HUNGARY AFTER 1989: INSCRIBING A NEW PAST ON PLACE*

KENNETH E. FOOTE, ATILLA TÓTH, and ANETT ÁRVAY

Abstract. Since the fall of the Communist government in 1989, Hungary's political monuments and historical shrines have undergone great change. Although popular attention focused on the removal of overtly political monuments, new shrines were also created, and forgotten memorials were restored. In a departure from earlier political eras, decisions about contested places are issuing from local authorities and private citizens, rather than from the central government. The result is a sometimes subtle rearrangement of public memorials and shrines that interprets the national past by drawing symbolic and spatial parallels between some historical events while rejecting connections among others. The meanings of events and places, particularly those linked to twentieth-century wartime and civil upheavals, remain contested. Keywords: Communism, contested places, Hungary, memorials, monuments.

The dramatic collapse of European Communism in 1989 produced many striking images of crowds toppling statues, vandalizing buildings, and slapping hastily lettered signs on renamed streets. Hungarians shared in this iconoclasm as it swept central and eastern Europe. Favored targets were statues of Lenin, Marx, an assortment of Hungarian Communist leaders, and Soviet war memorials erected at the end of World War II (Figure 1) (Tóth 1990). This backlash of destruction is unsurprising, given the close connection between public art and political propaganda in the twentieth century and earlier (Lane 1968; Taylor 1974; Craig 1978; Tumarkin 1983; Golomstock 1990; Ettlin 1991; Robin 1992; Vale 1992; Ades 1995; Tóth 1997a, 1997b; Levinson 1998; Michalski 1998). Just as important as the destruction, however, were efforts to create new memorials and to restore historical and religious shrines left derelict for forty years.

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Work on the most important new projects was linked directly to the events of 1989 and the fall of the Hungarian Communist government. Efforts were made to honor the martyrs of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. Apart from the hundreds who died fighting in October and November of that year, a number of political prisoners—including former Prime Minister Imre Nagy—were executed later. The bodies of many of these martyrs were buried secretly in anonymous paupers’ graves in inaccessible parcels of one of Budapest’s largest cemeteries. Their remains were exhumed and reinterred in 1989, with the June reburial ceremony in Budapest’s He-

*Fig. 1—A statue of Lenin in the Ferenc Móra Museum storage facility in Algyó, Hungary. Until 1990 the statue stood in front of the Csongrád County administration building in Szeged (Tóth 1990). Numerous other statues, plaques, and memorials removed from public view share quarters with the Lenin statue. (Photograph by Kenneth E. Foote, March 1999)*
roes' Square a key event in crystallizing public opposition to the government (Verdery 1999, 16, 29–31). The Hungarian Communist Party disbanded in the fall, and negotiations began for the withdrawal of Russian troops. Parcel 301 in Rákos-

![Image](image_url)

**Fig. 2**—Parcel 301, in Budapest’s Rákoskeresztúr Public Cemetery. Here many of Hungary’s executed political prisoners were buried in anonymous paupers’ graves after the 1956 Uprising. In the foreground is the grave of Prime Minister Imre Nagy, executed in 1958. In the distance is the memorial designed by György Jóvánovics, unveiled in 1992. In 1989 the reburial ceremony held for these political prisoners set the stage for the collapse of the Communist government. (Photograph by Kenneth E. Foote, November 1998)

keresztúr Public Cemetery has now been transformed into a national shrine and the anniversary of the outbreak of the uprising—23 October—into a national holiday (Figure 2). Dozens of other memorials for the 1956 Uprising and for the coun-
try's losses in World War II, banned during the Communist years, have since been erected (Figure 3). No longer under the sole patronage of the national government, these new monuments are sponsored by political, social, and religious organizations, local government, veterans' and survivors' associations, businesses, and private individuals (Szőlőssy and Boros 1998, 12). Sergiusz Michalski may be correct in stating that the general European public has become suspicious of monuments
sculpted solely of political ideology (1998), but we argue that such skepticism has not slowed the upwelling of public commemoration in Hungary.

