

## ***Brody. A Galician Border City in the Long Nineteenth Century***

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### Synopsis

#### *1 Introduction*

The introduction begins with the arrival of a train in this north-eastern most border city of the Habsburg Empire. For travelers from Vienna it was the end of the line, yet for immigrants from Russia it was the first step to a new life. The preface thus invites the reader to reconsider notions of center and periphery. This changing of perspectives is proposed as a leitmotiv for the many questions raised throughout the book. The introduction furthermore presents the methodology and terminology applied in this study within the context of current academic discourse on urban and economic history, on nationalities studies and the construction of memory.

#### **Part 1 The Economic Rise and Fall of the Town of Brody**

#### *2 Brody – A Success Story (1630-1815)*

The first of two comprehensive chapters on economic history deals with the reasons why Brody developed into a major trading city. I sketch the support Brody received during the seventeenth and eighteenth century from its noble landlords, not least by encouraging Jews to settle in town. Accordingly, an increasing number of Jewish wholesale merchants was able to establish close ties with important fairs in the German lands on the one hand, and with trading centers in Eastern Europe like Berdychiv on the other.

The chapter's emphasis is on the first fifty years of Habsburg rule in the city following the First Partition of Poland in 1772. I analyze the internal discussions that led Empress Maria Theresia to grant Brody a free trade privilege. This privilege allowed Brody to become perhaps the most important commercial hub in East Central Europe for legal and illegal goods passing between the continent's East and West. The city's significance can best be studied during the Napoleonic era, when Austria relied on merchandise imported via Brody and Odessa – a city of utmost commercial and cultural importance for Brody's Jewish merchants. Even French consuls frequently reported on the city. They considered smuggling activities in and around Brody both necessary and a nuisance, because while banned British goods passed through easily, the porous border at the same time allowed French silk to find its way into the restricted Russian market as well.

### *3 Stagnation and Crisis (1815-1914)*

This chapter deals with Brody's economic stagnation in the decades after the Congress of Vienna and the steep decline the city experienced in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I identify several factors for this downfall: worsening Austro-Russian relations hindering commercial exchange between the two empires, Brody's late connection to the European railroad network, the globalizing European trading system making transit cities generally less important, the reluctance of Brody's elite to adapt to a modernizing economy, the lack of capital for industrial entrepreneurship, the competition with other Galician cities, and last but not least, a devastating fire that forced the city council to take up debts it could not actually afford. As a result, beginning in the 1860s Brody gradually lost its position as the province's second largest city. With a population stagnating at approximately 20,000 inhabitants, it was eventually overtaken by a dozen other Galician towns.

## **Part 2 An Extraordinary Galician City**

### *4 Austria's Most Jewish City*

This chapter on Brody's Jewish community is the first of four chapters dealing with the aspects that made Brody special with regard to other towns in Galicia. With Jews accounting for between two thirds and three quarters of its inhabitants, Brody was Austria's most Jewish city. I analyze both the integration of Brody's Jews into the Habsburg legal and political system as well as their integration at the local level. The latter testifies to Brody's special position, because ever since the year 1799 Jews and Christians had an equal share in the city's political and administrative self-governing institutions – a phenomenon unknown in any other Habsburg town before the introduction of Austria's liberal constitution of 1867.

Brody also played a key role for East European Jewry in general. The city's institutions of religious learning and justice enjoyed a high reputation all over and even beyond the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Brody was not only a center for rabbinic scholarship but had developed into one of only three hot spots of the Jewish Enlightenment, the *Haskalah*, in Galicia. Close ties with other Jewish communities in Eastern Europe allowed Brody to function as a springboard for the dissemination of the *Haskalah* in the Russian Empire.

