

## POPULATION

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### DEMOGRAPHIC AND ETHNIC CHANGES OCCURRING IN OPAVA DURING THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY\*

#### Abstract

Opava was the capital of Austrian Silesia (1743–1928). At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Czech-German ethnic structure of the city was mixed. The German population became the majority later. After the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic, the Czech population in Opava increased to 30–40%. The demographic structure was influenced by the city's administrative and cultural features. From the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, industry lost its importance because Opava could not compete with the rapidly developing industrial conurbation Moravská Ostrava.

**Key Words:** Silesia, Opava, 19<sup>th</sup> century, population, ethnic development.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Śląsk, Opawa, XIX wiek, ludność, rozwój etniczny.

The characterization of the population processes developments and the associated ethnic processes in the city of Opava during the long 19<sup>th</sup> century can help in comparing developmental tendencies in other cities located in Central Europe, contributing to understanding the more general regional and local particularities.

Opava was one of the first cities located in today's Czech Republic to have obtained the municipal rights. It was the seat of the Principality subordinate to the King of Bohemia. Following a long dispute, it became a part of Silesia, one of the lands of the Bohemian Crown. After the First Silesian War, when eight-tenths of the Silesian territory was given to Brandenburg-Prussia, Opava became the capital of the Bohemian Silesia (Böhmisch-Schlesien), commonly called Austrian Silesia (Österreichisch-Schlesien) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With some intervals, it remained the capital until 1928 when Silesia was annexed to Moravia. During the

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German occupation, Opava became the seat of the Eastern part of the Province of Sudetenland (Ostsudetenland). Since 1945, Opava has been a district capital.<sup>1</sup>

### Demographic development of the city and its population structure

Opava was the most populated city in Austrian Silesia. However the data on the numbers of inhabitants until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are not reliable. Available sources state that in 1760 there were 3,109 inhabitants in the city (the suburbs were probably excluded); in 1819 8,425 inhabitants (4,429 in the city and 3,996 in the suburbs); in 1835 9,462 inhabitants; and that in 1843 there were 12,556 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> By the 1830s, the city walls had been pulled down, which brought an incentive for further development in the suburbs. By mid-century, as many as 52 per cent of the population lived in the suburbs.<sup>3</sup> This tendency continued, as can be confirmed by the most recent data from 2010 where only 3,875 people live in the historical part of the city, that is several hundred people less than at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The largest population growth in the city was recorded in the years of rapid modernization between 1851 and 1921, when a number of factors such as industrialization, urbanization, the bureaucratization of the state administration, social and political emancipation caused the population to more than triple. The following table shows the development of the population of Opava and the neighbouring municipalities from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the first Czechoslovak census in 1921.

Table 1  
Population Development in Opava and the Closest Municipalities from 1851 till 1921<sup>4</sup>

	1851	1869	1880	1890	1900	1910	1921	1851–1921 1851 = 100
Opava	9496	16608	20562	22867	26748	30762	33457	+352
Kateřinky	2780	3657	4292	5043	7046	7496	6545	+235
Kyleřovice	1554	1756	1870	2134	2472	2761	2678	+172
Jaktař	477	586	635	696	750	894	1133	+237
Otice	516	644	726	821	819	867	900	+174
Komárov	569	578	627	663	668	844	887	+156

<sup>1</sup> A wide range of literature on the city's history exists, such as: *Opava Historie, kultura, lidé* (Praha 2006), comp. the selected bibliography on pp. 538–551.

<sup>2</sup> Jiří R a d i m s k ý, "Vývoj obyvatelstva ve Slezsku, 1754–1930," *Slezský Sborník* (hereafter *Slsb.*), 45, 1947, pp. 1–16 – *Opava...*, p. 213; *Slezsko*, Opava 1992, pp. 56, 61, and others.

<sup>3</sup> Milan M y š k a, "Opava v polovině 19. století," *Časopis Slezského Muzea*, B, 38, 1989, pp. 113–133.

