

Introduction

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The differences in living standards of modern societies are one of the main subjects of study for contemporary economists and sociologists. It is commonly accepted that economic inequalities are a natural phenomenon that propels development and are socially acceptable within certain limits. However, vast inequalities are destructive, unjust, and generate conflicts. The main aim of the contemporary study on living standard inequalities is determining their causes, scope, and social and economic effects. The study of social inequalities within pre-industrial communities is similar in nature but requires different methods and relies on a separate source base.¹

Focusing on the townspeople as the subject of our research stems from the conviction of their important role in the formation of the middle class within the societies of the broadly defined West. The decisive civilisational significance of this group in today's world justifies the need to research its origins. The basis for its formation in the cities of the late Middle Ages and the Modern Period was the relative personal and economic freedom realised under conditions of municipal self-government, communal consciousness, and, at the same time, the feeling of distinctiveness of one's social stratum, as well as the legally regulated possibility of inheriting property—an urban plot of land with a house and a workshop, along with the necessary financial background. Under these conditions, a burghers' work ethos, an acceptance of social differentiation, and an awareness of shared responsibility for the fate of the community developed.

The main objective of the authors of the study presented here is to take advantage of the opportunities offered by archaeology for the study of quality of life and lifestyle. At the same time, we realise that gaining the most comprehensive possible knowledge of this phenomenon in Central European cities of the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period will only be achieved in interdisciplinary cooperation, specific to the faculty known as historical archaeology (Frommer 2007; Majewski, Gaimster 2009; Mehler ed. 2013; Orser 2017).

In our research, we aimed to approximate knowledge of the extent to which quality of life and consumption patterns differ among urban residents by means of an analysis

of their immediate environment and material culture. In this regard, it is a research effort aimed at reconstructing lifestyles and the directions of change. We know that European urban communities of the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period achieved a specific, relatively good standard of living. This was higher than that observed in the rural population but did not reach the level at which the secular and religious elites lived. An increasingly prominent feature of the burghers' communities was the internal stratification in terms of occupation, property ownership, and social status, resulting in a diversity of lifestyles. Especially in the large, thriving cities, a division into at least three social strata with nearly impassable boundaries developed (Irsigler 1983, 84; Ennen 1987; 1988, 638). The first of these was the patriciate, dominant in the city government, composed of financiers and merchants engaged in long-distance trade. The level of wealth of the representatives of this group allowed for a lifestyle that can be described in the research assumption as at least partly luxurious.

The second, much more numerous, group of townspeople consisted of artisans who owned a house and a plot of land. They can generally be described as the urban 'middle class' of the time. This group was also internally highly differentiated. Its more impoverished part consisted of tenants of buildings or rooms, who are mentioned in the written sources (Goliński 1997, 289–352). We tentatively assume that the standard of living of craftsmen determined the average standard for a given town.

The third group consisted of people earning their living as hired labourers, not owning a plot of land in the town, not renting premises for their use, and not paying taxes. It included individuals living alongside their families and workshops, serving as domestic servants or apprentices, casual and seasonal workers, and the poor depending on alms. Their numbers in the town are difficult to establish, as these people usually remained outside the scope of written sources. A significant proportion were newly arrived migrants. They were essential to the functioning and development of the town, and their numbers were probably variable depending on the nature of the town's economy, economic efficiency, and even the season (Clark 2009, 161–163). We assume that representatives of this group, who may have made up as much as half of the population, were relatively the poorest, at risk of social marginalisation, and their standard of living was generally lower than that of the other two groups (Braudel 1979;

¹ Elsewhere, we have attempted to assess the potential of archaeology for researching inequality in the standard of living in pre-industrial cities (cf. Piekalski *et al.* 2022).

Goliński 1997; Berry 2022).² This traditional division of the urban community, even if distorted by an overly scientific tendency to compartmentalise reality and therefore simplified, provides at least a preliminary vision of the potential differentiation of consumption levels. The research questions we pose are concerned with verifying the correctness of this general scheme on the specific examples of two large cities in the inner zone of Central and Eastern Europe. The main object of research for us is Wrocław, the historical capital of Silesia, and the most important comparative background is Prague. Both cities were culturally, as well as politically, connected in the discussed period.

