

Quarter Captains and Their Role in Prague's Municipal Self-government in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

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ABSTRACT

In the presented study, the author deals with the question of whether the division of late medieval Prague (or the towns of Prague) into quarters played a political role in addition to its administrative function of tax collection and organization of the militia. In other words, the author seeks to determine whether Prague's neighborhoods also played a political role, which was the case in several western cities. In studying Prague's roots, the author became interested in whether neighborhoods served to represent local communities vis-à-vis the town council. The oldest quarter regulations from Bohemian towns date from the beginning of the sixteenth century. The provisions of these regulations mainly concern fire protection, but two other important aspects also appear. The quarter captains also performed the task of social supervision in urban households, and their responsibility was to the burgomaster and not to the quarter's community. Therefore, in the study, the author works with the hypothesis that quarter self-government in Central Europe was not representative of the residents of the quarter being in communication with the town council, but rather a tool through which the town council gained blanket control over the town's spaces. A more intensive use of quarter organization headed by captains as well as sergeants and corporals (depending on the number of houses) enabled town councils to change political communication. A functioning quarter administrative network could better fulfil the will of the council than the permanent negotiation for consensus with guilds and other institutionalized communities. Similar terminology, familiar from the more western cities of the empire, thus, in fact, denoted an administrative structure which functioned in a significantly different manner.

KEYWORDS: Prague, self-government, urban administration, town council

Declaration on Possible Conflicts of Interest

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“I also know very well that the whole of the Old Town of Prague is divided into four quarters, and in each quarter one captain from the neighbors of that quarter is elected, and he has his sergeants (safety warden, for 50 houses) and corporals (street warden, for ten houses). Then it is also divided into certain settlements, which are named after churches, many years ago and beyond human memory.”¹

The testimony of several witnesses surrounding the administrative division of the Old Town of Prague from the middle of the seventeenth century draws attention to the existence of a developed quarter administration, which until now Czech urban historiography has paid surprisingly little attention to, compared to historians conducting research in neighboring countries. A comparison with the Silesian cities, which Polish historian Ewa Wólkiewicz drew attention to almost two decades ago at a Prague workshop dedicated to urban history,² or a precisely prepared probe on the example of České Budějovice which was published recently,³ did not provoke a more significant discussion. At the same time, the issue of town quarters is not an isolated phenomenon. Despite local differences, quarters fulfilled an administrative role in many European cities. One of the crucial problems associated with the functioning of quarter administration is the degree of their dependence on, or independence from, a central power, or the question of whether quarter communities could serve as actors with their own representation. It turns out that through the study of the functioning of the quarter organization, we can acquire answers to more general questions, for example, the way power is exercised and controlled, the application of political communication tools, or the process of forming local identities in late medieval Europe.⁴

In this study, I will therefore seek an answer to the question of whether the functioning of the quarter administration in Prague (in the Prague conurbation) at the turn of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period represented the

¹ Testimony from the middle of the seventeenth century expressed in a dispute over the charging of houses attributed to the settlement near the church of St Valentine in the Old Town of Prague. Cf. Archiv Hlavního města Prahy (AHMP) [Archive of the Capital City of Prague], Sbirka listin [Collection of Paper Documents], sign. PPL I-451/48.

² EWA WÓLKIEWICZ: Urzędnicy i służby municypalne w miastach późnośredniowiecznego Śląska [Officials and Municipal Services in the Cities of Late Medieval Silesia], in: MARTIN NODL (ed.): Sociální svět středověkého města, Praha 2006, pp. 135–163.

³ DANIEL KOLÁŘ: Vývoj funkce čtvrtníka v královském městě Českých Budějovicích od 15. století do první světové války [The Development of the Quarter Captain's Function in the Royal City of České Budějovice from the Fifteenth Century to World War I], in: Archivní časopis 69 (2019), 2, pp. 165–194. The author of this text has focused more on the later period.

⁴ For more, see ROMAN CZAJA, HELMUT FLACHENECKER: Quarter and Quartermasters in Franconian and Prussian Towns, 14th–16th Centuries: The Common People and Their Participation in Urban Governance, in: MATTHEW FRANK STEVENS, ROMAN CZAJA (eds.): Towns on the Edge in Medieval Europe: The Social and Political Order of Peripheral Urban Communities from the Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries, Oxford 2022, pp. 190–207.

attitudes of the residents of the quarters or if it was a mere administrative structure controlled by the town council. But first, I will briefly introduce the Prague self-administration. If we speak of “Prague” at the turn of the sixteenth century, we in fact speak of five administratively independent units. The Old Town of Prague on the right bank of the Vltava was created in the first half of the thirteenth century by the transformation and connection of several residential cores using a location suitable for crossing the River Vltava and accessing connecting roads. Charles IV founded Prague’s New Town at a bend in the Vltava in 1348. Its extensive walls surrounded the Old Town, but at the same time it remained spatially open to its older neighbor. The Lesser Town of Prague, a transformed settlement under Prague Castle towards the river—today’s Malá Strana—was also one of the royal towns. These three towns complemented the towns of Hradčany (Castle Town) and Vyšehrad, which I will leave aside, because they were different in their genesis, legal status and degree of development of their self-government.⁵

In the late Middle Ages, the three towns of the Prague core were represented by three town halls, which were the administrative centers of separate municipalities. The Old Town of Prague was administered by 18 councilors, while the other two cities were administered by twelve each. This was also one of the causes of the rivalry between the Old and New Towns, which sought to compare the size of the aldermen’s councils and check the privileges held by its older neighbor. Besides the town council, the second crucial institution of the municipal self-administration was the municipal court. The urban mayor, who in the thirteenth century had been the head of the town government, was relegated in the fourteenth century, to a subordinate position vis-a-vis the town council. During the Hussite wars, the role of the “town community” increased significantly. Originally, it was a gathering of all full-fledged townspeople, but already at the beginning of the fifteenth century, participation in the gathering ceased to be strictly tied to property ownership; the amount of property now played a decisive role.

At the time of the Hussite wars, a new phenomenon appeared, the so-called large community. A large community meeting could be a gathering of all residents, even including those in the suburbs. This radical model appeared only in exceptional situations during the Hussite era. More common were gatherings of “communities” including, in addition to the owners of houses, also wealthier craftsmen crossing the threshold of the property census. As a rule, the capacity of the town hall was sufficient for such a gathering. Convening the community was difficult and was accompanied by complaints of frequent absences. The community was therefore represented in a number of more common situations by the so-called community elders, who were convened as an advisory body of

⁵ The earliest development of the complex of medieval Prague was most recently summarized by: VÁCLAV LEDVINKA, JIŘÍ PEŠEK: Praha [Prague], Praha 2000, pp. 45–155; JAN VLK (ed.): Dějiny Prahy I.: Od nejstarších dob do sloučení pražských měst (1784) [The History of Prague I: From the Earliest Period to the Unification of the Prague Towns (1784)], Praha 1997, pp. 52–98, 127–140.

the council. Usually both groups appeared together, for example, during negotiations on the manipulation of city assets. The community also demanded a check on municipal management. However, the annual change of city councils remained in the hands of the king or royal chamberlain. The municipal communities in Prague's towns had no right to interfere in the selection of councilors.⁶

A large and populous conurbation such as late medieval Prague could not do without a developed system of delegating powers to officials charged with overseeing municipal finances, markets, walls, wood sales, roads, churches, guilds, etc. It was not possible to cover a wide range of offices by appointing councilors; it required the involvement of the "elders of the community," guild masters and other "honest people." Every year, several dozen people changed their positions in the authorities (or were confirmed in their administration) in the Old Town of Prague alone.⁷ In addition, some institutions—for example, self-governing church wards created during the Hussite period—escaped the direct intervention of councilors for a long time. However, this does not mean that their representatives did not enter other municipal offices.⁸ The institutions that were not originally part of the administrative apparatus or whose activities were directed to a different area were thus also engaged in the system of distribution and control of power.⁹

