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**„HISTORY. CIVILIZATION. CULTURE”  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL**

**Hungarian National Monuments in Cluj and Târgu  
Mureș during the Dual Monarchy (1867–1918)**

**- Summary of the doctoral thesis -**

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## Abstract

### **Hungarian National Monuments in Cluj and Târgu Mureş during the Dual Monarchy (1867-1918)**

In my doctoral dissertation I examined, in the light of various archival sources, correspondences and articles published in the contemporary press, the Hungarian national monuments erected between 1867 and 1918 in two towns, Cluj and Târgu Mureş, which were significant both in economic and cultural terms, as well as administratively. During the Dual Monarchy, the local community erected six national monuments in Cluj and five in Târgu Mureş. Moreover, in the case of Cluj, we know of several unfinished memorial projects that were meant to commemorate significant figures of the national past. By discussing them in a separate chapter, I endeavoured to offer a more complete picture of the initiatives to erect statues in this town, respectively to contribute to our knowledge on the position of the society of the time regarding the national past.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the emergence of modern nation-states, a commemoration movement began throughout Europe, while in the second half of the century the erection of public monuments gradually became an independent artistic, political, and social domain. Monuments, which played a significant role in shaping national identity, first appeared in France after the Revolution, soon followed by other countries that started to adopt the French model. In Germany, for example, while in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century there were only a handful of national monuments, by the end of the century their number had reached hundreds.<sup>1</sup> In Hungary, national monumental sculpture started to unfold in the years following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, and the surge in the number of monuments was brought about by the celebration of the Millennium and by the new waves of the cult of Lajos Kossuth, following his passing.

Until the First World War, most monuments erected in public places commemorated major figures and events of the national past. This phenomenon involved a large section of society, as the vast majority of these monuments were financed from public donations. This is the period when the practice of erecting monuments became institutionalized: statue committees were set up that administered the process of monument erection, calls were launched for statue designs, the winners were selected by a jury, and unveiling ceremonies were

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<sup>1</sup> Hans A. Pohlsander: *National Monuments and Nationalism in 19th Century Germany*, Bern, 2008, p.20.

organized. The same practice can be observed in Transylvania, where the genre of public monuments can be found especially in larger towns.

The phenomenon of monument erection in the two examined towns was significant, even in the context of contemporary Hungary. The first statue in the country dedicated to József Bem was erected in Târgu Mureș, being the work of Adolf Huszár, one of the most important Hungarian sculptors of the time. The same town of Szeklerland erected the first full-length statue of Kossuth in Transylvania, being at the same time the second in the country after the one erected in Miskolc (Hungary). One of the most important works of the period's national monumental sculpture is the memorial statue of King Matthias erected in Cluj, in regards to which I tried to provide a more complete picture in the dissertation by incorporating new sources.

The motivations for erecting the discussed monuments were varied. Of the 11 monuments examined, in four cases the motivating factor was shown to be closely linked to the town's past. Two of them, the memorial to the Szekler martyr soldiers in Târgu Mureș and that of the martyr soldiers in Cluj commemorated the executions in the mentioned towns, both being related to the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence of 1848-49, respectively to the events that took place as a result. In Cluj, two personalities that had a close association with the past of the local community were also commemorated: Count Imre Mikó, the founder of the Transylvanian Museum Society, and Matthias Corvinus, the famous son of the town. A second group (consisting of the statues of József Bem and Francis II Rákóczi, as well as the memorial column of the poet Petőfi) is formed of the statues that commemorate personalities who, although could be linked to the past of the examined towns – a fact that was usually mentioned by the persons erecting the statues – this connection was not as close as in the case of the group discussed above, serving, in most cases, more as a pretext. Finally, some of the monuments could not be linked to the site of the erection; however, they fit into the national commemorative movements (the statues of István Széchenyi, Lajos Kossuth and Queen Elizabeth, the Guardian of the Carpathians). With the exception of two statues (that of King Matthias and Francis II Rákóczi), the subjects of the examined sculptures were provided by the events of the recent past, five of which were directly related to the events of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence of 1848-49. As seen from the example of the two towns, the events of 1848-49 occupied a prominent place in the collective memory. These commemorations proclaimed the struggle for national independence, and the movements that led to their creation were usually headed by members of society who professed ideas related to independence. The initiative to

commemorate the “kuruc” Francis II Rákóczi had a similar motivation, led by the most important representatives of the local Independence and ‘48 Party.

