Straßen im 16. Jahrhundert: Erhalt – Nutzung – Wahrnehmung.
Ding, Materialität, Geschichte 5.
By Alexander Denzler. Cologne: Böhlau, 2023. pp. 544.

Mobility is a basic historical and general constant of the *conditio humana*. While historical research has repeatedly dealt with the social, religious, and cultural conditions of mobility and migration in particular, its material basis has tended to be neglected. This is the starting point for Alexander Denzler's professorial dissertation, which breaks new ground in various ways.

After a concise overview of the secondary literature with differentiated consideration of the conceptual disparities in historical scholarship on streets, the introduction explains the aim of the study, the source basis, and the methodological approach. The volume aims to examine the natural and material conditions of the street in the sixteenth century. To this end, Denzler analyzes the maintenance, locomotion, and appropriation practices of the time, thereby acknowledging his commitment to the historical praxeology that has recently shaped the discourse in the historical sciences. Furthermore, he reveals his hermeneutic premise at the outset: "Streets are thus to be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that was 1. materially existent, 2. socially marked, 3. sovereignly-legally percolated, and 4. the result of preconditioned social practices" (p.14).

Denzler highlights the shortcomings of older research on early modern streets, according to which they were in poor condition and were chronically underfunded in the early modern period. To prove his point, he analyzes the diverse manifestations, uses, maintenance practices, and forms of appropriation of transport routes by people in relation to nature. Denzler examines the many streets and paths of the sixteenth century, focusing on the Upper German region, with the centers of Augsburg, Nuremberg, Ulm, Regensburg, and in particular Nuremberg a "traffic junction" of the sixteenth century.

With regard to the maintenance of streets in the sixteenth century, Denzler strives for an analysis of street maintenance from below and thus an appreciation of the social dimensions of street construction. A further object of investigation is the analysis of the material condition of sixteenth-century streets in the context of the tense relationship between humans and nature. Methodologically, the study follows a praxeological and environmental-historical approach that focuses on the various "doings" (practices) and "sayings" (speech acts) in relation to streets conceptualized as a "contact zone of humans and nature." By including the "artifacts" of streets in the sixteenth century, Denzler

 DOI 10.38145/2025.3.491

also calls attention to the materiality of the early modern street in the sense of the material turn, centering on the concept of the "street space" defined from a pluralistic approach. Denzler applies this diverse set of research questions, research objectives, and methodological considerations to an impressively broad array of sources, including account books and official records, treatises on *Policey*, territorial and village orders, official and private correspondence, court records and cartographic representations, country surveys, leaflets, itineraries, travel reports, travel prayers, and travel guides.

Denzler's study is divided into five systematic chapters and presents five fields of investigation: namely visualization and terminology; travel; materiality; governance; and micromobility.

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 is devoted to the blurring of many terms mentioned above. Here, Denzler shows that a schematic typology of the phenomenon "street" misses an essential aspect of the premodern "street," which was characterized precisely by its hybrid form of use and thus also of name. In addition to this aspect of historical semantics, Denzler uses a broad and methodically differentiated selection of sources to analyze the techniques used to create visual renderings of streets in the sixteenth century, which oscillated between "aestheticizing fictionality and documenting factuality" (p.107).

With these analyses, Denzler is able to demonstrate, for example, the methods used to assert the public significance of streets in early modern leaflets or the relevance of visual depictions to emphasize the importance of the roadside. Overall, according to Denzler, in the sixteenth century there was a "typological canon of representational elements for the visual description of street space" (p.102), which was less diverse than the semantic field of "street." Denzler describes an intensification of the administrative recording of physical space in the second half of the sixteenth century, which can be seen in the country descriptions and mapping projects. In addition, this chapter examines the roadside as an inherent component of the street space that has been particularly extensively shaped by people, also making it clear that the sacralization of the street space unfolded through roadside shrines and roadside crosses. Leaflets, on the other hand, reflected the public nature of the street in the sixteenth century and used selective depictions in specific contexts, especially in the case of street crimes.