The attention of historians, therefore, is attracted by the criteria which the council elite used in integrating selected institutions into the town administration, while restrictions were applied to others by councils. The research into institutions that filled the power space between the ruling and the controlled

⁶ The basic form of the Prague municipal self-government and the transformation of the authorities of their bodies was first presented by: JAROMÍR ČELAKOVSKÝ: *O vývoji středověkého zřízení radního v městech Pražských* [On the Development of the Medieval Establishment of the Councilor in Prague's Towns], Praha 1921. More recently: JIŘÍ SPĚVÁČEK: *Úloha Prahy v koncepci českého státu Karla IV* [The Role of Prague in Charles IV's Conception of the Bohemian State], in: *Folia historica Bohemica* 10 (1986), pp. 137–171, and JAROSLAVA MENDELOVÁ: *Správa Nového Města pražského v letech 1348–1784* [Administration of the New Town of Prague in 1348–1784], in: *Documenta Pragensia* 17 (1998), pp. 43–60.

⁷ For instance, in 1571, around 200 people were replaced or confirmed in the offices during the regular renewal of the city council, but some townspeople held more than one office. For more, see: *Kniha trhu a obnov rad 1571–1629* [Property Change Book and Renewal City Council 1571–1629], in: AHMP, *Sbírka rukopisů* [Collection of Manuscripts], no. 69, fol. 1r–4v.

⁸ The probe for the second half of the sixteenth century was elaborated by: JAROSLAV DOUŠA: *Staroměstští konšelé v jiných funkcích městské samosprávy v letech 1571–1602 a 1630–1650* [Old Town Councilors in Other Posts of the Municipal Self-Government in 1571–1602 and 1630–1650], in: *Documenta Pragensia* 20 (1997), pp. 43–74.

⁹ For more, see MICHAEL J. BRADDICK, JOHN WALTER: *Introduction: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Early Modern Society*, in: MICHAEL J. BRADDICK, JOHN WALTER (eds.): *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland*, Cambridge 2018, pp. 1–42.

has been developing dynamically in the last quarter century. It has been shown that there was a very intensive political communication in this sphere. However, the results in the study of this area have so far been fragmentary in Central European historiography.¹⁰ Whereas relations between town councils and guilds have received attention since the nineteenth century, for example, research interest in the political role of parish settlements is relatively recent.¹¹ Hence, we know very little about the role of town quarters and their representatives, although (as the introductory quote shows) their existence was taken for granted by contemporaries.¹²

The number of mentions of the so-called quarter captains and their pyramidal organization composed of “fifties” and “tens” (sergeants and corporals, according to the number of houses overseen) was growing during the late Middle Ages in a number of Central European towns. The quarters were not an auxiliary administrative division suitable only for collecting taxes as the quarter captains also performed other tasks assigned by the town council. Nevertheless, caution is warranted when studying the functioning of the quarter organization. As with many other medieval offices, the same terms may refer to institutions of different quality, and conversely, two differently named offices may have approached one another in their functions.¹³ We can thus encounter in the Bohemian sources from the late fifteenth century the appearance of the quarter

¹⁰ A valuable summary and new research results in the Central European context is offered by: KATEŘINA HORNÍČKOVÁ (ed.): *Faces of Community in Central European Towns: Images, Symbols, and Performances, 1400–1700*, Lanham 2018. Mainly working from the Bohemian sources, are the contributors of the proceedings: KATEŘINA JÍŠOVÁ, JAN HRDINA (eds.): *Radnice, rynek a tržiště—místa setkávání, obchodu a reprezentace ve středověkých a raně novověkých městech* (Town Halls, Squares and Market-Places—Places of Encounters, Trade and Representation in Medieval and Early Modern Towns), Praha 2017. On a more general level: ANDRZEJ PLESZCZYŃSKI: *The Identity of Self-Governing Groups (Guilds and Communes) in the Middle Ages and Their Collective Identity*, in: ANDRZEJ PLESZCZYŃSKI (ed.): *Imagined Communities: Constructing Collective Identities in Medieval Europe*, Leiden 2018, pp. 204–221, and: HANA MANIKOWSKA, ANNA POMIERNY-WAŚIŃSKA: *Główne nurty badań nad przestrzenią miasta średniowiecznego* [Main Trends in Research on the Space of the Medieval City], in: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 63 (2015), 2, pp. 189–199.

¹¹ A synoptic view of the Czech milieu is presented by: PAVEL B. KŮRKA: *Kostelníci, úředníci, měšťané: Samospráva farnosti v utrakvismu* [Sextons, Officials, Burghers: The Self-Government of Parishes in Utraquism], Praha 2010.

¹² Unfortunately, the monumental overview of the development of Prague's administration by Jaromír Čelakovský remained unfinished and ends at the very beginning of the sixteenth century. As I will show below, the strengthening of the role of the quarter organization came later and Čelakovský does not include it in his text. His followers continued in Čelakovský's footsteps. For more, see ČELAKOVSKÝ, pp. 124–389.

¹³ A general overview of the activities of the quarter captains was published by: ZIKMUND WINTER: *Kulturní obraz českých měst II.: Život veřejný mezi r. 1420–1620* [Cultural Image of the Bohemian Towns II.: Public Life in 1420–1620], Praha 1892, pp. 24–27. However, the documents gathered connect the activities of the quarter captains in typologically different towns.

captain as a messenger of the town council going around the houses with an invitation to the assembly of the community¹⁴ and the same figure in the role of the commander of part of the town militia,¹⁵ through to being the organizer of the fire safety measures of the relevant town quarter.¹⁶ The differentiated content of the captain's office shows that more source studies will have to be prepared before more general conclusions about its competence can be drawn. In Czech urban historiography, one can rely, for example, on the passages in syntheses devoted to České Budějovice, Hradec Králové¹⁷ or Kadaň.¹⁸ However, it is possible to say generally that Czech research has not yet advanced so far as to be able to make generalizations, which, for instance, Roman Czaja introduced for Baltic towns.¹⁹ In the series of his studies, a program for further research is also presented. The discussion is evoked mainly by the thesis regarding changes in the internal quality of the quarter system, or the stages of

¹⁴ Kniha paměti města Dvůru z let 1456–1544 [Memorial Book of the Town Dvůr Králové 1456–1544], in: Státní okresní archiv [State District Archives], Trutnov, Archiv města [Archive of the City], Dvůr Králové nad Labem, no. 12.

¹⁵ Cf. HERMENEGILD JIREČEK (ed.): *Codex iuris Bohemici*. Vol. 2, 3: *Scripta ad rempublicam administrandam spectantia saec. 14*, Praga 1889, pp. 104–106.

¹⁶ The quarter captains in Kutná Hora saw an interesting development. In the fifteenth century, they were not directly mentioned, only the fire supervision office was separate. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, this office was transformed into a new form. It was already a completely emancipated component of the town administration. It was referred to as the “captains over fire by quarter” and each quarter was represented by multiple names. Cf. *Kniha městské rady 1529–1530* [City Council Book 1529–1530], in: Státní okresní archiv [State District Archives], Kutná Hora, Archiv města [Archive of the City], no. 11, f. 387r.

