
The Srednja Europa publishing house is well-known in Croatia. For years now, in accordance with its name and mission statement, it has specialized in books not only on Croatia, but on Central Europe. A considerable part of its publications are translations of books by Polish scholars who deal with the history of southern Slavs, or works on common Polish-Croatian historical aspects.

The reviewed book is among the latter. It remembers an album originally published in 1881 by the Cracow Society of Art and Literature. The money from its sales was donated to the casualties of the earthquake that had hit Zagreb on 9 November 1880; it was a symbolic act of solidarity of the Cracow people with the inhabitants of the ruined Croatian capital. The album became so popular that it was reissued three times and its reception in the Polish, Croatian and Czech press was very positive. With time it became mainly a rare book for bibliophiles. The 2011 reissue is worth presenting to the readers, as it is not a mere reprint but a scholarly study of the Cracow initiative of nearly 140 years ago.

Krakow Zagrebu... is a bilingual publication — all the texts are both in Polish and Croatian. The layout is logical and coherent. The book consists of six parts. The main one is the reprinted album and a table of contents with transcribed texts — in Polish (back in 1881 the album was published in that language) and in Croatian translation. The other parts are three modern texts referring to the idea and content of the album, and a reprinted fragment of the Zagrebulje cycle by August Šenoa (1838—1881), an outstanding 19th-century Croatian author and eyewitness to the 1880 earthquake. Finally, there is a lexicon of authors who had contributed their work to the Cracow album, a short summary in English, a list of abbreviations and information on the editors and authors of contemporary texts.

There is no introduction proper in the album but this role is played by an essay by Maciej Czerwiński, Kao Krakov Zagrebu... Povijest poljsko-hrvatskih odnosa u kontekstu albuma izdanog 1881. godine / Krakow for Zagreb... The history of Polish-Croatian relations in the context of the album Publisher in 1881. The author presents the background of his own search for this album and the initial work on its publication. Then he describes Polish-Croatian relations through the years, focusing on the 19th century. In general, he presents the issue correctly and very aptly, showing the leading figures in Polish-Croatian relations, like Faust Vrančić, Vinko Pribojević, Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer, and Ivo Andrić. However, at times the author writes rather freely, combining elements in a historically inaccurate manner.

Due to my poor grasp of Croatian, I am going to refer my remarks to the Polish version of the text. On page 21 the author says that king Władysław IV Vasa «did not come from the Jagiellonian dynasty, but was chosen in a free election». It is worth remembering that also the Jagiellonians used to be elected, not only their successors. While discussing the work by Ljudevit Gaj,
Horvatog sloga i zjedinjenje, all of a sudden a conclusion appears, that Jan Henryk Dąbrowski, the hero of the Dąbrowski’s Mazurka, Gaj’s inspiration, was born near Cracow. According to Czerwiński, it is another coincidence connecting the two cities (p. 22). Is that not merely poetic licence? And when on p. 25 appears the motif of Strossmayer’s acquaintance with the Sapiehas and the visit paid by young Adam Sapieha in Djakovo in 1888, the author wanders in his discussion as far as to Pope John Paul II and the conference in April 2005 held by the Faculty of Slavonic Studies at the Jagiellonian University to commemorate Strossmayer, coinciding with the Pope’s death. Irrespective of the legitimacy of such farfetchedness and seeking unnatural connections, the author is not correct in one place. Writing about Strossmayer, he says: ‘The host, however, did not live to see 1926, when Adam Sapieha became Archbishop of Cracow and settled for the next 25 years in the Bishop’s Palace in Cracow […]‘. (p. 25). Indeed, Sapieha did become Archbishop in 1926 but he had lived in the Palace since 1912 (having been appointed Bishop in 1911), that is much longer than 25 years. Despite these few remarks, one needs to emphasize that Maciej Czerwiński introduces the readers very well into the intricacies of Polish-Croatian relations, especially those readers unfamiliar with the issues.

The selected last fragments of August Šenoa’s features from the Zagrebulje series do not seem to require a commentary. In the introductory note the authors aptly explain the reason for publishing them. They were translated into Polish by Maciej Czerwiński. That is a very good introduction to the reprint of the album. In order to facilitate the reading of the poems and short literary forms included in the album, after the reprinting the texts were transcribed (p. 45-71). Was the decision not to translate them into Croatian right, though?

