. Over 200	6	1	3	4	27	4
Undefined	61	6	6	7	47	6
Total	987	100%	80	100%	770	100%

Table 2: Old Town of Prague 1427–1429: Structure of inhabitants of burgher houses. Created by author (2018).

Some Old Town houses can be compared to modern tenement buildings, such as house no. 505, 504/I “U Řezané or Vysochané věže” (by the Engraved Tower; in Latin *ad sculptam turrim*). Apart from the luxurious corner town house with a tower, the building lot contained a group of other small houses and structures and in 1429, 12 lodgers-inquilini lived there, contributing a total of 28 groschen to the town’s treasury. Similarly, in the house of Wenceslas of Litomyšl (Václav z Litomyšle) no. 405/I on Havel market, a total of 15 lodgers were listed. Judging by their interesting surnames, Nadržínek, Huba or Dopijan (Randy, Gob or Toper), it must have been a cheerful company.⁶⁸ The data from our source inform us about the approximate possessions of a given individual, but we learn nothing about the quality and size of the space they lived in, either alone, or with family. Besides, the rented space could be divided or joined according to the current needs and these would be reflected in the rent paid for such space.

The scheme mentioned above shows clearly that these rather small, humble houses, often made of wood or half-timbered, were mostly used as single-family accommodation, not as a tenement building. This category also covers numerous small houses found in small side streets, and tiny buildings and sheds sometimes found on large building lots in the centre of the town (Chart 2). Clearly, even tenants-conventores would not avoid renting these small spaces, as they were cheaper, albeit located on the edge of the town. Everything depended on personal means and the intentions of the individual. In total, only ten tenants-conventores could afford to rent large, luxurious houses valued at over 101 threescores of groschen.

68 PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 126, 130; compare TOMEK, *Základy I*, 113–114.

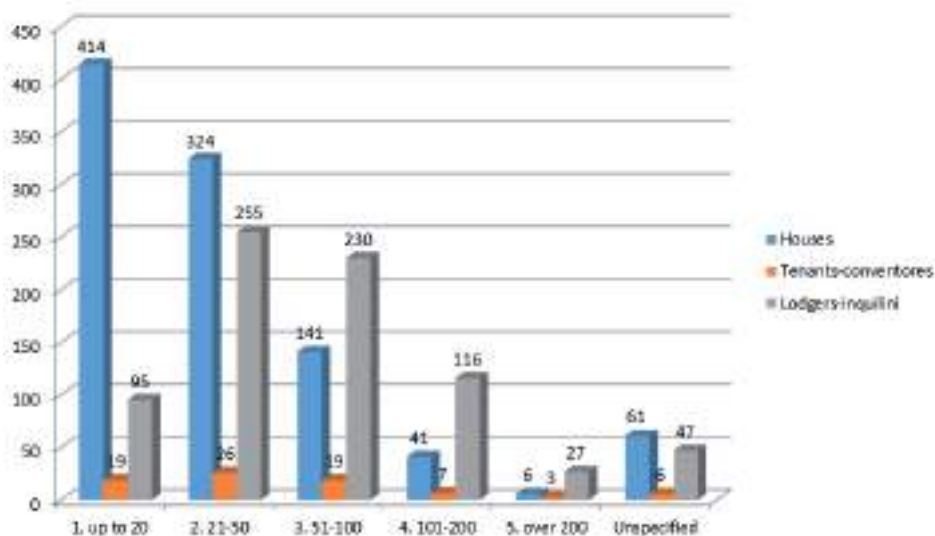


Chart 2: Old Town of Prague 1427–1429: Structure of inhabitants of burgher houses. Created by the author (2018).

From the little preserved information about the rentals of Prague houses, we can see that sometimes, lease contracts included information as to who and under what conditions shall pay the city tax – whether the owner or the tenant-conventor. According to a municipal order from 1373, Old Town taxpayers were to pay 1 groschen per threescore of current assets and 4 groschen per threescore of immobile assets. This was unusual and it proves the superiority of the wealthy upper merchant class within the Old Town of Prague over the remaining population – in no other trading centre, such as Frankfurt am Main or Augsburg, was the tax on current assets, i.e. merchant capital, lower than that on real estate.⁶⁹ It is clear however that tenants-conventors rented the whole building and inhabited it with their family, or leased it further with profit to those needing accommodation, usually craftsmen and tradesmen.

