

CITIES UNDER SIEGE, CONQUERED AND OCCUPIED

THE CONTEXTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE UNSUCCESSFUL
DEFENCE OF CITIES FROM THE MIDDLE AGES UP THE 20TH CENTURY

The 39th international conference on Urban History held by the Prague City Archives, Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Faculty of Humanities of Charles University, Institute of History of Faculty of Arts of J. E. Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem and Institute of History and Archival Studies of Pedagogical University of Cracow

6–7 October 2020, Prague



The four-hundredth anniversary of the plundering of Prague by the Catholic army, which, following the Battle of White Mountain, entered the city without a fight, despite Prague's clear ability to defend itself, raises a more general question about the contexts and consequences of the unsuccessful defence of cities from the period between the Middle Ages up to the 20th century.



There were a great number of towns that were conquered and subsequently destroyed to their foundations or at least thoroughly plundered. We can start with Troy, plundered by Agamemnon's army, and continue through Carthage, levelled to the ground, all the way to Rome, conquered in 476 by Flavius Odoacer of the Ostrogoths and, more than a millennium later (1527), looted by mercenaries of Emperor Charles V. The conquest of Constantinople by Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II in 1453 achieved European-wide popularity. An exemplary conquest and slaughter in central Europe was Imperial General Tilly's Sack of Magdeburg in 1631, while in eastern Europe there was the Polish control of Moscow in 1610 or Napoleon's occupation of the same city – this time scorched – in 1812. The twentieth century, the two World Wars in particular, offers numerous examples of conquests, including those of major towns. Noteworthy in the Second World War are the occupations of Warsaw by the Germans and Berlin by the Red Army.



Cases of conquest are also found in the history of Prague, beginning in 1310 by John of Bohemia to George of Poděbrady, the subjugation of the Prague agglomeration by Ferdinand I in 1547, the aforementioned Battle of White Mountain (1620), the occupation of Prague by the Saxons in 1631/1632, up to the occupation by Bavarian-French-Saxon and Prussian forces in the 18th century and again by the Prussians in 1866. And finally, we should not forget the entry of the Nazi German army in 1939 and the invasion of Soviet forces in 1968.



The large number of conquests of major cities or even metropolitan areas suggests that European urban society had to develop certain behavioural patterns and formal procedures for handling these occasions. Our primary interest at the conference will not be the stories behind the conquering and plundering of cities or an analysis of the military strategies for taking large and fortified urban settlements. Instead, we shall focus on the phenomenon of "being conquered", i. e., on how the cities dealt with the resulting situation.

But why were the cities seized? Great plunder played a role from the very beginning. Moreover, large cities and agglomerations formed or were established at strategically important sites, so that their occupation meant the added bonus

of controlling the vast surrounding area. The subjugation of a capital city often meant the end of the entire war and hence additional financial and political gains. To what extent were the conquerors and the conquered aware of this aspect?

Was it a period custom to defend oneself down to the “final keg of gunpowder”, or were there respected borders marking the point of surrender in order to spare the population the fury of the conquerors? What were the customs of victors in relation to the vanquished cities? Were there certain rules for surrender, for behaviour towards the victors and rules for treating the defeated population? An equally important subject is the “duties” of the conquerors: How was the occupied territory managed? Was administration *ad hoc*, or were the occupiers somehow prepared for this important function? And how did the defeated population act? Did they create or reconstruct the administrative and organisational structures of the city or wait with this until the end of the occupation? To what extent was it possible to expect that existing city administration would cooperate with the occupiers once the city was taken?

What exactly did the change in the situation mean for the poor, for the wealthy elite, for specific groups of the population (e. g., Jews, who were the target of pogroms, both as occupiers and the actual population)? Was the conquest of cities an engine for their subsequent modernisation? Last but not least, we shall also focus on the issue of how or, especially in the case of conquered cities, what was referred to in chronicles, in the period press and in the reports of diplomats and special agents? Was there an established pattern of reports on occupied cities? These are the subjects that interest us in connection with the anniversary of the Battle of White Mountain.

Please send offers for papers along with an abstract by 15 April 2020 to the contact address provided below. The organisers reserve the right to make selections among the submitted papers. Presented papers shall be printed in a monothematic volume as part of the *Documenta Pragensia* series. Foreign participants will be provided accommodations at the expense of the organisers. No conference fees are collected. The conference languages are Czech and German (or English). Simultaneous interpretation from German is provided.

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