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# LABOUR

ORIGINS OF TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN BRNO

LT000

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Independent Group

Interiors Buildings Cities, TU Delft

2018/2019

Since the middle ages the craftsmen represented three quarters of the town population and were integral to towns. One of the conducted crafts was cloth making, that was suitable for export and was the only craft (except for brewing) including the direct division of labour. These characteristics made it exceptional and very potential for further development in the future.

As any other town of that age, Brno was undoubtedly producing cloths and there are evidences of prospering export to the neighbouring countries.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in comparison to Czech cities and especially to Jihlava (*Iglau*) the amount of production was significantly lower. It is worthy to mention that Jihlava constituted its own language island (*Iglauer Sprachinsel*). A crucial turning point for Brno could be found in the second half of the 18th century. After the loss of the economically important Silesia, current sovereign Maria Theresa was looking for a compensation that could enhance the industrial development in Czech lands. Therefore, a group of wool making specialists from Verviers (former Austrian Netherlands, now Belgium) was sent to

1. Hana Jordánková a František Zřídkař, *Brno město řemesel, průmyslu a obchodu*, Brno 1993, p. 6.

Jihlava, regarded as a center of wool industry of that time. They were supposed to retrain local artisans to make fine cloth, because so far these workshops produced only rough cloth. Unfortunately this intention turned out to be unacceptable for local guild. In 1764 Johann Anton Kernhofer, director of credit bank and councilman, came up with an idea to move this manufacture to Brno and because of an absence of strong cloth making guild, it was successfully realized. There was again lack of specialists and at this time they were invited from Belgium, the Lower Rhine region and Saxony.<sup>2</sup> This first manufacture in Brno was prospering in particular thanks to the local trader Johann Leopold Köffler who laid foundations for wool production in Brno. Köffler's family originated in the Austrian Carinthia (*Kärnten*). Under his management the manufacture succeeded on foreign markets and he founded the very first workers colony in Brno. Despite all of this it bankrupted in 1789, but many of his former employees became entrepreneurs and founded their own enterprises. One of them was for example Johann Heinrich Offermann that will be productive into the inter-war period in the 20th century. It is then legitimate to call Köffler's manufacture as a "mother" of industry in Brno.

2. Ibid., p.15.

This one act of relocating accelerated a massive industrial wave in Brno, that by the historians could be compared only to turbulent development of industry in British Manchester. Thus, Brno has an epithet the Moravian Manchester. Foreigners and newcomers played an important role in this transformation and formed a new chapter in the history of the city.

Main figures in wool industry of Brno were coming from cities like Aachen, Burscheid, Düren, Gemünd, Julich and Monschau in Rhineland, but also from Verviers and Eupen in today's Belgium. That means they originated in Protestant countries and their arrival would not be possible without the Patent of Toleration issued by Josef II in 1781. Afterwards they were allowed to settle down and remain Protestants, which was encouraging to relocate with the families and relatives. Protestant community in Brno was exclusively German at that time. Very common were also newcomers from other Habsburg provinces like Steiermark, Hungary or Veneto. There were entrepreneurs of Czech origin but rather as a minority. As a consequence of the industrial progress in wool factories, special textile machinery became very in demand. Machines could not be exported

from the Great Britain because of the Continental Blockade, so that English and Irish engineers arrived in the Western and Central Europe.

At the turn of the 18th and 19th century manufactures are replaced by factories. However, there is a blurred distinction between these two terms, because some manufactures were already at this time called factories. Some of manufactures were also using simple machines, even though Latin origin clearly refer to making with hands.

### Industrial boom of the 19th century in Brno

Beginning of the 19th century meant the end of Napoleon Wars and therefore termination of the Continental Blockade, nevertheless wool industry in Brno collapsed. Cheaper and higher-quality products from England flooded the market of Austrian Empire. As a result 11 factories from 29 did not survive.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand some of the stronger companies utilized the crisis and purchased more machinery like for example J. H. Offermann or Brüder Schöller - one of the new foreign companies that came to Brno after the

3. Hana Jordánková a František Zřídkač-selý, *Brno město řemesel, průmyslu a obchodu*, Brno 1993, p. 17.

crisis. Their factory is considered to be the most complexed and integral factory of that time, because all the production processes were carried out there. Luckily wool industry recovered in few years and soon it grew even faster than before. Important milestone was the year 1839, when the first train arrived from Vienna to Brno. It signified de facto an introduction of steam railway in Czech lands. Moreover it was a direct connection to Viennese markets and further to foreign countries. After the official permission from authorities in the middle of the 19th century, Jewish entrepreneurs could finally spread into outskirts of Brno. Namely then Brüder Popper, Löw - Beer family or Brüder Strakosch.