¹⁷ Thanks to Věra Němečková, for example, information about the existence and use of a quarter organization in late medieval Hradec Králové became more widely known, but the same author adds to the relevant passage in the Hradec monograph the thesis on the selection of lower nobles from the surrounding estates to head the town militia in the position of town (quarter) captains. However, we only meet with aristocratic commanders of quarter militia in Prague during the Thirty Years' War, and František Šmahel, using the example of Tábor, urges caution regarding the role of aristocratic captains. If we talk about the Bohemian milieu of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the quarter captain was usually one of the neighbors of the relevant quarter. Cf. VĚRA NĚMEČKOVÁ: *Hradec v době husitské a jagellonské 1420–1526* [Hradec during the Hussites and Jagiellonian Dynasty, 1420–1526], in: RADEK BLÁHA et al.: *Hradec Králové: Historie, kultura, lidé*, Praha 2017, pp. 101–144, here p. 132, and FRANTIŠEK ŠMAHEL: *Návraty k pramenům: Studie k počátkům husitského Tábora* [Returns to the Sources: Studies on the Beginnings of Hussite Tabor], Praha 2020, p. 338.

¹⁸ The example can be an analysis of the town administration prepared by: PETR RAK: *Správa města Kadaně v letech 1465–1620* [Administration of the Town of Kadaň in 1465–1620], Ústí nad Labem—Praha 2014, pp. 225–227. Rak's considerations are also characteristic of this type of urban monograph. The quarters are usually mentioned here in the chapter on urban administration, and domestic sources are interpreted in the paradigm of Winter's above-mentioned synthesis.

¹⁹ ROMAN CZAJA: *Quarters in the Municipal Authority System in Late Mediaeval Prussian Towns*, in: *Acta Poloniae Historica* 119 (2019), pp. 175–189.

the transformation of the quarter organization from its administrative role to the representation of quarter communities. Czaja's research for the Baltics also co-determined three follow-up questions, which I will look for answers to in my text. First of all, I will ask whether we can talk about the existence of a more developed form of the quarter organization in the late medieval cities of Prague. If so, was it controlled by the town council or did it represent the will of the community? And finally, how did the activities of the quarter organization manifest themselves in the political life of late medieval Prague?

The Quarter Organization from the Perspective of Contemporary Urban Historiography

“And be taken for such offices from both the second, third and even fourth quarters of the town, so that everyone can try it and know what the jobs and care are in such town posts.”²⁰

The words of the New Town scribe Prokop from the middle of the fifteenth century form one of the most open calls to take into account the town's topography in the selection of town officials which we can encounter in Bohemian sources. In practice, however, it was a recommendation that was reflected in the highest positions of self-government only in exceptional situations.²¹ We encounter the taking into account of the affiliation to the district more in the selection of municipal elders and some officials supervising town operations, and also in the selection of quarter captains. Even in these cases, we must interpret the situation under investigation with caution. Prokop's emphasis on the engagement of all quarters was asymptomatic, not pursuing a specific political goal in the form of suppressing the current conflict. We should perceive it as fulfilling the transformed ideal of the ancient polis. There were also practical

²⁰ The New Town scribe Prokop wrote his recommendations on the organization of the town administration in the middle of the fifteenth century, while in the following passage he states that the councilors should serve in their posts for only a year. Cf. FRANTIŠEK PALACKÝ (ed.): *Dáwnj práwa i rozepře nowého a starého měst Pražských* [Early Law and New Argument and Prague's Old Town], in: *Časopis Českého musea* 10 (1836), pp. 299–322. On the figure of the scribe, see KATEŘINA JÍŠOVÁ: *Novoměstský písař Prokop* [The New Town Scribe Prokop], in: EVA DOLEŽALOVÁ, PETR SOMMER (eds.): *Středověký kaleidoskop pro muže s hůlkou: Věnováno Františku Šmahelovi k životnímu jubileu*, Praha 2016, pp. 538–544, where the earlier literature on the topic is also summarized.

²¹ Cf. FRANTIŠEK PALACKÝ (ed.): *Archiv český* [Czech Archives], vol. 1, Praha 1840, pp. 209–212, no. 21. In 1422 by decision of the external conciliation commission, new councilors were appointed based on the quarter principle. This principle was chosen with regard to the goal—the elimination of the supporters of the popular preacher of the recent “ruler of Prague” Jan Želivský. The new order culminated in the preacher's invitation to the town hall, his sentencing and his execution. For more, see PETR ČORNEJ: *Pád Jana Želivského* [The Fall of Jan Želivský], in: PETR ČORNEJ: *Světla a stíny husitství (Události—osobnosti—texty—tradice): Výbor z úvah a studií*, Praha 2011, pp. 101–135.

reasons for engaging the “neighbors” from a particular quarter. The burghers brought an advantage in the form of knowledge of local conditions. At the same time, the representative, who had been sent, checked the collection of taxes. He thus became important for both sides of the power spectrum—for the town council and the community. Therefore, one of the key issues I will return to repeatedly in this text is to set a boundary that will allow us to distinguish the community (strengthened, for example, by joint participation in the militia and the town watch service) from a mere circle of people connected by a short topographical distance. Alternatively, did the quarters in the medieval town represent a mere administrative unit, or were social ties thickening within the quarters (and with what consequences)?²²

These are questions inherent in a number of recent works on the space of medieval towns. Robert Jütte has already declared a shift from administrative history approaches to cultural history when studying the quarter system. Unfortunately, his program from the early 1990s did not provoke much discussion. The call for interdisciplinarity and systematic study of quarter systems in towns of different types did not find its followers.²³ This repeated the situation associated with another (earlier) German study devoted directly to quarter organizations, this time from the pen of Johannes Schultze. Already this historian and archivist drew attention, in the 1950s, to the role of town quarters in the administration of many towns and called for their systematic treatment. The impetus for Schultze’s study, in which the author tackles the alleged Roman tradition in establishing town quarters, was the search for common principles for the functioning of these administrative districts. He considers the organization of the town militia and fire protection to be the main tasks of the quarter administrators. According to the historian’s findings, parish districts and quarter divisions also overlapped in a number of large imperial cities. The quarters therefore received names according to the patrons of the respective parish churches.²⁴

Jütte built on this thesis; he saw the blending of the parish community and the inhabitants of the relevant quarter, reinforced by neighborly ties, as the basis for perceiving the quarter as a distinct social space. The quarter was not only an auxiliary topographic unit used in the collection of tax, but a social institution with sufficient internal ties to be able to participate in power. This situation was accepted on the part of the municipal self-governments of a number of

²² The selection of officials by quarter was usually a way of resolving the conflict between the town council and the community. In Prague’s New Town, the selection of tax officials from the burghers of a particular quarter was established during the fifteenth century, and in 1488, after the third defenestration of Prague, new representatives of the community were selected by quarter. Cf. ČELAKOVSKÝ, pp. 325, 356–357.

²³ ROBERT JÜTTE: *Das Stadtviertel als Problem und Gegenstand der frühneuzeitlichen Stadtgeschichtsforschung*, in: *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 127 (1991), pp. 235–269.

