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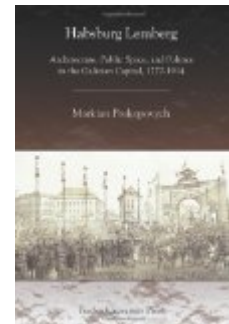


Markian Prokopovych. *Habsburg Lemberg: Architecture, Public Space and Politics in the Galician Capital, 1772-1914*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008. 357 S. \$49.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55753-510-8.

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Commissioned by Jonathan Kwan



At the Edges of Empire

Despite the death of Emperor Franz Josef I and the renunciation of Emperor Karl, the Habsburg monarchy, at least in the Western historian's consciousness, continues to grow. Through the 1980s, attention centered on Vienna, as presented in the works of Carl Schorske and large shows in New York and Paris, among others; the 1990s and the profound changes it witnessed shifted focus to areas such as Bohemia, Slovakia, and Hungary. A spate of translated publications, such as those of Peter Hanak and others, opened the histories of those areas to an audience lacking the requisite language skills to work with original sources. In this most recent decade, the further limits of the Austro-Hungarian lands—marginalized even until today—have become the focus of numerous studies.[1] Thus we should warmly welcome one of the latest additions to this new opening of the Austrian east, *Habsburg Lemberg. Architecture, Public Space, and Politics in the Galician Capital, 1772-1914* by Markian Prokopovych.

The book is divided into four chapters and proposes itself as a consideration of the relationship among architecture styles, urban greenery, nationalism, and imperialism in the polyglot city of Lviv/Lwiw/Lemberg. Each of the four chapters deals with a single aspect of this relationship, as clearly presented from the start in the chapter headings.

The first chapter, "Architecture, Public Space, and Politics Revisited," sets the stage for the rest of the book.

Within are discussed the basic questions of the city's relationship to the Austrian government (and to Austrian governance), the ideals (and problems) nationalism poses within that relationship, and how these nationalist ideals express themselves in the physical fabric of the city: the municipal and public structures, the streetscape, and urban parks. The following three chapters further develop those ideas, focusing on specific aspects of those relationships. The second chapter, "Writing the City: Bureaucrats, Historians, Technicians and Nationals," examines more closely the actual players on the municipal stage who created the cityscape in which the confrontation between nation and empire plays itself out. Chapter 3, "Making the City: Institutions, Parks, Monuments," narrows its focus to the actual structures the players of chapter 2 designed, while the fourth and final chapter, "Using the City: Commemoration, Restorations, Exhibitions," examines the ways the spaces highlighted in chapter 3 were used by the local populace and for what purposes. Each of the four chapters is subsequently divided into several smaller topics, usually three, but the unusually large chapter 2 is divided into seven.

Despite the intellectual and theoretical framework (the author seems profoundly taken with postmodernist theory and especially postmodernist jargon) which should unite the book into a seamless whole, yet each chapter, devoted to an aspect of the urban relationship, does not seem to be concerned with, or build on, the topic as a whole. It is as if a series of short, newspaper-

like articles, each covering a single aspect of the topic, have been strung together under an overarching rubric. The merits of the particular organization and theoretical stance of the book can certainly be debated, but a variety of editing and proofreading errors detract from the essential and ultimate value of the book. When working in so many different languages and alphabets, transcription errors and spelling mistakes are bound to arise, but precisely for that reason even greater attention must be paid to proofreading. As early as the introduction, the word "Zeitschrift" is spelled incorrectly; such errors abound. But more confounding than simple spelling errors is the author's repetitious writing, confusing use of footnotes, and sometimes incomprehensible inclusion of original text and words. Within the same paragraph, sometimes almost identical phrasing will be used repeatedly or with only minor variation: "Ossolinski's money was short, yet his aspirations great"; later in the same paragraph Prokopovych writes: "Ossolinski, whose finances lagged behind his aspirations ..." (p. 136). Twenty pages later, "Municipal aspirations were great, finances were severely limited" (p. 156). Even more confusing is the author's inclusion of original text or words where there seems to be no call for it. For instance, in chapter 4 he writes "the local vernacular (Landessprache), i.e., Polish" (p. 198). Certainly, where nuances of meaning can be lost in translation, the inclusion of original text is called for, but in this case, as in so many others, there seems to be no purpose. Even footnotes, so essential to the academic project, have not escaped unscathed; some are so complicated that they themselves seem to require explanatory notes, while others leave the reader wondering if the note itself was actually necessary. In one or two cases, even, the note seems to contradict the argument it is intended to support, for instance where the relative value of marble over bronze for public sculpture is being discussed (pp. 167-168, n. 182.)