In the second half of the 19th century wool industry probably reached its peak. After all fine cloth from Brno got through to European and American markets. The biggest sales area was in the North America, although it was only for couple of years. Importance of this trade confirmed a consulate founded in Brno as a first institution like that in Czech lands.<sup>4</sup> Despite several crisis wool production kept its leading position among cities in the monarchy, on the first

4. Tomáš Zapletal a Andrea Březinová, *Brno - moravský Manchester*, Brno 2014, p. 24.

world war it was not prepared though. Storing supply material only in one year advance led to fast depletion during the war and it was followed by using substitute lower-quality materials that irretrievably damaged the machinery. Wool industry in Brno had reached its culmination point (in terms of technical development) in the end of the 19th century and began to lag.

It would be also worth it to mention an unequal position of industrialists of Czech origin. Undoubtedly, German industrialists consider themselves as full Brno inhabitants and identify themselves within the city. It is after all a main purpose of this thesis to prove that Germans were not an alien element of the city but its fixed and in a sort of way a native component. Nevertheless, it was harder for factories “in Czech hands” to have an access to works commissioned by the municipality or other bigger companies under German influence. There were few exemptions as for example a factory specialized on electrotechnical components that expanded even abroad that was founded in Brno by J. Donát, R. Bartelemus and Š. Doubrava.<sup>5</sup>

5. Hana Jordánková a František Zřídkař, *Brno město řemesel, průmyslu a obchodu*, Brno 1993, p. 22.

## Urban development

In the century of an industrial revolution that struck Brno as no other Moravian city, a completely new image of the city was formed - from the provincial city into the industrial centre. Except from increasing number of inhabitants and economic power in the city, outskirts behind the city walls were subject of much turbulent development. New factory complexes and new typologies of factories in general changed the approaches of urban planning at that time. While until then the place of working and living was identical, in the 19th century a separation of these two essential elements of the city occurred. This trend could be traced back in earlier English industrial cities or later it was applied in the city of Zlín in interwar period of Czechoslovakia. However, Brno of the 19th century was not an accurate example of the strict separations into zones for industry and living, there were rather efforts to concentrate all the functions in one compact location.<sup>6</sup> As first illustration could serve already mentioned factory of J. H. Köffler in the northern outskirts of the city. The factory was located

6. Tomáš Zapletal a Andrea Březinová, *Brno - moravský Manchester*, Brno 2014, p. 50.

next to important road heading to the north called Velká Nová street (nowadays Lidická). On the grounds of need for workers housing, he founded a labour colony that consisted of 44 single houses in the vicinity of the factory. It was the first colony of that kind in the Austrian monarchy. Although this colony now belongs to the past, a visible track in the current urban block was left in form of the street *Mezírka*. [3]

Factories had to be placed to the outskirts of cities simply because of their scale and also incompatibility with hygienic standards of the urban environment. In terms of Brno there was one more reason for choosing periphery locations and that was presence of water as a technological source necessary for textile industry.<sup>7</sup> Therefore water from rivers Svratka and Svitava and their mill races was used for processes like fulling or colouring, but it could not be used as a power source though. Insufficient steam gradient did not enable that. Luckily this deficiency turned to be a challenge and it started fast development in the machine industry in Brno.

7. Bohumír Smutný, *Brněnští podnikatelé a jejich podniky: 1764–1948, encyklopedie podnikatelů a jejich rodin*, Brno 2012, p. 13.

It would be worth it to focus more precisely on Brno outskirts since they were undergoing massive changes at that time. The first incentive for a development of outskirts originated in 1783, when Joseph II equalized gild masters from cities and outskirts. Then there was no legislative obstruction, but funds were still missing in that area. First factories had to be constructed thanks to foreign capital that was brought by entrepreneurs from German Saxony and Rhineland. Till the end of the 18th century Wilhelm Mundi founded his factory in *Zábdrovice*, Heninrich Hopf in *Cejl*, Johann Heinrich Offermann in *Náhon*, Leopold Schulz in *Křenová* and Johann Bartholomäus Seitter in *Petrohradská*.<sup>8</sup> These factories were reliant on a great amount of workers and current settlements were not able to accommodate them. Naturally outskirts became their new homes. In terms of urban development of Brno two phenomenas could be followed. First of all radial structure of the suburban area was consolidated and formed one continuous ring around the city. Secondly it shaped into the industrial zone that was