Thus, in our efforts we aimed to trace the phenomena available to strictly archaeological research and the analysis of iconography, taking into account written sources, with the cooperation of representatives of neighbouring disciplines of humanities and science. We have attempted to approximate the content of the notion of luxury and average standard in the specific subjective conditions of late medieval and modern cities in Central and Eastern Europe. Our objective was to identify phenomena and objects distinctive enough in urban culture to be described as luxurious, and, at the same time, to point out the importance of ostentatious consumption in social life.³ The question of the extent of luxury consumption in urban society and the chronological changes occurring were important. On the other hand, we tried to determine which objects of material culture we could consider as standard, not deviating from the average level of urban life. Determining the boundary and extent of poverty in the context of late medieval and early modern cities proved to be a particularly challenging aspect of our research (cf. Alfani 2017; Berry 2022, and further literature therein). The way in which aesthetic needs, the role of symbolism, and the representation of one's individuality and position in the urban community were also the subject of our inquiries (Berg 2011). All of these questions fall within the general issue of lifestyle, its determinants, variations, and transformations over time.

Issues related to the natural conditions of the area occupied by the town and its immediate surroundings are important. We have attempted to assess their significance for the standard of living in the town, and, at the same time, the actions of the burghers impacting the natural environment—both those that were destructive and those aimed at improving people's comfort. Similarly, we addressed the issue of security, that is, the defences of the city as a whole and the conventions of the townsfolk's armament, or lack thereof. We recognised that these factors also affect the level and lifestyle of the town.

Why have we focused on the period from the 15th to the 18th century? It does not correspond to the traditionally distinguished periods or epochs of European history. The Middle Ages itself can hardly be considered a generalisable phenomenon. In fact, it is a roughly 1,000-year period saturated with a variety of phenomena and cultural currents, specific to the whole of Europe but regionally very diverse (Wickham 2016, 15–22). The rhythm of development in the former Roman provinces differed from that in the central-eastern and northern zones of the continent, which were essentially devoid of the heritage of antiquity. Significant changes and a definitive departure from the prehistoric cultural model did not occur there until the Middle Ages, no earlier than the 9th to 10th centuries. It was then that the first structures of Central and Eastern European states developed, and in the late 12th century, migration from the then overpopulated West began, resulting over time in a transformation of settlement and economics, including the emergence of cities with legally organised burghers. The lack of an ancient past in these areas also calls into question the caesura between the Middle Ages and early modernity, which in the South and West is primarily defined by the intellectual movement of the Renaissance. Discussions in the literature point out that, from a continent-wide perspective, the turn of the Early Modern Period was a drawn-out process rather than a clear caesura (Le Goff 2015, 31–58).

In the realities of Central and Eastern Europe, early modernity was not a reference to the intellectual output and art of antiquity. It was not so much the flourish of Renaissance style that set the rhythm of change but the Reformation and the associated transformation of the understanding of reality. The first works of Renaissance architecture and art were created by artists imported from the South rather than local builders and craftsmen. Moreover, in studies of Wrocław and Silesia, the elements of cultural continuity between the 15th and 16th centuries are so clear that it is difficult to trace a clear boundary between the Middle Ages and modernity (Piekalski, Wachowski 2009b).

The subject of our research is therefore urban civilisation, primarily modern, but firmly rooted in the medieval past. The 15th century was a time when the cities of Wrocław and Prague had already been legally established for two centuries, their spatial development had stabilised, and the communities living there had developed their own distinct identities. Both cities were important parts of the urban and economic network and played significant political roles (Fig. 1.1). The upper chronological limit of our study is also somewhat conventional. We conclude it before the onset of intensive industrialisation and the economic, demographic, and social changes associated with it. It should be noted that limiting the scope of the study to the 15th–18th centuries does not imply setting rigid time caesuras, and we are open to exploring periods that extend a few decades in either direction.

² Clark (2009, 65) suggests that in some cities of medieval Europe, the number of lower-class townspeople could have constituted up to 70% of the total population. However, this opinion is not supported by the sources.

³ This phenomenon is analysed mainly in the context of modern societies. The rich literature includes Veblen (1899), Hebdige (1988), and Lury (1966).