Commemoration, National Identity, and Political Iconoclasm

The events of 1989 are rooted in the longer traditions of European political iconoclasm, but a subtler process of historical reinterpretation is also under way in today's Hungary. Set in motion with the statues toppled in 1989 was a debate about the national past that, perhaps for the first time in the twentieth century, included a broad cross-section of the population and a wide range of political voices. Through the 1990s the process involved renegotiating the meaning of key episodes in Hungarian history and affected the way these events have been represented and commemorated in the landscape. The changes also relate to important theoretical issues raised by recent research into the politics of place and the impress of nationalism and national identity on the landscape.

What is happening in Hungary contributes to an understanding of how political shrines anchor national traditions of patriotism and commemoration, particularly during periods of political change. The emergence of political shrines seems closely related to the gradual rise of the modern, secular nation-state beginning in the late eighteenth century. New republics in the Americas and France were faced with crafting cohesive societies around institutions other than a monarchy, sometimes simultaneously rejecting previous close ties between church and state. Each nation developed secular traditions and rituals, their goal the definition of a sense of national purpose and identity. These traditions revolved around heroes, victories, and accomplishments of the new republics, and they came to be celebrated in literature, poetry, historical writing, opera, popular music, theater, painting, sculpture, architecture, and landscape design (Craig 1978; Agulhon 1981; Cosgrove 1984; Nora 1984; Lowry 1985; Trouillas 1988; Leith 1991; Vale 1992).

Cultural and historical geographers have recently turned to examinations of these phenomena, particularly how commemorative traditions emerge in the landscape and in monumental built forms (Lowenthal 1985; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Daniels 1993; Johnson 1994, 1995; Foote 1997; Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998; Till 1999). Historical shrines and monuments are particularly important as social and spatial anchors for historical traditions, much as national holidays anchor traditions in time. Secular efforts at tradition building mirrored, at least in function, court rituals and religious traditions that had evolved in Europe over centuries. Throughout the nineteenth century the use of secular traditions grew, even within the monarchies and empires. These traditions became a means of legitimizing political and territorial claims over increasingly large and diverse populations and for coming to terms with the social and economic upheavals brought about by industrialization. As Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger argued, many a supposedly ancient national tradition was actually invented during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and sustained in the twentieth as a symbol of national identity (1983).
There is great variation in the traditions that have developed within the nations of Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere. The most detailed studies have focused on France, the United States, Great Britain, and Germany, although elements of other national traditions have been examined as well (Nora 1984; Lowenthal 1985; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Bodnar 1992; Vale 1992; Daniels 1993; Boyarin 1994; Gillis 1994; Lebovics 1994; Sherman 1994; Schama 1995; Azaryahu 1996a, 1996b, 1999; Yeoh 1996; Foote 1997; Inglis 1998; Lloyd 1998; Yoneyama 1999). Less is known about how such traditions have evolved in other European nations, such as Hungary, and in countries in other regions of the world. In this article we focus on Hungary in order to expand the range of debate on the development of commemorative landscapes and national identity, both in central Europe and elsewhere. This is not solely because Hungary has experienced a political, social, and economic history different from that of many of its European neighbors. Hungary is also of interest because studying it yields insight into how nations of the former Soviet bloc are interpreting their years of Communist rule and how commemorative traditions respond to changes of political regime. This trait, too, Hungary shares with the many nations that experienced political upheaval and revolution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Argenbright 1999).