When we focus on the social stratification of tenants, we find that the tenants paid a tax reaching from 1 to 6 groschen. Most frequently, tenants paid 1 to 2 groschen to the town's treasury (Chart 3).⁷⁰ From this, we can assume that most tenants' current assets reached from one or two threescores of groschen up to six threescores of groschen.⁷¹ Of course there were some exceptions. Some lodgers paid higher taxes of

69 GRAUS, *Městská chudina*, 96–97.

70 PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 118–146.

71 Bedřich Mendl thought that the tax for tradesmen was calculated by the number of adults in their household. MENDEL, *Sociální krise*, 121. On the other hand, Karl Beer thought that the tax was calculated according to the trade of the person in question. BEER, *Über Lösungsbücher*, 68. In my opinion the tax was determined, in accordance with the town order from 1373, by the value of owned real estate. Otherwise we would have to accept the unlikely concept that some tenant households embraced ten and more adults, and this is in my view highly unlikely.

10 to 20 groschen.⁷² This could indicate that these were wealthy citizens with significant property, owning 10 to 20 threescores of groschen. These wealthy lodgers usually lived in prestigious central locations (Old Town Square, Havel market etc.), in luxurious merchant houses made of stone.⁷³ Records of tenement books show that at least some lodgers were wealthier than some tenants-conventores who rented whole houses (Chart 4).⁷⁴ After all, from the total number of 80 tenants-conventores, only circa one quarter (26%) paid taxes of over 6 groschen. One possible explanation could be that in these instances we are faced with a material and social rise of lodgers who accepted the city law shortly before they purchased their own house. In the case of lodgers who accepted the city law, the records usually do not state the sum of the tax, probably because from then on, they were taxed like full-fledged citizens.⁷⁵

72 Tax of 10 groschen was assessed for innkeeper John (Jan), who rented house no. 934/I "U tváří" (The Faces House). At the time, the house was owned by Elis (Eliška), widow of Bernard of the Faces (Bernášek od Tváří). This wealthy widow probably had no use for her large house, so she decided to rent part of it to John. PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 68, 110, 142; compare with TOMEK, *Základy I*, 18.

73 The irregular distribution of wealth among the various tenants within individual houses can be shown by the example of house no. 490/I. Innkeeper Wenceslas (Václav) paid tax of 20 groschen, while tailor Peter (Petr), who accepted the city law (*habet ius civile*) had to pay tax of 34 groschen (this probably covered the sum covering the process). Apart from these two, two other lodgers are listed here, a man named Mačák and Elis (Eliška), seamstress of Mathew (Matěj). Each paid tax of 1 groschen. Similarly, in house no. 477/I, a tailor named Falcon (Sokol) is listed. He was due to pay tax of 10 groschen, probably as a remaining debt for accepting the city law – in the pre-Hussite Prague, the fee for accepting the city law was 32 groschen. PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 123, 124 etc.

74 For tenants-conventors, the tax was rounded off to full threescores of groschen. Where the listing states both the original and the new tax, we copy the new amount. The exact amount is not listed in every case; sometimes, the number covers debt towards the town authority, or, on the other hand, the amount was pardoned in return for services or because the town authority owed money to the given burgher.

75 In house no. 15/I owned by the widow of Hilbrand, tin worker Peter (Petr) is listed by name as a lodger. The fact that lodgers who accepted the city law were taxed differently than others is proven by the note that other lodgers in house no. 15/I are only listed as "alii habent ius civile". PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 123, 124, 127, 134, 139 etc.