<sup>4</sup> "Obyvatelstvo Slezska a Hlučinska v několika důležitějších směrech na základě sčítání lidu ze dne 15. února 1921 se zvláštním ohledem na předešlá sčítání lidu," *Opava* 1924, pp. 188–192, 206, 502–508 – some statistical data was also obtained from this source.

The selected growth index in Opava and in the closest municipalities exceeds the average of the entire Silesian territory that today forms a part of the Czech Republic, and reached the value of 183. However, Opava and its neighbourhood was not the region of major industrial development in Silesia, as was the industrial zone of Ostrava, which was mainly located in the Těšín region, or, more precisely, in the part of this region that became part of the Czechoslovak Republic after the First World War.<sup>5</sup> The table shows considerable population growth both in Opava and also in the neighbouring municipalities. After 1921, the number of inhabitants in the neighbouring municipalities (which today make a part of the city of Opava) grew much faster than that in the city itself.<sup>6</sup>

When compared with other cities in the Czech lands, Opava was a relatively large city in terms of its population. In 1869, it ranked seventh after Prague, Brno, Plzeň, Liberec, České Budějovice and Jihlava, and belonged among the top ten most populated cities as late as 1930 – overtaking Jihlava, but more inhabitants were reported in Moravská Ostrava, Ústí nad Labem and Olomouc.<sup>7</sup> Based on the last census, as of 26 March 2011, Opava ranks only fifteenth, with a population of 58,054. It is not even the most populated city in Silesia, where the first place belongs to Havířov, which was established in the 1950s, and even more people live in the Silesian part of the Moravian-Silesian city of Ostrava, such as in the Poruba housing estate, which is home to 100,000 people.

It is correct to ask what the causes of such a development are. Let us try to explain them using data on population movement and on the economic and professional structure of the population related to the former provincial city. Immigration contributed more to population growth than birth rate did (i.e. higher natality than mortality). Women prevailed significantly: in 1843, there were 851 men per 1,000 women, while in 1869 there were only 818 men per 1,000 women. The birth rate in the city of Opava was quickly decreasing, being significantly lower than that in the rural district of Opava and than the Czech average birth rate. The situation is shown in the Table 2 and includes the 1930s, when the extreme birth rate decline in Opava was undoubtedly the consequence of previous developments.

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<sup>5</sup> Blanka Pitronová, “Vývoj lidnatosti ve Slezsku a na severovýchodní Moravě v období 1869–1910,” *Slsb.*, 67, 1969, pp. 313–335; Jiří Matějček, “Populačnímu vývoji severní Moravy a Slezska v letech 1910–1921,” *Slsb.*, 76, 1978, pp. 44–62.

<sup>6</sup> Population development index in the years 1921–1930: Opava 108, Jaktář 153, Otice 126, Kylešovice 131, etc. Jiří Matějček and Jan Steiner, “Vývoj počtu obyvatelstva ve Slezsku v letech 1910–1930,” *Slsb.*, 68, 1970, p. 287.

<sup>7</sup> Ludmila Fialová, “Změny ve vývoji plodnosti obyvatelstva na Opavsku na konci 19. a v první polovině 20. století,” *Slsb.*, 88, 1990, pp. 138, 140.

Table 2

Birth Rate in Opava in 1871–1937 (the average number of babies born per 1,000 inhabitants)<sup>8</sup>

	Opava – city	Opava – rural area	Czech lands
1871–1880	30.6	40.1	38.8
1881–1890	26.3	37.0	38.2
1891–1900	24.4	38.6	35.8
1901–1910	22.0	35.9	32.2
1931–1937	9.3	21.0	16.0

The facts shown in the table illustrate the overall situation as similar to the findings that during Habsburg times, the inhabitants of Opava city were moving to Vienna rather than the inhabitants of the district of Opava, who were rather headed for Opava proper<sup>9</sup> without, however, changing the city's national structure significantly. For our purposes, the data on the economic activities and professional structure will be more important and they show that "... the city was undergoing a deformed economic development and continued strengthening one-sidedly its administrative-management and cultural components."<sup>10</sup> The table 3 shows a significant drop in the share of the economically active population in the capital of Silesia in years 1869–1900.

