

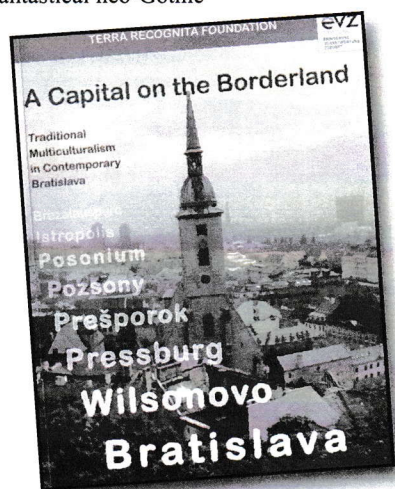
Searching out ethnic riches in central European cities

by Michael Ivory

This pair of attractively produced softback books were published in English in 2009 with the aim of drawing attention to the multicultural past of the cities of Budapest and Bratislava. The authors' contention that "most people today seem to take it for granted that Hungary's capital is a completely Hungarian city" could probably apply equally well to Bratislava, in the sense that the capital of Slovakia is seen by its citizens and visitors as an indisputably Slovak metropolis.

Both books set out to show that, despite their present apparently monolithic character, each city is still rich in reminders of its ethnically varied heritage. Thus *Hidden Faces of a Capital* has chapters dealing with German, Jewish, Orthodox and not least Slovak Budapest, reminding us that many Slovak subjects of the erstwhile Hungarian kingdom gravitated quite naturally to the capital of that realm. So numerous were they that Budapest was sometimes referred to as the "biggest Slovak city".

Reminders of this substantial presence in the 19th century include buildings such as the Slovak Lutheran church on Rákóczi út or the Bobola Palace, the sumptuous edifice on prestigious Andrassy út erected for himself by Ján Bobola, who rose from laying bricks to becoming a successful building contractor, responsible for the construction of the fantastical neo-Gothic



The Hidden Faces of a Capital: Traditional Multiculturalism in Contemporary Budapest

Csaba Zahorán (Ed)

A Capital on the Borderland: Traditional Multiculturalism in Contemporary Bratislava

István Kollai

Hungarian Parliament.

Bobola is commemorated by a plaque on the wall of a school, while another bilingual plaque memorialises Milan Hodža, who studied law in Budapest, and was a member of parliament here before his subsequent career as one of the most prominent politicians of interwar and wartime Czechoslovakia.

As well as showing a panorama of Bratislava with St Martin's Cathedral in the foreground, the cover of *A Capital on the Borderland* reminds the reader of the several names which the city has enjoyed over time, from Brezalauspurc via Pressburg, Prešporok, Pozsony, even (very briefly) Wilsonovo, before today's name was officially established in 1919. The multicultural past of which these names are evidence is evoked in chapters devoted to "Pressburg's" role as coronation city and centre of German and Jewish life, to the 19th century Hungarian-dominated Pozsony, to the Prešporok of awakening Slovak nationhood, and finally to the increasingly homogenous 20th century "Bratislava".

The book's emphasis is primarily on the different ways in which the various

communities have viewed their shared urban habitat over time, notably on how these views have been expressed in the townscape, in buildings, statues, and memorial plaques.

Particularly fascinating are the accounts of statues and monuments moved, destroyed, or banished to lapidariums according to whoever was exercising authority at the time. Thus in 1911 the statue of the ultra-patriotic (despite his Slav origins) Hungarian poet Petőfi displaced that of German composer Hummel in front of what is now the National Theatre, only to be moved in its turn in 1919 to make way for one of Hviezdoslav.

Petőfi languished for many years on the Petržalka bank of the Danube before finally in 2003 being moved to a rather more dignified location, the Medical Students' Garden in the Old Town.

Hummel meanwhile has been returned to a slightly less prominent position close to where he was originally. Further examples are given of what might light-heartedly be referred to as a kind of musical chairs, though many more can be found in a witty and more wide-ranging essay by Lubomír Lipták, inexplicably omitted from what is otherwise a useful bibliography.

Both books are well illustrated and contain excellent city plans showing clearly the various buildings and monuments referred to in the text, invaluable aids to any visitor interested in exploring beyond the scope of the more conventional guidebook. The information presented appears to have been well researched, though there are startling contradictions in the way the ethnic composition of the population of pre-World War I Bratislava is shown.

As in all translations by non-native speakers, there are a few (very few) errors in the English, and, while every effort has been made to remain neutral in the presentation of place-names, those with a Slovak orientation will fume at the occasional infelicity (eg Kôrmôc for Kremnica).

■ Both books were published in 2009 by the Budapest-based Terra Recognita Foundation and sponsored by the German EVZ Foundation devoted to the promotion of historical understanding.

Film men to make a comeback in the republic

Foreign film producers have good reason to return to Prague.

Once a thriving filming location, the Czech Republic lost out to competition from Hungary, Romania and other countries of central and eastern Europe which offered lower prices and lucrative tax rebates. In an effort to lure them back, the Czech government came up with its own incentives' package which has now been approved the European Commission.

Once aspiring to become the Hollywood of the East, the Czech Republic has in recent years lost its position among the most popular places for film production in central and Eastern Europe.

While in 2003 foreign film crews spent more than five billion crowns in the Czech Republic, the number has dropped to 700 million five years later.

One reason why Prague lags behind Budapest, Bucharest and other places in the region has been the lack of tax rebates for foreign film

productions. But according to Czech Radio correspondent in Brussels, Pavel Novák, this will soon change. "According to my sources close to the European Commission, I learnt that the system of incentives for the film industry, which the Czech Republic sent to Brussels for approval in January, has been approved."

Under the plan, film producers will be able to get 20 per cent of their costs back – something Czech filmmakers have been calling for for years.

The Czech Republic has been one of the last EU member states to introduce tax rebates for the film industry – so will the plan really put Prague back on the map?

Czech officials are hoping the incentive plan will work; George Lucas had earlier said he was considering shooting his *Star Wars* TV series here, and there has been interest from other American, German and French film producers.