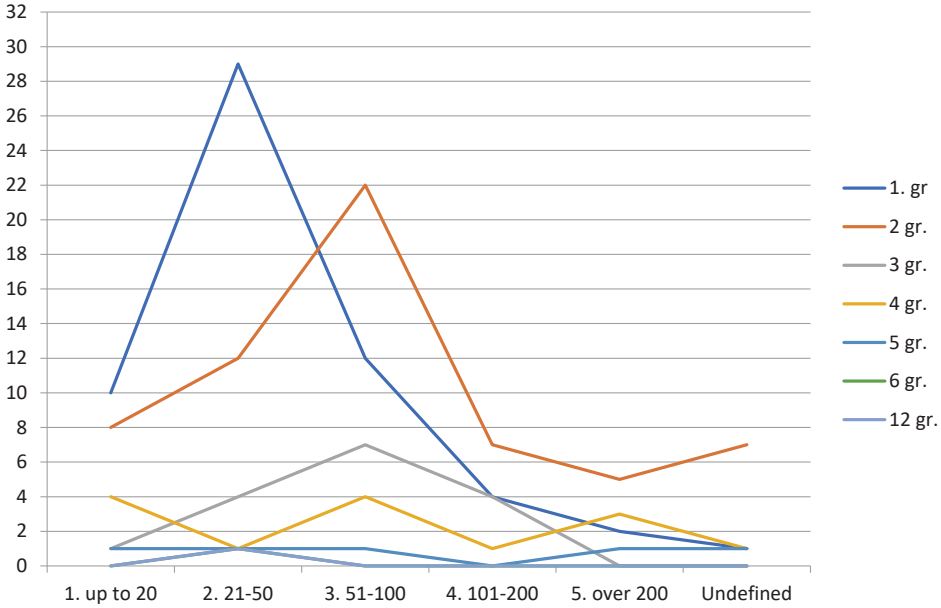


Chart 3: Overview of taxes paid by lodgers-inquilini, relative to the value of houses they lived in. Created by the author (2018).

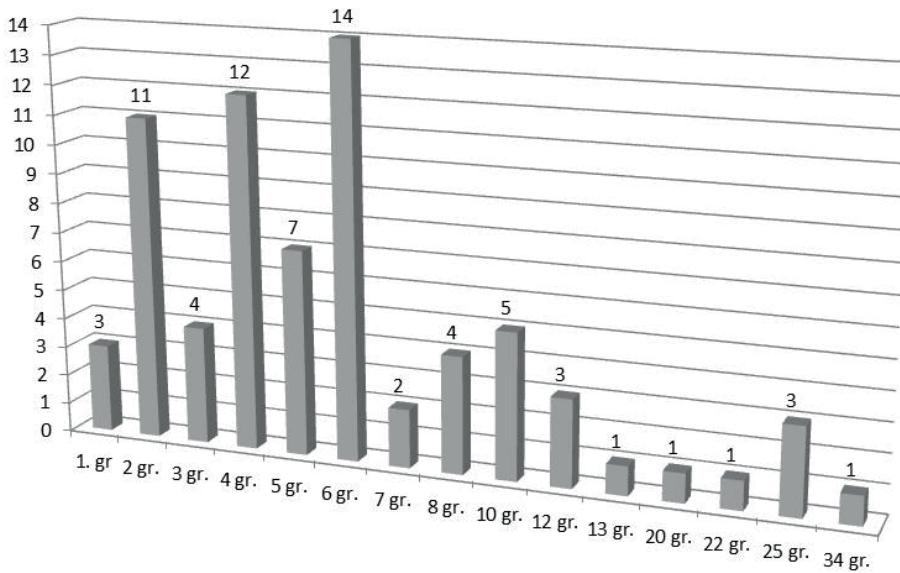


Chart 4: Old Town of Prague 1427–1429: Tax paid by tenants-conventores. Created by the author (2018).

4. The Social Structure of Inhabitants at Home

Three examples of selected individuals, an owner, a tenant-conventor and a lodger-inquilinus (roomer) will serve to offer a glimpse of the lives of three quite different citizens of medieval Prague. Both the house owner Martin of Aachen (Martin z Cách) and the lodger Zdena could be seen as typical urban dwellers, although they stood at opposite ends of the social ladder. Martin of Aachen was one of the wealthiest and most influential Prague citizens, almost an "aristocrat", while Zdena was a poor widow who had to live frugally and with restraint. In between these examples, we shall look at that of bordel owners, in many ways unexpected in our idea of a regular city dweller. However, looking more closely, one discovers that brothels were accepted parts of a medieval town, and in the Prague agglomeration alone there were several of these. The unequal relationship between brothel madams (brothel-owners) and prostitutes is one of the specific examples of the relationship between tenant-conventor and lodger-inquilinus.

