

Burgher houses in Prague's Old Town in the light of the inspection protocol of the Theresian Cadastre

Abstract

The development of houses in the Old Town during the Baroque era is most often evaluated from the perspective of art history. This thesis looks at Old Town houses through the lens of comprehensive tax sources. The starting point is 1653, when work on the first cadastre in Bohemia – the Roll of Assessment, sometimes also called Tax Roll or Taxation Roll – started in the Prague towns. I endeavour to determine the trends in the housing property owned by Old Town burghers by comparing information from the Roll of Assessment and the inspection protocol of the Theresian Cadastre of 1725–1726.

The written result of the inspection of the Theresian cadastre is a remarkable source which records much important information regarding the history of houses in the Old Town. In this case, the comparison with the Roll of Assessment is limited by the information value of the older cadastre, which does not yield as much detailed information as the inspection protocol. Only indicators concerning the number, structure and tax burden of the houses could be analysed.

The tax sources do not prove significant changes in the number of houses in the Old Town in 1653–1726, but they indicate a different situation in their structure. An increase in the number of houses from which tax was paid, a decline in the number of aristocratic houses subject to municipal tax and a slight rise in the number of aristocratic houses recorded in the Land Tables can be regarded as the main trends visible in the development of houses in the Old Town. Within the individual Old Town quarters, I studied the changes in the average tax burden per house, i.e. I compared the number of houses and the total tax burden in the Roll of Assessment and in the inspection protocol of the Theresian cadastre.

Price is among the key information on Old Town houses. The size, location and condition of the house and its ability to serve craft and trade can be viewed as the main factors affecting the price of the property. This thesis focuses on specifying the location of expensive and inexpensive houses. The average house price was clearly the

highest in the Havel quarter (owing to the business opportunities in this area and the good construction condition of the houses), followed by the Týn quarter. The cheapest houses were concentrated in the Linhart and Nicolas quarters.

I followed the social stratification of burgher house owners through the lens of tax sources on the basis of immovable property and occupation (and related income where relevant). House ownership was interpreted in this thesis as a sign of social status, taking into account not only the price of the property, but also the overall number of houses held by individual owners. I attempted to define the common features that can be observed in the distribution of the individual occupational strata within the town. I arrived at the conclusion that social and occupational status also affected the town's topography.

Information about the exterior of the houses reveals the division into the sumptuous and peripheral quarters of the Old Town. From the perspective of the tax source of 1725–1726, Prague's Old Town appears as a town of advanced housing with a predominance of stone-walled and well-preserved houses. Houses in the Old Town were taller than those in the New Town.

The interiors of the houses were also evaluated. Burgher houses had humbler equipment compared to aristocratic houses subject to municipal tax, even those that were similarly priced. Burghers were much more constrained by the economic aspect and their economic activity placed different requirements on the spatial characteristics of the house. Above-standard rooms are mentioned in aristocratic houses subject to municipal tax. In the last chapter I discuss the issue of rental housing, focusing on the occupancy rates in the individual quarters and the amounts of rent collected.

This thesis aimed at a statistical analysis of key information from the inspection protocol of the Theresian cadastre for houses in Prague's Old Town. The information value of this source is amplified by the fact that it is the only comprehensive source of information on burgher houses in the first half of the 18th century, as market books on house sales were not preserved for the Old Town of Prague.