

Krzysztof Mikulski, *Przestrzeń i społeczeństwo Torunia od końca XIV do początków XVIII wieku (The Area and Society of Toruń from the End of the 14th to the Beginning of the 18th Century)*, Toruń 1999, Wydawnictwo UMK, 464 pp.

K. Mikulski, a Toruń historian of the middle generation, has recently published a book on Toruń's urban society, the evolution of socio-economic relations in the town and the transformations which took place in its lay-out over a period of nearly three hundred years. It is no exaggeration to say that the book is an important event in the historiography of Polish towns as for some time books dealing with the socio-economic history of towns in modern times have been a rare occurrence and the recent studies, overburdened with detailed information, have often been of a popularising character.

The author has presented a dynamic picture of social changes in Toruń, combining it with an analysis of the economic situation in the town. It is commendable that chronologically Mikulski has gone beyond the Swedish invasion, which is usually regarded as a turning point and the cause of the crisis of Polish towns¹.

What is most impressive about Mikulski's book is his meticulous archival research. He has made use of assessors' books of the courts of the old, new and suburban Toruń (this has enabled him to analyse contracts for the purchase and

¹The historians' discussion on this subject is presented by M. Bogucka in the book: M. Bogucka, H. Samsonowicz, *Dzieje miast i mieszczaństwa w Polsce przedrozbiorowej (The History of Towns and Townspeople in Pre-Partition Poland)*, Wrocław 1986, pp. 451–453.

sale of property, and credits granted on the security of immovables); he has also made use of three lists of house and craft taxes from the 1390s and another six taxation lists from the 15th century (this was the basis for defining the residence of taxpayers and for presenting a socio-topographic picture); he has consulted guilds archives, records of admission to municipal law, some registers of the Lutheran and Catholic churches, genealogies of Toruń families, the inhabitants' records drawn up in 1703, when the town was seized by Sweden, and Prussian sources from the turn of the 18th century (cadastral records, measurements of buildings).

Mikulski has also consulted various studies, paying special attention to those in Polish and German. However, he has not made use of studies by A. Daumard and F. Furet, J.-C. Perrot, and H. Schultz, which, even though they do not concern the area researched by him, would have drawn his attention to questions overlooked by him².

Mikulski has presented changes in the financial and vocational structure of Toruń's population (analysing also the lists of the richest property owners) in 1450, 1500, 1550, 1600, 1640 and 1703. He has ignored the year 1400, for the lists of taxpayers from the turn of the 13th century are incomplete (most of them mention only the taxpayers' addresses). Mikulski's research covers a wide area (the Old and the New Town and their suburbs), but the reader will have no difficulty in following the author's reflections thanks to two maps showing the distribution of occupations in 1394 and 1703 and the topography of Toruń's suburbs, and two maps showing the town's socio-topography in 1394/1455 and in 1703. The book also contains 70 tables, 16 diagrams, 26 illustrations and, what is also important, an extensive summary in German (pp. 440-459). Let us add that nearly a quarter of the book (pp. 322-406) consists of an interesting annex which presents the town's size and an analysis of Toruń's streets' names.

The book has four parts: I. *The basic elements of Toruń's topography in the 13th-17th centuries*; II. *The occupational structure of the population*; III. *Property structure*; IV. *Toruń's socio-topography*.

It is impossible in a short review to deal with all the questions raised in this interesting book and present all the conclusions reached by the author. Let us focus attention on the most important ones. Mikulski starts by presenting the original lay-out of the Old and New Town and their suburbs and then describes the town's buildings and houses according to his classification of urban plots. Having analysed the changes which took place in each type of plots in 1450-1640, he points out that the development became more dispersed, the number of plots with houses having decreased markedly. They were replaced by plots with a large, easily accessible economic hinterland or individual plots bought for economic purposes. The decline of suburbs at the beginning of the 17th century is regarded by Mikulski as a sign of diminution of the town's economic opportunities (p. 69).