Chapter 3 examines various anthropogenic forms of interaction and experiences with the street space. To this end, Denzler analyzes itineraries, travel reports, travel guides, and, in particular, medical and theological travel instructions (the so-called apodemics, in the discussion of which Denzler draws in particular on the two *Reißbüchlein* by the humanist physician Georg

Pictorius and the Lutheran theologian Michael Sachs). In doing so, he ultimately focuses on the plural practices of traveling, with which the physicality of the travel experience correlated significantly. Denzler seems to have three things in mind: the physical challenges of the itinerary, the constraints and possibilities for action of biomotor-induced locomotion, and the dependence on the street space as an essential point of reference for the world of experience reflected by contemporaries. In principle, according to Denzler, a direct interweaving of actors, physicality, mobility, and nature was characteristic of travel in the sixteenth century. His remarks on travel *memoria* in the sixteenth century and the "great silence" of contemporaries about the travel routes and streets they encountered are particularly fascinating. Denzler contends that a street space is constituted and produced in the first place and ultimately also categorized according to the travel itineraries he has examined.

Chapter 4, which focuses on the materiality of streets in the sixteenth century, deserves special mention. Denzler examines this aspect on two levels. In addition to the material resources of streets, he also includes the workforce that maintained the streets in the sixteenth century. Ultimately, he provides a vivid picture of the multi-layered maintenance practice of the transport infrastructure (streets, bridges, paths) in the early modern period. This is all based on the specific case study of the imperial city of Nuremberg and the municipal accounts of the street and bridge office *(Weg- und Stegamt)* from 1544 to 1562. The focus of the study is therefore on the actors and resources involved in maintenance and repair. Particularly important is Denzler's observation at the very beginning of the chapter concerning the double dependence of infrastructure on nature (building resources from nature and deterioration due to nature). In this chapter, Denzler vividly and comprehensibly discusses the multifaceted work process for the maintenance of streets and bridges by various actors, materially and pecuniarily, through labor, knowledge, pious efforts by charitable foundations, and governmental action. Last but not least, Denzler is also able to make the various actors involved in street maintenance (including officials and building craftsmen, such as stonemasons, carpenters, foresters, blacksmiths, laborers, henchmen, peons, and unpaid peasants) tangible, and he impressively traces their scope of action and everyday work lives.

In Chapter 5, Denzler examines street rule in the sixteenth century in order to determine the significance of streets for rule and society within the territorialization process characteristic of this era. He repeatedly and convincingly points out the disparate "openness of the records," which entails specific heuristic, epistemological, and methodological challenges. Denzler is particularly concerned with the tension between the usability of the streets

and the actions of the rulers with regard to the streets. Another aspect is the controversial and constantly renegotiated street peace in the sixteenth century, i.e., the question of safety on the streets in the sense of an increasing securitization as an "imagined ideal and practiced obligation of rule." Denzler is able to show how streets were a "symbol and means of rule." He sums this up in the concise formula "ruling with and over streets." Denzler does not understand this dynamic negotiation process of "'street-related' acts of rule" as a mere top-down process of rulers vis-à-vis their subjects, but also focuses in particular on intermediary actors, such as tax collectors, carters, and merchants, whose street-related supplications he examines in more detail. In particular, Denzler's analysis of cross-confessional cooperation between the Catholic prince-bishops of Würzburg and the Protestant dukes of Saxe-Coburg with regard to street maintenance policy should also be highlighted, as it allows us to question and, to a certain extent, deconstruct sometimes overly monolithic interpretations of the so-called confessional age. Questions and investigations pointing in this direction of the possible confessionality *(Konfessionalität)* of streets and transport infrastructure in the sixteenth century would be very welcome in the future. In this chapter, Denzler is also able to show that street inspections as a form of authoritative quality management already began in the sixteenth century, which had not been taken into account in earlier research.