²⁴ JOHANNES SCHULTZE: *Die Stadtviertel: Ein städtegeschichtliches Problem*, in: *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 92 (1956), pp. 18–39.

imperial cities, and some powers were delegated to the relevant representatives. In addition to the already mentioned military and fire protection, it was also about the protection of order as well as some organizational tasks in the collection of town taxes and market regulations. Jütte attempts to define quarter society as a social system that fulfilled certain features. The most important of these included stable social relations within the community, representation of accepted positions, limited size, and internal pressure on conforming conduct. In the relevant quarter, the quarter captains, equipped with police powers, assisted in maintaining order. In this conception, the town quarter became a social institution standing between the entire urban society—too numerous and differentiated from the point of view of an individual burgher—and a locally oriented neighborhood based on everyday interaction.²⁵

Arnd Reitemeier also uses the emphasis on everyday contacts in his reflections on the role of quarter organization. In the spirit of his long-term research, he connects administrative matters with approaches to the study of communication, asking questions about the forms of communication taking place within the municipality and from the municipality towards its partners. He is interested in which “places” of urban space could be described as nodes of communication and whether ordinary interaction did not play a more significant role than political-administrative acts in identifying an individual with a town quarter or parish community. The community of women at the well, the celebration taking place in front of the church during the erection of the lighthouse, or the meetings taking place, for example, in the cemeteries used as market places, in his view, gain significant potential for shaping collective identity. Reitemeier equates them with the existence of an external representative of a quarter of the municipality, for which he found a number of variants of designation: “Viertelmeister,” “Viertelvertreter,” “Wachtmeister,” “Bannermeister,” etc.²⁶

In their conclusions, all of the mentioned authors confirm that involvement of the quarter, or alternatively parish communities or so-called political guilds in the administration of municipal affairs, was reflected in the political communication of the respective town. It is precisely from the point of view of

²⁵ JÜTTE, pp. 235–236. The thesis of the two authors mentioned was built upon by, e.g., HELMUT BRÄUER: *Wider den Rat: Der Zwickauer Konflikt 1516/17*, Leipzig 1999. Although he does not pay close attention to the quarter or even street “masters,” it is worth noting his reflections on the dichotomous position of these figures appointed to office by the council; they were sworn to the council but at the same time represented the relevant spatially defined segment of the urban population. In addition to their loyalty to the councilors, the “masters” were also interpreters of the opinions of the respective quarters, so their actions did not have to be based on the intentions of official town policy. A more detailed look offers: JÖRG ROGGE: *Für den Gemeinen Nutzen: Politisches Handeln und Politikverständnis von Rat und Bürgerschaft in Augsburg im Spätmittelalter*, Tübingen 1996, pp. 142–150.

²⁶ ARND REITEMEIER: *Kirchspiele und Viertel als “vertikale Einheiten” der Stadt des späten Mittelalters*, in: *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 141/142 (2005/2006), 1, pp. 603–640.

political communication that we should be interested in the means used to generate common positions of the relevant urban communities, places of finding consensus, communication with the town representation and its bearers. In the case of the political guilds of German cities, their members met in established guild taverns. We can also consider parish churches as a traditional place for influencing the views of the town, especially if one of the engaged priests came to the pulpit with an updated sermon. However, the town hall remained the primary place of political communication for the representatives of the quarters in Central Europe, especially regarding their meetings within the town municipality or about the strictly mentioned subordination to the town council.²⁷

Following administrative developments or political communication is not the only research avenue to have led historians to an examination of the functioning of the Central European variants of the quarter organization. Jarosław Suproniuk was led to his research by an interest in the beginnings of the police force in Polish towns. Comparing their development, he comes to the conclusion that the initiating moment of the emergence of the quarter administration was the control of the magistrate's office by the town council, because the councilors, along with the property and the magistrate's powers, also had to take over the tasks of the magistrate's office. Moreover, in the late Middle Ages, the newly acquired responsibility for maintaining public order was met with efforts to control the urban population across the board. Not surprisingly, the earliest Polish documents establishing the quarter come from Krakow. From as early as the middle of the fourteenth century, evidence can be found of the town's division into quarters (districts) and the officials at their head (*magistri circulatorum*). The original administrative system underwent several adjustments, which were reflected in the terminology used. Still in the fifteenth century, the officials at the head of the quarter were called *Capitanei*, and a century later, "sergeants." The lower component was represented by corporals, which we also know from German cities. What was, on the other hand, unusual was the office of the chief governor, called the *Hutman*, who had his seat at the town hall and with whom the sergeants met regularly. Although the designation *Viertelmeister* (Polish *wiertelnicy*) gradually prevailed for them, their function differed significantly from the analogous authorities of more western cities. As pointed out already by Suproniuk, and as simultaneously proved by the statute from 1543, they acted more as presiding officers in the courts and resolved minor conflicts in their districts. They therefore had a common scribe and wrote the agenda in a special series of town books. The court, which usually took place at the town hall, was presided over by the *Hutman* and the *wiertelnicy* came to him at the invitation of the councilors or a message sent by the town

²⁷ The concept of so-called "public spaces" in the interpretations of the Bohemian sources is used in: MARTIN ČAPSKÝ: *Město pod vládou kazatelů: Charismatic Religious Leaders in Conflict with the Town Council in the Late Medieval Bohemian Crown Lands*, Praha 2015.

hall messenger. On the contrary, the statutes do not say anything about military duties, obligations to control firefighting measures, etc. We know from other sources that the competence of Krakow quarter officials also extended to these areas, but developments in Krakow were so regionally specific that it is difficult to use them for further comparison.²⁸

The situation in Prussia and Pomerania is much closer to the development in the imperial cities, although Czaja believes that for them, the key changes took place with a certain time lag compared for example to the Polish milieu. The earliest decree ordering the establishment of the quarter comes from Elbląg from 1414, and the statutes issued by the Gdańsk town council were only from two years later. Despite the proximity of time, there were different reasons behind the establishment of the town quarter institutions. In Elbląg, the councilors and the grand master of the Order of Teutonic Knights were reacting to the military pressure developed by the Jagiellonian dynasty and the measures were mainly to reinforce the town's ability to defend itself through a more thorough definition of the obligations in the control and defense of the town's walls. In Gdańsk, the town council aimed to weaken the position of the guilds, which had acquired a number of powers within the town government.

As stated above, Czaja presents two fundamental theses in his studies, which I will verify using Bohemian (Prague) sources. He draws attention in particular to the change in social ties within the quarter organization. In the earlier phase, in which quarters were mainly administrative districts, the quarter organization played an important role in the collection of taxes, in police affairs, protection from fires and the organization of the town militia. In the later phase, we can already supposedly speak of the establishment of quarter communities, which were formed based on neighborly ties and jointly performed duties, and which communicated with town councils and promoted their interests towards them. The town council responded to the change in the quality of quarter organization by strengthening its control over the quarter officials, but at the same time used them to perform municipal administration. The second thesis of Czaja that I will work upon within the following lines starts from his analysis of the Gdańsk conflicts between the councilor elite and the guilds. The councilors sought new instruments for asserting their will. The town's administration, by measuring the quarters, was reacting to the transformation of the political situation in which the current model, when exposed to the control and delegation of powers to guilds, began to prove to be insufficient. The changed conditions required

²⁸ JAROSŁAW SUPRONIUK: *Policja miejska i przepisy policyjne w Polsce XIII–XVI w.* [Town Police and Police Regulations in Poland in the Thirteenth–Sixteenth Centuries], in: *Roczniki dziejów społecznych i gospodarczych* 66 (2006), pp. 25–88; FRANCISZEK PIEKOSIŃSKI (ed.): *Prawa, przywileje i statuta miasta Krakowa (1507–1795): Tom 1,1 (1507–1586)* [Laws, Privileges and Statutes of the Town of Krakow (1507–1795): Volume 1,1 (1507–1586)], Kraków 1885, pp. 121–124, no. 102–103.

the strengthening of across-the-board control of the town and intensified political communication between the council and the urban population.²⁹