In the next chapter the author analyses in detail the occupational structure of the population. As he shows, it depended on the town's economic situation, which he illustrates by the development of trade in immovables. The turnover in realty was small in Toruń until the end of the 14th century, for the merchants owning thriving businesses preferred to invest their money in merchandise and annuities. The economic breakdown in the first half of the 15th century affected equally the shopkeepers and craftsmen (the number of masters decreased in all crafts). The economic boom in the second half of the 15th century led to a change in the ruling circles and to considerable transformations in the population's financial structure (bakers, brewers and furrers increased their wealth). This was accompanied by the emancipation of the common people, who ever more frequently bought the property they had been renting. The 16th century was a

²A. Dumard, F. Furet, *Structures et relations sociales à Paris au XVIII siècle*, Paris 1961; J.-C. Perrot, *Genèse d'une ville moderne. Caen au XVIII siècle*, Paris 1975; H. Schultz, *Berlin 1650-1800. Sozialgeschichte einer Residenz*, Berlin 1987.

prosperous period for traders and craftsmen, with the exception of drapers and later also of brewers. Considering the size of the town, the turn of the 16th century was still a period of great public investments (reconstruction of the townhall and arsenal, construction of a guard's house and a hostel for pupils of the economic school, beginning of the construction of approaches to the castle and fortifications), but the years that followed were marked by a regression in Toruń's economy. All the crafts declined and the outflow of money impoverished the inhabitants. It was only the last decade of the 17th century that witnessed a modest economic enlivenment.

In the next chapter the author analyses the financial structure of Toruń's population, taking the number of the immovables the inhabitants owned in the 15th–17th centuries as his criterion. In the late Middle Ages merchants engaged in overseas trade, and brewers were the richest group in the town. They invested their income in urban and landed property. In the second half of the 15th century the old patriciate was replaced by new merchants engaged mainly in grain trade. In the 16th century, having gained control of the town and having become its élite, they strove to obtain noblemen's privileges in order to strengthen their position. At the end of the century the noble patricians once again moved out to the countryside, to their landed estates. Contrary to the opinions current in literature, Mikulski says that the financial breakdown in the first half of the 17th century, caused by an economic slump and the Polish–Swedish wars, led to a second crisis of Toruń's hereditary patriciate and the disappearance of its representatives from the municipal authorities (pp. 206 ff.). It is interesting to learn that in the 17th century the town's élite consisted not only of "new" merchants and brewers but also of an ever growing number of educated men, lawyers, physicians and pharmacutists, who formed the nucleus of the town's bureaucracy.

The last chapter, the most extensive one, surveys the distribution of individual trades in the town and its suburbs. Mikulski presents an interesting theory that Toruń's late medieval socio-topographic structure developed in two ways: thanks to the original "arranged" settlement of the main population groups in the Old Town (in two separate districts, one inhabited by merchants, the other by craftsmen) and thanks to the evolution caused by the inflow of new vocational groups and the development of the town (p. 307). The latter factor was visible especially in the New Town, in which the population was mixed, consisting of representatives of various trades and people not belonging to any guild. Concentration in a specific area was noticeable especially in the case of trades which had been long established in the town and which distinguished themselves by numeral strength and mass production (bakers, butchers, brewers, shoemakers, drapers and tanners). Location was important to some craftsmen for it made it easier for them to sell their products (e.g. brewers, cooper, as well as craftsmen looking after the means of transport, that is, blacksmiths and wheelwrights, lived in the main streets near the gates) or it offered them favourable conditions for their production (for instance, access to water was important for tanners and representatives of metal crafts). Only the richest craftsmen (goldsmiths, armourers and belt makers) had their own houses in the merchants' district.

Mikulski points out that research into Toruń's socio-topography throughout the ages is a difficult task. He makes an interesting observation that only a prolonged breakdown in the demand for a product led to the dispersal of households of masters of a given trade and that none of the crafts which had been dispersed in the Middle Ages succeeded in forming significant concentrations in the 16th and 17th centuries; the same can be said about craftsmen who migrated from the suburbs to places within the town's walls. In his opinion, the only sign of social modernisation in 17th century Toruń was the purchase of houses in the most exclusive streets by representatives of the new bureaucratic élite, the officialdom.

One could, of course, point out, as one can in the case of many monographs, that the author has passed over in silence certain questions (e.g. marriage

licences, the social and vocational mobility of successive generations, the choice of spouse as an element guaranteeing the stability of social barriers separating the social strata and vocational groups).

But what is more important is that Mikulski points out that it is necessary to continue research into the socio-economic history of Toruń. He thinks it is imperative to examine the functioning of Toruń's suburbs and the way in which the burgher estate became a closed estate, excluding the inhabitants of suburbs (p. 213). He also proposes research into the socio-economic activity of the Toruń plebs on the basis of poll-tax records from 1723 and parish books (p. 132).

Mikulski's book has enriched our knowledge of the people and economy of Toruń in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period and is thus a significant contribution to research into the history of towns in pre-partition Poland.

Cezary Kukło