4.1 House Owner: Martin of Aachen

Martin of Aachen (*Martinus de Ach*) was one of the important Old Town citizens at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and he belonged to the members of the so-called old patriciate.⁷⁶ His example demonstrates well the changes in the upper layers of Old Town society across the Middle Ages. Martin of Aachen owned a luxurious merchant house, no. 560/I "U Císaře" (Emperors' House; *Ad Cezarem domus*) in Celetná street.⁷⁷ Already in 1418, he accepted a release from the administration of the town and left to live on his country estates. Further on, he was strictly mentioned as a member of gentry, Martin Fanach of Ostrov (Martin Fanach z Ostrova).⁷⁸ He did maintain good relations with the town even during the Hussite wars and this may have been the reason his real estate was not confiscated by the new Hussite rulers after 1419.⁷⁹ Martin of Aachen was a typical example of an Old Town citizen who did not live there anymore but who rented out his real estate in town to tenant-entrepreneurs, who leased the space further for profit. Such is also the case of the "Emperors' House". In 1429, tenement books state that it had a tenant-conventor, Mathew Constantinus (Matěj

76 TOMEK, *Dějepis* 3, 497; compare TOMEK, *Dějepis* 8, 436.

77 The house must have been exceptionally luxurious, because even after 1419, when the outbreak of the Hussite revolution caused a significant drop in Prague real estate prices, the value of the house was estimated at 225 threescores of groschen, which is a very large amount. TOMEK, *Základy I*, 140; PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 3, 4, 87, 118, 176. In the pre-Hussite era, the total value of the house oscillated around 500 threescores of groschen, which made it one of the most expensive houses in the whole Old Town of Prague. Compare MENDL, *Z hospodářských dějin*, 283; and MUSÍLEK, *Patroni*, 69–73. The land plot also embraced one smaller house on the side (*domus posterioris ad Cesarem*); in 1429, one tenant-conventor, blacksmith Otmar (*Othmarus faber*) is listed along with one lodger. TOMEK, *Základy I*, 137; PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 4, 119, 177.

78 MEZNÍK, *Praha*, 73, 142, 175, 179, 180; compare MUSÍLEK, *Hus a pražští konšelé*, 275–317.

79 The situation needs some further explanation. As late as in 1438, the heirs of Dietrich of Aachen (Dětrich z Cách; his sons Martin, Aleš, Frána and Dětrich) split their inheritance, containing several houses in the Prague agglomeration. Although some houses were confiscated by the town's authorities during the Hussite revolution, the ambivalence is testified through a note about the agreement specifically stated in one of municipal books on request of the council. It seems that the heirs of Dietrich of Aachen took a different stand towards the new, reformed religion than their father, and this is reflected in the ambivalent approach from the town's authorities. It is clear though that Martin Fanach of Ostrov maintained good relations with Hussite aldermen even after the war was over. TOMEK, *Dějepis* 8, 436.

Konstantin; *Mathias Constantinus*), and a total of five smaller lodgers-inquilini.⁸⁰ Martin did not surrender his real estate, but to avoid taking care of a large house that would be costly, he rented it out. Thus he avoided the costs of running another household and he could even count on a regular income from the share of the rent which went into his treasury. Other wealthy Old Town citizens stayed in town; well-off members of the new, post-war ruling elites used the opportunity to buy houses confiscated by the administration for a fraction of their real value. Then, they rented the property to tenants-conventores, who further leased the unused space to lodgers-inquilini.⁸¹

4.2 Tenants-Conventores: Prostitutes in New Town of Prague in the Turbulent Tenement Market

In the New Town municipal books for debts up to 10 threescores, we find hundreds of entries revealing that Prague prostitutes had significant debts.⁸² Yet, their creditors are always the same – a few female citizens. We can assume that Anna Habartová, Lidka and Elizabeth Trchla (Alžběta Trchla) were former prostitutes who had managed to accumulate significant wealth through the oldest profession. We can also assume that they owned the brothels located in today's Krakovská street.⁸³ Their debtors, current or future prostitutes, confess significant amounts, sometimes reaching several threescores of groschen. The records often contain an annex saying that as soon as the debtor is reminded, she has to pay the whole sum immediately and in cash. Taking the large amounts into account, this simply meant that the debtors were completely exposed and dependent on their creditors. For example, one woman who borrowed over 6 threescores of groschen from her brothel madam had to swear that she would not leave her brothel madam without her consent under pain of death.⁸⁴ Promises "under the heaviest penalty" (*sub alcioire pena*) were very common in this cruel environment.⁸⁵

When researching New Town judicial books from the second half of the fourteenth century, František Graus proved that similar loans were very common. Also, the pledgers were always groups of prostitutes. The above mentioned Anna Habartová of Krakov lent the total of 65 threescores and 14 groschen to 14 women, and in 1397, she lent 70 threescores of groschen to 13 women.⁸⁶ Lidka of Krakov lent 51 threescores and 56 groschen to a group of 18 women in 1396.⁸⁷ In the same year, Alžběta Trchla of Krakov lent 31 threescores and 22 groschen to 9 women, and in the following year, Manda of

80 "Procopisu de Chwal, Manda Weykardi, Gira et Marzik, Iohannes Czarka", PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 87, 118; compare TOMEK, *Základy I*, 140.