Figure 1.1. Prague and Wrocław within the urban network of Central and Eastern Europe, with major communication routes marked in orange. Compiled by N. Lenkow.

As noted above, our project aims to reconstruct the lifestyle and social stratification of city dwellers in the late Middle Ages and Modern Period. The source base primarily consists of archaeological material, as well as the historical buildings of Prague and Wrocław, which are heavily supplemented and verified by iconographic and written records. An essential part, fundamental to our analyses and interpretations, is the data from archaeological excavations in both cities. In the case of Wrocław, this is mainly the material obtained during excavations in various parts of the Old Town (Pl. Stare Miasto). This includes artefacts from a rather large excavation in the prosperous merchant zone at Kielbaśnicza and Św. Mikołaja Streets. From the zone occupied by craftsmen and peddlers, we have material retrieved in 2016–2017 at Jodłowa Street, and in the development quarter between Nowy Targ Square (lit. *New Market Square*, Ger. *Neumarkt*, present-day *Plac Nowy Targ*) and Wita Stwosza, Św. Katarzyny, and Św. Wita Streets (Fig. 1.2). Over a total area of more than 4,000 square metres, with layer depths of around 4 metres, a rich and internally diverse set of archaeological evidence was gathered. These sources provide valuable opportunities for the study of the transformation of townhouses from wooden structures, through constructions combining wood and brick, to high-quality brick buildings. Accompanying these structures are water and sanitary facilities, together with an extensive and varied assemblage of finds from organic materials, metals, ceramics, and stone. Their cognitive potential turned out to be in line with the possibilities we

expected for studying the diversity of material culture in the adjacent plots. In the case of Prague, we aimed to include in the analysis finds from different parts of the agglomeration, including the Old Town (Cz. *Staré Město*), the left-bank Lesser Town (Cz. *Malá Strana*), and the New Town (Cz. *Nové Město*). The majority of material was obtained from the excavations at two large sites in the New Town. These were groups of plots in the corner of Národní třída and Mikulandská Streets, and in the quarter delineated by Spálená, Purkyňova, Vladislavova, and Charvátova Streets. For the Old Town of Prague, materials were retrieved from selected buildings on U Radnice, Liliová, and Dlouhá Streets, and for the Lesser Town, from plots on Karmelitská and Míšeňská Streets (Fig. 1.3).

As previously mentioned, our analysis seeks to approximate understanding of the variation in consumption patterns and levels in urban communities. However, we remain cognisant of the limitations of the archaeological method in this regard. It is not possible to assign the discovered objects of material culture to individual persons. The assemblages of finds analysed, which are derived from excavations in historic parts of cities, usually represent deposits created by groups inhabiting a shared urban plot and its associated infrastructure. We do not distinguish between the house owner and the servant within this group, and only occasionally is it possible to differentiate between man and woman, or between children and adults. Consequently, the results presented reflect an averaging of