8. Karel Kuča, *Brno: vývoj města, předměstí a připojených vesnic*. Praha 2000, p. 83.

prevailing above the residential aspect of outskirts, even though it was essential to keep labour living in this area. As a result of the abrupt development, the outskirts were not able to transform to properly working urban districts.<sup>9</sup> For example no new churches were erected, but only older religious buildings were revoked or tore down. Unfortunately even the inner city could not help to avoid this course, because it could not naturally merge due to the presence of baroque fortifications. More than a discomfort for workers at that time it posed a threat for the development in the future but maybe also unique opportunity for something new.

An interesting indicator of city growth were cemeteries. Suddenly they became inside of the city that was from the view of authorities undesirable. In 1784 then a ban was imposed for burying in the populated settlements and cemeteries were pushed into the outskirts. Numerous diseases and epidemics for sure contributed to this shift.

In contrast to excessive growth in outskirts, the inner city went through important but different changes. In the end of the 18th century under the rule of Joseph II and his reforms,

9. Ibid.

plenty of monasteries and other religious buildings were closed and transformed into military facilities because circumstances demanded that. Otherwise it could be concluded that till the middle of the 19th century, outskirts were playing more significant role in architectural development compared to the centre.

### Textile factories

Textile factories were usually built in the form of boxes of several floors and the interiors were not divided and served as one immense space. These multi-story production facilities had also their own name in Czech (*etážovka*), but they were developed by English inventors and engineers. New textile machines needed appropriate building that would have enabled convenient installation and replacement of smaller machines, secondly enabled easy distribution of steam force and finally secured safe working conditions for employees (sufficient amount of light and air). As a result multi-story building made of bricks or stone with regularly sized windows was introduced. Interior supports were often



from cast iron and all the circulation was shifted outside so that internal layout would be less disrupted.<sup>10</sup> In the second half of the 19th century this typology was imported to the Czech lands together with textile machinery from England. Average floor height was very similar to apartment buildings and their rigid structure predetermined them to an almost universal use in the urban areas. Thus, it is no surprise that some of them were easily converted to housing or offices. Moreover, textile factories served as a logo/icon for factory owners and therefore technical and architectural quality corresponded to that. In case of factories in Brno, they were very rigid and decent structures that could be standing till nowadays without any major intervention. It could be concluded that multi-story textile factories foreshadowed the future development of the modern architecture and classify them as “protofunctionalism” is then more than appropriate.

10. Eva Dvořáková, Benjamin Fragner, Tomáš Šenberger. *Industriál – paměť – východiska*. Praha 2007, p. 158.

## Architecture of factories

Historical styles of the factories in the 19th century factories prevailing in Brno include late classicism and the Neo-Renaissance. Architects were back then making efforts to stylize factories into palaces. One of these was for instance factory H. F. & E. Soxhlet (Cejl 68) from 1833 build as a classicist three-story building. Remarkable width of twenty-seven window axes was crowned by a decorated tympanum. Nevertheless, by the end of the 19th century this eclecticism was fading and “protofunctionalistic” architecture was taking over. Architecture free of any decorative elements. From this moment harsh times began for historians of architecture and overall heritage conservation. Industrial heritage became more ambiguous and as Aleš Filip quotes: “...even though common art-historical (*kunsthistorisch*) tools apparently fails, it is impossible to liberate ourselves from a belief that factory buildings are rather a cultural phenomenon than an engineering work.”<sup>9</sup> Factories are indeed technical monuments, but also an indisputable memory of society, of labour force and industrialist's efforts. It is sur-

11. Tomáš Zapletal a Andrea Březinová, Brno – moravský Manchester, Brno 2014, p. 52.

prising that industrial heritage was given an appropriate attention not sooner than in the 70's of the last century and in Czech lands one decade later.

Over time Brno factories lost their original production function (with a few exceptions) and the buildings are now used as warehouses, offices, flats, etc. However, many have fallen into despair and their further existence is uncertain. It would be appropriate to briefly mention several precedents. First of them is Moritz Fuhrman Factory as an excellent example of multi-storey textile factory. Secondly the Aron and Jakob Löw-Beer's Sons Factory that represents a typical factory complex of the late 19th century with evident eclectic approach. And as a third example suits the Bochner Palace that accommodated residential and administrative facilities.