Another overarching problem throughout the book is the author's loose use of architectural styles and his commentary on them. In discussing the Biedermeier, for instance, the author describes a typical structure in the style as a "house with a decorum free [*sic*] facade set in a complex of ordered greenery" (p. 46). In discussing the use of the Doric order for Pietro Nobile's Ossolineum, the footnote ends up invoking the French Second Empire style, which would not arrive for another forty years. The Ruthenian National Institute, according to the author, "established the first Ruthenian enclave in the historic center and was conceptualized as an embodiment of the Ruthenian presence" (p. 149). At their hearts, concep-

tualization and embodiment seem diametrically opposed. The author's understanding of how architects and architecture function seems rather odd. In the introduction to chapter 3, he writes "the role of public officials, and especially that of publicly employed architects and building engineers, was decisive in the success of building projects. Along with their participatory influence, their attitudes and preconceptions shaped building practices" (p. 133). One assumes that would be a given. Then, later in the chapter, "National symbolism required a grandeur of scale that the city's architecture was unable to provide. Thus professional adherence to the neoclassical architectural canon contradicted national aspirations and assume priority over them" (p. 174). How precisely would this work? Are national aspirations bound only to style, or to use and function? The already mentioned Ruthenian National Institute is not in a "Ruthenian" style, but nonetheless was presented as embodying national aspiration. In considering the 1894 Provincial Exhibition, Prokopovych writes, "[t]he exhibition continued a veritable display of architecture representing the entire spectrum of styles and trends in currency" including Carpathian, Swiss, and Gothic, but also neoclassical and neo-Renaissance (*sic*), yet, "[h]istoricism" he maintains, "figured as the accepted style for the exhibition buildings that represented the state and high culture just as it figured in the permanent structures found in town" (p. 249). There are also a number of non sequiturs in the book: "[a]lthough the provincial exhibition of 1877 was influenced by earlier foreign models, 1894 was locally a symbolic year" (p. 247).

The choice and quality of the illustrations also leave the reader confused. In a book which makes so much of style and its meaning (though without defining the various styles and often making seemingly contradictory comments about them) the necessity of germane and legible illustrations would seem self-evident. In some cases, it appears the author had an illustration and therefore used it, whether or not it was necessary but in other cases, such as the maps at the end of the book, the size and quality of the images is such that they are, for all intents and purposes, useless. If one knows the city, one does not need the maps; if one needs the maps, they are too small to be legible. Fewer, but better should be the guideline.

Prokopovych is obviously a very capable researcher. Fluent in Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, Czech, and German, he has made extensive use of both published and unpublished materials, newspapers, magazines, as well the municipal archives of the city of Lviv. And while the topic he approaches is rich and fascinating, the format of the

book as well as the author's approach immediately detract from the book's value. One would greatly look forward to a revised version of the book, which would resolve these problems and make it truly the essential work on the urban history of this significant and important Habsburg city.

Note

[1]. The research is vastly aided by the creation of specialized research centers which bring international attention to the area, such as Jacek Purchla and the International Cultural Center (www.mck.krakow.pl); the Center for History of East Central Europe (<http://www.lvivcenter.org>), and of course the Central European University, all of which facilitate research and exchange.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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