

Dániel Veress, Searching for Styles of National Architecture in Habsburg Central Europe 1890–1920. Art Nouveau and Turn-of-the-Century Architecture as Nation-Building 1890–1920. (Master Thesis)

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The main focus of Dániel Veress' Master thesis is on the formation of "national style" in architecture at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century in the Habsburg monarchy. This period was characterised here by certain rupture with the academic ways of artistic creation and by the search for "new", "modern" styles. Veress pursues this movement in four distinct environments – Viennese, Hungarian, Czech and Polish. It should be emphasized that such comparative approach is not obvious in the contemporary (art) history. The author did not only formally compare the buildings that could be regarded representative of the "new" style, he also analyzed in depth the historical and social conditions of the "secession" of modernists' groups. Concerning the analyzed (?) buildings, the exhibition pavilions which represented the very embodiment of artistic programs seem to be a good choice. What I really appreciated is the core part of the thesis, namely the analysis of four "manifestos" of these movements (pp. 62-73). Veress concentrates on the "urgent" and "inevitable" language of the manifestos but he also tries to establish connections between texts and the interpretation of material culture (buildings).

From the historical point of view it would, however, have been useful not only to regard the buildings as quasi-emanation of artistic statements and ideas but also to search for specific conditions of their construction/creation. This means commissioning by contractors, negotiations with state or municipal authorities etc. In order to achieve this, an extensive research in the archives would be needed, which would, as a result, exceed the scope of a master thesis.

The "pavilions and manifestos" chapters convince us as well as Veress' conclusion that a proper "national style" using vernacular motifs developed before WWI only in Hungary because of its relative political autonomy. Even if this assertion fits at first glance, the role of the state and social (demographic) conditions in artistic/cultural development should have been discussed in more detail. Is it, for example, exclusively Rondo-cubism that can be considered the Czech national style (used for public buildings after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918) if Cubism was similarly widespread before? Is the

commissioning of a certain style by state authorities for the purpose of representation the decisive moment for the development of a national style? Is it simply the high share of rural population in a society which leads (Hungarian and Polish) artists straight forward to the vernacular/rural art as a source of inspiration (p. 78-79)? Without dealing with these questions, the somewhat strong statement that "*the national style could emerge only under the aegis of a sovereign state*" (p. 76) seems a little bit superficial (regardless of the fact that despite its broad autonomy, Hungary didn't represent *a sovereign state* including the sovereignty in foreign affairs until 1918 either).

Similarly to this slightly shortened interpretation consisting in juxtaposition of two phenomena (social/professional stratification and emergence of a distinct artistic style), Veress sometimes uses somewhat simplified phrases which would better be avoided ("*the age of nationalism caught the Poles*", p. 37). His expression is otherwise rich and accurate apart from few exceptions - "Ausgleich" does not mean exactly "compromise" (p. 16), sporadic errors can be found on p. 28 ("*represented not a brake with the historicist style*" – rather "break") and 46 ("*I have not founded any reference in the literature*" – correctly "found"). It can be argued about the appropriate designation/status of Czech Lands and Galicia within the Habsburg monarchy (p. 6 "Austrian provinces"), further it wasn't surely the "*Viennese court*" that "*possessed*" the entire country (i.e. Hungary, p. 16), finally the exact meaning of the sentence "*Like in the case of Prague, the Habsburg governance did not allow Cracow to extend its authority to the neighbouring settlements.*" (p. 38) remains obscure as well.

The thesis contains few typing errors (p. 22), several double expressions like "*I arrived to/reached the most edifying part*" (p. 73, further p. 24) indicate that a not fully revised version was submitted. Finally, the languages in the table 6 (p. 79) should have been provided in English, not in French.

Apart from these small imperfections, the master thesis by Dániel Veress is – especially for its comparative scope – an important contribution to the study of interrelations between the politics or social movements and the art. I strongly recommend it for the defense with the grade "**excellent**" (1) and I hope – as I could get to know the author during his stay in Prague – Daniel will continue his research on this topic.

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