Certain contrasts do exist, however, between Hungary and its European neighbors in history and in relation to commemorative traditions that have been studied in nations like Great Britain, France, and Germany. The Magyars were the last arrivals in the great migration of central Asian peoples into Europe. Ever since they captured the Carpathian Basin in the late ninth century they have maintained a more or less continual state that has played a key role in European, especially central European, history. By way of comparison, the Magyar conquest of the Carpathian Basin (895–896) predates the Norman conquest of Britain (1066) by almost two centuries. But whereas Great Britain was never again successfully invaded, the Hungarian nation was forced to defend itself repeatedly against eastern invasion from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The unification of France dates only from the seventeenth century, and most attention to its patriotic and commemorative traditions has focused on their evolution after the revolution of 1789, particularly from the Third Republic onward.

German unification came still later, and, apart from their shared loss in World Wars I and II, Germany and Hungary developed quite different commemorative traditions. Indeed, much of the work on German political shrines and traditions of commemoration has focused primarily on three issues: their use by the Nazis as political propaganda, their importance to Holocaust remembrance, and their role in the political competition between East and West during the cold war (Lane 1968; Taylor 1974; Helmer 1985; Rüurup 1989; Young 1993; Hartman 1994; Koonz 1994; Koshar 1994; Puvogel and Stankowski 1995; Azaryahu 1997; Ladd 1997; Wise 1998).

These differences are of detail, as much as in broad historical outline. Hungary's experience of pivotal events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been far different from those of even its closest neighbors in central Europe (Gerő 1995).
Many writers have stressed the role of the revolutions of 1848–1849, the Franco-Prussian War, World Wars I and II, and other civil wars in forming a nucleus around which commemorative traditions have been forged (Fussell 1975; Coombs 1986; Mayo 1988; Linenthal 1991; Gillis 1994; Laqueur 1994; Piel 1994, 1995; Tumarkin 1994; Winter 1995; Farmer 1999). Such events held unique consequences for Hungary. The suppression of the Revolution of 1848–1849 produced martyrs whose sacrifices have been celebrated ever since. Commemoration of losses in World War I, so important in many nations, was used in Hungary to rally opposition to its territorial dismemberment under the Trianon Treaty of 1920. Hungary was the only nation, apart from Russia, to have a Communist government after World War I. Suppressed in less than six months, this Republic of Councils (1919) was replaced by a conservative regime (1920–1944) that allied itself with Germany during World War II. This conservative government was, in turn, replaced by a Nazi puppet government (1944–1945). Any commemoration of losses in World War II, apart from Soviet war memorials, was forbidden by Hungary’s postwar Communist government.

This frequent turnover of government, though not unique to Hungary, does offer evidence of the role played by divergent ideologies in defining commemorative traditions. It also offers insight into the little-studied role of iconoclasm in the overall development of national commemorative traditions, particularly during periods of political transition and change (Gamboni 1997, 51–106). Of interest is the way new regimes in Hungary and elsewhere destroy shrines, erase monuments, and eliminate commemorative traditions as they gain power and attempt to impress their own vision of history on the landscape and social life. Postrevolutionary France, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union have gained some attention, as have the looting and desecration that occurred during and after World War II (Harvey 1985; Hudson 1994; Nicholas 1994; Akinsha, Kozlov, and Hochfield 1995; King 1997; Simpson 1997; Michalski 1998). Research conducted in the past fifteen years hints that political iconoclasm should be treated as part of the general process through which nations build commemorative traditions, rather than as exceptions or anomalies. At the least, the patterns of destruction offer insight into how nations interpret highly contested political places and events.

