

Pál Rosti's Cuba in 1857

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The Author and his Work

In 1861 a book was published in Pest which opened a window for Hungarian readers on Latin America: *Uti emlékezetek Amerikából* (Memories of Travels in America) by Pál Rosti.¹

The author, Pál Rosti (1830–1874)² made up his mind some time in the early 1850s to realize his childhood dreams and make a tour in the New World roughly following the route of Alexander von Humboldt in a land which was almost completely unknown to the Hungarian public of the day. His decision was also motivated by the fact that after the fall of the 1848–1849 Hungarian revolution and war for independence, living under the system of Austrian oppression he could not see other possibilities of acting for national advancement than the fields of arts and sciences.³ After several years of careful preparations⁴ he started the big journey on 4 August 1856 sailing from Le Havre, France for the USA on the French steamliner “Alma”. Returning two years later, he landed on 8 August 1858 in Southampton, UK.

¹ P. Rosti, *Uti emlékezetek Amerikából*. [Memories of Travels in America] Pest 1861, ed. G. Heckenast, Facsimile edition: Budapest 1992, (henceforth: Rosti, *Uti emlékezetek...*).

² This short paper does not have room for a detailed biography of Pál Rosti. Recently a study of Károly Kincses was published by the Hungarian Museum of Photography and Balassi Kiadó at the same time as the facsimile edition: *Rosti Pál 1830–1874*. [Pál Rosti 1830–1874] Budapest 1992, (henceforth: Kincses).

³ Cf. Rosti, *Uti emlékezetek...*, Foreword.

⁴ In the autumn of 1849 Rosti went into voluntary emigration to Germany and he studied chemistry at the University of Munich for four years. In 1853 he returned home and spent a year in Pest studying geography and ethnography. In December 1854 he travelled – presumably legally – to Western Europe, to England and France. He learned photography because he was convinced that the new technique was the best method to diffuse geographical knowledge. See P. Rosti, “Úti vázlatok. Olvastatott a Magyarhoni Földtani Társulat 1859-ki február 28-án tartott szakgyűlésében,” [Sketches of Travels. Read at the meeting of the Hungarian Geological Society on 28 February 1859] in J. Szabó, ed., *A Magyarhoni Földtani Társulat Munkálatai*. Pest 1863, Vol. II, 160.

The "Humboldtian" trip to Latin America started on 12 January 1857 when Rosti arrived at Havana, Cuba from New Orleans and ended on 7 April 1858 in the harbour of Veracruz, Mexico. The special feature of Rosti's journey was his interest in photography which was still in its infancy in those years. Rosti learned the new technique in Paris some time between 1854–1856. In the course of his tour in Latin America he made nearly fifty serviceable photographs of the sights of the countries he visited. He can thus be considered one of the pioneers of Latin American photo-history and he is doubtless one of the first landscape-photographers of the New World.

So Rosti's travels in America resulted in two works for posterity. One of them and the first to be published was the famous *Fényképi Gyűjtemény* (Collection of Photos) exhibited for the Hungarian public at the beginning of 1859 in the National Casino. Experts agree that Rosti's photos are of unique value in the history of Hungarian photography but there are numerous questions and uncertainties around them. As far as we know neither before nor after his Latin American trip did Rosti take photographs, only his Latin American pieces have survived. Of these, four albums are known, three of which are located in Hungary. Unfortunately no negatives indicating his technique have survived so we do not know exactly whether he used the so-called collodium-procedure or the Le Gray wax-paper-negative method.⁵ We don't know either where he made or had the copies made though the albums containing them were prepared for certain in Paris, in the workshop of Despierres, the court bookbinder and they were ready by 1 November 1858. On this day Rosti visited his ideal, Baron Alexander von Humboldt, in the latter's residence in Berlin-Tegel and presented one of the albums to him.⁶

