SUMMARIES

A TALE OF ONE CITY: TOPOGRAPHIES OF PRAGUE BEFORE 1848

Chad Bryant

This article compares the 1845 edition of Franz Klutschak’s German-language “Guide to Prague” (Führer durch Prag) with Karel Vladislav Zap’s 1847 Czech-language work of the same name in order to interrogate two related sets of questions concerning the history of Vormärz Prague. First, the two works tell much about the changing form, content, and popularity of topographies, a scholarly genre that provided readers with information about the city’s climate, population, history, and, most important, physical structures. Klutschak’s and Zap’s works demonstrate how authors working within this genre adapted their topographies to appeal to early nineteenth-century travelers and a growing number of local, bourgeois elites interested in their city and its structures. Second, Klutschak and Zap’s topographies reveal much about how the two men thought about the past and the present, which in turn points to numerous ways in which Prague’s elites, whether Czech- or German-speaking, shared a common cultural and mental universe. In this discourse they represent two sides of an ongoing debate about the wrenching changes experienced in the years before 1848.

CONSTRUCTING SLAVIC PRAGUE: THE “GREEN MOUNTAIN MANUSCRIPT” AND PUBLIC SPACE IN DISCOURSE

Marek Nekula

This article focuses on the nineteenth century and contemporary narratives of Prague as well as the transformation of the city’s public space. The author proceeds on the assumption that the “Green Mountain Manuscript”, as a central text in Czech culture, sketched a mental map of Bohemian-Slavic space whose center was represented by Vyšehrad and an image of Prague closely identified with Vyšehrad. This mental map was also the context for the staging and media representation of Václav Hanka’s funeral. In this way the meaning of Prague became associated with Vyšehrad, marking an important step in the iconographic transformation of Prague’s public space. The funerals of Hanka and Božena Němcová led namely to the foundation of the “Svatobor” association, which initiated the transformation of Prague’s public space, hitherto characterized by a nationally ambivalent iconography, into a Bohemian-Slavic space. This transformation manifested itself in the monuments to
Hanka (1863) and Josef Jungmann (1878, foundation stone laid in 1873) erected using the association’s funds.

In terms of methodology, this article is based on cultural semiotics, connecting it to other recent studies of the public sphere. With reference to New Historicism the article relativizes the distinction between “high cultural” and “trivial” texts, showing how a “cultural text” also determined contemporary commemorative practices.

CELEBRATING SLAVIC PRAGUE:
FESTIVALS AND THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT, 1891-1912

Claire E. Nolte

In the course of the nineteenth century, Prague was transformed from a provincial German city into a modern Czech metropolis. As the population of the city grew, an influx of Czech-speaking peasants changed its ethnic makeup. In 1861, the first Czech mayor of the city was elected, beginning an era of Czech domination of city government that lasted until the end of the monarchy. The Czech mayors of Prague undertook to remake their city into a modern metropolis with a distinctly Czech character. In addition to modernization projects like ghetto clearance, these leaders imprinted a Czech identity on the public space with new representational buildings and other projects. In the years leading up to World War I, the city hosted grand festivals that attracted international attention and enhanced its reputation as a modern urban center. Three events exemplify this process: the 1891 Jubilee Exhibition, the first great triumph for Czech Prague; the 1895 Ethnographic Exhibition, a celebration of national identity; and the 1912 gymnastic festival of the Slavic Sokol movement, one of the largest celebrations up until that time in the city. Reports from foreign visitors to the 1912 festival praising Prague as the modern capital of the Czech nation show how the identity of the city had been transformed on the eve of World War I.

ANDRÉ BRETON AND THE MAGICAL CAPITAL:
AN AGONY IN SIX FITS

Derek Sayer

While few would nowadays dispute Prague’s claim to be “the second city of surrealism” after Paris, the popular notion that there is an intrinsic affinity between the Bohemian capital and the surrealist worldview – as first asserted by André Breton in 1935 – is far more problematic. This article debunks the myth of “surrealist Prague,” arguing that the coming together of former Czech poetists and French surrealists in the mid-1930s owed far more to the unique political circumstances of the time than to anything in the city’s genius loci. If there is anything that makes Prague a fitting object of a surrealist sensibility it is the city’s modern history, not its mythologized “magical” past.