The question also entails the key to seeking the distinction between the powers of the magistrate and quarter captains. We can say that the magistrate only had a limited apparatus or number of catchpoles, whereas the quarter captains could, through their corporals (or lieutenants and sergeants), effectively mediate the will of the town council in the entire circle of the town walls. We can support this claim with a number of documents. For instance, in Nuremberg in 1491, the corporals (or *Gassenhauptleute*), by order of the city council, went to all landlords with a written decree, ensuring that it was signed and re-delivered to the chancellery.³⁰ We also know from the examples of a number of Bohemian towns the obligation of the quarter captains to circulate among the “neighbors” an order of the council and to convene them at a meeting of the “municipality.”³¹

Formation of Prague’s Quarter Organization

“Items discussed and we order: for the community of Old Town to elect for itself immediately councilors by its quarters, proper and god-fearing people, as they would suit this office.”³²

The oldest Prague sources on the division of the city into quarters date back to the early 1370s. Jan Hrdina analyzes and describes the procedure for collecting the town tax and documents as it was organized according to the individual quarters.³³ Each quarter bore the name of the patron saint of the local church. In 1373, four burghers took care of the collection. Two collectors came from the town council and two were selected by the municipal community. This

²⁹ ROMAN CZAJA: Urzędnicy kwartalni w starym mieście Elblągu w średniowieczu [Quarter Officials in the Old Town of Elbląg in the Middle Ages], in: RENATA SKOWROŃSKA, KRZYSZTOF KOPIŃSKI et al. (eds.): Piśmiennictwo: Opisywanie i interpretacja źródeł. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Januszowi Tandeckiemu w 70. rocznicę urodzin, Toruń 2020, pp. 83–95, and CZAJA, Quarters, pp. 175–189. Similar conclusions were offered by an analysis of the circumstances in which the quarter organization in Nuremberg was enforced: FRANZ WILLAX: Bürgerausschuss und Feuergehorsam im Nürnberg des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts, in: Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg 75 (1988), pp. 109–132.

³⁰ For more, see WILLAX.

³¹ These duties of the quarter captains are written, for example, in the “Order” published in Dvůr Králové in East Bohemia at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Cf. *Knihy pamietni města Dvoru z let 1456–1544*, fol. 196r.

³² PALACKÝ, *Archiv český* 1, no. 21.

³³ For more, see JAN HRDINA (ed.): *Liber summarius bernarum Nove Civitatis Pragensis: Příjmy a výdaje Nového Města pražského v letech 1411–1418 (Úvod a edice)* [Liber summarius bernarum Nove Civitatis Pragensis: The Incomes and Expenditures of Prague’s New Town in 1411–1418 (Introduction and Edition)], in: *Pražský sborník historický* 43 (2015), pp. 297–307.

model was probably applied earlier, and tax officials followed its intentions in the following years as well. Further clarification was brought by a royal decision from the turn of the sixteenth century, which consolidated the functioning of quarters as tax wards. From now on, four tax collectors were to collect the tax in each quarter; two of them had to come directly from the given quarter. The meaning of this decision is clear. At the place of their anchorage, the burghers had a better overview of their neighbors' property. The question is how to interpret this decision. Was it proof of the existence and strengthening of the role of the quarter community? The use of neighborhood ties may have been motivated by a utilitarian effort to better control the admitted properties.³⁴

We do not have a similar tax register from this period preserved from the Old Town of Prague, but another document from the administrative division of the city has been preserved. Pursuant to the provisions of 1371, the quarter division governed the organization of the burgher militia. In the case of a campaign beyond the boundaries of the land, only two of the quarters were to leave their maternal town, while the other two were to take care of ensuring the town's safety. Each quarter was to be led by two captains, one of whom was selected from the group of councilors and the other from the community. In the early fifteenth century at latest, the two captains were replaced by one, who was installed by the newly appointed town council along with the other town officials. Unlike the mandates of the councilors, the quarter captain did not have to be replaced every year, and one burgher could hold the post repeatedly.³⁵

Sources from the sixteenth century, which I will discuss more in the following passages of the text, always connect the origin of the quarter captains with a specific quarter. Community elders are also listed by quarter.³⁶ However, we only have direct evidence of the consideration of quarters in the election of councilors in one case. The quarter principle was enforced in 1422 as a "neutral" model that was supposed to stabilize conditions in Prague after repeated coups. The hidden goal of the decision was the elimination of the followers of the radical Hussite preacher Jan Želivský, many of whom lived near the town hall in Prague's New Town. The plan succeeded, and the new council encouraged further weakening of the preacher's influence. Želivský eventually ended up on the gallows, and his death unleashed an outburst of anger from the gathered crowd, which swept away the existing town council. After its fall, the quarter system for election to city council was never used again.³⁷

Although the Prague milieu knew how to deal with the administrative division of the city into quarters, in the fifteenth century the quarter system was used as a means of recording town taxes and for the principle of organizing the

³⁴ HRDINA, pp. 220–222.

³⁵ ČELAKOVSKÝ, pp. 164–165.

³⁶ *Knihy trhu a obnov rady 1571–1629* (as in footnote 7), fol. 1r-4v.

³⁷ Cf. PALACKÝ, *Archiv český* 1, no. 21. A summary of these events was provided by FRANTIŠEK ŠMAHEL: *Die Hussitische Revolution*, vol. 3, Hannover 2002, pp. 1757–1759.

municipal militia.³⁸ Already in the earlier literature, the obligation of townspeople to provide night patrols in their quarter had been written about. An important role in the organization of this type of duty was still played by the magistrate, whose tasks were increasingly tied to maintaining order. In addition, in the first third of the sixteenth century there was a significant change in local administration. In 1523, the “Order among the Captains, Lieutenants, Sergeants, Corporals, Lord Burgomaster and Lords Measured” was proclaimed in the New Town of Prague. The comprehensive directive regulated the duties of quarter captains and their subordinates in several areas. The focus of their work was clearly on fire fighting. The duty of the quarter captain and corporals was to regularly inspect various tools used to extinguish or eliminate fires, such as leather bags, hooks, ladders and wagons in houses, to organize firefighting work, and to disperse curious onlookers and prevent looting. In each quarter, the captain was to walk the section of the street with the appropriate corporal, ensure the roads were “passable” and, above all, check the condition of the chimneys in the houses. If a chimney was found to be dangerous, the landlord would quickly seek redress under a fine, which went to the captain and his people. Paradoxically, in comparison with the Nuremberg and other orders, only a minimum of attention is paid in the Prague regulation to the military component. In the event of the declaration of an alarm, the quarter captains and their subordinate apparatus came to the town hall and listened to the burgomaster’s orders. Based on those, they either continued in their organization of the militia or again released a part of it. The captains also checked the burghers’ armor and weapons; they made sure that their number remains stable, but they devoted far greater attention to the inhabitants of the houses.³⁹

It is in this point that the Prague Regulation differs from similar “orders” issued at the same time in other Central European towns. I have already mentioned the Nuremberg Orders above. The orders of Gdańsk also favored the military over the disciplinary component. The “Order of the Town of Kremnica” dates from 1537, and specifically regulates the duties of the quarter captains. Their areas of activity were similar to those in Prague, but they differed in their emphasis. In addition to the introductory general declaration on the prevention of indecent behavior (blasphemy, gambling, fornication, etc.), the quarter captain’s duties included checking the fire prevention measures. However, most of the 14 brief points were devoted to defending the town. The appointed official supervised the burgher weaponry (he only did not register it as

³⁸ According to the regulation of the New Town Council in 1532, which regulated the duties and security of the magistrate’s office, townspeople in danger should first turn to the magistrate and then to the relevant quarter captains. The magistrate’s “order” reveals that there must have been a forced clash of the authority of the magistrate and the quarter captains. Cf. *Kniha pamětní 1411–1544* [Municipal Official Book 1411–1544], in: AHMP, *Sbírka rukopisů*, no. 989, fol. 347r.