Table 3

Economically Active and Inactive Population in Opava and in Silesia in years 1869–1900

	Opava	Silesia	Opava	Silesia
	1869	1869	1900	1900
Economically active population	56.2%	55.4%	42.0%	52.3%
Economically inactive population	43.8%	44.6%	58.0%	47.7%

The table shows that in 1869, the share of the economically active population in Silesia and in Opava was roughly the same. Three decades later, the difference was more than ten per cent to the disadvantage of the capital of Silesia. Opava offered employment mainly to men (offices, schools, cultural institutions, military quarters), while the economic activity of women was considerably lower when compared with the national average. The following data underlines the particulars of the social structure of the city as well. In 1869, only 2.9% of the Opava

<sup>8</sup> L. Fialová, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>9</sup> J. Matějček, *op. cit.*, p. 51, and others.

<sup>10</sup> Milan Myška, "Společenská skladba obyvatelstva Opavy ve druhé polovině 19. století," ČSM-B, 21, 1972, p. 65. We have also integrated a lot of other information from this study.

city worked in agriculture while in Silesia as a whole the percentage was 55.7% and even in Moravská Ostrava, the originating centre of the significant mining and metallurgical industrial area, 14% of the economically active population worked in agriculture. In Moravská Ostrava, 68.7% of the employed population worked in industry at that time, while Opava lagged behind significantly in this aspect. In 1900, Opava, in terms of the population share employed in industry, lagged even behind the political district with weakly developed industry. Within the industrial population structure, the clothing, chemical and food industries prevailed while the metalworking industry employed only 3.4% of the economically active inhabitants. It may be stated that in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Opava lagged behind as far as industrialization is concerned, but its significance as the administrative and cultural centre of the Czech Silesia was growing.<sup>11</sup> This tendency also continued during the times of the first Czechoslovak republic. In 1921, only 32.6% of the population worked in industry and, among the cities of Czechoslovakia with a population of over 20,000 inhabitants, a lower share of population working in industry was reported only in Olomouc, Cheb, Košice, Mukačevo and Užhorod. The state, public and other services, and the freelance professions employed 16.8% in Opava at that time, which was the largest share in the whole republic.<sup>12</sup>

Recently published research<sup>13</sup> makes it possible to compare certain larger cities in Moravia and in Silesia in this aspect. I will try to characterize the particularities of Opava, Olomouc and Moravská Ostrava cities on this basis. The basic data is summarized in Table 4 and may serve as an inspiration for further research.

Table 4

The Number and Structure of Intelligentsia in Opava, Olomouc and Moravská Ostrava (years 1857 and 1910)

	Opava 1857	Opava 1910	Olomouc 1857	Olomouc 1910	Moravská Ostrava 1910
Freelance professions	31 11%	109 9%	37 15%	133 11%	100 10%
Clerks*	198 72%	798 68%	209 54%	858 67%	622 60%
Technical intelligentsia	0 0%	25 2%	1 0%	25 2%	122 12%
Educators	28 10%	205 18%	63 16%	187 15%	167 16%
The clergy	15 6%	36 3%	57 15%	69 5%	12 1%
Other	3 1%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	7 1%
Total	275 100%	1173 100%	367 100%	1272 100%	1030 100%

\* State clerks, municipal clerks, private clerks.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61 and other.

<sup>12</sup> "Sčítání lidu v Republice československé ze dne 15. února 1921," part II (population occupations) and part 3, (Praha 1927) in *Československá statistika*, vol. 23, series VI, part V.

<sup>13</sup> Andrea Pokludová, *Formování inteligence na Moravě a ve Slezsku 1857–1910*, Opava, 2008, pp. 255, 256 and others.

As far as Opava is concerned, the largest share of the clerks is certainly most striking and consisted mainly of state clerks, land clerks and municipal clerks. Opava was the seat of the Land Government and the Land Council, and was the seat of both the city district and the rural district, the seat of the Regional Court, the seat of the Police Directorate and the City Hall. It was also home to a number of cultural institutions with the Land Museum, the theatre etc. leading the way.