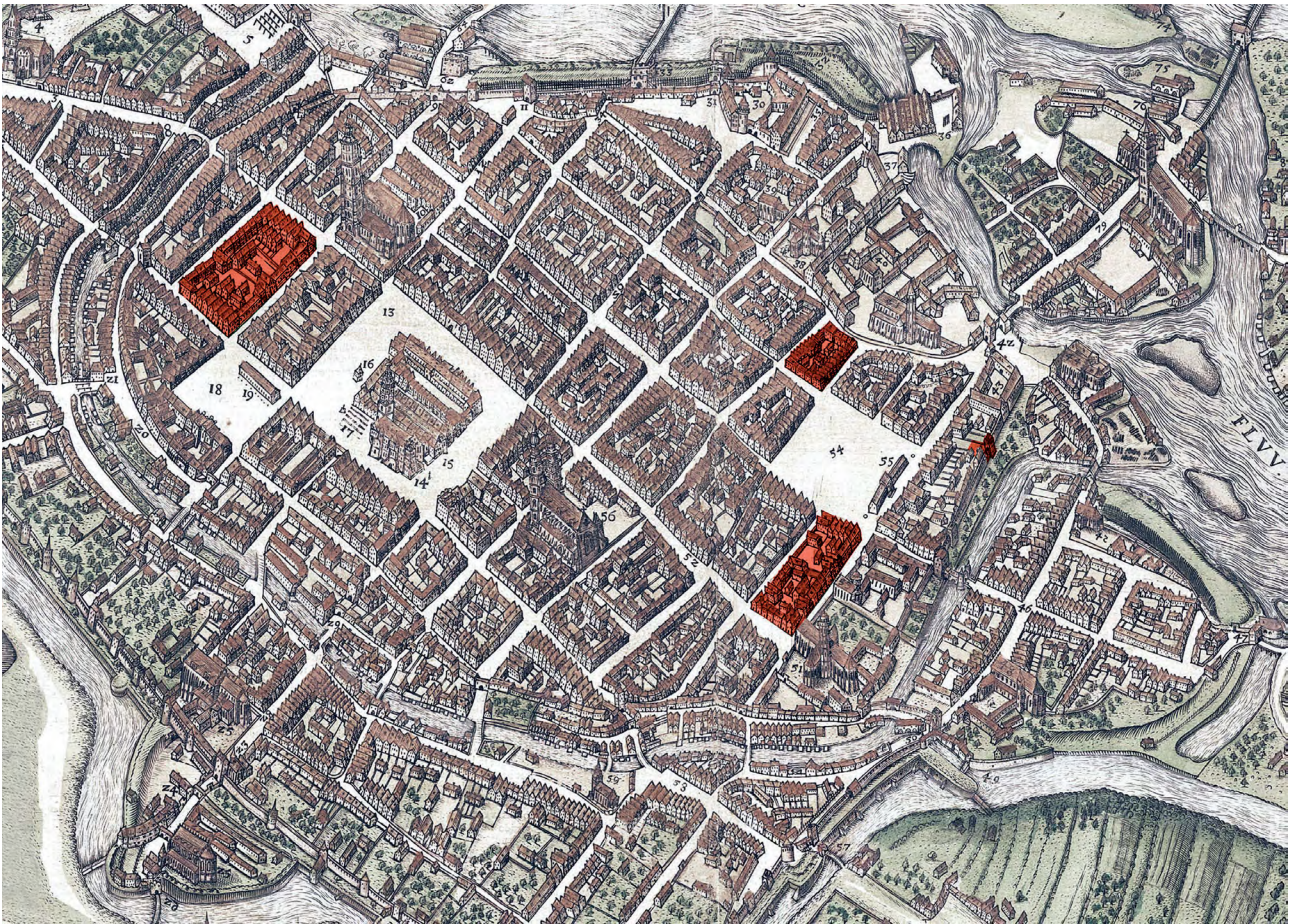


Figure 1.2. Fragment of Wrocław—Old Town (Pl. *Stare Miasto*) on the *Gross-Vroom Plan*, with the main archaeologically investigated areas in this book marked. Source: Czaja ed. 2017, supplemented by P. Duma. Compiled by P. Rajski.

activities undertaken by multiple individuals of varying social positions within the household and broader urban community.

The method employed is reflected in the interdisciplinary composition of the research team. It comprises archaeologists specialising in medieval and modern research in Prague and Wrocław, urban historians, an art historian, an architectural historian, a chemist specialising in archaeometry, zoologists, and a botanist. These researchers vary in seniority, ranging from doctoral students to highly experienced academics. This diversity is considered an asset, fostering discussion and peer review of results and views. The authors of individual chapters have provided their own perspectives on various issues. The editors of this volume, acknowledging that diversity of opinion is both natural and desirable in the humanities, have deliberately avoided homogenising these views. In principle, the perspectives presented do not contradict those of the editors of the volume but rather complement and enrich them. Certain opinions are reiterated in successive chapters and have been preserved with respect for the fellow co-authors.