81 This was the approach of John son of Ludvík (Jan Lojzův), for example. John was the descendant of one of the wealthiest pre-Hussite citizens, apothecary and royal courtier (*familiaris*) Ludvík of Florence, and this is true for many other citizens of Prague. Compare PÁTKOVÁ, *Berní knihy*, 62 (house no. 24b/I) etc.

82 *Knihy soudní dlužních zápisů pod 10 kop 1388–1399*, fol. 175v, 176r, 212v etc.; these documents were collected and interpreted by GRAUS, *Městská chudina*, 67–68.

83 Concerning the topography of Prague brothels, see an overview by IWAŃCZAK, *Prostytucja w późnośredniowiecznej Pradze*, 95–104; MENGEL, *Bones, Stones, and Brothels*, 218–244; MENGEL, *From Venice to Jerusalem*, 407–442.

84 *Knihy soudní dlužních zápisů pod 10 kop 1388–1399*, fol. 212v. In the contemporary sources this part of town was sometimes called Krakov. In Krakovská street, there were around 40 houses, and at the time, it was on the outskirts of Prague. Apart from numerous containing gardens and brothels, hangmen lived there. TOMEK, *Dějepis 2*, 247.

85 GRAUS, *Městská chudina*, 67.

86 Compare *Knihy soudní dlužních zápisů pod 10 kop 1388–1399*, fol. 175v, 176r, 183r-v.

87 *Knihy soudní dlužních zápisů pod 10 kop 1388–1399*, fol. 172r-182v.

Krakov lent 101 threescores and 11 groschen to 22 women.⁸⁸ To make escape from this trap even more difficult, the “entrepreneurs” are the guarantors of the debts for each other. If the pledger managed to escape one creditor, she would fall into the hands of the “benefactor” who offered to be her guarantor. These women probably also rented out spaces in brothels to the prostitutes. Girls not only used these spaces for their trade, they also lived there. Some rented tiny houses (*domibus meretricium*) where they worked and lived.⁸⁹ At the time, the everyday life of common Prague harlots must have been very hard and they are rightfully considered as people at the bottom of the society.⁹⁰ On the contrary, brothel owners lived well and their enterprise permitted them to rise economically and provided a stable income, albeit detested by the majority.⁹¹

It is questionable, however, to what degree the medieval society was hypocritical. Even contemporary preachers and moralists realized in accordance with St Augustin that prostitutes played an important role within society (*Take away the prostitutes and fill everything with lechery / Odejmi nevěstky a naplníš všecko cizoložstvím*) and the administration of the town acted accordingly. Councillors often protected the prostitutes and they did not see the brothels as the worst enemy of good morals. This changed radically only after the reformist movement and the Hussite take-over in Prague. The point above was reinforced by an unknown author of old Czech satire who stated that if someone was willing to fulfil the Old Testament commandment about stoning the adulterer, then “he would have trouble finding enough stones to stone all those concerned” (*v některém kraji kamenie nemohl by tolik shledati, by chtěl vše ukamenovati*).⁹²

4.3 Lodger-Inquilinus: Zdena, Lodger in the New Town of Prague

The example of New Town lodger Zdena tells a story about the complicated character of tenement housing and relations in a medieval town, but also about the basic character of the living standards of the less well-established inhabitants of the town, namely in terms of privacy. In 1411, Zdena received a warrant of free living in a brick room near the entrance of house no. 368/II in Podskalí and the right to use a corner in the main room where she could place a table and cook her meals.⁹³ If the owner of the house was to breach these conditions, he was to pay Zdena 10 threescores of groschen as a fine. From this amount, Zdena was to receive five threescores of groschen, as this was most likely equivalent to the estimated rent of the rented room.⁹⁴ Clearly, Zdena

88 *Kniha soudní dlužních zápisů pod 10 kop 1388–1399*, fol. 172r, 177r.

