

FORUM

Coda: Repositioning Early Modern Prague on the Global Stage

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The question that sparked this forum was to what extent we can see Prague as an important stage for Renaissance and Reformation exchange and as an internationally connected city. It is striking, though not unexpected, that all the authors have been drawn to some extent to sources and subjects in Rudolfin Prague. It must be stressed, however, that the emphasis of each of these studies is somewhat different to an older field of “Rudolfin studies.” The researchers here do not focus on the emperor’s court but use it as context. It is tangential to their main focal points—on Jewish communities, religious change, and the exchange of scientific and musical knowledge—and these are first and foremost historians not of Prague but of social and cultural history, music, art, material culture, and religion. This indicates a marked shift from the historiography. For this generation of scholars, Prague is not only a city that is home to a fascinating and intriguing art historical moment but is also a city of early modern international connections. It provides a unique context for understanding communities, everyday experiences, religion, and culture in early modern Europe—a multilingual, multiconfessional, and multicultural mixing pot whose composition changed dramatically across the early modern period. Rudolf’s court was certainly a catalyst for these crossings and encounters, but they did not fade away after his death in 1612, nor were they limited to the confines of the castle above the city.

The research presented here sets out the vibrant and often astonishing ways in which Prague was entangled in international, transregional, and global webs that shaped its culture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Honisch and Horacek show how music and science produced their own networks that drew on the community of Prague and Rudolf’s patronage (in these cases as an enthusiastic patron of science and a more reluctant patron of music). Honisch’s finding that music was “a medium of intercultural contact and encounter” draws attention to the multiple identities of Prague burghers. They might be Bohemians, Christians, and musicians trained in polyphony, and draw on one or all these imagined communities at any one time. Her study shows that music and religion allowed individuals to transcend place and form networks beyond the city through shared identities and media. Similarly, in the world of astronomy, Tycho Brahe drew on the lingua franca not only of science but also of visual imagery to produce his *Astronomiae instauratae Mechanica* for Rudolf II in 1598. Hoping to secure Rudolf’s patronage, Brahe pointed out how, by becoming a patron of astronomy, he would increase God’s glory and no doubt reap divine rewards in doing so. Horacek also points to how transregional networks were essential to the advance of astronomy more widely. Discoveries could be made by “active observational work using *many* accurate instruments, by *multiple* people collecting observations in *collaboration*” (my emphasis). Through these two studies, Prague is shown to be firmly embedded in networks of music, art, and science spanning the continent.

Parker and Ivanič meanwhile draw attention to religious communities that were superimposed on the geographical landscape and drew burghers into broader networks of existence and identity. Parker provides perhaps the most unequivocal example of what this could mean for individuals in their daily lives. The story of the Jewish pawnbroker Ester and Lady Juliana’s missing clasp that ended up in Poznań reveals how trade routes, pawnbroker networks, the Ashkenazi diaspora, and the postal system criss-crossed Central Europe. A tiny clasp and a fleeing Jewish woman found it hard to hide in such a

tightly woven web of connections. Knowledge and objects moved quickly from one node to another. Prague was deeply embedded in this web, and—as Parker highlights—was “a lively point of interaction on the ‘margins’ of Europe.” Objects also tell a story of Catholic culture that expanded beyond Prague. Ivanič’s work shows the “glocal” nature of things that allowed people to feel at once connected to a specific Bohemian identity and to a wider Catholic community spanning the globe. In particular, Catholic culture in Prague was “cross-pollinated with Catholic culture in places including Bavaria, Poland, Italy, Spain, and beyond to Jerusalem.” Prague burghers displayed an impressive ability to reach out of Prague when it came to religion and trade. For many of them, their daily lives were intertwined with communities in other parts of Europe and beyond.

While historians’ attention in recent decades has turned to global history and encounters in distant lands or around the seaports of Europe, this forum shows that there is much yet to uncover by reflecting back into the heart of Europe. Firstly, extending Beverly Lemire’s thesis geographically, globalization was important to the culture and everyday life of these Central Europeans—just as it was for the inhabitants of Venice, London, and Amsterdam.¹ Secondly, this forum also reveals how methodologies from global history that focus on networks, encounter, and exchange can be applied to Central Europe. Prague was a place of regional and continental importance and a crucial node in the story of early modern Europe that deserves renewed attention.

The analysis of the vast interconnections across Prague, Central Europe, and beyond presents multilingual, interdisciplinary, and archival challenges as complex as any global history. The studies here are “tasters,” as it were, of the possible riches to be found by turning a global lens onto the heart of Europe. These studies of early modern Prague represent a vibrant and burgeoning field, no longer hemmed in by the thirty-six-year duration of Rudolf’s reign and court. Further collaboration and forums in which scholars of Central Europe are able to come together and examine these shared questions will produce gains in this area and allow the history of an early modern connected Central European world to catch up with the global histories of the era. These efforts will enable researchers to investigate how cross-border connections in Central Europe and beyond in the early modern period shaped the cultures of Central European countries and their partners.

¹Beverly Lemire, *Global Trade and the Transformation of Consumer Cultures: The Material World Remade, c. 1500–1820* (Cambridge, 2018).