Starting from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the development of the city of Opava was dynamic and, at the same time, inconsistent. The city gained prestige thanks to its administrative functions and cultural activities. However, it lagged behind economically, finding itself off the main traffic routes. A considerable part of the population made their living by working in occupations associated with the city's administrative and cultural functions, in trade and finances and in the industrial and craft activities required for the city and its inhabitants. Few of these such activities extended beyond the region's border.

### **Ethnic development**

Since its founding, Opava was a city consisting of a mixture of nationalities. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was probably a Czech majority. Following the Thirty Years' War, the German population prevailed, in particular as far as the municipal elites and upper class population are concerned. Since 1655, Czech entries in the Parish Register were disappearing. Even the number of the previously numerous Czech surnames of the citizens was decreasing, although surnames are not necessarily a reliable reference to determine the nationality. The last Czech entries in the Municipal Register of Opava were recorded in 1717, but in the 1780s, the Czech language was not allowed to be used at the Land Court of Opava. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, preaching in the Czech language was maintained in only two churches in Opava.

Based on the religious statistics, various descriptions of the city from the last two decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, people of German nationality were mainly living in the inner city while the suburbs were home to people of mixed nationalities. People of Czech nationality were living in the municipalities neighbouring Opava.

As late as 1828, one of the Parishes of Opava was considered mixed in terms of nationalities. However, by the beginning of the, both Parishes were mostly German. In public, the Czech language was used in church only while it was removed from schools during the reforms under the rule of Maria Theresa. The last private Czech school located in the Ratibořské suburbs was closed in 1814, even though, based on calculations using the educational data from 1865, Czech pupils should have accounted for 20–60% of elementary school students at the time. Beginning in 1848, the Czech language was taught as an optional subject at the Grammar School of Opava until the early 1870s. At that time, Czech shop

signs were removed and the Czech language was maintained in the clerical work if it was necessary for communication purposes.<sup>14</sup>

We are missing any reliable, detailed data until the 1880 census, when nationality based on the colloquial language (*Umgangssprache*) was officially enquired about for the first time. Thus, we are talking rather about estimates of various information capabilities. Based on the 1851 census, Opava had 9,496 inhabitants, of which 1,900 inhabitants (i.e. 20%) were Czech. The estimates for the 1869 census assumed that there were 10,608 Germans and 6,000 Czechs in the city and its suburbs, meaning that the Czechs would account for 36.2% of the population. In 1880, Opava's population was 82.4% German, 11.7% Czech (including Moravians and Slovaks) and 4% Polish. However, only 5% of the Czech nationals were living in the inner city, while the majority lived in the suburbs. Czech nationals worked mostly (80–85%) as workmen.<sup>15</sup>

The additional statistical information related to the nationality of the citizens determined based on the colloquial language and/or nationality in Opava and in the neighbouring municipalities is summarized in the following table:

Table 5

Czech and German Nationals in Opava and in the Neighbouring Municipalities  
Based on Census Data from 1890–1921<sup>16</sup>

	1890		1900		1910		1921	
Opava	Cz	10.6%	Cz	9.7%	Cz	6.6%	Cz	25.5%
	G	81.2%	G	82.7%	G	8.6%	G	65.8%
Kateřinky	Cz	70.4%	Cz	63.1%	Cz	39.1%	Cz	72.0%
	G	20.8%	G	29.5%	G	51.9%	G	22.3%
Kylešovice	Cz	98.4%	Cz	98.1%	Cz	93.8%	Cz	98.4%
	G	0,2%	G	0,2%	G	5.6%	G	1.1%
Jaktař	Cz	77.7%	Cz	56.4%	Cz	73.4%	Cz	82.4%
	G	10.6%	G	34.1%	G	21.3%	G	11.9%
Otice	Cz	95.7%	Cz	94.1%	Cz	96.0%	Cz	91.8%
	G	0.5%	G	1.5%	G	3.5%	G	1.7%
Komárov	Cz	89.8%	Cz	93.8%	Cz	88.2%	Cz	91.8%
	G	4.8%	G	2.4%	G	10.2%	G	6.2%

<sup>14</sup> The following works were used to characterize the nationality shares in Opava: *Opava...* pp. 201–203, 225–226, 247 and others; Adolf Turek, “Přehled národnostních poměrů v Opavě do poloviny 19. století,” *Opava. Sborník k 10. výročí osvobození města*, Ostrava, 1956, pp. 93–133; Adolf Turek, “Národnostní vývoj Opavska od druhé poloviny 19. století,” *Slsb.*, 42, 1937, pp. 171–176; Adolf Turek, “Přehled vývoje národnostních poměrů v západní části našeho Slezska do první světové války,” *Slezsko na cestě k československému státu*, Opava 1969, pp. 19–49.