### *5 Brody's Christian Minorities*

Chapter six sheds light on Brody's gentile society. It gives an insight into the city-owning noble Potocki and Młodecki families, the few but wealthy non-Jewish merchants and government officials. Besides looking at these socio-economic groups, I also sketch the development of the Polish and Ruthenian/Ukrainian national movements in the city. Nationalists set up youth organizations, sports associations, educational institutions, corporatist economic societies and mutual savings banks. In retrospect however, Brody did not play a decisive role in the Galician Polish-Ukrainian conflict; apparently, the city was too Jewish, too German-speaking and too much a stronghold of the old Russophile Ruthenian movement, which was difficult to reconcile with the fervent Ukrainian national narrative of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 6 *Religion—Language—Nation. The School: A Multicultural Lebenswelt*

This chapter emphasizes Brody's position as a regional educational center and as a place of ethno-confessional entanglement. Unlike many other Galician cities, Brody already had a secondary school by the late 1780s. In addition, a private Israelite Secondary School was opened in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was later taken over by the state and gradually upgraded into a fully-fledged high school. I also dedicate a sub-chapter to Brody's Jewish and girls' schools.

Even though language issues and national conflicts did arise in Brody's schools, I show that different schools opted for different solutions to respond to these challenges. Regardless of the solution adopted, they continued to be a place of ethno-confessional meeting and coexistence. Looking at students' statistics, we realize that many students had a far more pragmatic attitude towards nationality than some nationalist hotheads would like to make us to think.

## 7 *The Border City*

This chapter turns toward Brody's geographical position right next to the Austro-Russian border – a key issue not only for the city's economic but also for its social history. Hundreds of Polish insurgents and civilians sought refuge in Brody in 1863. Even more refugees arrived in 1881 and 1882 following the pogroms in the Tsarist Empire. In these two years, Brody became the center of an international relief action headed by the Paris Alliance Israélite Universelle.

Another interesting aspect of Brody's status as a border city was communication across the border. Not only did travelers legally cross the lines, but also deserters, smugglers and spies. The latter two groups were especially active during the Napoleonic Wars. By the help of a smugglers' statistics, I show that smuggling was far from a purely Jewish business but rather a transnational endeavor.

### **Part 3 Perceptions of the Brody in History**

## 8 *Placing Brody?*

The last two chapters of the book touch on the ways Brody was and is perceived and remembered. Austrian, German, French, Russian and American travelers passing through the city related very diverging impressions. Certainly, those visiting during earlier decades had more to tell about Brody's thriving commerce. More fascinating, however, is the discrepancy between Westerners perceiving Brody as on the fringe of European civilization and travelers from the continent's East, who identified the city as a gateway to a presumably better world.

I then turn to the images of Brody painted by well-known authors. While Joseph Roth depicts Brody as the incarnation of hopeless but wise periphery, Sholem Aleichem's portrait of the city is more ambivalent. The latter stresses the importance of Brody as a Jewish place, however, not reducing it to a mere shtetl. Both, travel accounts and literature, have created long lasting imageries that allow us to situate Brody on the mental maps of Eastern Europe.

### *9 Places of Memory in and of Brody*

The book's last chapter deals with the ways memory of the historical Brody has been maintained up until today. For Brody we have the lucky but rare case that the city's former Jewish, Polish and Ukrainian communities have published memory books. Not astonishingly, the respective stories differ strongly and mostly follow a national and sometimes nationalist narrative. Adding an Austrian and Soviet memory perspective, this book finishes with a promenade through today's Brody with historical and contemporary images of the city.

### *10 Conclusions: Brody—A Story of Failed Success?*

The concluding chapter first reprises the book's main sections, and then discusses the question whether Brody really was an ever declining periphery. I suggest that such a perception would strongly vary according to the narrative perspective retained – the Viennese or the Galician one; furthermore, it would depend on the topics the reader is most interested in – economic and demographic decline versus Jewish integration and successful anchorage on Eastern European mental maps.

The book has an appendix with selected archival documents and the statistical data for the graphs used in the text. It contains a list of all figures, tables and maps used, as well as a bibliography. It includes a directory of place names and persons and a thematic index.