The existing body of literature on the cities and townfolk of Europe in the period under study is vast and highly

diverse (Johanek, Post 2004; Duchhardt, Reininghaus 2005; Clark 2009, with references). Most of the major works in this field have been produced by historians *sensu stricto* and rely predominantly on written sources. Of particular relevance to the research we have undertaken are the contributions of historians devoted to the problems of the socio-topography of Central and Eastern European cities (Wiesiołowski 1982; Goliński 1997, 2011b, 2015; Musilek 2012b, 2015b, 2016). Some of our inquiries, methodologically referring to analyses of consumption patterns, build on a long-standing research tradition, as reflected in the literature produced by economists and cultural anthropologists (Veblen 1899; Douglas, Isherwood 2002; Berg 2011; Kopytoff 2013). These approaches, in turn, occasionally inspire archaeological research (Majewski, Schiffer 2009, with references; more recently Haase, Whatley 2020; Piekalski *et al.* 2022). Additionally, it is worth noting the substantial body of literature concerning the origins of mass consumption (e.g., Baghdiantz McCabe 2014; Trentmann 2016). These processes are related to the period under consideration, and their echoes are reflected in the sources we analyse.

Material culture illustrates urban living conditions. Drawing on the classical perspective of Fernand Braudel (mostly 1979), one can argue that it forms the ‘structures