<sup>15</sup> Milan Myška, “Češi v Opavě v roce 1880,” *The Yearbook of the District Archive in Opava*, 8, 1988, pp. 26–35.

<sup>16</sup> *Obyvatelstvo Slezska a Hlučínska*, pp. 165–209, 269–274.

The table shows quite conclusively that the national structure development in Opava and mostly also in the neighbouring municipalities where the Czech population was outnumbered and headed towards germanization, which was halted only by the establishment of the Czechoslovak republic. These facts express the general tendency in the development of the national structure in Silesian cities. The share of the German nationals living in Silesia as a whole dropped between 1880–1910, but they strengthened their positions in cities.<sup>17</sup> In the Silesian cities, Czechs outnumbered Germans only in Klimkovice in 1910, and even lost their majority in Frýdek. At that time, Polish nationals only had a majority in Fryštát and in Jablunkov. Even the city of Těšín, a centre for Polish national activities, featured a German majority (62%), while the Polish nationals accounted for 32% in the city.

Opava was the most important centre of Czech national life in Austrian Silesia, although it was quickly germanized. By the 1840s, no goal-directed national efforts can be observed on the Czech side, and even awareness of Czech nationality was not clear. The majority of the Czech-speaking population considered the mastering of the German language to be a logical prerequisite for social advancement. The first Czech reading clubs were established in the 1840s. Opava's German population entered the 1848–1849 Revolution with markedly differentiated programmes for the constitution of the German States, refusing the Czech constitutional postulates timidly promoted from Prague and from other Czech centres located in Moravia. At first, the Germans did not condemn Czech cultural activities, regarding them as a way of enriching and enlivening social-cultural life. The 1860s brought significant changes that led to the beginning of the renewal of constitutional life under the monarchy. The first Czech newspaper was issued in Opava starting in 1861, and then turned into a political newspaper. In 1869, the Czechs claimed their allegiance to the Czech constitutional requirements in the Ostrá Hůrka camp. In 1877, they founded their main national union known as *Matice Opavská*, and established numerous contacts with the representatives of the Czech politics from Prague. The Germans rejected Czech political, cultural and language requirements. Unlike the Czechs, German political life was considerably differentiated into liberal and conservative wings with Austrian-centric and pro-Prussian orientations.

The 1880s marked a decisive turn in the national development throughout Cisleithania, with nationalism becoming a popular phenomenon. In the previous

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<sup>17</sup> In 1890, German nationals accounted for 49% of the total population of Silesia while in 1910, Germans accounted for 44%. There were 77.8% German nationals living in Silesian cities in 1890 and in 1910, their share was 80% – Marie G a w r e c k á, “Národnostní poměry ve městech rakouského Slezska před r. 1914,” *Národnostní poměry v historii měst*, Prostějov 1993, pp. 89, 96; Marie G a w r e c k á, “Problematyka narodowościowa Śląska Austriackiego w latach 1742–1918,” *Studia Śląskie*, 52, 1993, pp. 61–74; Marie G a w r e c k á, “Národnostní poměry slezských měst v době modernizace (1740–1918),” *Město a městská společnost v procesu modernizace*, eds. Pavel Kladiwa and Aleš Zářický, Ostrava 2009, pp. 147–159.