With one exception, the initiators of the commemorations came from the local elite, and the initiatives were usually formulated in calls published in contemporary newspapers. In Târgu Mureş, the erection of the memorial to the Szekler martyrs was proposed in 1867 by Ádám Lázár, a lawyer and later an opposition member of parliament, as well as the chairman of the local Equality Circle. A year later, in 1868 journalist Deák Farkas, who was born in Târgu Mureş and worked as a senior official at the Ministry of Justice, proposed the commemoration of József Bem in the form of a statue. In 1894, at the meeting of the Civic Association of Craftsmen held with the chairmanship of György Bernády, it was decided to erect a statue dedicated to Lajos Kossuth. In 1903, the town supported the initiative of lawyer Miklós Sárkány and archivist István Biás to erect a statue dedicated to Francis II Rákóczi. In 1910, György Bernády, mayor and president of the town’s Beautification Association, proposed the erection of a memorial column dedicated to Petőfi in connection with the redesign of the main square.

In Cluj, in 1882 the town decided to erect a statue in the memory of King Matthias at the suggestion of Lajos Nagy, the church’s chief clerk and teacher at the local Unitarian college. In 1883, the board of directors of the Transylvanian Museum Society of Cluj decided to erect a permanent memorial to Count Imre Mikó. In 1895 István Kuskó, one of the founders and the custodian of the Relic Museum in Cluj, a member of the town council, initiated the erection of a permanent memorial to the martyr soldiers on the town outskirts. In 1899, the general assembly of Cluj decided to erect a statue dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, at the request of the Beautification Association led by the former mayor, Károly Haller. The only case where the initiator was not local is that regarding the statue of the Guardian of the Carpathians: in 1915 Döme Lyka, a landowner from Pázmánd and former Transylvanian deputy, offered to the mayor of Cluj to erect a wooden statue for charity at his own expense.

Following the initiatives, statue committees were set up to administer the memorial erections. The committee’s work included raising funds to cover the cost of erecting the monuments, organizing collections and charity events, selecting, entrusting and communicating with the sculptors who received the commissions, deciding on the memorial locations, and ensuring appropriate unveiling ceremonies. These committees were composed mainly of town council members, representatives of the cultural life, members of the local aristocracy, lawyers, priests, university professors, merchants and landowners. The number of members could vary from a few dozen to a hundred people, but the important decisions were usually made by smaller subcommittees, the so-called executive committees. The committee with the largest number of

members was the one formed in Târgu Mureş for the erection of the Kossuth Statue, with a total number of 380 members (307 inhabitants of Târgu Mureş and 73 residents of Mureş-Turda County), with György Bernády – a member of the town council and leader of the Independence and '48 Party at that point – elected as president, and Béla Geréb – the mayor of the town – as honorary president. Later Bernády, already as mayor, chaired the committees for the statues of Rákóczi and Petőfi.

The statue committees of the two towns can be paralleled with similar organizations of the time established for commemorative events in Germany and France, whose senior positions, as Charlotte Tacke's research has shown, were also held by high-ranking town officials or local dignitaries.<sup>2</sup> The composition of the Vörösmarty Statue Committee in Székesfehérvár shows a pattern similar to the Transylvanian examples: its chairman was Count Jenő Zichy, and its members were wealthy townspeople, lawyers, traders and entrepreneurs who actively participated in the town's public life.<sup>3</sup> As Gyula Soós pointed out, "all prominent townspeople, from the lord-lieutenant to the salt office's official, from the prior of the Piarist order to the Jewish chief rabbi, were elected"<sup>4</sup> in the 30-member committee for the statue of Dugonics in Szeged.

With regards to Cluj, the founding of the university in 1872 attracted socially active people, who played an important role not only in the town management, but also took part in organizing monument erections. An example in this regard is Sándor Márki, who arrived in Cluj in 1892, where he started teaching at the university's Department of Medieval and Early Modern History. He soon became involved in the work of the King Matthias Statue Committee, edited the memorial book published at the statue's inauguration, later became a member of the Kossuth Statue Committee, and in 1906 proposed the erection of Stephen Bocskai's statue in the EMKE (currently Avram Iancu) Square, as well as renaming it to Bocskai Square. Károly Széchy, who was also involved in the activities of the King Matthias Statue Committee, moved to Cluj in 1880 as a teacher at the Higher State School for Girls, and from 1885 he taught at the university. In 1894 he was member for the jury that evaluated the designs sent in for the call. Another university professor, Zoltán Ferenczi, performed important tasks as secretary of the King Matthias Statue Committee and developed an intimate relationship with the monument's

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<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Tacke: *Denkmal im sozialen Raum. Nationale Symbole in Deutschland und Frankreich im 19. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen, 1995, pp. 77-134.