#### Moritz Fuhrmann Factory

In 1893, entrepreneur Moriz Fuhrmann bought a plot and houses at Cejl 72 and two years later he set up the headquarters of his company there. Initially it was also a residence of his family, as it was usual for first generation of entrepre-

neurs, right at the in factory premises. In 1913, new six-storey factory was erected at the bank of the Svratka river and the main production was moved to this new location. The massive reinforced concrete structure featured a simple industrial appearance which was based on a subtle Classicist pattern with a central avant-corps topped by a pediment. Windows were left without any decorative elements only with segmental arches. Unfortunately, the factory was left to decay until recent times, when it was rebuilt and disposed of unique and valuable character.

#### The Aron and Jakob Löw-Beer's Sons Factory

After releasing restrictions against Jewish entrepreneurs, Löw-Beer family could have expanded in 1877 their production to Brno. They bought the former factory Gebrüder Popperin in Old Brno and produced the supplying cloth for military uniforms. Apart from that, company established a subsidiary in Germany and owned smaller businesses in France and Germany and a shop in Vienna. It was one of the most successful companies of that time. However, only corner wing from the immense factory complex survived, so it is rather one of the few remaining evidences of textile

industry in the area of Old Brno.

### Bochner Palace

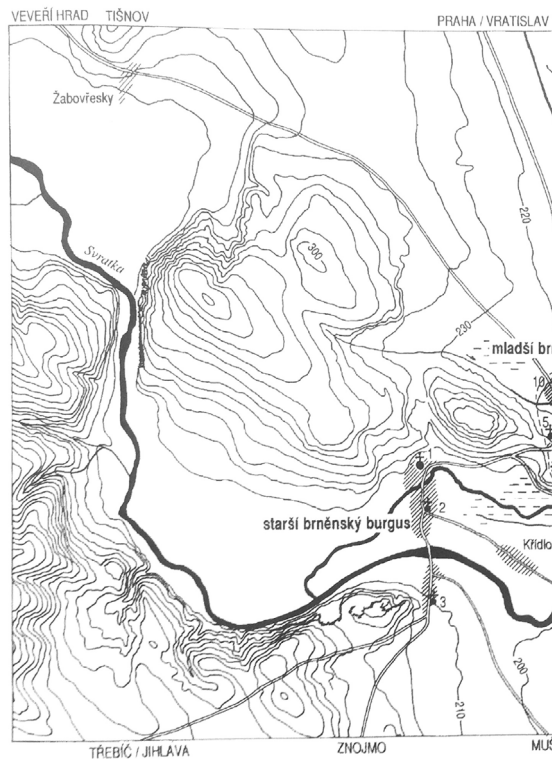
This historicist Neo-Renaissance palace was built between 1864 and 1867 by the builder Josef Arnold. It is also one of the scarce examples, where the author is known. Maybe due to its hybrid function combining housing and administration that he designed for the Bochner brothers. Palace served as a headquarters for adjacent factory and family residence firstly for Bochner family and later for Stiassni family until the 1918. “The facade of the palace is divided into three sections crowned by volute modillions. Statues of children placed in the window keystones are reminiscent of other Josef Arnold’s buildings. This building is a great reminder of what the first phase of the development on the Brno Ring Boulevard (*Brno Ringstraße*).”<sup>12</sup>

In this building block delimited by streets Dornych and Přízova, English entrepreneur Paul Neumark started his

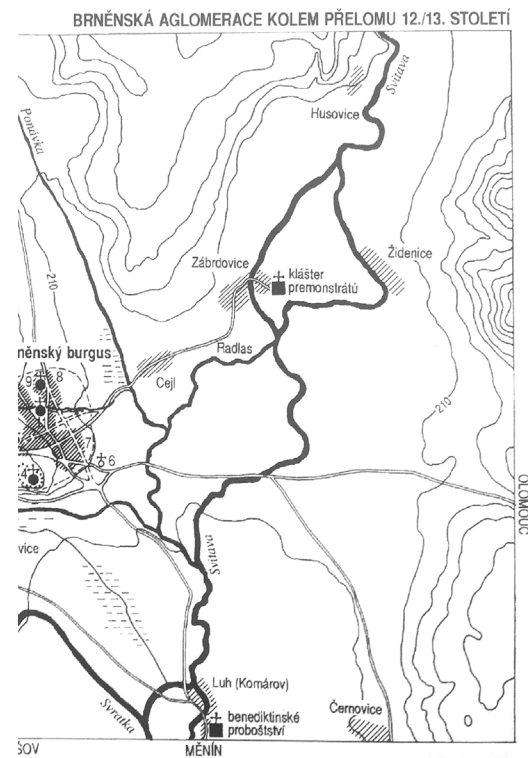
12. Petra Svobodová and Veronika Lukešová, *Exploring the History of the Textile Industrialists in Brno: Löw-Beer / Stiassni / Tugendhat*, Brno 2017, p. 107.