János Pótó’s study of Budapest’s monuments between 1945 and 1953 argues that decisions reached about the destruction, construction, and conservation of political shrines were given careful thought and attention (1989). In the immediate post-World War II period, with much of Budapest in ruins, the new Communist government faced choices about which monuments to restore, which to remove, and whether to build new shrines. Whether damaged or undamaged, politically unacceptable monuments, such as those to Hapsburg monarchs, were removed. Simultaneously, new monuments were erected and damaged monuments restored if they celebrated the ideology of the new government. In between lay a whole range of secular, religious, and artistic monuments that were left largely untouched. Some that were damaged were restored, and the inscriptions and symbols of a few were modified slightly, but for the most part the Communist government found no rea-
son to alter these. Although decisions taken after 1989 fall into these same general categories, almost immediately there appeared indications that a more complex type of reinterpretation was under way, in terms of both the number of changes made and their selectivity. As Géza Boros has argued, the key difference was that in 1989, after four decades of grand commemorative gestures made unilaterally by the national government, Hungary turned the planning process on end and invested these rights in local governments (Szöllőssy and Boros 1998, 12). The resultant outpouring brought commemorative activities by local governments, churches, veterans' and survivors' associations, political parties, and individuals. Now even the central government must seek the approval of local authorities before a national project can move forward.

Relatively few monuments were removed after 1989. Resistance to the destruction of out-of-favor memorials soon emerged: Those tactics were too evocative of the Communist de-Stalinization of public spaces in the 1950s. Most public art removed from public view after 1989 was placed in the care of local museums and county authorities and stored for future consideration. The changes that occurred must also be placed in the context of the vast array of public art on view in most Hungarian cities and towns. Hungary, like more than a few of its neighbors, has a long tradition of public sponsorship of art, whether religious or secular (Wehner 1986). Budapest's public sculptures alone number some 1,000 (Hadházy, Szöllőssy, and Szilágyi 1985; Szöllőssy, Szilágyi, and Hadházy 1987; Prohászka 1994, 1997; Szöllőssy and Boros 1998). Szeged, a regional center noted for its public art, has close to 900 (Tóth 1993). Catalogs for the city of Pécs and for Hajdú-Bihar and Veszprém Counties are equally impressive (Sz. Kürti 1977; Bándi 1980; Romváry 1982). Only a few dozen pieces of art in each city were removed or modified after 1989. Though perhaps highly visible political works, they were few in number.

After Budapest's choices for removal were made, some of the best known and artistically most striking works were relocated to Statue Park (Figure 4). This opened in 1993 and was set in a suburban area of the Twenty-Second District, quite far from the center of the city. The distance was necessary and intentional, for it separated statues physically and symbolically from their original sites and political meanings. Visitors who are willing to make the trip to Statue Park can view examples of forty years of political art, consider the works and their creators, and perhaps reflect on the significance of the Communist period in Hungarian history. Although other cities have discussed displaying their collections of stored art in a similar way, none yet has a competing Statue Park.

Changes and removals made after 1989 were selective (Tóth 1997a, 1997b). The question was not whether to remove all of the statues put up during the Communist regime, nor whether to return all place-names to their pre-Communist forms. After all, the Communists erected many an apolitical work of art, assigned countless innocuous toponyms, and honored a number of historical events that are still celebrated today. Of the Hungarians who were publicly commemorated, many were distinguished in vocations other than politics. It was not an easy task to revert to pre-
1948 statues and toponyms. Names had changed and some statues had been moved several times since the nineteenth century, so every revision had to be weighed carefully. The result was a selective series of modifications of place-names and public art, as the city of Szeged demonstrates (Table 1). Many toponyms were left unchanged, but others were returned to names assigned in much earlier periods (Péter 1974; Ráday, Mészáros, and Buza 1998; Tóth and Zánthó 1998). Some statues were removed, others were modified only slightly, and still others were actively restored (Szöllösy and Boros 1998, 7–15). And, no matter how politically offensive, no memorials were removed from cemeteries. This meant that, even as Soviet war memorials were removed from public squares, the Soviet war graves were left undisturbed.