<sup>3</sup> Kovaloszky Márta: A székesfehérvári Vörösmarty-szobor. *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 43. 1–2. (1994) 133-136.

<sup>4</sup> Soós Gyula: A szegedi Dugonics-szobor. *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 6, 2–3. (1957), p. 203.

creator, János Fadrusz, as evidenced by the letters discovered during the research. In 1903, following the death of Albert Deáky, Ignác Kosutány, who moved to Cluj in 1900 after being appointed professor at the university's Faculty of Law, was elected chairman of the Kossuth Statue Committee.

The main intention of those who worked to erect the monuments was to commemorate the defining figures and events of the national historical past, but national considerations prevailed also in the selection of sculptors and even in the choice of material for the monuments to be erected. With one exception, the sculptors were entrusted by direct invitation. A general requirement was that the monument be made by a Hungarian sculptor, whose selection was influenced by their training or their connection with the town or its community. Adolf Huszár – a sculptor from Budapest, the first significant representative of Hungarian monumental sculpture after the Compromise, the creator of the Eötvös and Petőfi statues in Budapest – was commissioned to make the statue of Bem in Târgu Mureş after a failed design call, the choice being determined by the sculptor's previous achievements. When the Transylvanian Museum Society commissioned Baron Miklós Vay Jr. to create the bust of Count Imre Mikó, they again turned to a leading Hungarian sculptor; however, one of the aspects influencing this decision may have been the sculptor's aristocratic background.

We have come across several cases in which the sculptor that made the monument came from the local community. In 1867, József Klósz, who was born in Cluj, modelled the bust of István Széchenyi and offered it for free to his hometown, which became the first public monument of Cluj after the Compromise. The memorial to the martyr soldiers in Cluj was also made free of charge by a local, Dávid Smiel, owner of a stone quarry and member of the town council, an act that had contributed in a significant way to strengthening his socio-political position. Modelling the statue of the Guardian of the Carpathians was entrusted by the committee led by Gusztáv Haller to the sculptor Ferenc Szeszák, who was born in Cluj and was the custodian and restorer of the antiquities collection of the National Museum of Transylvania. In the case of Târgu Mureş, we also come across a similarly motivated request, in 1906, for example, the creation of the statue of Francis II Rákóczi was entrusted to a young sculptor born in the town, Károly Székely. In addition to the professional success of the creator of the Kossuth Statue in Târgu Mureş, Miklós Köllő from Ciumani, the sculptor's Szekler origins also played an important role.

The only exception regarding the selection of sculptors was the case of the statue of King Matthias in Cluj, the national significance of which motivated the need to decide on the person of the sculptor to be appointed through a sculpture competition. The call, announced in



1893, stipulated that only works by artists from the country would be considered. A total of seven people entered the competition, which attracted almost all the significant Hungarian sculptors of the period. The sculptor János Fadrusz from Bratislava was chosen from among them, in whose winning design the jury appreciated the novel artistic conception, as well as the monumental and “strong national” character.

Not only the Hungarian origins of the sculptors in charge of creating the monuments was an important consideration for the committee members, as they also attached great importance to creating the memorial and pedestal from Hungarian stone, if possible. Contemporary newspapers considered it important to highlight that Klósz carved the bust of Széchenyi in Cluj from “stone from the country”. In the case of the Mikó Statue, the inauguration was postponed for several years by the attempt to find a suitable, specifically Transylvanian stone type for the pedestal, for which an attempt was made to open a quarry, but in the end the committee members had to settle for stone from Chiuzbaia, Partium. In the document placed in the foundation stone of the memorial column dedicated to the martyr soldiers in Cluj, it was specified that its stone, extracted from the mines of Cheile Baciului and Cluj-Mănăştur, was the same which was used for the Millennium Memorial Column erected in Braşov on Tâmpa Hill, as well as for the Royal Palace in Buda and the Parliament Building in Pest. According to the original plan, the pedestal of the King Matthias Statue was to be made of Transylvanian stone from Cheile Baciului, however, as it was not possible to extract the blocks at the required size, stone from Süttő (Esztergom County, Hungary) was finally chosen. In the case of the Bem Statue from Târgu Mureş, it was stipulated from the very beginning that Szekler stone types will be used for the pedestal, so it was made from “Szekler granite from the country”, more specifically from Ditrău. The pedestal of the statue of Rákóczi was made of limestone from Sóskút (Hungary), and the Petőfi Memorial Column from stone extracted at Chrast' nad Hornádom (Slovakia).