business. Therefore, four-storey corner building from reinforced concrete was erected. It was crowned with classicist tympanum, but during the interwar period Ernst Wiesner was supposed to take part in its later alterations.<sup>13</sup> Wiesner’s authorship is deduced from his work on villa for Walter V. Neumark. At the beginning of the Second World War, the whole complex was confiscated and sold as all the other Jewish property. After the war the factory was nationalized and since then called Vlněna state enterprise (národní podnik Vlněna). Production finally ceased around 1997 and the buildings were sold. Today, after the recent demolition in 2017 of factory buildings, the palace remains the only witness of the turbulent history of the Bochner, Stiassni and Neumark families.

13. Tomáš Zapletal and Andrea Březinová, *Brno – moravský Manchester*, Brno 2014, p. 55.



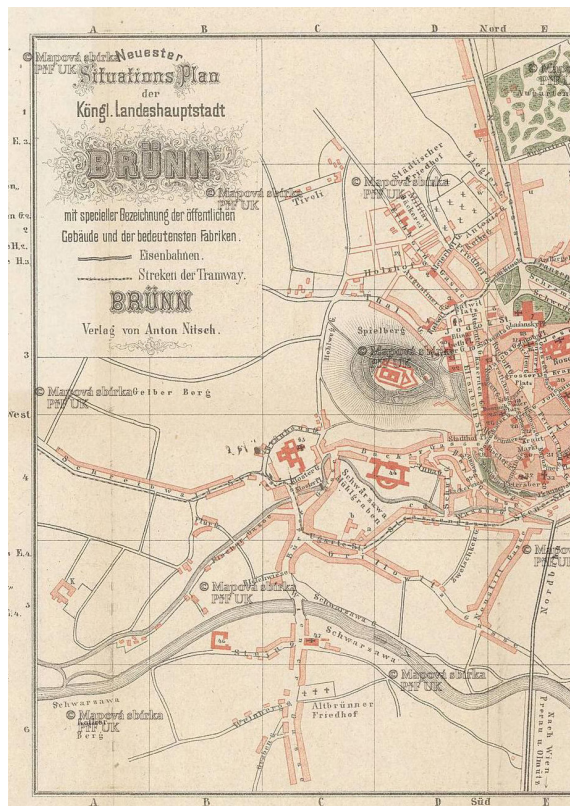
- 1 - Church of the Virgin Mary (former rotunda),
- 2 - Church of St. Oldřich and Prokop (unknown age),
- 3 - Church of St. Wenceslaus (unknown age),
- 4 - Provost church of St. Peter (Petrov),
- 5 - Church of St. Michael (unknown age),
- 6 - Church of St. Martin (unknown age),



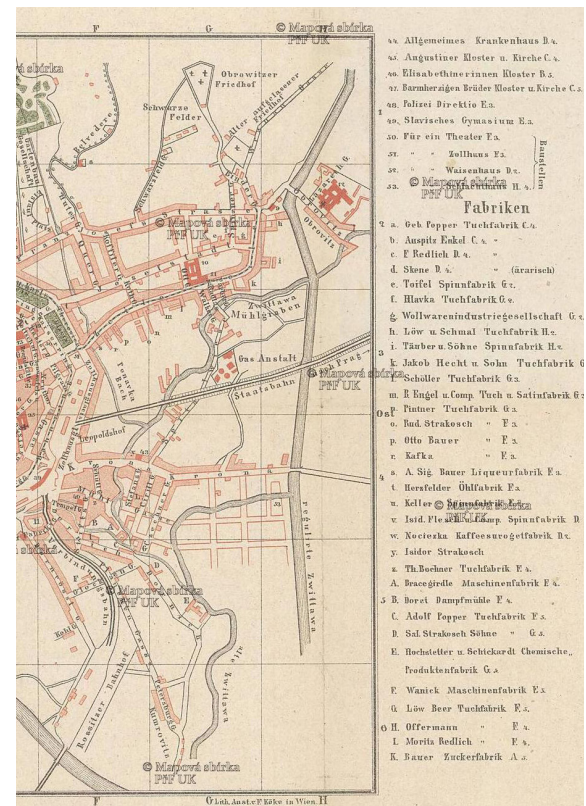
- 7 - documented ancient settlement,
- 8 - Villa forensis of German colonists,
- 9 - Church of St. James,
- 10 - Villa forensis of Roman colonists,
- 11 - Church of St. Nicholas

