

Wojciech Balus. *Krakau zwischen Traditionen und Wegen in die Moderne: Zur Geschichte der Architektur und der Öffentlichen Grünanlagen im 19. Jahrhundert.* Stuttgart: Steiner, 2003. 133 pp. EUR 38.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-515-08344-7.



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Published on HABSBURG (March, 2006)

Wojciech Balus's book is neither the first one on the symbolism of Cracow architecture nor, as one may expect, an application of Carl Schorske's cultural historical approach to the study of architecture. The author's aims are more modest. Indebted to its forerunners,[1] he concentrates on the development of Cracow architecture and park planning as a sign of the city's search of identity. The book consists of two main chapters, "Identitätssuche der Stadt in ihrer Architektur" and "Zwischen Tradition und Modernität: Krakaus Grünanlagen" and a large introductory chapter "Geschichte und städtebauliche Entwicklung Krakaus im Überblick." Balus suggests that Cracow's architectural and urban development was shaped according to an explicit national vision of the city as the "spiritual capital of Poland" and a "depository of national traditions."

In the first chapter on architectural history, "Identitätssuche der Stadt in ihrer Architektur," the author discovers the nineteenth-century stylistic fashions to confirm to a theory of a local (in Polish, *swojski*, in German, *unserer* or *einheimischer*) search of a separate urban identity. The transformations of the concept of national style are the book's major concern. The search for an historic-national, yet local, urban identity underwent several phases, pioneered by the invention of Cra-

cow's Neo-Gothic. In this phase, the key events were the erection of the first Neo-Gothic church in the town of Rzepiennik Biskupi and the re-discovery of the so-called Cracow system of construction, i.e. the Gothic vaulting technique peculiar to medieval Cracow. While the former was perceived as the forerunner of the local school of Neo-Gothic despite its lack of local symbolic references, the latter was labelled the "Vistula style" and seen as a sign of the Polish national architectural style. The Neo-Gothic phase was followed by numerous quotations from local Renaissance buildings. Finally, the architect Teodor Talowski contributed to the invention of a modern, yet historicising city image. With these examples the author demonstrates how the local was *made* into the national.

The sub-chapter on Talowski is one of the strongest in the book. Balus reveals at great detail how, through a combination of "earlier" (medieval) and "later" (renaissance) architectural details, the asymmetrical facade composition, the wealth of medievalizing ironic inscriptions and the use of aged brick Talowski actually invented a "historical dimension" and imprinted it on the urban landscape of the city. Talowski's ironic, referential approach and his "deconstruction of Vitruvianism" may well earn him a place as another forerunner of post-modernism, already assigned to the recently re-discovered Slovene architect Josip Plecnik (p. 67).

In the book's second chapter, "Zwischen Tradition und Modernität: Krakaus Grünanlagen," Balus provides an insight into how the Cracow Baroque pleasure garden (*Vergnügungsgarten*) was transformed into a public park. Detailed stories are told about the garden of the local Riflemen (*Schützenverein*) society, the *Planty* promenade and the Dr. Jordan City Park. A concise introduction is provided about the *Vormärz* culture of pleasure walks and the exclusive socializing in the greenery. Some gardens prove more accessible than others, and this aspect demands further analysis. In Lemberg, the Galician capital, for example, even such private gardens restricted the "public" to wealthy and middle-class Christians. If this was true for Cracow too, it would add to the answer of why and how the city came to be seen as a "spiritual capital of Poland" rather than a multiethnic and multireligious town.

The book's strongest feature is its architectural historical analysis. Brilliant insight is given to the symbolism of Cracow's historic architecture as "speaking stones," loaded with biblical meaning, references to antiquity and modern national meaning. Architecture thus became literally a "history embodied" and a "book to read," while the city became *monumentum patriae*. Particularly revealing are the stories of Wawel restoration and the deep symbolic connotations that were invented around the medieval castle, and the rediscovery of the Renaissance details of the same castle, now interpreted as a "specifically Polish version of the Renaissance style" (p. 53). Cracow's architectural development led not to *Jugendstil*, as elsewhere, but to a "favouring of combined and heterogeneous historical forms" that should imprint the "heritage-like character" of the city (pp. 54-55).

The book's shortcomings lie in the areas outside architectural history. First, the two main chapters are connected only loosely. The reader is tempted to think of a somewhat supplementary character of the second chapter, a result of the author's involvement in a comparative project on parks and gardens in the Habsburg Monarchy. As a consequence of Balus's thorough analysis of the buildings and styles in the city center in the first chapter, it would be more logical to have a corresponding study of the newly added suburbs and their architecture. Instead, one gets an analysis of public parks and gardens, while innovative architecture in the new districts remains almost entirely untouched. The book is missing a general theme that would bind the two chapters, such as Peter Hanak's concept of "the workshop" for the study of fin-de-siècle Budapest or Akos Moravanszky's idea of "competing visions" for the nineteenth-century archi-

itecture in Central Europe.[2] The idea of an explicit national vision ("the spiritual capital of Poland") as a main driving force behind Cracow's architectural development and the argument that such a vision prevented radical architectural innovation and caused particular attention to restorative, historicizing and inner-city projects is not entirely convincing.[3]

Second, in contrast to the sophistication of the analysis of the architecture, the discussion of general history remains caught up in old national historical interpretations of Cracow's history that are unrelated to the issue of urban planning. Balus repeatedly suggests that Cracow's decline in the eighteenth century—the so-called period of "ruin"—was a result of repeated occupations: Swedish, Prussian and, finally, Austrian. Yet, if anything, the Austrian "occupation" made most of the developments described in this book possible. Balus's presentation of the major *Vormärz* public initiative, the so-called *Plan zur Verschönerung Krakaus* is unjustly negative.[4] Cracow's peculiar disadvantages, such as its status of a border-city and the worsening of its economic situation after its full incorporation into Galicia are repeatedly emphasized. Other, positive aspects of its specific position in the monarchy such as its municipal independence well into the 1840s and the urban regulation plan for greater Cracow as early as 1910 are not adequately stressed. There is also a tendency to equate the start of modernization, urban expansion, and population growth with the Galician autonomy of 1867, thereby presenting fortifications as a negative factor hampering development until this date.[5] Finally, 1918 is termed "reconstitution of independence," and thus the whole Austrian period of Cracow's history appears somewhat unnatural and handicapped.