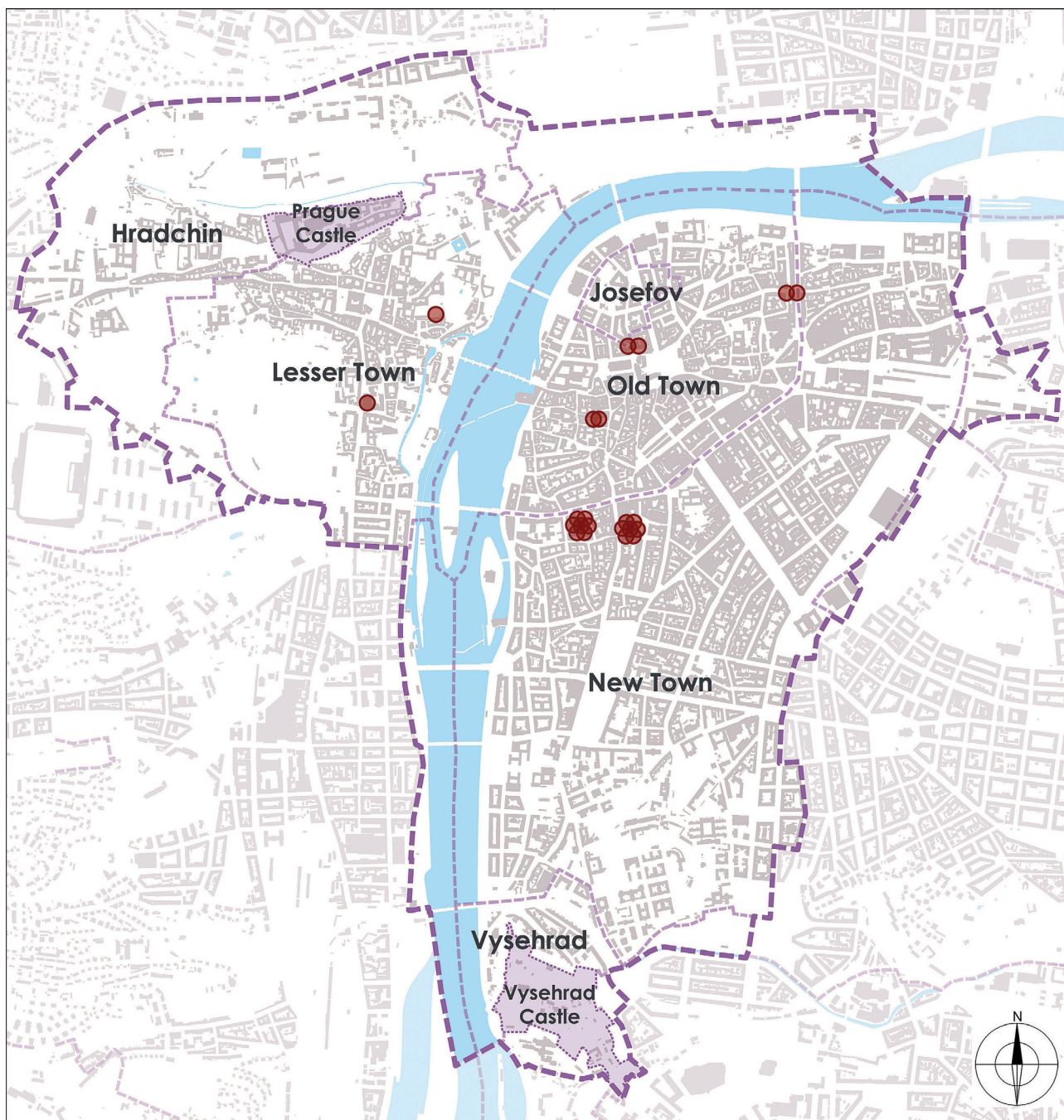


Figure 1.3. Prague agglomeration in pre-industrial times. Main excavation sites used in this book are marked. Compiled by T. Cymbalak.

of urban daily life'. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the differentiation within material culture reflects, to a significant degree, the internal stratification of urban communities. In the literature presented by archaeologists to date, the broad theme of urban social stratification has been developed and extensively presented in publications on London and other cities in the UK (e.g., Schofield 2000; Harward *et al.* 2015; Schofield *et al.* 2018). The results of the multifaceted studies of material culture objects undertaken in recent years are also of relevance to us. At least some of these are concerned with the role and significance of the object/artefact as a social indicator and its possible differentiated functions. In his studies,

Chris Caple (2006, 44–93) points to the phenomenon of differentiating the quality of objects by the material from which they are made, i.e., materials with specific valued properties. Similarly, the authors of the work presented by Susanna Burghartz *et al.* (2021), who, speaking from the positions of historians and art historians, attempt to link modern artefacts to the identification of specific social environments. Julie De Groot's (2022) work examines the significance of objects within domestic spaces. She based her research on post-mortem inventories and lists of court seizures. The functioning of an object in domestic space was related to its value, which she discussed using the example of 16th-century Bruges. The analysis was

conducted through a detailed examination of inventories from deceased property owners and confiscation records, with a primary focus on paintings, textiles, and furniture. Nevertheless, the background of this study also provides substantial insights into other types of objects, their functions, meanings, and value.

Numerous articles published in the journal *Post-Medieval Archaeology* and the monographs published by the Museum of London Archaeology are also worth highlighting. However, these represent research centres located at opposite ends of Western Christian Europe from Prague and Wrocław. Some related issues have also been addressed by researchers from across the Atlantic (White, Beaudry 2009). Particularly significant are studies of specific objects and their relationship to occupations, social stratification, and gender (Beaudry 2006; Beaudry, Mehler 2016). In addition, monographs of an almost textbook character for the study of historical archaeology, understood as post-medieval (Ger. *Neuzeitarchäologie*) are worth mentioning (cf., e.g., Frommer 2007; Majewski, Gaimster 2009; Symonds, Herva 2014; Scholkmann *et al.* 2016; Orser 2017). While these works primarily address issues distant from the context of Central and Eastern Europe, they nonetheless influence the topics we address. This is true both in terms of direct material sources—if only through imports of technology and finished goods—and because of their use of research methodology (e.g., Gerritsen, Riello 2015; Jervis 2017, 2018).

We should regard the previously conducted studies of waste deposited in strata, rubbish pits, and latrines as relevant to our research. This body of literature encompasses methodological approaches ranging from prehistory (Kuna, Němcová 2012) to the present day (Rathje 1974; Rathje *et al.* 1992; Brunclíková, Sosna 2012). When juxtaposed with written sources, these studies provide substantial insights into people's actual living conditions and consumption patterns (Cessford 2014, 2017).

The extent of recognition regarding the issues we are addressing through archaeological methods in the regions extending from the Atlantic coast to the contemporary borders of Poland and the Czech Republic can be characterised as moderate. The volume edited by Natasha Mehler (2013) offers valuable insights into the state of research in Central Europe in its broadest context. Furthermore, the investigation of lifestyle in Hanseatic cities has been comprehensively documented in the proceedings of the conference *Lübecker Kolloquium zur Stadtarchäologie im Hanseraum. VI. Luxus und Lifestyle* (Gläser ed. 2008; cf. other volumes in the set). Collectively, these studies provide a solid, comparative background for our research.