Drawing Historical Parallels through Placement

The timing of this wave of post-1989 monument building is not unexpected. Kenneth Foote notes in his study of American shrines that commemorative activity frequently begins or increases on major anniversaries (Foote 1997, 111–133, 219–222, 268–273). Fortieth or fiftieth anniversaries are often particularly important, because the last veterans and survivors of an event are coming to the end of their lives. These veterans and survivors often lead the push for commemoration as a means of passing the legacy of their sacrifices on to the next generation. With the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II and the fortieth anniversary of the 1956 Uprising falling so
Table I—Political Monuments Removed, Erected, or Restored in Szeged, Hungary, 1989–1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Removed</th>
<th>Erected or restored</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>The burial pole on Arad Martyrs’ Square, one of the earliest illegal grave poles. The World War II memorial in Tápé. The relief of István Bibó (1911–1979), a lawyer and philosopher who was influential in twentieth-century Hungarian politics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Eight to ten statues, busts, portraits, and reliefs of Lenin, in various places. The bust of Zoltán Komócsin (1923–1974), a politician who was important in founding the Communist Youth Association in 1957. The memorial for martyred policemen killed on duty after World War II. The memorial stone to the Great October Socialist Revolution, in a park dedicated to the revolution. Created in 1988, this was the last Communist political memorial erected in Szeged. Its inscription was removed in 1989. The memorial stone on the Tisza riverbank, where illegal Communists met during the interwar period.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>The Liberation Monument in Gyáláret, on the outskirts of the city. It was a flag stand before it was converted into a liberation monument in 1950. The Liberation Monument in Tápé, on the outskirts of the city. It was a flag stand until 1950 and was restored as such in 1991. The relief of Máté Zalka (1896–1937), a writer, fighter in the international working-class movement, and legendary general in the Spanish Civil War. The relief of István Szirmai (1906–1969), organizer of the illegal Communist Party and editor of the regional newspaper Délmagyarország. Two Soviet war memorials on Széchenyi Square. The Young Guard memorial stone on the orphanage named after this recruitment association for the Communist Party.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>The 1919 Republic of Councils Memorial, a propaganda memorial typical of the Kádár era.</td>
<td>The flag stand in Tápé used in official celebrations.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The plaque for Kunó Klebelsberg, minister of culture and education during the Horthy era (restored). The relief of Kunó Klebelsberg in Klebelsberg District. Ten to fifteen new plaques for the martyrs and resistance fighters of the Communist era on public buildings and in public places.</td>
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Table I—Continued

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Monument/Statue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Removed</td>
<td>The bust of Anton Makarenko (1888–1939), a Soviet writer and educator</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Two reliefs of Ferenc Rózsa (1906–1942), a journalist and fighter in the working-class movement who was killed while being arrested</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>The portrait of Antal Czibula (1879–1955), a lawyer and participant in the 1919 Republic of Councils</td>
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<td>The relief of Vladimir Majakovskij (1893–1930), a Russian poet</td>
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<td>The May Day monument</td>
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<td>The plaque for Nikosz Beloiannis, a Greek freedom fighter whose name was given to Cathedral Square in the 1950s. The stone for his plaque was from one originally dedicated to Kunó Klebelsberg.</td>
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<td>Reliefs of ten miscellaneous Communists</td>
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<td>Erected or restored</td>
<td>The relief of Vladimir Majakovskij</td>
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<td>The May Day monument</td>
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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Removed</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Erected or restored</td>
<td>The 3rd Hungarian Regiment memorial (reconstructed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Removed</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Erected or restored</td>
<td>The eighteenth-century Maria column, which had been pulled down during the Communist era (reerected)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The portrait of István Bibó in the pantheon on Cathedral Square (returned)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>The sculpture of Saint Stephen and his wife, Gisela, on the 1,100th anniversary of the Magyar Conquest, on Széchenyi Square, where a Soviet war memorial once stood</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>The memorial to József Kovács, martyr of the 1956 Uprising</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Removed</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Erected or restored</td>
<td>The flag stand on Széchenyi Square</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The statue of Queen Consort Elizabeth, wife of Emperor Franz Joseph, which had been replaced by one of Stalin and Lenin in the 1950s (reerected)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The well of Saint Stephen, on the beach</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The 1956 Uprising memorial by Miklós Melocco, on Rerrich Square</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Removed</td>
<td>None</td>
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|      | Erected or restored | The statue of Saint Borbála, patron saint of miners and oil workers. Sponsored by the Hungarian Petrol Company, which runs a refinery near Szeged, this is the first wholly religious statue erected since 1989.
close together, monument building in Hungary received a twofold impetus in the 1990s. The appearance of new monuments was all the more striking because, having been banned for forty years, they seemed to arrive suddenly.