period, nationalism was only limited to actions undertaken by the elites. Mass non-political organisations and new political parties started to form, even though Czechs experienced political differentiation as late as after the turn of the century. Opava became one of the centres of extreme German nationalism in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the ideas of Georg von Schönerer, cited by Adolf Hitler as one of his ideological predecessors, found acceptance there. The main dividing line in German politics was no longer the contrast between conservatism and liberalism, but the contrasts between racial antisemitism (spread by the German Labour Party in Silesia, for example) and the rest of German politics. The Czechs went on the offensive, establishing their first grammar school in 1883 with the help of the Central Educational Foundation (*Ústřední Matice Školská*). It began as a private school, and from 1896 was a state school. A Czech kindergarten and a primary school were founded. City schools (continuing after primary education) were prevented from being founded in Opava due to the resentment of the municipal authorities, and thus were established in the neighbouring municipality of Jaktář, a Moravian enclave subordinate to the Office of Education of the Moravian capital of Brno. Litigation suits escalated and conflicts and collisions occurred.

Following the defeat of the Central Powers in the First World War and the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, Opava became the capital of one of the five German “provinces” located in the border area of the Czech lands that attempted to be annexed to the Austrian Republic (Deutschösterreich). After the defeat, the City Council protested against the city’s annexation to the Czechoslovak Republic.

A new development stage of the national situation then began in the city, and is related to the national Czech offensive in all aspects of life. The Germans considered these changes unfair and in opposition to their right to self-determination, to which they started to claim their allegiance in Opava for the first time. The Czechs claimed that this was an act of historical justice and redressing of previous injustices. Due to this, the percentage of Czech nationals in Opava rose from 7% to almost 26% between 1910 and 1921, while the proportion of Germans dropped from 89% to 66%. The Czechs coming to the city after the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic assumed positions in the newly restructured state administration and in Czech cultural and educational institutions. While the criterion used for determining nationality used in census taking – in the Austrian Empire this was the language a person spoke in public, while in Czechoslovak censuses it was the mother tongue – may have played a certain role in these changes, it was undoubtedly the change in political relations that played a decisive role. The statement by Ernest Renan that “the nation is a daily plebiscite” can be considered correct. The stated changes, although seemingly violent, are more or less in accordance with other facts. In this sense, we present the result of the elections to the City Council of Opava held on 30 March 1924, following the first Czechoslovak census. At that time, the German parties received 72% of the vote

and the Czech parties received 23% of the vote, roughly in conformity with the national structure of the city.<sup>18</sup>

### Epilogue

The breakthrough changes in the national situation in Opava occurred as a result of the Second World War. The German inhabitants were expelled to Germany; the Jews who before the war numbered more than 1,000 were killed in the concentration camps and most of the handful of survivors emigrated to Palestine. Thus, Czech nationals have been the dominant group in Opava since 1945, but the regular census results also show that Slovak, German, Russian and Vietnamese nationals reside in the city.

*Marie Gawrecká*

#### DEMOGRAFICZNE I ETNICZNE ZMIANY LUDNOŚCI W OPAWIE W XIX WIEKU

#### Streszczenie

Opawa była stolicą Śląska austriackiego, jak również siedzibą lokalnego sejmu oraz władz państwowych. Na początku wieku XIX struktura ludności miasta była mieszana – czesko-niemiecka. Z biegiem czasu ludność niemiecka zaczęła zdecydowanie dominować i na przełomie wieku XIX i XX Opawę zamieszkiwała w 90% ludność niemiecka. Pod względem religijnym przeważali katolicy, podczas gdy przedstawiciele innych religii (protestanci i Żydzi) stanowili zaledwie 6–7% społeczności miasta. Zmiany demograficzne były stymulowane przez administracyjne, biznesowe oraz kulturowe funkcje miasta. W ostatnich trzydziestu latach wieku XIX Opawa nie mogła konkurować z szybko rozwijającą się Morawską Ostrawą, będącą ośrodkiem przemysłu wydobywczego i metalurgicznego. Po powstaniu Czechosłowacji w 1918 roku Opawa straciła swoje ekonomiczne oraz administracyjne funkcje. Liczba ludności czeskiej wzrosła do 30–40% na skutek skutecznej polityki etnicznej władz państwowych.

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<sup>18</sup> Refer to the synthesis in which the specialized literature is stated. *Opava...*, Gawrecki, Dan a kol.: *Dějiny Českého Slezska 1740–2000*, Opava 2003.