³⁹ *Pořad nad hajtmany, [...] 1523* [Order over the captains [...] 1523], in: AHMP, *Sbírka rukopisů*, *Kniha pamětní* [Municipal Official Book], inv. no. 332, modern transcription of the manuscript destroyed in 1945.

in Prague, but evaluated whether the firearm was working), set guard watches, closed barriers, and had a small rapid division. The threat to the city from the Ottoman Turks was also shown in an important organizational detail. While in Prague the burgher militias headed for the square, in Kremnica, the landlord would immediately send one of the stableboys to the walls. Those neighbors whose task it was to defend the towers were also immediately sent to their places.

The shift is also evident in the control of taverns. In Prague, the quarter captain made sure that there were no “layabouts” in the pubs—people who did not work. Their idleness was perceived as a sin and at the same time, as an economic threat to the burghers. Layabouts lured neighbors to gamble and alcohol, etc. In Kremnica, “foreigners” in particular were under supervision, perceived as a threat to the city.⁴⁰ The town council issued a comprehensive city code at the same time in Wrocław, Silesia as well. The regulation from 1527 also co-determined the duties of the quarter captain, traditionally referred to as the *Viertelmeister*. The councilors declared that the town was divided into quarters headed by a quarter captain who had four *Eltesten* overseeing the corporals. We do not find such strictly defined military duties of the burghers in the Wrocław Order as we do in the Kremnica Order. In addition to the organization of the guard service, fire protection and weapon control (among other reasons so that there would not be too many of them in a single household), the quarter captain’s responsibilities included supervising the interests of orphans. If a landlord died, leaving minors, it was the duty of the appointed officials to draw up the estate inventory quickly. However, a specificity of the Wrocław regulations was the emphasis on the system of announcing the will of the council, which in written form travelled to the level of the corporals, who proclaimed it loudly among the neighbors.⁴¹

The orders of Kremnica and Wrocław for the quarter captains were parts of extensive directives regulating a number of the aspects of town life. Strengthening social control exceeded the notional threshold of burgher households and ranged from regulating the movement of the labor force (Kremnica), to controlling the functioning of markets (Wrocław) and controlling the number of neighbors who could accept an invitation to sit over wine/beer in the private part of the house (Jihlava).⁴²

⁴⁰ MIKULÁŠ ČELKO, MÁRIA PAPONOVÁ (eds.): *Das Stadt- und Bergrecht von Kremnitz—Mestské a banské právo Kremnice*, Košice 2004, pp. 325–327.

⁴¹ EMIL WENDBROTH (ed.): *Statuten der Stadt Breslau von 1527/1534*, in: *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte und Altherthum Schlesiens* (1862), pp. 39–113.

⁴² The town council in Jihlava justified its interventions by stating that drunks would disturb the night peace when returning from these private meetings. Cf. MARTIN ČAPSKÝ: “Na pranýř jej namalovati dali”: Politická komunikace v pozdně středověké Jihlavě [“They Put Them Drunk on the Pillory”: Political Communication in Medieval Jihlava], in: *Studia mediaevalia Bohemica* 11 (2019), pp. 213–257.

The strengthening of social control tendencies in the urban milieu has so far been written about mainly in connection with the office of the magistrate.⁴³ The authority of the four captains to a certain extent overlapped with that of the magistrates, but this was a relatively common phenomenon in medieval administrative systems. Confirmation of this situation is again found in the sources of Prague. Despite the existence of the order for quarter captains, in 1532 the large municipality in negotiations with councilors approved the strengthening of the magistrate's powers. And it was precisely the magistrate who remained the main figure responsible for order in the towns. The magistrate could enter homes and check taverns and the movement of prostitutes. Only in a situation where the magistrate was not available did the burghers turn to the relevant corporal or other official in conflicts. The quarter captains remained active, but their tasks were more closely linked to firefighting measures. Among other aspects, the order responded to a new way of managing water. The burghers no longer used the wells dug on their own plots, but went to the municipal wells, where water was supplied through pipes from water towers. However, the unequivocally positive decision in terms of the quality of the water used worsened the town's prospects in the event of a fire. Water was becoming more difficult to access. The quarter captains newly had to see to it that when pipes were laid, they were interrupted by mounts with pins so that the pipes could be opened, and each burgher also had to have a key ready so that access to the water could be opened.⁴⁴

Two more orders from the second quarter of the sixteenth century have been preserved from the Prague milieu. The first (I will call it the second redaction and it is preserved in a modern copy) was probably part of a larger set of regulations and in the Modern Period, was included in the period after 1530. As has already been pointed out using the examples of Kremnica and Wrocław, the emergence of similar specifying statutes was not unusual. Even in the towns of Prague, the regulation associated with the strengthening of the powers of the magistrate's office could be a broader part of measures to discipline the city population. Unlike the earliest Prague order from 1523, this second redaction lacks an introduction to the quarter organization headed by the captain. The text immediately begins with the duty of the captain to register waggoners and carpenters in his quarter in case of a fire. The right of a magistrate to imprison a corporal who neglected his duties testifies to a possible connection to the

⁴³ With the kind permission of the authors, I was able to become acquainted with the hitherto unpublished text: HANA JODÁNKOVÁ, LUDMILA SULITKOVÁ: *Právní normy a role rychtáře v sociální kontrole v královském městě středověku a raného novověku (na příkladu Brna a Prahy)* [Legal Norms and the Role of the Magistrate in Social Control in the Royal Town of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period (Using the Examples of Brno and Prague)], in: PETR HOLUB et al. (ed.): *Propter amorem regionis suae usque ad summitatem scientiae: Věnováno Zdeňku Martínkovi k životnímu jubileu*, Pelhřimov 2022, pp. 97–104.

⁴⁴ *Kniha pamětní 1411–1544* (as in footnote 38), fol. 347r–350v.

adjustments to the position of magistrate. The right of control thus passed from the quarter captain to the magistrate, and the entire network thus lost its exclusivity to the magistrate's office.⁴⁵ The third redaction comes from 1548.⁴⁶ It was issued by the town councils of three Prague towns (Old Town, New Town, and the Lesser Town of Prague). Again, it basically uses the text of the first redaction, but clarifies it with a number of details concerning firefighting, the organization of the quarter's inhabitants and, for example, access to wells. The third redaction already mentions the office of the royal magistrate as well, which was established by the sovereign in royal towns after 1547. The supervision of layouts, the control of servants and, above all, the obligation of written records based on tithing were also being developed.⁴⁷

A similar tendency can be observed in imperial towns, from which the most administrative sources illustrating the development in Central Europe have been preserved. Jörg Rogge analyzes the development in late medieval Augsburg and points out the role of corporals subordinate to the quarter captains.⁴⁸ The spatially designed system, based on eight "quarters" led by two captains, replaced the older militia organized on the guild principle. The new officials were not a counterweight to the town council, as was the case with the guild masters; on the contrary, they were more dependent on councilors. Even in this mentioned imperial city, we find the publication of a constitutive "order of corporals" from 1499, which ordered fire checks and military duties, including approaches to social control. In the chapter of his book devoted to the consolidation of the internal stability of the city, Rogge also points to similar regulations already in force in Nuremberg from the 1440s. The term *gute polizey* denoting a complex of measures introduced to more consistently discipline the urban population is used in Czech historiography rather by historians of agrarian history, and its research in the urban milieu is at its beginning today. This is definitely a pity. The quarter captains and their network played an important role in the plans of the (Prague) councilors.⁴⁹

The New Town councilors even demanded in the issued order: "Every corporal should be urged by the captain or sergeant to describe his ten houses first,

⁴⁵ Vyměřený řád hejtmanům, [...] po 1530 [Order Imposed over the Captains [...] 1530], in: AHMP, Sbirka rukopisů, Kniha pamětní, inv. no. 332. The modern transcription of the manuscript was destroyed in 1945.