Chapter 6, with which the book comes to a close, focuses on streets as a communal resource within the rural neighborhood and social proximity of the early modern village. Drawing on recent research on premodern rural society, Denzler assumes three levels of actors for the village in the early modern period: 1. village community; 2. officeholders; 3. governance. Here, Denzler focuses on the villagers and unpaid laborers and analyzes their scope of action as empowering interactions. He calls attention to the micromobility of rural society in the context of rural mobility and street maintenance practices, which has been largely overlooked in the earlier scholarship. To this end, Denzler focuses on the small streets that were essential for the (village) proximity of rural society and the production and use of rural street space. Denzler convincingly and quite rightly classifies these supposedly small streets as central components of the premodern street system, which were constitutive of the everyday reality of life for the majority of the village population. Denzler provides these analyses on the basis of the village orders he examined, paying particular attention to responsibilities and maintenance practices. He defines the maintenance of the streets by the village community in the field of tension between cooperation and individual responsibility. However, Denzler also identifies the divergent and sometimes very different spectrum of normative regulation in such village

orders. He takes a critical look at the relationship between authorities and subjects in the sixteenth-century village, convincingly demonstrating that the ruling and the common socage at this time were not exclusively coercive and were only reluctantly fulfilled by the subjects as a burden. Rather, the work necessary to provide such traffic-infrastructural services was fundamentally accepted, as the subjects performed unpaid street socage *(Straßenfronen)* for the government but also for themselves and the other subjects.

In general, Denzler notes an increase in the importance of the street system in the sixteenth century. He quite rightly points to the close correlation between the intensified use of streets and the changing world and spatial experiences of the people of the time. Furthermore, he repeatedly emphasizes the fundamental processual nature of mobility and locomotion, identifying the carriage as an innovation in travel, and he even speaks of an incipient carriage age in this context. Denzler draws a differentiated, convincing picture of the streets as plural-used, sensitive spaces of economy and trade, property, money, and monetary materialities, also postulating that the technology of street and road construction before the construction of the causeway was characterized by the participation of many non-experts.

The summaries at the end of each main chapter are particularly useful. Unfortunately, the book does not contain an index of persons or places, which would have facilitated more targeted and faster access for future case analyses. Some linguistic errors only slightly diminish the overall very good impression of the study, which remains a consistently pleasant read.

Alexander Denzler concludes his study with a concise summary of the important results of his analysis, projecting all the individual findings back onto the three areas of practices that were ultimately constitutive for the sixteenth-century street: 1) practices of use and transportation, 2) practices of maintenance, and 3) practices of exchange and appropriation. In doing so, he cleverly ties his findings to the fundamental praxeological methodology of his study. Denzler has offered an impressively nuanced new perspective on street history by overcoming the deficiencies (and oversimplifications) of prevailing perceptions of the early modern street system.

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Fiume hosszú árnyéka – A városi modernizáció kritikája a 19. század második felében [The long shadow of Fiume: Criticisms of urban modernization in the second half of the nineteenth century].
By Veronika Eszik. Budapest: HUN-REN Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2024. pp. 196.

This book, which focuses on critical assessments of urban modernization in Fiume during the second half of the nineteenth century, is based on Veronika Eszik's doctoral thesis in history, completed at the Atelier Department of Interdisciplinary History at Eötvös Loránd University, which is already an indication of the rigor of the methodology and the quality of the academic supervision. Eszik, furthermore, is fluent in the three languages necessary for work on Fiume (Italian, Croatian, and Hungarian), which is not always the case in studies on this city. She has based her work on several conceptual and methodological decisions for which she offers ample explanation in the introduction. Starting from the notion of development as a Promethean phenomenon (Chapter 2 is dedicated to urban space and planning), Eszik proposes a study on the various narratives of the city (Chapter 3) to address anti-urban reactions on several levels: the surrounding rural populations, which was gradually integrated into the city but felt excluded, both because of the acceleration of "progress" and for political reasons, since the Slavic hinterland found itself facing the Italian-Hungarian urban elites. These contradictory aspects generated conflicts centered on the appropriation of the urban space and the challenges of modernization (Chapters 4 and 6). Fiume is therefore well situated, in its imperial, Hungarian, Italian, and Croatian context, as case study of the tensions of urban modernization.