The contents of the three albums located in Hungary are not identical. The copy in the National Széchenyi Library which was originally given to the Hungarian National Museum contains 45 pictures, the album in the Museum of Photography which came into the collection from the legacy of Ágoston Trefort contains 47 pictures, the album of the Loránd Eötvös Geophysical Institute contains 40 pictures. Out of the maximum 47, four pictures show parts of Havana, 11 photograph landscapes and buildings in Venezuela, and the remaining 32 commemorate Rosti's experiences in Mexico⁷. Though in the mid-nineteenth century numerous lifelike engravings and many photographs were made of the different regions of Latin America, Rosti's photos are doubtless a valuable source for the historians of the visited countries.

⁵ Károly Kincses is of the opinion that Rosti used the Le Gray waxpaper-negative method. Cf. Kincses, 23–24.

⁶ Rosti, *Úti emlékezetek...*, 70. According to the author Humboldt recognized and greeted among the pictures the photo about the giant "Zamang del Guayre" tree, the tree which he himself described in his work *Voyage aux régions équinoxiales* (Cf. *op. cit.*, Tome V, 142).

⁷ Kincses presumes that at least six albums were made with Rosti's photos. See Kincses, 20.

The other result of Rosti's journey considered more important by the author himself was the book entitled *Uti emlékezetek Amerikából* (Memories of Travels from America), published in 1861 in Pest, which as mentioned before opened a window to Latin America for the Hungarian reading public. Prior to this book only scattered newspaper articles and geography books translated from other languages informed those people who could read only Hungarian about the distant continent. More profound or detailed knowledge – e. g. the works of Humboldt – was available only for those who could read foreign languages (especially German and French).⁸ Rosti's work is the first original Hungarian report based on personal field experiences about such important countries of Latin America as Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico.

Rosti's lavishly illustrated large format book consists of 194 pages and a table of contents. The short *Foreword* is followed by three major units clearly separated even by the pagination of the chapters re-starting in each part. Though our short paper is confined to an introduction and analysis of Rosti's experiences in Cuba it seems necessary to outline the structure of the whole work.

The first part divides into nine short chapters and bears the title "Habana". Eight chapters (pp. 3–31.) deal with Rosti's Cuban experiences, the last one (pp. 32–36) relates his journey to La Guayra, Venezuela, via St. Thomas.

The second part (pp. 39–119.) is entitled "Venezuela". It contains 17 chapters, the last two dealing with Rosti's experiences in Trinidad and his journey to Veracruz, Mexico. After a general introduction to the country and a description of Caracas the author thought it necessary to divide the book into three major parts: "A. The seaside region. The valley of Aragua. B. Llanos. C. The Orinocco (sic!) region." In contrast to the other two main parts of the work, the chapters dealing with Venezuela are well known to historians specializing in Latin America since these parts were published in Spanish in 1968 under the title *Memorias de un viaje por América*.⁹

The third part (pp. 107–194.) of the book is entitled "Mexico" and consists of 19 chapters. This unit is relatively the largest (87 pages) and has an extra *Introduction* (pp. 107–109).

The book is well-proportioned as the sizes of the major parts correspond to the length of time Rosti spent in the given country and also the readers are taken into consideration e. g. he knew that the events in Mexico were of great public interest. Rosti spent two months in Cuba, five in Venezuela and seven in Mexico where he had to break his journey because of the approaching civil war. We

⁸ It is well known that Humboldt published his works in French. In the 1830–1840s in Hungary there was a great interest in French culture and language, many members of the educated, reformist gentry and the intellectuals knew the works of Alexander von Humboldt. Rosti was made to learn about Humboldt's travels presumably in his childhood by his geography teacher Antal Vállas.

⁹ P. Rosti, *Memorias de un viaje por América*. Introducción: Prof. T. Wittman. Traducción y notas: J. Sárosi, Universidad Central de Venezuela. Publicaciones de la Escuela de Historia. Serie: *Varia* III (1968).

know that he had planned to visit Peru as well but for unknown reasons this visit did not take place.