The placement and design of the new memorials is important to their interpretation. Many are erected with an eye toward drawing parallels and analogies between recent events and heroic episodes from Hungary’s past. New memorials for the 1956 Uprising and World War II are most often placed close to those erected for the 1848–1849 War of Independence. Indeed, the single most common historical parallel established by the placement of the new memorials is between the heroism of 1956 and the sacrifices of 1848–1849. Sometimes the new shrines draw an additional parallel of placement with memorials to the Rákóczi War of Independence against the Hapsburgs (1703–1711), but this is not as common as the parallels drawn with 1848–1849. The new shrines can also be found close to memorials for World War I, as in the town of Martonvásár (Figure 5), though drawing this parallel of placement is not always possible. Many World War I memorials were effaced during the Communist years or left in such bad repair that they offer poor sites for new shrines. And the meaning of World War I remains far more equivocal for Hungary than do the events of 1848–1849, 1956, or the Rákóczi War of Independence. World War I led to the territorial dismemberment of the Hungarian Empire, and the memorials became rallying points for the conservative regime of Admiral Miklós Horthy (1920–1944) (Kovács 1985; Halmágyi 1998). Parallels of placement are still made between 1956 and memorials for World Wars I and II, but rarely so if the World War I memorial is of an overtly martial design depicting fallen or fighting soldiers.

A good example of these historical alignments can be found in the placement of Szeged’s two 1956 memorials in and adjacent to its Arad Martyrs’ Square (Figure 6). The name of the square honors the generals executed in Arad after the 1848–1849 War of Independence, but it has been the site of some of Szeged’s most important memorials for more than 200 years. The Rozália Chapel was built there in the eighteenth century to honor victims of a plague. A memorial column was added in 1896 to the Heroes of the Battle of Szőreg, an engagement in the 1848–1849 War of Independence that occurred on the outskirts of Szeged. After World War I a second column was added to the square to honor Szeged’s 46th Infantry Regiment, and an equestrian statue of Prince Ferenc Rákóczi was moved into the square. Another World War I memorial, a Heroes’ Gate dedicated to the 12,000 soldiers Szeged lost in the war, was constructed on the south side of the square during the interwar period. Just to the east is a small courtyard holding a statue of Saint George and the Dragon. The first 1956 memorial in Szeged was erected on the west side of Martyrs’ Square in 1989. The second, a major sculpture by Miklós Melocco unveiled in 1997, was placed in Rerrich Square. Although the Communists removed the 46th Infantry Regiment memorial, the Heroes’ Gate has been restored. A major memorial to the victims of World War II was raised in Szeged in 1993, but in the town’s major cemetery, adjacent to a set of mass war graves. Such complex assemblages of memorials as found in Szeged
ged are, however, relatively rare. In Debrecen, Hungary’s second-largest city, war memorials are not so juxtaposed, and its Arad Martyrs’ Square contains no monument.

In some towns parallels of placement are made with other events. In Köszeg, on the Austrian border, the memorial plaque for World War II is next to one honoring soldiers who died in the battle of 1532, during which the garrison protected Vienna from advancing Turks but was decimated in the ensuing siege. Such parallels of placement are relatively rare, if only because there are few memorials to the Mongol and Turkish invasions except on important battlefields and in towns like Köszeg.