The book offers a deliberately partial picture of society, urban spaces, and discourses (and one hopes that Eszik's discussion will prompt more in-depth research). Eszik offers a rich look at the laboratory character that Fiume took on for the Hungarian state from the perspectives of infrastructure (the recurring dispute over the railway line that only served Hungary), industry, and urban planning. The city assumed this place as a kind of textbook study in part because of the arrival of numerous experts who formed a group of agents promoting discourses of modernization. In this regard, Eszik has a tendency, common in studies on various parts of Austria-Hungary, to seek models and points of comparison in Western historiography, in this case largely French, when works on the empire would have been more relevant. This is particularly true of the

 DOI 10.38145/2025.3.496

colonial dimension, where insights from Czernowitz or Sarajevo would have been useful. Similarly, when it comes to urban planning and the destruction of the old urban fabric, the examples of Prague (*asanace*, or the major project undertaken in Josefov, the Jewish Quarter, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth, allegedly to modernize and sanitize the area) or even Vienna are essential, not to speak of Hungarian examples, such as the city of Temesvár (today Timişoara, Romania). Not surprisingly, some reactions noted here were found elsewhere, when the urge to modernize was seen as a negation of urban heritage.[1]

The comparison with Zengg (Senj), which is presented in Chapter 5 and which may seem surprising at first glance, proves convincing. It is understandable why another coastal city in Croatian territory was chosen, given that, in purely quantitative terms, one would expect a comparison with Pola (Pula) or Zara (Zadar), which were under Austrian administration. This would be a useful avenue to explore in further research. The discussion of Zengg allows Eszik to illustrate the anti-modern narrative that is one of the central themes of her study. More surprising, however, is the absence of the theme of mirror rivalry between Fiume and Trieste, which is constantly evoked in contemporary sources. This is an important element that dominates the discourse in Fiume, and some consideration of this rivalry would have added nuance to the description of the Hungarians' ambitions, which were also directed against Austria. One of the objectives of the development of the port and the shipping companies was to divert part of the freight traffic from Trieste to Fiume, regardless of how illusory this undertaking was.

One of the book's great strengths is its focus on the discourses of various actors, from the central government to Hungarian intellectuals and local Italian and Croatian protagonists. However, it would have been useful to see a more detailed picture of Fiume's society, particularly from the perspectives of its community life and school system, on which there are abundant sources, as this would have helped clarify certain elements of these discourses. Among the aspects of the narrative put forward by the central government, that of Fiume as a "second capital" is very well demonstrated, and Eszik draws on an extensive array of sources, including literary ones. The analogy between Budapest, which was gradually conquered by the nation, and Fiume serves to turn difficulties

1 Cf. Wolfgang Kos, Christian Rapp, eds, *Alt-Wien: Die Stadt, die niemals war* (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2005).

(distance, non-Magyar populations) into assets. Eszik also highlights the paradox of exalting a regional center that was not conceived as such due to its status as the kingdom's only port. This proactive policy was supported by a propaganda campaign at both the local and national levels. Never did the since paraphrased words "Tengerre magyar!" (To the sea, Hungarians!), attributed to Lajos Kossuth in 1848, seem more apt.

The flip side of this discourse, characterized by anti-modernism and Croatian nationalism, is explored through the 1883 bilingual sign affair. Croatian nationalism began to focus more and more on the city of Fiume, and Croatian nationalist discourses (of which the sign affair was a motif) began to fuel resentment among members of the rural populations and in the hinterland in general, as also became increasingly true in Zengg, which emerged as a stronghold of the Party of Rights (Stranka Prava). The arguments subsequently developed by the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka) echoed this observation of a growing divide between urban and rural areas. Eszik provides clear discussion of the Catholic religious dimension of the movement, but she would have done well to have offered more details concerning its anti-Hungarian (no doubt linked to the Calvinist beliefs of certain members of the Magyar elite) and anti-Semitic aspects. Less attention is devoted to the third actor, the Italian municipality, though its attitude towards irredentism on the one hand and autonomism on the other is very revealing of the unease felt towards the central state, Croatia-Slavonia, and the desire to preserve the Italian character of the city. These issues were raised not only in debates concerning architecture. The figure of Riccardo Zanella, briefly mentioned, reflects these ambiguities. Eszik would have done well to have noted that the state initially attempted to exploit the autonomist movement in order to prevent the development of irredentism, which was poisoning political life in Trieste. The tacit alliance between the local elites and Budapest only reinforced the anti-urban Croatian discourse, which portrayed the city as a true *corpus separatum*.