Rosti used the photographs, the products of his exhausting efforts to illustrate the book. As the printing technique of the day was not able to reproduce photographs a young painter, Gusztáv Klette made lithographs about some of the pictures. Under the direction of Rosti the lithographs were supplemented by drawings of persons whom the photographs could show only dimly or in no way at all because of the considerable length of the time of exposure. Woodcuts were made of another group of the photographs, the editor Gustav Heckenast ordered them from D. Freemann. The final result was a lavishly illustrated book with two coloured pictures, 13 lithographs, 25 woodcuts and two steel-engravings (these last were not based on Rosti's photographs but the editor bought the publishing right of the engravings of J. M. Rugendas from the G. G. Lange Verlag in Darmstadt).¹⁰

Cuban Impressions

At the end of a pleasant three-days voyage, embarking from New Orleans, Pál Rosti disembarked in Havana on 12 January 1857 and he left the island on 12 March 1857 for Venezuela via St. Thomas. His book makes it clear that originally he had intended to spend only two weeks in Cuba. We do not know what made him change his mind, why he stayed much longer. He mentions, that he had planned to travel also in the inner parts of the island and wanted to see other famous towns apart from Havana e. g. Trinidad and Sant-Yago de Cuba (sic!) but "shortage of time and other circumstances" kept him from doing so.¹¹ The increasing danger of yellow fever and the growing heat are given as reasons for his departure: he had not yet got used to the extreme heat of the climate and thought it safer and better spend the high summer in Caracas located at a higher altitude.

The Cuba part of the *Memories of Travels...* can be read as an intelligent snapshot recording the impressions of two months. This snapshot raises at least two intriguing questions.

The first one asks how authentic Rosti's pieces of information were for his contemporaries, how valid in the long run his statements and judgments were based on two months' experiences remembering that his book was the main source of information about Cuba's social and economic system for the Hungarian reading public.¹²

¹⁰ Kincses, 25.

¹¹ Rosti, *Uti emlékezetek...*, 32.

¹² Information about Cuba were not abundant in nineteenth-century Hungary. Readers could use some geographical works like the *General or Universal Geography* by Canabich (Pest, 1817.) translated by István Czövek into Hungarian; or the *Manual of Geography* (Pest, 1831) by Elek Zádor which gave the geography of the countries of the world after foreign models. Every now and then a newspaper article was published about the island (e. g. a description of Havana by an unknown refugee of 1848 in the 20 July 1850 issue of the *Pesti Hírlap* [Pest Journal]). Still, until the publication of Rosti's book Cuba was *terra incognita* for the Hungarian public.

The second one asks how far Rosti's book can serve as a historical source for present day research. Does it offer information which confirms, colours or modifies the results of modern historiography? Would it be worthwhile for Cuban historiography to rely more heavily on Rosti's vision of Cuba and to incorporate it into works analysing mid-nineteenth century problems? This second set of questions attracts two comments at the very beginning. Latin American research in Hungary is of course well acquainted with Rosti's book and relies on it when dealing with nineteenth-century problems of the continent. The best example is Tibor Wittman's book *Latin-Amerika története* (A History of Latin America) in which Rosti is quoted in both the Venezuela and Mexico parts.¹³ Also, the Cuba chapters of the *Memories of Travels...* are not completely unknown in Cuba. Salvador Bueno's book *Cinco siglos de relaciones entre Hungría y América Latina*¹⁴ gives an ample and basically correct survey of Rosti's book and goes into details about the Cuba chapters though his interpretation is partly (but not completely) based on Wittman's study published in Spanish.¹⁵ However, as far as we know, in spite of Salvador Bueno's pioneering work Rosti's book has not left its mark on Cuban historiography in the last quarter century and has not been used in works analyzing the problems of the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁶ So we feel encouraged to attempt within the confines of a short paper to introduce and interpret the Cuba chapters of the *Memories of Travels...*, being fully aware that a really successful introduction to the international research community would demand the publication of Rosti's book in Spanish or in English.