This does not mean that the obvious parallels between the Mongol, Turkish, and Soviet occupations are entirely overlooked. Muh, the site of the devastating defeat of Hungary during the Mongol invasion of 1242, received a major new memorial in 1992. Mohács, long an important shrine to the defeat in 1526 at the hands of the Turks, has received considerable fresh attention since 1989.

Traditional Magyar Folk and Religious Symbolism Revived

Design elements in new memorials rarely embrace the martial symbolism so common to earlier Hungarian war memorials, depicting fighting or fallen soldiers. Instead, traditional Magyar folk and religious symbols are employed, or, in some cases, entirely fresh symbolic idioms are adopted. This simplicity of design is rooted in the private origins of new memorials that are intended to be unobtrusive. Typically, these involve simple gravestones and plaques that list only the names of the dead, erected in private cemetery plots and churchyards out of the public eye.

The first of these memorials were illegally constructed during the waning years of the Communist regime. Surreptitious efforts led to the development of one of the most pervasive symbols of the 1956 Uprising—the Hungarian grave or burial pole. The grave pole is a tradition that, though rooted in earlier Magyar precedents, flowered in the Protestant areas of Transylvania around the time of the Rákóczi War of Independence in the eighteenth century. Soldiers’ graves were marked with their lances, and the form of the lance was later imitated by the grave pole. Through time, a system of symbolism also evolved, with the size, shape, and decoration of a pole indicating gender—a tulip for women, a hat or a star for men—age, marital and social status, and wealth (Malonyay 1909, 275–293; Hoppál and others 1994). By the twentieth century, grave poles were rarely used for burials. Their revival in the 1980s owes much to the ease with which they could be constructed and erected. The wood needed for the poles was inexpensive and could be hewn in secret, using simple tools. Moreover, it could be erected in a cemetery or public space at night in an hour or two.

The first grave poles were erected in Parcel 301 by an avant-garde protest group on 16 June 1988, the same day a memorial to martyred Prime Minister Imre Nagy was being unveiled in Paris. The use of grave poles spread quickly both before and after the fall of the Communist government, and they are now the most widespread.
symbol of the 1956 Uprising (Boros 1997, 81). Hardly a town or village in Hungary is without a grave pole in its main square, in a churchyard, or near a World War II memorial. The use of the grave pole to symbolize the 1956 Uprising is in some ways fortuitous, for the events of 1956 were not directly connected to those of eighteenth-century Transylvania (Boros 1997, 81). The use of the grave pole does, however, allude to a heroic episode in the Hungarian past. During the Rákóczi War of Inde-
pendence, Hungarians were attempting to fashion an independent state from the territory liberated from the Turks and the land still held by the Hapsburgs. Use of the grave pole draws a subtle parallel between the fight to liberate Hungary from the Turks and Hapsburgs, on one hand, and the struggle against the Soviet Union, on the other. This is the same kind of parallel implicit in the placement of so many 1956 memorials adjacent to monuments to the 1848–1849 War of Independence. But be-
cause relatively few memorials to the Turkish and earlier Mongol invasions exist, as we noted above, the parallel is drawn through the design of the grave pole rather than from its placement.

Other traditional Magyar symbols and burial designs, including distinctive floral designs employed on arches, gates, and pillars in cemeteries and public places, have also been revived, as have religious statues and shrines. When the Communists gained full power in 1949, churches in Hungary basically ceased to exist: All religious institutions were closed, religious orders were dissolved, and schools and many other church properties were confiscated by the state. Religious memorials began to be taken away soon after the promulgation of a secretarial decree (179.481/1946) that mandated the removal of any painting, object, or statue that depicted or referred to Hungarian kings, Austro-Hungarian monarchs, or officials of the Horthy government. Although the decree did not state explicitly which religious statues had to be removed, it made clear that religious iconoclasm was to be sanctioned by the Communist government to undercut Hungary's Catholic and Protestant churches.

