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The subject of Michael Prokosch’s edition—based on a master’s thesis submitted to the Institute for Austrian Historical Research (Institut für österreichische Geschichtsforschung)—is the oldest citizens’ book of the city of Linz, dating from 1658 to 1707. Citizens’ books are still one of the central historical sources.[1] Prokosch is therefore correct when he describes the oldest citizens’ book of Linz as one of the “most important sources for the history of the city of Linz” (wichtigsten stadtgeschichtlichen Quellen für Linz, p. 7), although it naturally only covers a very limited group of people. Citizens’ books record the admission of new citizens to a city. The diversity of their contents varies greatly according to space and time, as does that of the city of Linz. Most of the 844 entries contain at least the name, occupation, and date of admission. This is supplemented in some cases by information on the origin and/or birthplace of the individual, their previous life (such as former occupations), the documents presented (for example, baptism certificate or education certificate), the type of admission (in Linz there was the possibility of being admitted as a citizen, fellow citizen, or titled citizen),[2] and the type of payment made (Einschreibgeld, Armengeld, Mitbürgergeld, Bürgergeld) as well as their amount (pp. 12–14, 26f.).

The edition is preceded by an introduction in which Prokosch places the citizens’ book in the context of current research (in the German-speaking area) and within the spatial and temporal context. He also provides an insight into recent studies on citizens’ books in other Austrian cities. For an overview of the Austrian sources (table 1, pp. 14–17), Prokosch relies on a listing by Helmut Lackner.[3] However, this list is in need of updating in some cases. For example, the citizens’ books of the city of Salzburg are no longer stored in the archives of the museum Carolino Augusteum (today’s Salzburg Museum), but in the Municipal Archives of Salzburg.[4] The value for research could therefore have been increased by revising and updating Lackner’s listing, and by adding the holdings of market communities,[5] but it is already an advantage that there is now a clearer compilation of Austrian citizens’ books. The introduction, through the detailed description, gives a good insight into the context in which the citizens’ book emerged and its external and internal
structure. Supplementary illustration supports this.

The edition is accompanied by a codicological description and the edition guidelines used. As far as can be said from the outside, the edition itself seems to be carefully executed and contains all the necessary information to understand the author’s working methods.

In his evaluation, Prokosch is guided by the essential contents of the citizens’ book; for example, the time of admission, the origin of the new citizens, occupations, or payments are discussed and some interesting explanations are found. Thus, he illustrates some possibilities of the source from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. The analysis is written close to the source and the arguments are discussed and supported using many examples. Prokosch often focuses on the differences between citizens, titled citizens, and fellow citizens. So in the sections on the citizen’s tax and other payments and occupations, it is not surprising that merchants and innkeepers made up a large part of the citizens, while fellow citizens were often craftsmen. The amount of the admission fee depended on the type of admission. Interestingly, the amount of the fellow citizens’ tax (Mitbürgergeld) depended on occupation, whereas this did not seem to be the case for the citizens’ tax (Bürgergeld; pp. 211–223). A good idea of the amount of the payments to be made is given by comparisons with prices for some goods and services (p. 220).[6] Furthermore, aspects such as the mention of women in the citizens’ book, social advancement, or the house property of the citizens are discussed. For example, Prokosch tries to identify the houses of some persons (pp. 202–207), and locates them on a contemporary map (p. 202). The explanations are supplemented by several tables, diagrams, and illustrations, which are often very helpful and will be important for future comparisons with other cities. Some of them, however, would have been more informative in color and in a larger size (see especially pp. 216–219; but that was probably not the author’s responsibility). The differentiated discussion of the contents testifies to the author’s excellent knowledge of the source. However, more comparisons to other cities could have been made in some places to make the information for Linz even more relevant. An appendix with a glossary, a list of seals and abbreviations, and a differentiated and very informative register, especially to the persons, concludes the volume.

With this edition, Michael Prokosch has presented an essential source not only on the history of Linz, but also on questions of differences per occupation, migration, or social advancement. Thanks to the precise description, he brings us close to the original source. In addition, the differentiated evaluation illustrates a variety of different ways to use citizens’ books for historical questions. Due to the large number of persons mentioned, it would be worth considering for future editions of citizens’ books to implement them digitally and thus make them much more widely accessible, more flexible, and fully searchable (although the contents here are very well indexed by Prokosch’s directories). Against the background of the still unsecured long-term storage of such variants, the printed version such as this edition also has its advantages, of course.

Notes

[1]. For example, Pro civitate Austriae 21 (Vienna/Linz: Österreichischer Arbeitskreis für Stadtgeschichtsforschung, 2016) with contributions from Martin Scheutz, Larissa Rasinger, and Michael Prokosch (contains an earlier, partial version of the evaluations included in the edition).
[2]. Fellow citizens did not have as many rights and duties as citizens. Titled citizens presumably had similar rights to citizens, but only had to pay the admission fee of fellow citizens (p. 37).


[4]. Moreover, the tradition of the citizens’ books of Salzburg does not end with 1737. There are also later compilations made in the nineteenth century based on the town council protocols, which cover almost the entire eighteenth century, and a list of civic records for the years 1818 to 1913. See “Sources on Migration History in the City Archive,” City of Salzburg website, https://www.stadt-salzburg.at/migrationsarchiv/neue-quellen-zur-migrationsgeschichte-im-st..., 17, 2020).


[6]. However, the statement that a pound of beef cost four to five Gulden in the seventeenth century must be a mistake (p. 220). Although data for this period is fragmentary, beef prices in Vienna were between three and five Kreuzer. Alfred F. Pribram et al., eds., Materialien zur Geschichte der Preise und Löhne in Österreich, vol. 1 (Vienna: Carl Ueberreuters Verlag, 1938), 294.


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