Pál Rosti's book *Memories of Travels in America* contains eight chapters dealing with Cuba:

- I. Habana leírása általában (General Description of Havana)
- II. Egy vasárnap Habanában (Sunday in Havana)
- III. Habana égálja. Sárgaláz (The Climate of Havana. Yellow fever)
- IV. Czukor-ültetvények. Czukorgyártás (Sugar Plantations. Fabrication of Sugar)
- V. Rabszolgaság (Slavery)

¹³ T. Wittman, *Latin Amerika története*. [A History of Latin America] Budapest 1971, 150, 270, 292–293, 329. A Spanish version of this book was published as well. Ádám Anderle's book (*Szabadságra született Amerikánk* [Our America Born to be Free] Budapest, 1983), deals with Rosti's impressions in Mexico. There exist many scattered references to Rosti which emphasize his photographic work but do not deal with the main work, the *Memories of Travels...*

¹⁴ S. Bueno, *Cinco siglos de relaciones entre Hungría y América Latina*. Budapest 1977. Bueno introduces Rosti's book in general, and on pp. 115–117 he gives a more detailed description about the Cuba chapters.

¹⁵ See T. Wittman, *Observaciones de un viajero húngaro sobre la Venezuela de los últimos años de Monagas*. Foreword to the 1968 Venezuelan edition of Rosti's work.

¹⁶ The literature on Rosti has about one notable Cuban reference apart from Bueno's book. A study was published by María Eugenia Haya (*Apuntes para una historia de la fotografía en Cuba, Casa de las Americas, 1979.*) which mentioned Rosti as one of the pioneers of scientific photography. C. p. Kincses, 9.

- VI. Szabad szerecsenyek s kevert vérűek (Free Blacks and Mixed Races)
- VII. Szabad telepítvények (Free Settlers)
- VIII. Dohány és szivargyártás (Tobacco, and Fabrication of Cigars)

The ninth chapter (Habanából St. Thomas és La Guayrába – From Havana to St. Thomas and la Guayra), closing the first part, deals less with Cuba its main interest being the voyage to Venezuela. In it Rosti draws a very vivid picture of travelling conditions in the Caribbean with great emphasis on the advancement of shipping, stating that "one can leave Havana any week by steamliner not to mention the numerous sailing ships leaving each day towards each part of the world."¹⁷ It is clear from the text that Havana had far better communication with the USA than with Spain: meanwhile steamliners go to New Orleans and New York twice a month, to Mobile and Charlestown once a month, to Cádiz only one ship per month.

The Cuba part of the *Memories of Travels...* is the best-written and most homogeneous part of Rosti's book considered as a narrative literary text. It is also enigmatic and mysterious in a way.

It is mysterious because in contrast with the parts dealing with Venezuela and Mexico the author does not refer either to his ideal Humboldt or to any other authors or sources.¹⁸ Nevertheless, he most certainly used some and did not restrict himself to his own notes. The details of contracts with Chinese coolies or some data in the chapter about tobacco cultivation betray it. But in this homogeneous narrative text he does not quote even his own notes or his letters sent to Hungary though in other parts of the book this happens several times.¹⁹

The text is mysterious also because it displays a Cuba without history. Rosti does not write anything about the history of the island, his work is a snapshot in the true sense of Havana and her surroundings. This is remarkable because in the Venezuela part he does not only describe the dictatorship of president Monagas but briefly relates the history of the country's becoming independent. As for the history of Mexico, he gives quite a detailed account and dwells on the country's political life and institutions in a separate chapter. In the case of Cuba not much more than casual remarks refer to the island being a colony of Spain or inform the reader that the governor, the captain-general of the island is General Jozé (sic!) de la Concha at the time of Rosti's visit.²⁰

¹⁷ Rosti, *Úti emlékezetek...*, 32.