This informative and engaging study opens up many avenues for discussion and further research, which hopefully will address the lacunae that remain and enable Eszik to engage in dialogues with specialists in the urban history of Austria-Hungary.

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Hungarian Historical Review 14, no. 3 (2025): 499–502

Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics in the Interwar Period and Beyond: A Transnational History.

By Balázs Trencsényi. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025. pp. 336.

It has become commonplace on both sides of the Atlantic to declare that liberal democracy is in crisis. For some years now, a grim politics of neoliberal austerity has eroded faith in a better future. The Left has gone into a defensive crouch everywhere, trying desperately to preserve what can be saved of the twentieth-century welfare state. And anti-democratic populists have risen to power in many places, not least in Washington, D.C. Their xenophobia, pro-natalist fantasies, and contempt for liberal norms at home and abroad have reminded many observers of the 1930s, when democracy faced an even graver crisis. What should we make of these resonances? Are the similarities between past and present superficial, or are they evidence of deeper continuities? What can historical understanding offer in the present moment?

Balázs Trencsényi tackles these questions in his impressive new book, *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics in the Interwar Period and Beyond*. Rather than reconstruct the genealogy of a particular anti-democratic movement or trend, Trencsényi devotes his study to the very concept of crisis used by critics past and present. He begins, as any conceptual historian must, by paying his debts to Reinhart Koselleck, who showed how crisis evolved from a turning point in history (the moment of crisis) into a critical diagnosis of a conjuncture (we are in a crisis) that also and at the same time legitimized political action (the crisis demands a solution).[1] Writing in the 1950s, Koselleck famously traced this evolution back to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. In this book, Trencsényi repurposes Koselleck's approach for the present moment by historicizing it and putting it in a wider spatial frame. According to Trencsényi, the idea that crises can jump across national borders and multiply in dozens of different places simultaneously—the sheer ubiquity of crisis that so many people sense today—was profoundly shaped in the ideological crucible of the interwar era. Crisis as a concept did not radiate out into the world from a birthplace in Western Europe. It emerged in many countries and in many distinct but intersecting forms at once both local and global. A history of discourses about crisis—one that includes even Koselleck's foundational contribution—must

1 Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

DOI 10.38145/2025.3.499

therefore be, Trencsényi insists, a transnational history focused squarely on the decades between the two world wars.

Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics is a panoramic survey of interwar European debates about crisis. Reading it is a humbling experience. Is there no intellectual whose works Trencsényi has not read? Alongside canonical figures like Carl Schmitt and Antonio Gramsci, he discusses an astonishing range of writers from East Central and Southern Europe. Even regional specialists will not know them all. By casting his net so widely, Trencsényi can juxtapose unfamiliar thinkers and texts with much more familiar ones, revealing how various global crises were interpreted differently in different corners of Europe. A particularly striking example comes in his discussion of the interwar precursors to present-day neoliberalism (pp.128–32). Trencsényi begins where one might expect: in Vienna with Ludwig von Mises. But he then shifts the focus to Bucharest and the Romanian economists Mihail Manoilescu and Ştefan Zeletin. Like their Austrian counterpart, Manoilescu and Zeletin wanted to defend private property against collectivist ideologies, and they similarly worried that parliamentary democracy was too weak for the job. But the two Romanians were nationalist politicians who wanted to build a liberal capitalist society for the Romanian nation. Eager to put their thumb on the scale in favor of ethnic Romanians, they were far more willing to consider state intervention in the economy than von Mises and the other members of the so-called Austrian school. They were also more sympathetic to populist nationalism than the Austrians would ever be. (Manoilescu flirted with the fascist Iron Guard and served in the pro-Nazi government of Marshal Ion Antonescu; von Mises was forced to flee Vienna in 1940 because he was Jewish.) By setting these figures next to one another, Trencsényi shows how the interwar crisis of liberalism could be interpreted very differently, depending on the context. He also reminds us that places outside Western Europe are better understood, in his words, as "laboratories of ideas and practices with global repercussions" (p.267), rather than as semi-peripheral regions that only digested ideas generated elsewhere.