⁴⁶ Kniha nálezů radních 1542–1552 [Councillors' Decree Book 1542–1552], in: AHMP, Sbirka rukopisů, no. 1154, fol. 256r–257v.

⁴⁷ Ibid., fol. 256r–257v.

⁴⁸ ROGGE, pp. 142–150.

⁴⁹ Ibid. A unique summary was presented for the Bohemian milieu by: LUDMILA SUTLÍKOVÁ: Právní normy a soudní praxe trestně právního charakteru ve vybraných královských a vrchnostenských městech (Příspěvek k disciplinaci městského obyvatelstva v předbělohorské době) [Legal Norms and Court Practices on Criminal Law in Selected Royal and Manorial Towns (Contribution to the Disciplination of the Urban Population in the pre-White Mountain Period)], in: Sborník archivních prací 55 (2017), pp. 146–198.

the landlords, their wives, the journeymen servants, the maids and farmhands, and that for each individual should be written down how they make their living insofar as they are with the landlord.”⁵⁰ The corporal was obliged to edit his lists every four weeks; he was to go round the houses after Sunday lunch, and if he found a new servant, he was to ask where they were from and what they did. If the new inhabitant of the house fell into the category of “loafer,” he was subject to the compulsory departure regulation within three days. The corporal was to notify the magistrate of such a man, and the magistrate would impose the relevant fine. Corporals familiar with the street microworld also responded to the movements of girls. If it turned out that a girl’s pregnancy was behind the departure of a maid from a household, the corporal would have to find out what had happened to the child, or where the girl had placed it. The councilors promised to reduce the number of infanticide offenses by the tightening of supervision. The housekeeper was responsible for violating moral standards. If she did not report her girl’s pregnancy, she was fined again. A different punishment fell on the heads of innkeepers who did not report that a loafer had settled in their bar or who allowed prostitutes to stay there. They faced a three-day imprisonment. A corporal who subverted his supervision was subject to the same punishment. The regulation of the urban area was disrupted by enclaves outside the legal scope of the town councils. But the new regulation bore them in mind. It was the duty of each corporal to draw up an inventory of aristocratic houses and to find out how many guests/layabouts there were, what they were like and what their nature was, and all this he had to submit to the burgomaster in writing. However, even this instrument, which strengthened the position of the council at the head of the urban community, could spiral out of control.⁵¹

New Town Quarters in the Political Conflict over the Unification of the Prague Towns

In addition to the towns of Prague, we find numerous references to the functioning of the quarter organization in another important Bohemian royal town—Kutná Hora. No independently published orders for quarter captains have survived from there; the originality of the local sources lies in another aspect. Continuously preserved town books from the late Middle Ages make it possible to follow the gradual strengthening of the authority of the appointed councilors, who used to be entrusted with the supervision of the danger of fire. At the end of the fifteenth century, they were first mentioned within the assigned offices. Gradually, their names became associated with the names of the specific quarter where they exercised supervision. In the 1530s, they were already listed according to quarters, and together with them were listed several other figures who along with them commanded the already mentioned corporals, whose analogues are also known from the Prague orders. Unlike Prague,

⁵⁰ Pořad nad hajtmany, [...] 1523 (as in footnote 39).

⁵¹ Ibid.

however, the custom was preserved in Kutná Hora that the first appointed (de facto quarter captain) was always a member of the council. These “officials over fire” thus came from the council elite and were legitimized by their connection with the council. Again, we cannot talk about the quarter captain’s representation of the quarter; it was a top-down function. Why was the genesis of the quarter’s organization of fire protection so different in Kutná Hora? The explanation probably lies in the political turbulence that the towns of Prague went through at the beginning of the sixteenth century, which brought drastic changes in the administration of the quarters. The result was the aforementioned quarter orders.⁵²

At the turn of the sixteenth century, groups promoting the unification of the Old and New Towns and their opponents clashed in the New Town of Prague. The dividing line separated the New Town “large community” and even some guilds opposed the unification. The escalation of the situation was apparently due to the politically clumsy attempt of the town council to break the guild disagreement by convening the municipality in quarters. In the past, this step had been successful several times.⁵³ While the Poříčská and Jindřišská quarters fulfilled the ideas of the councilors and supported the unification, the other two districts were against it. Some preachers even called for resistance in the churches of the resisting quarters. Their argument included references to the alleged will of the town’s founder, Emperor Charles IV, who allegedly did not wish for unification.⁵⁴ The quarter community was able to effectively block unification negotiations for several years. But was this dispute evidence of the long-term existence of communities sharing a common identity?

The transformation of a rather freely functioning quarter community into the form of a political institution capable of generating long-term disagreement with the town council’s policy would have to be accompanied by the fulfilment of several conditions. In a political institution of this type, rules governing the formation of a common opinion had to be adopted. Let us talk now about the assembly of the “whole community,” which was more complicated with regard to space and obtaining consent, or representatives of the community with delegated powers. In that case, however, there would have to be a consensus on the rules for their selection. In both cases, there had to be an agreement on the place of gathering and talks. Resistance against the central institution of power—the town council—was usually supported by a mutual oath, and was

⁵² *Registrum rubeum parvum* (1462–78), in: Státní okresní archiv [State District Archives], Kutná Hora, Archiv města [Archive of the City] Kutná Hora, no. 7, f. 173r, and *Kniha městské rady 1529–1530* (as in footnote 16), f. 387r.

⁵³ *Křížovnický rukopis*, pp. 322–323, in: Národní knihovna [National Library], Prague, *Staré letopisy české 1433–1503*, sign. XIX.C.11.

⁵⁴ JAROSLAV KAŠPAR, JAROSLAV PORÁK (eds.): *Ze starých letopisů českých* [From the Old Bohemian Annals], Praha 1980, p. 298. The most detailed description to date of the long conflict: WACSLAW WLADIWOJ TOMEK: *Dějepis města Prahy*, sv. X [History of the City of Prague, vol. X], Praha 1894, pp. 220–451.

sometimes even prepared in writing and sealed. A search for documents confirming the institutionalization of the New Town quarters has not yielded a clear result. Power centers competing with the town hall did not establish themselves in the quarters in the longer term. Although we can document the generation of approval for protests in churches, parish houses or guild houses, it seems that the rebels did not succeed in disrupting the legitimizing potential of the town hall. Maybe they were not even trying to. Paradoxically, the meetings of opponents of unification took place at the town hall, and representatives of the opposition even managed to register their objections in the town books.⁵⁵

The neighborhood and the main media of the pulpits of the two centrally located churches were apparently the key link between the residents of the protesting quarters. The limited ability to generate common opinions was replaced by intensive involvement of the leadership of some guilds. In particular, the influential butchers' guild was able to act unitedly against unification, although its members were not limited only to the Štěpánská quarter. Obtaining the support of the monarch can be considered the peak of the acts against the town council. Vladislaus II Jagiellonian, who at this stage of his reign spent most of his time in Hungary, strictly forbade further efforts to unify the towns of Prague.⁵⁶

In the end, it was a temporary victory. The New Town councilors used their bureaucratic and political superiority and gradually eliminated the opposition. Persecutions hit the butchers' guild's leaders. Their loudest leader was even executed. The abbot of the Slavonic monastery, who preached against unification, had to leave the town. Already in 1508, the burgomaster of the New Town of Prague increased the number of so-called municipal elders by 24 people. By this step, the councilor gradually gained the numerical superiority of his followers in the body representing the municipality. Coercive actions, such as the assembly of the urban poor (1519), organized by opponents of unification, were

⁵⁵ Cf. *Kniha pamětní 1411–1544* (as in footnote 38), fol. 343v–347v. In general: PATRICK LANTSCHNER: *Conflict in Medieval Cities: Italy and the Southern Low Countries 1370–1440*, Oxford 2015, pp. 21–86, and EBERHARD ISENMANN: *The Notion of the Common Good, the Concept of Politics, and Practical Policies in Late Medieval and Early Modern German Cities*, in: ÉLODIE LECUPPRE-DESJARDIN, ANNE-LAURE VAN BRUAENE (eds.): *De bono communi: The Discourse and Practice of the Common Good in the European City (13th–16th c.) / Discours et pratique du bien commun dans les villes d'Europe (XIIIe au XVIe siècle)*, Turnhout 2010, pp. 107–148.