The publication state of archaeological sources from the 15th–18th centuries in Prague can be regarded as well-established. This is primarily evidenced by the four comprehensive volumes in the *Studies in Post-Medieval Archaeology* series (Žegklitz ed. 1990–2012, 2019;

cf. Juřina *et al.* 2009; Klápště 2016), which serve as a strong basis for our research. In Wrocław, archaeological investigations have predominantly concentrated on the medieval period, as documented in the *Wratislavia Antiqua* series (Vols. 1–24, 1999–2021). Recent findings were summarised in a two-volume, comprehensive work that focuses on the chronological span of the 11th–14th centuries (Piekalski, Wachowski eds. 2018). The results presented here, which encompass the 15th–18th centuries, represent, in many respects, a continuation of this research.

In the historical context of research conducted in Wrocław, prior efforts have aimed to delineate the differentiation of the level of everyday life on the basis of archaeological artefacts. These investigations primarily concentrated on the Middle Ages, with less emphasis on the complexities of the Modern Period. The research on the townhouse is advanced, as evidenced by the works of Stein (1931), Chorowska (1994, 1999), Chorowska, Lasota (1995), and Piekalski (2004b). Moreover, significant attention has been directed toward understanding the natural conditions and the water and sanitation infrastructure of the town, as documented by Buško (1995a), Piekalski (2004a, 2013), Brzezowski (2005b), and Marcinkiewicz, Piekalski (2018a). While individual comments and observations have been recorded in excavation reports or broader studies of archaeological finds, a comprehensive examination can be found in the monograph detailing the burgher plots at 10–11 Więzienna Street in Wrocław, edited by Buško, Piekalski (1999). This work provides an insight into the everyday lives of a relatively impoverished segment of the city. In the 15th century, one of these plots was occupied by a tannery workshop that posed a nuisance to the surrounding area, while the other was owned by an executioner. Additionally, a definition of luxury in medieval Wrocław and the relationship between elite consumption patterns and those of the middle and lower strata were presented (Piekalski 2008). Efforts have also been made to delineate the extent and distribution of meat consumption, as explored in the works of Piekalski (1995a), Chrószcz *et al.* (2018), and Pietruszka, Piekalski (2021). A wide-ranging assessment of the functional and technological level of material culture objects, albeit with limited capacity to indicate the social affiliations of their users, was achieved through a study of a market in the eastern part of medieval Wrocław (Piekalski, Wachowski eds. 2018).

We sought to structure our book in accordance with the established research objectives. Thus, the medieval heritage presented in Chapter 2 serves as the starting point, without which it would be difficult to understand the unique characteristics of early modern cities in Central and Eastern Europe, including Prague and Wrocław. Chapters 3 and 4 perform a similar function by outlining the economic foundations and natural conditions under which these cities developed and which were subsequently transformed, thereby affecting the living conditions of their inhabitants. In Chapters 5–11 we discuss the home and its infrastructure, taking into account both housing

standards and the variability found in different urban areas, while also considering the influence of more or less favourable neighbourhoods that reflect the social status of residents. The thematic block on the nature and diversity of consumption is addressed in Chapters 12 and 13, from which we draw conclusions about the capabilities and ambitions of users, as reflected in their social and communal standing. Chapters 18–20 describe the archaeological evidence of artisanal production, which has implications for the quality of consumable goods, with the analysis notably supported by specialists from the natural sciences. In Chapters 21–27 we explore the complex issue of urban security, as well as the expressions of pride and identity manifested through fortifications and armaments. Chapters 28–31 are devoted to the spiritual lives of the inhabitants of Prague and Wrocław, the symbolism embedded in their collective consciousness, and their pursuits of intellectual

development, which function as an important vehicle for social mobility. The final Chapter 32 offers a summation of the work and provides our assessment of the success of the research undertaken.

The volume presented here is the result of a team effort. Our research involved several institutions: the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Archaeology of Charles University in Prague, the National Heritage Institute in Prague, and the Institute of Archaeology of Wrocław University. The editors extend their gratitude to all the authors for their contributions and for the rewarding experience of collaborating with them. We would also like to thank the many contributors of graphic material, the translators who facilitated the translation from Czech and Polish into English, and the proofreader for their significant assistance.