The richness of the book's intellectual landscape has another advantage. Across chapters devoted to different aspects of the interwar crisis (such as the crises of liberalism, democracy, and capitalism), Trencsényi considers the legacy of interwar-era thought for the two ideological streams that dominate global politics today: neoliberalism and populism. A subtle analyst, he avoids polemical "hot takes" that warn "Fascism is back" or that "it is 1933 all over again." Instead, Trencsényi argues that the crises of the interwar era cast a "long shadow" over

the present, and he prefers to speak of affinities and resonances with the past instead of continuities or connections. In his view, "both neoliberalism and populism carry the experience of the interwar crises with them, and, in turn, their self-legitimization is also deeply entangled with the discourse of crisis" (p.242). In other words, historical study of the interwar period shows us how the same political conjuncture can give birth to diametrically opposed ideological streams. It teaches us to see the deeper conceptual structures shared by those streams. It also opens our eyes to differences between the past and the present and, in particular, to the ways in which historical time in contemporary crisis discourses (routinized, looping, and eternally stuck in the present) feels very different from the temporality of crisis in the interwar years (a radical choice in the present between alternative ideological futures).

There is, however, one critical aspect missing from Trencsényi's analysis: gender. Consider the case of the Czech economist and Minister of Finance, Karel Engliš. Engliš appears briefly in the chapter on the crisis of capitalism as someone who believed (not unlike Mihail Manoilescu) that a certain amount of state intervention was necessary to save liberal capitalism. So far, so good. But how could liberals intervene in society and still call themselves liberal? Much depended on the form that state intervention would take. As Melissa Feinberg has shown, Engliš hoped to manage the looming economic crisis in part by banning married women from the workplace, enshrining the male breadwinner as the social norm, and thereby (in his view) restoring balance to the labor market.[2] In the end, his plans were never put into effect. But they reflected a belief, shared by liberals and their opponents everywhere and very much still with us today, that in order to ensure social order, it was necessary to regulate relationships between men and women at home and at work. To be sure, Trencsényi devotes a few pages to figures like the Myrdals in Sweden or the Slovenian feminist Angela Vode in a brief section on the place of demography and birth rates in the crisis of social reproduction. But the general absence of gender from the analysis feels like a missed opportunity, not least because the demonization of "gender ideology" is a central issue in the politics of the populist right today. Weaving gender into the survey of interwar intellectuals would make it possible for Trencsényi to tease out a more complex net of affinities between past and present modes of crisis management. It would highlight the bundling, in

2 Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship, and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 112–14.

populist and neoliberal politics, of those forms of crisis discourse which he discusses in depth, like the crises of democracy and capitalism, with those he does not, like crises of masculinity or natality. Perhaps most importantly, it would have connected his important reflections on temporality and crisis with one of the most explosive debates about historical time in contemporary politics: the supposed timelessness of gender identities proclaimed by the populist Right (now enshrined in the Hungarian constitution since 2025) versus the assertion, commonplace on the Left and among academics, that genders are concepts constructed in and by history.

"The frequent appearance of the discourse of crisis," Trencsényi writes in the last pages of the book, has become "indicative of a real emergency—that of the growing rift between liberal and democratic principles. The consequences of this rift can be very tangible and painful" (p.287). What should liberals do? Can they say that there is a crisis without propping up the neoliberal status quo or legitimizing the populist assault on democracy? In reply, Trencsényi imagines a liberal democratic discourse of crisis that is self-reflective and open to dialogue. As answers go, it is hopeful if a bit unsatisfying. But *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics* was not written to be a manifesto. It is an outstanding comparative and transnational guide to the ways in which previous generations of intellectuals conceptualized and reacted to crisis. By considering their successes and failures, we gain better insight into our own current predicament.

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