⁵⁶ However, the division of quarters could also be used by the town council. The tax collection lists also served as a register of the townspeople if the council wanted to force a favorable opinion through its policy. In 1513, each of the townspeople had to answer the question of whether they agreed with the town's position on the nobility. If a person was to avoid the assembly of the community, he was summoned to the town hall to express his position, see KAŠPAR/PORÁK, p. 351. Josef Macek interprets this passage differently, assuming that meetings condemning "traitors" from among the townspeople were held in individual quarters. For more, see JOSEF MACEK: *Jagellonský věk v českých zemích 1471–1526 (3): Města [The Jagellonian Age in the Czech Lands in 1471–1526 (3): Towns]*, Praha 1998, p. 54.

not a political tool that could be used continuously. The creation of a similar broad social coalition required the use of a high degree of communication energy, and so the resistance of some burghers gradually weakened.⁵⁷

By recalling the rather spontaneous resistance against the unification of the Old and New Towns of Prague, we once again come to the causes of the issuance of three consecutive orders for quarter captains. With the promulgation of the captain's rules, New Town's town council ensured more consistent bureaucratic control over what was happening in the quarters. Articles introducing the obligation to supervise a diverse group of renters and other residents of houses exceeded the existing possibilities of the checks carried out, for example, through tax registers. By announcing the statute, the councilors at the same time leveled the emancipation of the quarter communities. In the second phase of the suppression of the opposition, the political representation of the quarters was replaced by a pyramid-built organization headed by a quarter captain.⁵⁸

In the captain's order from 1523, any mention of the special relationship between the captain and the town community as a political institution is lacking. In the captain's oath, which is also preserved in the New Town sources, the loyalty of the relevant official is tied to the burgomaster, the council and all of the community. However, the oath primarily addresses the link between the captain and the council. The captain was obliged to respond to the dispatches, to keep the contents of the proceedings where he was present secret, and to execute his office conscientiously. In the town book, of which, unfortunately, only partial modern copies have been preserved, the names of the new captains were written after those of the municipal elders and older guilds. The lieutenants subordinate to the captains followed. By analogy, it can be assumed that the appointment of captains was subject to the decision of the town council.⁵⁹

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, there was a different situation in Prague's towns than the one we encounter with Jütte, who considers the captains to be possible intermediaries between the council and the town community, or quarters. Future research will have to verify the presented thesis on the transformation of the captain's office at the beginning of the sixteenth century in the intention of the policy of Prague's councilors. The captains were a tool of the city council to strengthen its own power in the neighbourhoods.⁶⁰ In the dispute over the unification of Prague's towns at the threshold of the sixteenth century, the current New Town council wanted to obtain approval for its proposal to convene neighbors on the principle of their quarter affiliation as an

⁵⁷ KAŠPAR/PORÁK, pp. 316–318.

⁵⁸ MACEK, pp. 54–55, and KAŠPAR/PORÁK, pp. 316–321.

⁵⁹ Přísaha hejtmanuom čtvrtním [...], in: AHMP, Sběrka rukopisů, Kniha pamětní, inv. no. 332, modern transcription.

⁶⁰ As late as in 1519, crowds of people from resisting quarters gathered in front of the New Town Hall and (the supposed town poor) threatened to attack the town hall. The issue of the Captain's Order in 1523 in this direction confirms the considerations about the continuity of this administrative step. Cf. KAŠPAR/PORÁK, pp. 423–424.

alternative when the convocation by guild had failed.⁶¹ In the end, the transformation of the quarter organization fell into the hands of the council as a very powerful disciplinary tool which allowed the councilors to penetrate far beyond the boundaries of the private sphere.⁶²

Conclusion

Study of Czech sources proves that the town councils in Bohemian royal towns used the division of the city area into quarters, although this step could have had purely administrative, security, or political-power reasons. The question posed at the beginning of this work was whether quarter communities with their own identity were formed within the Bohemian royal towns and whether these quarter communities could enter a dialogue with the central town administration. Based on the research so far, I can present for further discussion the thesis that the division into quarters was used by many of the investigated towns, but it was usually a measure to facilitate the collection and recording of the town tax. From the entries in the town registers of Prague and Kutná Hora, as well as in those of other larger towns, it is evident that the quarter principle was used when filling (usually lower) municipal offices. Their most common task was protection against fires, gradually providing night patrols, and organizing the town militia in case of military danger. In addition to this component of the municipal apparatus, for example, auditors of the management of municipal finances were selected by quarter. We do not have enough records for the fifteenth century yet, but in the sixteenth century the regulations or names of offices dealing with fire protection appear in large numbers. The division into management by sergeants and corporals (according to the number of houses), headed by a captain, represented a rather complex administrative structure. However, it is likely that the basic principle could be much older, it just does not appear in the preserved types of sources. Evidence of the Prague municipal militia system operating on the basis of quarters from the early 1370s is an obvious clue.

It was participation in the town militia that was able to dynamize the strengthening of the quarter identity in the cities intensively involved in the Hussite wars in the Bohemian Crown lands in the 1430s and 1440s. Joint campaigns, the captain's office always being associated with a specific quarter, a military banner, and sometimes (apparently) even a fixed section of the walls for defense can all be classified as important identity-forming elements. At the same time, it is clear that a more significant transformation took place in the Hussite towns, apparently also because the organization by quarter helped to

⁶¹ Křižovnický rukopis, pp. 322–323.

⁶² In the middle of the sixteenth century, the quarter captains and their apparatus were even called upon to check the observance of posts in burgher households. Cf. *Primus Liber vetustissimus Privilegiorum, Statutorum et Decretorum Veteris Urbis Pragensis*, in: AHMP, Sbíрка rukopisů, no. 993/1, fol. 297v–298r.

overcome the weakening of the town administration after the partial change of the urban population based on their religion. Residues of this development can be found in the royal towns of the Hussite period in the arrangement of the quarter captains among the representatives of the community alongside the community elders and guild masters. However, we have no evidence of the creation of parallel bodies or meeting places at the expense of the town council even in these towns. Quarter communities remained undeveloped, unlike the cities in the western part of the empire. However, it would be a mistake to end consideration of the quarter administrative organization with this statement.

In the preserved Prague statutes of the quarter captains from the first third of the sixteenth century, the second of the foregone tendencies of their work is clearly reflected, namely the effort to use the captains in the town's disciplinary apparatus. The captains, even with their subordinate officials tied to a specific quarter, fulfil the idea of maintaining the *gute policey* and becoming a parallel force to the town magistrate. In this role, development in Bohemian towns, characterized by the strengthening of social control methods, approached some imperial cities. The town quarter organization became an instrument of intensified political communication and control covering the urban space, replacing an earlier and less effective model of negotiations between the town council and guilds.

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