

Brody: A Galician Border City in the Long Nineteenth Century

Börries Kuzmany, 2017

Publisher: Brill

Pages: 443

Language: Translated from German into English

Megan Palmer, History, University of Nottingham

The city of Brody (Ukr: Броди), in what is now western Ukraine, is rarely mentioned outside specialist historical circles – in most other respects it has been entirely forgotten. However, in 1830, Brody was one of the twenty-five most important cities in the Habsburg Empire. Börries Kuzmany's expansive and deeply researched monograph on the Galician city of Brody in the nineteenth century, originally published in German in 2011, restores Brody's place in history and provides a detailed account of the city's rise and decline.

The book is organized into three parts. Part one deals with the economic rise and fall of Brody throughout its time as a Habsburg city. Here, Kuzmany attributes the city's prosperity to its acquisition and loss of free-trade privileges, particularly as the First Partition of Poland in 1772 made Brody a Habsburg border town. Part two discusses the city's various social, ethnic, and religious groups, including the city's noble owners, the bourgeoisie, the lower classes, and various national and religious groups, such as Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians/Ruthenians. Kuzmany explores the residents' modes of self-identification and the way they were identified by others, demonstrating how frequently these categories overlapped and were strategic and changeable. Part three explores perceptions of Brody in historical and reflective writings as 'mental maps' and lieux de memoire, including those of its most famous literary sons, Joseph Roth and Sholem Aleichem.

For centuries, Brody was an important, multicultural east-west trading city in which itinerant and resident merchants traded across the border with Russia and at major European markets. Unusually for a Habsburg city, it was also majority Jewish. Brody acquired the rare privilege of free trade status within the Habsburg Empire in 1779, which made it, in effect, a land port that

could out-compete other nearby border towns. Brody reached its economic zenith during the Napoleonic wars by provisioning the Duchy of Warsaw's army. The city then entered a prolonged period of relative decline due to the loss of its trade privileges, a catastrophic fire in 1859, declining tax revenues, emigration, slow industrialization, and under-prioritized railway development. While Brody was a major economic player in 1830, by the First World War, it was not even ranked among the Habsburg large cities.

Throughout the book, the concept of centre-periphery is both rendered crucial and problematic. The First Partition of Poland placed Brody on the border between Habsburg Galicia and the Russian Empire; therefore, Brody has often been disregarded as peripheral in geographical, political, and cultural terms. However, Vienna certainly understood its economic importance. For the communities that had long been established in the region, Brody was far from peripheral, but the epicentre of trade, schooling, culture, and entertainment. For instance, its significance as a centre of Jewish spiritual development meant that long after Brody became located on the imperial periphery, 'the mental maps of eastern European Jewry [...] still had Brody marked at the centre, not the periphery' (p. 99).

Kuzmany deftly intertwines broader events in Habsburg history with local community and individuals' narratives to demonstrate how imperial rule was experienced, negotiated, and executed on the ground. He details the political and administrative organisation of Brody, which underwent considerable changes, as well as Brody's role as a centre for Eastern European Jewry, particularly in relation to the Haskalah movement. Again, he weaves the emergence of this branch of Jewish intellectual development with individuals who had connections with Brody, and demonstrates the city's retention and projection of cultural prominence despite its dwindling economic status. The strong relationship between Brody's Christians and Jews is another recurrent theme, along with the broadly harmonious but ever-fluctuating linguistic and religious heterogeneity within the city.

Kuzmany's close readings of a wide range of local sources and correspondence with Habsburg authorities present a complex and detailed picture of Galician development. Therefore, the loss of Kuzmany's methodology and source discussion in the English-language edition is regrettable. The English-language edition would have been enhanced by some micro 'bottom-up' snapshots of Brody's day-to-day life to accompany the expansive temporal survey of its population and activities within the larger narrative. The book's broad timescale and source constraints rather limit this possibility.

These minor quibbles should not detract from Kuzmany's considerable achievement. Much of the existing literature on Habsburg urban history clusters around iconic capitals – Vienna, Prague, Budapest. In Brody, Kuzmany reveals entirely different forces acting upon urban development and dynamics in the late Habsburg Empire. He demonstrates Brody's high-level functioning and complex economic, social, and local governance systems both prior to and throughout Habsburg rule, as well as its sophisticated relationship with imperial authority. His focus on local sources and events, rather than Vienna-orientated ones, reveals the importance of local agents and conditions in negotiating and asserting priorities and identities. This offers important insights into Habsburg identities, studies of imperial centre-periphery dynamics, and the agency of local actors in urban development.