¹⁸ Rosti quotes Lucas Alaman's book "*Historia de Megico*" (sic!). He refers to Humboldt several times (e. g. Rosti, *Úti emlékezetek...*, 45, 70, 139, etc.). He quotes the 1856 Mexican statistics on demography referring to the newspaper *Noticias de la ciudad de Mexico*.

¹⁹ He recalls his trip to the Llanos by referring to his diary, even the title of the chapter is "A Trip to Llanos after my Diary." See Rosti, *Úti emlékezetek...*, 79–90. Several times he quotes his letters sent to Hungary. E. g. he builds into the text a letter sent from the island of St. Thomas (*op. cit.*, 103–104.) and another from Mexico (*op. cit.*, 166–167.) in which he analyzes the political situation of January 1858.

²⁰ Rosti, *Úti emlékezetek...*, 12.

Rosti does not write about the political problems of the colonial system. His readers learn nothing about the great slave rebellions of the previous decades or about annexionism, the Creole political ambition to solve the problems of the island by joining the United States.²¹ There's no doubt that Rosti arrived at Havana in a blessed period of tranquility, of political standstill. But it is hard to believe that he did not know about the political problems of the island since he had prepared for the trip in New Orleans, one of the centres of annexionist Cuban emigration. Prior to this, during his travels in the United States he probably met a considerable number of Hungarian emigrants, and in New Orleans too, he was the guest of his former teacher, Antal Vállas. It is hard to believe that he did not hear about the expeditions of Narciso López to liberate Cuba and about the members of the Hungarian emigration who had taken part in the last revolutionary action.²² True, by 1855 the first wave of annexionism had calmed down, the organizations of Cuban emigrants in the USA dissolved. But in Cuba the movement was most probably a frequent topic of conversation especially after the Pintó plot revealed in 1855.²³ We do not know whether lack of knowledge or some other reason made Rosti avoid political problems in the Cuban part. We suppose that the main reason was of a political nature. While criticising sharply Mexican and Venezuelan politics the author did not want to enter into discussing delicate problems concerning the interests of a European power which was on friendly terms with Austria.

Finally, Rosti's Cuba-image is mysterious because he writes almost nothing about his social connections. Presumably he had entry into the so called "good society" and acquired most of his information from these circles. Also he was in touch with members of the plantation aristocracy. But we almost know nothing about his actual acquaintances in Havana.

A survey of the chapters of Rosti's book reveals that he was interested in three major topics in Cuba. The compulsory topic of travel books comes first: the description of the host city and its social life. Secondly, he gives an account of the economic characteristics and specificities of the country. The chapters dealing with sugar processing and the tobacco industry serve this purpose. Last but not least, and in close connection with this former subject, he deals with the problems of coloured people which can be read – from another point of view – as an attempt to analyze the labour force problems of Cuba. The detailed analysis of slavery, the description of the social status of free Blacks and Mulattoes and the special problems raised by the importation of a labour force – the coolies – from China give evidence about this third field of his interest.

²¹ Cf. L. Bethell, ed., *Cuba. A short History*. Cambridge, 1993, 10–20; F. Portuondo, *Historia de Cuba 1492–1898*. La Habana 1965, 345–418; R. Guerra Y Sanchez, *Manual de historia de Cuba*. La Habana 1971, 553–643.

²² Cf. Á. Anderle, "A 48-as magyar emigráció és Narciso López 1851-es kubai expedíciója," [The Hungarian Emigration of 1848 and Narciso López' Cuban Expedition of 1851] *Századok* 107 (1973), 687–709.

²³ Cf. Portuondo, *op. cit.*, 371–372.