Third, in his search for European influences in Cracow architecture, Balus demonstrates his reliance on the methodology of standard Polish historiography that traditionally sought to establish (western) European models of Polish heritage. Particularly revealing are references to a German art historian, August Essenwein, who was first to discover the "Cracow system," Leo von Klenze's *Walhalla* and Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Akropolis project in the discussion on Wawel restoration, and Parisian and Viennese models for the creation of *Planty*. Ironically, however, some of the other models are only hypothetical: for example, the Viennese model for the neo-classical Podgorze Church. Elsewhere, as in the discussion on *Vormärz* restorations, the Golden Chapel in Poznań cathedral and the Cracow cathedral, a broader German context is missing.[6] Polish theorists of architecture im-

bued Cracow medieval architecture with national value other than German and maintained at the same time the notion of this architecture's spiritual virtue. This is an interesting nuance that is not adequately explained.

Finally, the reliance on traditional national history also weakens the book's discussion of nationalism and national identity. This concerns uncritical reading of Maurycy Mochnacki's racist notion of the nation and Walerian Kalinka, a notorious anti-Semite,[7] the Nazi-style visual propaganda in Dr. Jordan City Park and the nationalization of the peasantry through guided architectural tours to Cracow. While the conceptual worldview of the peasantry remains veiled and while by now much of the scholarship on the late Habsburg monarchy has learned to appreciate kaleidoscopic, overlapping and yet conflicting identities of the monarchy's diverse inhabitants, the effect of such national guided tours may also remain dubious.[8] The entire history of Cracow is presented as a mono-ethnic story. Has the Jewish town of Kazimierz, officially integrated into Cracow in 1772, not figured in the discussion on local style, and if not, why? Clearly the attempts to establish various local versions of historicist styles were no "true" national styles for all the reasons so well explained. Yet the author never actually asks the question: is there a national style?

Professional architectural historians will find Balus's extensive analysis of symbols and architectural models, certain professional jargon and recurrent quotations from Latin legitimate and at times entirely revealing. Yet a larger academic audience interested in the issues of nationalism and generally in "Habsburg" topics will miss a broader insight into political and social history of this region.

Notes

[1]. Jacek Puchla, *Jak powstał nowoczesny Kraków* (Cracow: Wydawn. Literackie, 1990); *ibid.*, *Krakau unter Österreichischer Herrschaft 1846-1918. Faktoren seiner Entwicklung* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 1993); *ibid.*, ed., *Kraków i Lwów w cywilizacji europejskiej* (Cracow: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2003); Eve Blau and Monika Platzer, eds., *Shaping the Great City: Modern Architecture in Central Europe, 1890-1937* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 1999).

[2]. Peter Hanak, *The Garden and the Workshop: Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Akos Moravanszky, *Competing Visions: Aesthetic Invention and*

Social Imagination in Central European Architecture, 1867-1918 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). Moravanszky's book is not cited by Balus.

[3]. The fact that the inner city, *Planty* and the private parks and squares in the new quarters were decorated with national monuments, for example, shows that the attention to "nationalize" space was equally strong within and outside the historic city. On the other hand, most of Talowski's buildings actually stand outside the historic center, while the secessionist Old Theatre (Tadeusz Stryjenski and Franciszek Maczynski, 1903-1906) is in the inner city.

[4]. See, for example, p. 86. For a different perception of the situation of the *Vormärz* Galicia and Cracow by an Austrian bureaucrat, see Franz Kratter, *Briefe über den itzigen Zustand von Galizien. Ein Beytrag zur Statistik und Menschenkenntnis*. 2 vols (1786; reprint, Berlin: Scherer, 1990).

[5]. Austrian draconic military building restrictions on Cracow's *Planty*, valid well into the time of Galician autonomy, certainly produced a very different picture than building restrictions established for the Viennese *Ringstrasse* or Lemberg promenades. Yet a more thorough comparison with, for example, Lemberg and Budapest (where Austrian citadels were also perceived as symbols of "oppression" yet did not hamper urban development), is desirable.

[6]. For example, August Essenwein's account of the Cologne and Speyer cathedrals, allegedly "lacking" the national symbolic importance in comparison with the Cracow cathedral, should be taken in the context of Goethe's enthusiastic writing on the "Germanness" of the Strassburg cathedral. The whole idea of an historic monument as an artefact of the nation is a heritage of German Romanticism, while the rediscovery of the value of the medieval and the birth of scientific methods of building restoration was a general European trend.

[7]. Walerian Kalinka, *Galicja i Kraków pod panowaniem Austriackim* (1853; reprint, Cracow: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, 2001).

[8]. See Keely Stauter-Halsted, "Rural Myth and the Modern Nation: Peasant Commemorations of Polish National Holidays, 1879-1910," in *Staging the Past. The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, eds. Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001), pp. 153-172.

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Citation: Markian Prokopovych. Review of Balus, Wojciech, *Krakau zwischen Traditionen und Wegen in die Moderne: Zur Geschichte der Architektur und der Öffentlichen Grünanlagen im 19. Jahrhundert*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. March, 2006.

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