L T O O 1

Brno agglomeration around 12th/13th century

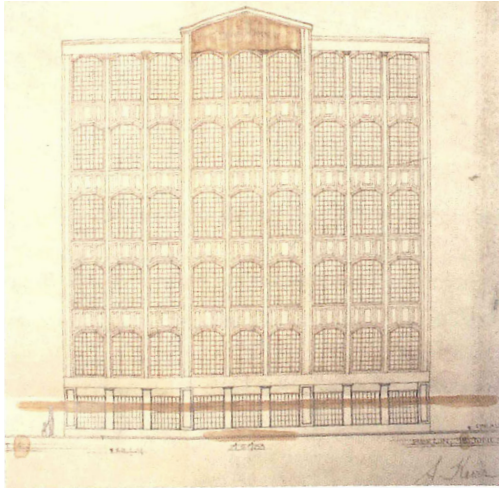


LT002  
Map of the 19th century with significant factories



Gr. Lith. Anst. v. F. Köke in Wien. B.

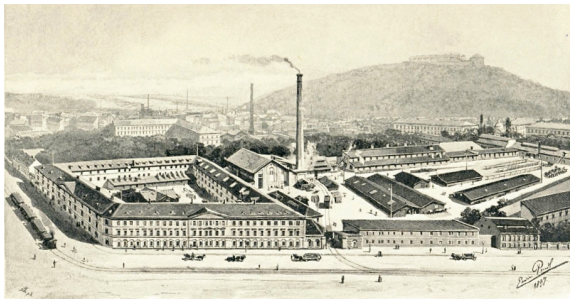




LT 003  
Moritz Fuhrmann Factory, original plan of the main facade  
1913



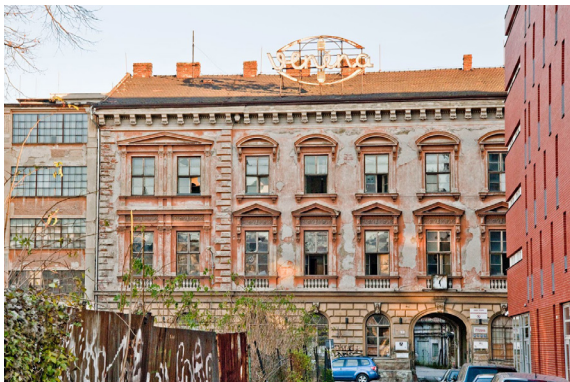
LT 004  
Moritz Fuhrmann Factory, state from 2005 vs. 2014



LT 005  
The Aron and Jakob Löw-Beer's Sons Factory  
1897



LT 006  
a similar view with leftover parts of the factory  
2017



LT007  
Bochner Palace  
2014



LT008  
Pau Neumark Factory  
1920's



## Figures

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- BT002** **Map of the 19th century with significant factories**, from Neuester Situations Plan der köngl. Landeshauptstadt Brünn, Anton Nitsch, 1870–1880, [http://digitool.is.cuni.cz/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object\\_id=1038848&silos\\_library=GEN01](http://digitool.is.cuni.cz/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=1038848&silos_library=GEN01)
- BT003** **Moritz Fuhrmann Factory**, from Tomáš Zapletal a Andrea Březinová, Brno – moravský Manchester, Brno 2014.
- BT004** **original plan of the main facade of Moritz Fuhrmann Factory**, from Petra Svobodová. Exploring the History of the Textile Industrialists in Brno: Löw– Beer / Stiassni / Tugendhat. Brno 2017.
- BT005** **a veduta of The Aron and Jakob Löw–Beer’s Sons Factory**, from <http://www.low-beerovy-vily.cz/podnikatelska-cinnost-low-beeru/>
- BT006** [maps.google.com](https://www.google.com/maps)
- BT007** **Bochner Palace**, from Tomáš Zapletal a Andrea Březinová, Brno – moravský Manchester, Brno 2014.
- BT008** **Paul Neumark factory**, from Tomáš Zapletal a Andrea Březinová, Brno – moravský Manchester, Brno 2014.

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