Rosti judges Havana beautiful but dirty. "The streets of the inner town are narrow, filthy and dark, the pavements are unusually narrow and one has to be on guard all the time in fear of being run down by the 'volante' equipped with broad wheelbase." (...) "Filth and untidiness belong to the character of Havana. Ugly half-naked children are rolling around on the ground with *negritos*..."²⁴ On the other hand he finds very attractive the promenade dividing the old inner and the new outer town (*paseo de Isabel II-da*) and the streets of the rapidly developing outer parts especially the so-called *calzadas* (*Calzada de la reina, Calzada del monte*) fringed with trees and bungalows in Italian style.²⁵

Havana people appear in Rosti's book as friendly and hospitable though somewhat untidy in the daytime. Women receive their visitors with loose hair, wearing dressing-gown and slippers, without stockings and over-garments. They dress up properly only in the evening when they drive out in the *volante* to shop or to take a walk.²⁶

Rosti was fascinated by the *volante*, this vehicle "constructed denying all the known laws of equilibrium" and very characteristic of Cuba. He gives a thorough and detailed description of it and thinks it fit even to be a part of the coat-of-arms of the city.²⁷

As for work, the morning hours were regarded as the most intensive in Havana. Rosti gives a very vivid and lifelike descriptions of the market place and the harbour. The European traveller (and his readers) found it strange that cattle were butchered in the market place and cows were milked there, under the eyes of the customers. The bread-seller (*panadero*), the poultry-seller and the fodder-seller (*malojero*) carrying a whole stack on his horse are introduced as well.²⁸

In Rosti's book the readers could follow a complete Havana Sunday. The day started between 6 and 9 in the morning going to church, at 11 people crowded in the *Valle de Gallos* where the big national entertainment, cockfighting started. At 4 pm. the other major entertainment, bullfighting invited the public. About five o'clock the good society's favourite pastime commenced: splendid *volantes* invaded the *Paseo de Tacón* and everybody went for a ride. Public entertainments ended in the *Plaza de Armas* where next to the governor's palace an excellent military band gave a concert at 8 pm. each day.²⁹

However, descriptions of cockfights, bullfight, pleasure-driving are perhaps less interesting for the reader of our day than Rosti's account of a religious service. Havana in the mid-century seems much more religious than in later years. Rosti was surprised to see that in the Havana churches no chairs or benches were provided. The maids of the ladies going to church carried carpets and small chairs and the women – ladies and black maids alike – settled themselves in the

²⁴ Rosti, *Uti emlékezetek...*, 4-5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-12.

centre of the church on these carpets. The gentlemen were standing or kneeling at the sidewalls. Church music was also a surprise to Rosti. On the one hand he could hardly bear the very special interpretation of the black orchestra playing the masses of Haydn or Mozart, on the other hand he had to listen often to fashionable Italian opera-pieces on the church organ during the service.³⁰

Church was one of the scenes of temporary earthly equality. The cockfight was the other. In the *riñadero* all differences of rank melted away, high class gentlemen cheered and shouted together with low class people in common excitement and bets were even made for large sums between people of very different social status. These oral bargains were held in respect, the loser paid. But at the end of the cockfight the short-term acquaintances were over.³¹

Describing Havana life, Rosti adds lots of details to the picture of American influence though he does not mention that, by that time, the US was the most important consumer of Cuban sugar. But we can learn from his book that in the financial chaos of the island the US dollar (called: *peso sencillo*) and its change, the dime had become more and more frequently used as currency. In the more distinguished Cuban houses *American rocking chairs* gave comfort to the inhabitants. Havana was a popular winter resort for wealthy American ladies, and in the fashionable cafés like the *Dominica* the excellent ice cream was kept cold with the help of ice imported from the lakes around Boston. The Cuban rail system followed the American model, the locomotives and carriages were purchased in the US.³²