In addition to the statue committees, the local population participated mainly through donations for the benefit of the monuments to be erected, but in the case of both examined towns, the population also assumed additional roles. The monument of the martyr soldiers in Cluj is a good example for the way in which the members of the local community got involved in the process of erecting the monument through various actions, which was considered a national affair. The design of the fence for the monument was made free of charge by the artisan locksmith Ágoston Demjén, the necessary iron was donated by the ironmonger Lajos Reményik, and its painting in silver was undertaken by painter Mór Grünwald. Samu Pollák, the owner of the asphalt and cement factory, undertook the asphalt paving of the part under the

fence, but the landscaping around the memorial column was also the result of community cooperation. The pedestal of the Mikó Statue was carved in stone by the local engineer János B. Gáll, and the pedestals of the statues of Queen Elizabeth and King Matthias were made based on the designs of architect Lajos Pákei from Cluj. The wrought iron fence of the memorial to the Szekler martyrs from Târgu Mureş was made by the local ironmonger János Törpényi, and the stone base needed for it by the local stonemason Lajos Csiszár. The park fence around the Kossuth Statue is also linked to the names of local craftsmen.

Most of the public works that have been erected have also significantly transformed the urban landscape. In Cluj, the redesign of the central square and the relocation to the Old Fortress of the Karolina Column commemorating the emperor's visit were related to the decision to erect the statue of King Matthias. The statue of Queen Elizabeth is related to the landscaping of the Citadel – designated as the place of erection – and the arrangement of the Elizabeth promenade. In Târgu Mureş, the full-length statues of Bem and Kossuth erected in the town's central square – bearing the name of Széchenyi – gave it a large town character. At the beginning of the century, a park with promenades and benches was built around the Kossuth Statue for relaxation, surrounded by an ornate fence. The tendency to encircle over time or to arrange parks around statues erected in the central squares of towns was a common phenomenon of Hungary in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so that the function of the spaces that once hosted weekly fairs gradually changed. In Pécs, for example, a year and a half after the Kossuth Statue was erected, it was decided to separate the statue “from the noisy world of vendors around it”<sup>5</sup> with the help of a suitable and aesthetic fence. The same was done in the case of the statue of Saint Ladislav in Oradea and that of the Kossuth Statue in Arad.

In the light of the sources discovered during the research, we can say that in addition to cultivating the memory of the figures of national history, in the case of the erection of the examined monuments, other purposes were formulated. In addition to proclaiming the greatness of Kossuth, the call issued by the Kossuth Statue Committee in Târgu Mureş also aimed to keep awake the “patriotic spirit”. The document placed in the foundation stone of the memorial to the martyr soldiers in Cluj also stated that in addition to caring for the memory of the martyrs, the purpose of erecting the monument was to nurture a patriotic spirit and to maintain it in the hearts of later generations. Certain thoughts have been expressed in connection to several memorials that suggest that these monuments, similar to the millennium monuments initiated

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<sup>5</sup> A Kossuth szobor kerítése. *Pécsi Napló* 18. 298. (1909. december 30.) 4.

by Kálmán Thaly,<sup>6</sup> played an important role in promoting the country's territorial integrity. In his speech at the unveiling of the Kossuth Statue in Târgu Mureș, János Bedőházi emphasized that the statue erected in the "Szekler capital" must express that it was raised not in an "obscure" border area, but in the periphery that is inseparable from and organically connected to the Hungarian state".<sup>7</sup> We also find an eloquent reference in a ministerial rescript regarding the statue of King Matthias, which sheds light on the "role" that the country's leaders assigned to the monument that was to be erected in Cluj: "In the heart of the Transylvanian parts of Hungary, it will be an imposing symbol of our Hungarian state, of the glory of our historical traditions and of the power of our patriotic unity."<sup>8</sup> Most of the public monuments erected in Cluj and Târgu Mureș during the Dual Monarchy have fallen victim to the statue destructions following the First World War precisely because of their national character.

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<sup>6</sup> Varga Kuna Bálint: *Árpád a város fölött. Nemzeti integráció és szimbolikus politika a 19. század végének Magyarországon*, Budapest, 2017, pp. 37-43.

<sup>7</sup> Bedőházi János: *Beszéd a marosvásárhelyi Kossuth szobor leleplezése alkalmával 1899. június 11-én*. Marosvásárhely, 1899. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Magyar Királyi Vallás és Közoktatásügyi miniszter 9496. számú leirata a kolozsvári Mátyás-szobor támogatása tárgyában, 1902. február 23. RNL KMH, 1. Fond, Városi iratok, Különböző ügyek 1902, Mátyás-szobor, 1969/1902.