89 GRAUS, *Městská chudina*, 67–68.

90 Concerning this theme, endless academic literature is available in the contemporary scholarship. Select titles are PEŠEK, *Ponížení a odstrčení*, 9–11; in the international literature see BOSL, *Das Problem der Armut*, 3–29; GEREMEK, *Slitování a šibenice*; RHEINHEIMER, *Arme, Bettler und Vaganten*.

91 Compare with the brothels madams (*meretrix*), who bought a house in Brno in 1377, where the situation was probably similar to that in Prague New Town. The town rule of Brno from 1353 states all the brothel owners by name. CDM VIII, no. 230, 176–177. In Brno, too, we encounter wealthy brothel owners who rent little houses to prostitutes. GRAUS, *Městská chudina*, 68 note. 169; compare MALANÍKOVÁ, *Brněnské ženy*, 21–42.

92 *Staročeské satiry*, 58 (Památky stare české literatury 3); Graus was the first to point it out, GRAUS, *Městská chudina*, 66.

93 *Manuál radní větší 1387–1399*, fol. 291v; MENDEL, *Hospodářské a sociální poměry* 5, 359.

94 *Manuál radní větší 1387–1399*, fol. 291v.

was not among the poorest of the poor within the urban society, and still, she lived in a single room and could only use an improvised shared space to prepare her meals.

Conclusion

Summarizing the research results, it is clear that in the first decades of the fifteenth century, the Old Town had its wealthy individuals, who did not want or were not capable of purchasing their own living quarters. Although they fully accepted the city law, they kept renting houses from wealthy owners of Old Town residences. Indeed, the main reason for this was the high prices of Old Town real estate. Inhabitants who did not belong to the upper-middle or upper class of urban society could not generally expect to accumulate enough capital to purchase a house. This was valid universally for Christians and Jews alike – within the Jewish quarter, Jews rented homes both from Christians and Jews. The poorest class of town society contained not only those truly poor, but also modest or less wealthy craftsmen. Apart from them, there were many groups of citizens who did not run their own household – journeymen (although not exclusively), beggars, servants, prostitutes and gamblers. In other royal towns of Bohemia and Moravia, these people usually lived in shacks at the outskirts of towns or in the suburbs.

Throughout the fourteenth century, it seems, the dynamically expanding Old Town of Prague did not offer much accommodation to this social group. It seems that heavy competition and a lack of free space forced these people to either seek accommodation in the residences of those citizens who would let them stay over for a fee or “for God’s mercy”, to move to the outskirts of the New Town of Prague, founded in an area of several former dwellings by Charles IV in 1348, or to move to the suburbs. Although we do not have concrete proof of this, archaeologists and construction historians have proven that the Old Town of Prague experienced a significant construction and architectural boom throughout the fourteenth century – and most likely it reflected a reaction of some enterprising citizens to the influx of newly arrived population. This process was speeded up by natural disasters, be it fires or devastating floods, almost as a yearly occurrence. New buildings appeared in the city and thus the built-up area became much more condensed. Originally large building lots were transformed into smaller: they were shrunk to accommodate new houses that were not built to house the owner’s *familiam*, but to be rented commercially. Together with this trend, new building lots and buildings evolved. This enterprise changed the character and organization of building lots significantly and led to the end of the original housing and architecture of the Přemyslid era. This long-term trend formed the new appearance of the city and very much transformed the structure of Prague as well as the organization of dwelling interiors. As early as in the medieval period new tenement housing had become a lucrative business and the old buildings had to give way to it. As a result, house owners earned a lot of money from renting.

As opposed to the findings of former studies, it seems that the Prague agglomeration evolved dynamically throughout the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth centuries, and this influenced the lives of its inhabitants. The analysis of Old Town tenement books from 1427 and 1429 has shown that the rental market was not destroyed even by the turbulences of the Hussite revolution (1419–1434), but the contrary. In Hussite Prague alike, tenement housing was sought after both by tenants-conventores and by lodgers-inquilini. Even the Hussite wars could not dissolve the elementary economic principles of a functioning urban society. Medieval people had

the same feelings and needs as in present times. Life strategies of individuals varied – Prague saw an influx of new inhabitants throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They came seeking a better life, while those already living there moved within the various town quarters. As long as we are able to accept this individuality, we can better understand the social world of the rich, but also the less wealthy urban dwellers: they influenced the medieval urban community in similar ways to those rich citizens.

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