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Spaces, particularly those in cities and towns, were connected with a wide range of social functions. Processions, public proclamations or provision of poor relief took place in urban spaces, but these spaces could also be the site of unrest and rebellion. The functions performed within the spaces shaped them, just as the spaces themselves influenced how, when and where social functions could be performed.

This edited volume focuses on such social functions in urban spaces from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century and contributes to the fields of urban, social and spatial history as well as research into court towns. It contains an introduction and ten contributions in German and English, which focus on central Europe and mainly use medieval and early modern case studies. The volume is divided into three subsections: »Centre and Periphery«, »Top and Bottom« and »Inside and Outside«. These three fields also correspond to horizontal, vertical and relational interactions.

As the editors stress in the introduction, this tripartite division is a way of framing the diverse cases assembled in the volume. Three brief examples from Frankfurt, Kiel and Nuremberg, all taken from the Middle Ages, show in exemplary fashion how urban spaces were shaped by their social functions. A slightly stronger framing of urban spaces and social functions would have given the volume as a whole an even clearer shape.

In his chapter, Pierre Monnet discusses broader implications of the connections between urban spaces and their social functions, giving a wide-ranging and intellectually stimulating overview. He stresses the importance of the Middle Ages for the development of cities. His assertion that during the early modern period there were few substantial changes in towns may have warranted some further discussion, as does the argument that there was no specific discourse on towns in antiquity. But overall the chapter helps to give a clearer sense of the kinds of questions which the volume as a whole seeks to address and provides a crucial addition to the introduction.

Zdzisław Noga contributes the first case study with his chapter on Jewish communities in Lesser Poland (*Kleinpolen*). In order to avoid competition, Jews were hindered from performing certain economic functions in the town and Christians were frequently reminded not to support them. The Jewish population was isolated



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more strongly in this region than elsewhere in Europe, resulting in distinctive social dynamics in the towns there.

Robert Šimůnek's chapter focuses on hospitals (*Spitäler*) and the provision of support for the sick in Bohemian residential towns in the Middle Ages and early modern period. The hospitals performed important functions for the urban community and shaped the urban environment. As the function of the hospitals changed, they turned from institutions of poor relief into places where wealthy citizens could stay towards the end of their lives.

Sven Rabeler's in-depth analysis shows that courtly sites in late medieval towns were spaces of interaction, representation, perception and consumption. Case studies from Eisenach, London, Worms, Augsburg and Würzburg illustrate with a wealth of sources how urban and courtly aspects influenced each other, both architecturally and socially. Rabeler identifies four kinds of interactions: urban spaces as sites of courtly staging, a process of »urbanisation« on the courtly stage, the town's self-staging and courtly criticism of towns. The author shows how closely connected urban and courtly actors were, illustrating lucidly the complex social dynamics in these towns.

Part two (»Top and Bottom«) of the volume starts with Marc Boone's exploration of social unrest in Flemish cities in the late Middle Ages. He explores how rebellious groups occupied urban spaces, especially ones with symbolic meaning, in order to demand changes in the urban fabric. The urban elites responded to these challenges to their authority by placing citadels in prominent positions in order to reaffirm their power and authority. This interpretation of an architectural and symbolic imposition of elites onto the cities forms one of the most interesting chapters in the collection.

In a similarly compelling complementary chapter, Friedrich Lenger focuses on social protest, but in a later period (from the late 18th century to the early 20th) and in the whole of Europe. Rejecting the notion of a progressive march towards a more peaceful urban community, Lenger argues convincingly that cities continued to be sites of social protest, citing examples such as food riots, protests and strikes.

Andrea Pühringer and Holger Th. Gräf shift the focus from unrest to relaxation and healing in Bad Homburg von der Höhe, a spa town in Hesse. The authors show how crucial the spa facilities were for the whole town and how they had an impact on almost all aspects of urban life, for example through the segregation of urban spaces or specific ecclesiastical spaces in the towns.

Miha Kosi begins the third part of the book (»Inside and Outside«) with his chapter on environmental relations in medieval Ljubljana/Laibach. The author shows the dependence of the town on its rural hinterland, particularly when it came to the supply of water and wood. In the course of the interactions between town and countryside, cooperation was the norm, but conflicts also occurred. Interesting though the chapter is, it would have been helpful to tie the case study back to the broader themes of the volume more explicitly.

Harriet Rudolph provides a particularly fascinating chapter on community formation (*Vergemeinschaftung*) in »urban open



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spaces«, with a focus on the town of Regensburg around 1800. By applying the concept of urban open spaces to key sites of social functions in Regensburg, Rudolph adds a new dimension to the volume and shows how closely intertwined imperial actors, clerics and citizens were. In this way, all strata of society were involved in important ceremonial and social functions.

The final chapter by Matthias Müller takes an art historical approach to understand the connected nature of the castle church and town hall of Weilburg as a symbol of Lutheran theology and ducal power. The architectural and artistic features of the town hall and main church indicated the duke's self-portrayal as protector of Lutheranism. In order to describe the adaptations that were made without destroying the main substance of the buildings, Müller coins the term »bewahrende Überformung«. With this focus, Müller skillfully shows another angle to the urban/social dynamic that forms the focus of the volume.

»Social Functions of Urban Spaces through the Ages« provides important pointers for future research and introduces a range of thought-provoking case studies, which can now be placed in a broader context and compared to other towns. Occasionally, a clearer indication of how the individual chapters relate to the overarching questions would have been useful and an index would have helped make the chapters more accessible. Nonetheless, the volume significantly advances our understanding of urban history in central Europe.



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