Relying on Tibor Wittman's works Hungarian writers tend to emphasize that Pál Rosti suggests a brighter, more optimistic vision of Cuban society and the economy than of Venezuela or Mexico which were independent countries but struggling with deep political crisis. This opinion is doubtless an authentic one though we think that Rosti shunned political problems intentionally. On the other hand we know that in the first couple of months in 1857 the island was politically stable after the uproar of the annexionist movement had calmed down and also the blessings of an economic boom, the prospering sugar industry could have been felt since 1855. The Crimean war increased demands and crisis was not approaching until the summer of 1857 when Rosti had already left. In the summer a considerable number of plantation owners became ruined in a short time and some banks depending on the boom went bankrupt as well.³³ But Rosti visited a sugar factory, the *ingenio Isabel* in January 1857.³⁴ So we can say that he made a snapshot of the sugar industry as well in the last favourable stage of a period of boom.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

³² *Ibid.*, 4, 5, 12, 15–16.

³³ See Guerra, 566–568; J. Le Riverend, *Historia económica de Cuba*. La Habana 1974, 358–363.

³⁴ Rosti, *Uti emlékezetek...*, 15–19.

Rosti describes in detail a typical half-mechanized sugar factory. The *ingenio Isabel* was a terminal in 1857 for the railway line starting from Havana and later going towards Matanzas via Güines.³⁵ Also it lent its name to a nearby settlement La Isabel still existing in our day.³⁶ So Rosti's book can offer an interesting source to Cuban researchers dealing with local history. The plantation supplying the sugar factory extended to cc. 50 *caballería* (c. 670 hectares) and altogether 400 slaves (including women and children) lived and worked on it. The *ingenio Isabel* belonged to the old-type sugar factories which produced the bulk of Cuban sugar. Sugar-cane was squeezed already with the help of steam-engines but the other phases of the technology – condensing the *guarapo*, cleaning and refining the raw sugar, etc. – were done in the traditional way about which Rosti gave a fairly exact description. Rosti visited the nearby sugar factory *Unión* as well which was more modern, equipped with vacuum-boilers, steam-pumps and centrifuge, with gas-light installed in the factory buildings, the *batey*. The work of the approximately 500 slaves of this factory was less exhausting according to Rosti than the work of their fellows in the *ingenio Isabel*. 50–60 Chinese workers were employed as well especially for the more delicate tasks. Rosti also heard about even greater *ingenios* much better equipped. In these the buildings and machines themselves were worth more than a million pesos and they yielded almost as much to their owners in a year³⁷

So Rosti experienced the metamorphosis of the sugar industry which was accelerating in the 1850s.³⁸ Thirty years earlier the wilderness had reigned in the place of the *ingenio Isabel*. It began to flourish in 1849 when the railway reached the plantation. In the second half of 1850s, according to Rosti, the *ingenio Isabel* secured an average of 300,000 forint, c. 150,000 dollar (*peso sencillo*) as income to its owner who is referred to in the book as "Don C. F.". This was regarded as a relatively modest income – "*una renta regular*" – among plantation owners.³⁹

Visiting the *ingenio Isabel* made it possible for Rosti to encounter directly the problem of slavery to which a long part is dedicated in the book.⁴⁰ The owner of the *ingenio Isabel* tried to convince his guest that his slaves were happy and slavery was a form of good luck, a life without daily problems. Rosti severely rejects this general Cuban opinion and the system of slavery as well. The most revolting element of slavery for him is the fact that a human being is compelled to place his whole life at someone else's disposal because God created him black.⁴¹ Rosti accepts some of the stereotypes characteristic of his age, e. g. he believes that col-

³⁵ Cf. O. Zanetti, O.-A. García, *Caminos para el azúcar*. La Habana 1987, 27–63, 69.

³⁶ See *Atlas de Cuba*. La Habana 1978, 118–119.

³⁷ Rosti, *Uti emlékezetek...*, 19

³⁸ Cf. Le Riverend *op. cit.*, 151–173, and M. Moreno Friginals, *El ingenio. Complejo económico social cubano del azúcar*. La Habana 1978, Vol. I–III. This is the best work known to us about the Cuban sugar industry.

