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**Dariusz Kupisz, Anna Obara, Krzysztof P. Pękała,
Dzieje Motycza na przestrzeni wieków [‘A history
of Motycz over the centuries’], Lublin, 2010; 148 pp.**

Writing about regional history is presently one of the most popular ways of presenting the past in the historical literature. And, it seems the simplest one – but the reality is just converse.

A monograph of a village named Motycz has appeared in the publishing market. The village is situated “in the Province [Voivodeship] of Lublin, Commune of Konopnica, at a close distance from Lublin – just dozen-or-so kilometres away” (p. 5). Regarding the nationwide scale, this is one of the hundreds of publications of its type, arranged in a similar way. Yet, each such publication reflects somewhat different image, which all in all shows how diverse the life in those hubs was.

The book’s content is split into three parts, which is a sort of standard (in the introduction, one of the authors says that there are four chapters – p. 6). The first part deals with the history of Motycz till the end of 15th century; the second shows the village in the modern era (16th to 18th cc.); the locality’s vicissitudes between 1795 and 1918 are discussed in the third. A calendar of occurrences directly involving Motycz in the two decades between the two World Wars is added (not quite aptly called a ‘chapter’); there are photographs directly or indirectly related to the area.

The authors have attempted at presenting in their texts as much historical information on Motycz as possible. The first certain mention of the village dates to 30th November 1317, appearing in a document of Prince Władysław Łokietek (Ladislav the Elbow-high), issued for the brothers Dzierżko and Ostasz of Bejsce. Ever since then, a series of factors informing the life of the old-time dwellers of Motycz have been observable. An exemplary factor is serfdom that the locals performed, as the subjects. Individuals confirmed based on the sources, some with their names and surnames, and analysis of their daily problems form an extremely important stage in cognising any local history. For instance, the valuable records of the land register of Lublin (1453), telling us of Jakub, chair of the village council, having been accused by a certain Anna of failure to meet his matrimonial promise (p. 35); or, another woman named Anna accusing Stanisław of Krasnystaw of bigamy (p. 42), are of

primary importance for an attempt at understanding the people of the period. These matters are obviously not ‘stipulated’ for this particular village, as such situations could be met in other parts of the Commonwealth – e.g. in Red Ruthenia, or Pomerania. In other words, the nature of issues of this sort was universal, and such is the image we encounter, to a smaller or bigger extent, in the publication under review.

Can the reader – particularly if a Motycz dweller – find an answer to one of pervading questions, following the idea that “man living in our contemporary time intuitively tends to search in the past for a number of questions s/he is uneasy about” (p. 5)? In spite of a plenty of its doubtless strong points, the book is but a typical monograph of a locality, made according to a standard model. There is nothing ‘novel’ about it; a record of relevant facts is basically provided. Well, there are questions posed, but they play a marginal part. One of the book’s weaknesses is linguistic and stylistic errors (as in chapter 3), no conclusive section and no collective breakdown of sources and studies provided. The authors/editors could have thought of a name index and/or list of abbreviations. Such outlined history of the locality could have been complemented by a study of its more recent history – the World War 2 period and the post-war years; the authors have so far resolved to “focus on investigating a history of Motycz of whose specificities its contemporary dwellers may very well not be aware, while access to the relevant information remains difficult to gain, as it is limited to a narrow group of history professionals” (p. 6).

This study’s target group are historians (due to an extensive source base specified in the footnotes, particularly, in chapter 2) as well as man-in-the-street not dealing with this scholarly domain on a daily basis.

To sum up, regardless of certain, mainly technical, shortcomings, the book may be regarded useful, providing a good basis for further, more penetrating studies – on the locality itself and on the settlement in the entire (historical) Province of Lublin.