The major scholarly study in the reviewed book is the article by Slaven Kale titled Krakov Zagrebu. O albumu iz 1881. godine izdanom u korist stradalima u po-tresu u Zagrebu / Cracow for Zagreb. A 1881 album published for the earthquake victims. It is a very solidly written article presenting the story behind the initiative, as well as the response the Zagreb earthquake met with not only in Cracow but in the whole of Galicia. The author unearthed a lot of unknown facts and sources. They let him show the Galician response to the tragedy and the reception of the album in various lights. S. Kale also analyzed critically the album itself and presented its authors’ background. An interesting observation is the one that the album, on account of its content, could not be distributed in the Russian Empire among the Poles who lived there. For the tsarist authorities it was not the purpose of the publication that mattered (donating the income from the sales to the earthquake victims) but the fact it included texts by blacklisted authors. S. Kale also showed that the copies kept in Polish and Croatian libraries are different — they come from different editions, which was not always marked at the moment of publication. The article is written with great expertness and can serve as a model of this kind of writing.

Unfortunately, one cannot say the same about the essay by Róža Książek-Czerwińska, titled Krakovska ciglica Zagrebu / The Cracow donation to Zagreb. The author attempted to capture the phenomenon of the Cracow people generosity for the sake
of common good — not only Polish but — like in the case of the Croatians — general one, regardless of the borders or divisions. One gets the impression, however, that the initial discussion soon turns into a reflection on the artists whose drawings were included in the album (Książek-Czerwińska focused on Jan Matejko, Juliusz Kossak and Jacek Malczewski). It ends with the following sentence: «The initiative [of making the album] shows strong social and cultural bonds and international solidarity in Europe at that time» (p. 137). This is actually very hard to prove, and at the same time easy to challenge — even if there are many more examples of cooperation between the contemporary state and national elites in the second half of the 19th century. Unfortunately, the author approached her task with too much optimism and a certain pomposity, which results in some not only bizarre but also ahistorical statements. For instance: «The Austrian partition was relatively the lightest, particularly in the period of the Independent Republic of Cracow and after 1866, when the so-called Galician Autonomy was created» (p. 131). Wherever did the author find the name «the Independent Republic of Cracow» (in Polish Niezależna Rzeczypospolita Krakowska), which she used twice (therefore consciously) and each time using capital letters, suggesting it was a proper name? She can’t have been more wrong. If she had wanted to use the official name, it would be The Free, Independent, and Strictly Neutral City of Cracow with its Territory (in Polish Wolne, Niepodległe i Słabo Neutralne Miasto Kraków i jego Okręg), as it was called between 1815—1846. The other names were: The Republic of Cracow, Free City of Cracow, the Republic of Cracow Free, Independent and Strictly Neutral. It was a state created by the Congress of Vienna, controlled by the three neighbouring countries, not being a part of the Austrian Galicia. And one can by no means say that during the Republic of Cracow «the Austrian partition was relatively the lightest», as all historical research denies that. What also seems odd is the phrase «after 1866, when the so-called Galician Autonomy was created». Galician Autonomy was the name for all the social and political rights Galicia obtained between 1860 and 1873 as a result of the Austro-Polish agreement. It was ultimately obtained after 1867 (not 1866, as the author wrote twice).

The discussion concerning Cracow in the second half of the 19th century is rather chaotic and probably does not ring a bell with a reader ignorant of local history. The logic of the author’s opinions is best illustrated by this sentence: «after the fire in the middle of the century the city was developed, gaining a Central European character, resembling some architectural solutions created after the earthquake in Zagreb» (p. 132). Quite apart from the ahistorical sequence of events, one wonders, what character had Cracow architecture had before 1850, i. e. before the great fire? Also the sentence which comes after the discussion of building enterprises in Cracow seems surprising: «What evidenced the development was also the fact that in 1870
the Austrian Prime Minister became a Pole from Galicia, Alfred Józef Potocki (p. 132). The lack of logic is really striking here. Fortunately, when the author goes on to talk about her own field, i. e. history of art, her theses are already well-ordered and well illustrate the connections between the world of the Cracow artists who took part in creating the 1881 album.

The lexicon of the authors who created the Cracow album is an extremely useful part of the publication, as most of them are unfamiliar not only to the Croatian readers but also to Polish ones — although some of them used to be leading artists and scholars of a renown transcending Cracow itself. It was therefore worth gathering those names to show that in order to help the victims of the earthquake in Zagreb the Cracow Society of Art and Literature had employed a real elite.

Despite the critical remarks, I would like to stress that the reviewed publication has not only an emotional value — showing the bonds between the Poles and the Croatians and examples of mutual cooperation. Through remembering the 1881 initiative the publishers have drawn the attention of a modern reader to unknown facts about Polish-Croatian relations and their context at that time. One needs to emphasize that it is a very well-edited publication. Nearly all texts contribute significantly to enriching the subject matter and prove that as regards cultural relations between the two nations, history is still hiding a lot of unknown, but very interesting facts.

- Tomasz Pudłocki