³⁹ Rosti, *Uti emlékezetek...*, 19.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17, 20–23, etc.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

oured people are less intelligent than whites but he is sure that this is the consequence of maltreatment and the lack of education. He thinks Cuban slavery altogether milder than the North American, especially the Louisiana version. In Cuba the work at the sugar plantations is the most exhausting. Rosti gives a detailed account of the five month long *zafra*, the sugar-cane harvest, about the hard work done in six-hour shifts almost without a break. The building where the slaves live on the *ingenio Isabel* is like a prison, "the rooms of the Blacks are miserable holes, dark cells."⁴² Urban slaves lived in better circumstances especially if they were good cooks, coachmen or masters of some other important trade. Such a skilled slave was worth 1,500–2,000 dollars in the second half of the 1850s.⁴³

Pál Rosti did not see any chance for the abolition of slavery as an institution. But he thought the humanity of the Havana people promising; they treated their slaves "kindly" and often gave them their liberty. The other way towards liberty was the so-called *coartación*. This old invention gave the possibility for self-liberation to the slave as once he had saved 50 dollars he could make his master determine the sum of his ransom and start the manumission procedure based on paying installments.

As a consequence of these two possibilities and of demographic growth the number of free Blacks and Mulattoes was steadily growing in Havana, and a good number of important professions were mainly in their hands. This group produced the majority of musicians whose art was much disliked by Rosti who was well educated in music but starting from the world of European harmonics he did not understand and therefore did not enjoy Cuban music. But he thought that racial prejudices against free blacks were weaker in Cuba than in the USA so there was a chance in the society for the peaceful and free coexistence of whites and blacks in the long run.⁴⁴

The chapter describing the situation of the Chinese labour force is very important as a historical source. The Hungarian traveller most certainly was one of the first foreign observers of this as the importation of Chinese coolies had started only ten years earlier, in 1847, to lessen the increasing shortage in the labour force.⁴⁵ The first "contractual slaves" had been liberated not much earlier than Rosti's visit. Rosti is exceedingly well informed on this field. For instance he describes the contents of the contracts much the same way as historiography does today (8 years of work, 4 pesos wage per month, obligatory place of work, etc.) and draws the conclusion that within the confines of these contracts the Chinese "are actual slaves for 8 years."⁴⁶ Their assimilation into Cuban society seemed to be difficult, their work produced profit only for plantation owners, tobacco fac-

⁴² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 24–26.

⁴⁵ Cf. e. g. P. Deschamps Chapeaux-J. Pérez De La Riva, *Contribución a la historia de la gente sin historia*. La Habana 1974, 115–162, 191–250.

⁴⁶ Rosti, *Uti emlékezetek...*, 26.

tory owners and for trading houses specializing in the importation of Chinese (e. g. *Cambell et Comp.*, mentioned by Rosti).

Pál Rosti closes the book on his Cuban peregrination with a optimistic chapter about the second biggest branch of the Cuban economy namely the tobacco industry.⁴⁷ He stresses the exquisite quality of the *Vuelta de abajo* (sic!) tobacco produced mainly by smallholders. According to his information this tobacco growing region gave work for c. 60–70,000 people in the mid-1850s. A detailed description is given of the sorting of tobacco leaves and the preparations for producing cigars. The major phases of production are explained, and we learn that 150 tobacco factories worked in Havana including around 30 first class ones. The two great rivals were Cabañas and Partagas. The latter produced the "Figaro" brand highly approved by the author.

With the last snapshot closing the chapter Pál Rosti, the Hungarian pioneer of popularizing Latin America in writing and pictures shows us a smoking Havana. A city where everybody (men and women alike) everywhere and almost all the time smoke: life goes on with a *tabaco* (cigar) between the lips. But in this very last picture – as a sign of the changing times – in the parlours of the ladies the *cigarette* makes its appearance, waste tobacco-bits wrapped in paper made by Spanish soldiers in their spare time.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 28–31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.