A striking example of this antireligious doctrine put into action, and of the response, is Budapest's Magna Dominæ Hungarorum Church, better known as Regnum Marianum. The church was built in the early 1920s in honor of the defeat of the 1919 Republic of Councils. It was sited on the southern edge of Budapest's City Park on Dózsa Street, close to Heroes' Square. Because its dedication to the defeat of the Republic of Councils was so clearly at odds with the views of the new Communist regime, the Regnum Marianum was razed in 1951. In its place was erected a mammoth statue of Stalin, overlooking a section of Dózsa Street that was used as a parade ground during the Communist years. This statue was, in turn, among the first monuments destroyed during the 1956 Uprising. Afterward a statue of Lenin, rather than Stalin, was erected nearby; and in 1969 the Communist regime placed a new statue squarely on the spot where the altar of the Regnum Marianum previously stood. This was a statue of a sailor, hand outstretched, carrying a revolutionary banner into battle. After 1989, the statues of the sailor and of Lenin were moved to Budapest's Statue Park, and a cross was positioned on the site of the Regnum Marianum. Similar cases can be found in many a Hungarian city and town. And although statuary and art were destroyed, some pieces survived, particularly monuments within churches or on church grounds. Some of these works are now being restored and returned to public view.

The Development of New Symbols

The revival of traditional Magyar and Christian symbols and monuments has been accompanied by efforts—sometimes controversial—to develop symbols that express the meaning of the 1956 Uprising (Hegedüs 1990; Kende 1993; Gábor and Szalai 1994; Boros 1997, 41–80, 115–128). Two that are frequently employed are depictions of the Hungarian flag with a hole in the center and of the “Pest Kid.” Both are related iconically to the uprising itself. The flags carried by the 1956 revolutionaries had the Com-
The Pest Kid celebrates the heroism of the hundreds of young street fighters in Budapest. The new monument that has generated the most debate was designed by György Jovánovics for Parcel 301 (Beke 1994; Földényi 1995; Rényi 1995; Ungváry 1995). Jovánovics uses a postmodern design idiom to position the viewer within a large memorial space punctuated by an abstract representation of the scaffolding on which the martyrs were hanged, a black obelisk recessed underground, and the graves of the martyrs themselves. The artist presents the viewer with a tableau purposefully difficult to comprehend, one that asks the visitor to reflect on national memory and the horror of the executions.

One feature with a clearly comprehended meaning is the memorial to Imre Nagy on Kossuth Square, adjacent to the Parliament Building in Budapest. The Nagy statue, life-size, stands at the midpoint of a small bridge looking toward Parliament. The bridge represents Hungary's path from Communism into the future. Nagy looks across this bridge that he was never able to cross. Another striking example is Miklós Melocco's unusual 1956 statue in Szeged (Tandi 1997) (Figure 7). From a distance it appears to be a small chapel, striking a motif of sacrifice. Closer inspection reveals the form of a huge butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, a symbol of change. The butterfly appears ready to fly to freedom, but its mandibles threaten like the teeth of an ogre or the gears of a war machine. Supporting the butterfly on their shoulders—or attempting to boost it into flight—is a group of young people, all modeled on participants and heroes of the uprising, who are enthusiastic despite being burdened by the insect's immense weight. A line from Gyula Illyés's well-known poem Some Words about Tyranny is carved on the butterfly's wings. Melocco has created a startling image of a fragile, beautiful creature emerging to freedom but crushing, or perhaps trying to consume, those who are pushing it skyward. The design suggests both the visionary appeal of the uprising and its tragic conclusion.

New Holidays and Ceremonies

The new memorials are best viewed as part of an ongoing process of commemoration rather than as static objects that, once erected, are gradually forgotten. Their construction has drawn communities into debate about the past, and, once dedicated, they serve as the focus for new rituals of commemoration. Since 1989 the Hungarian national calendar has been rearranged, and various holidays are celebrated differently from the way they were during the Communist years. This commemorative activity serves to anchor memory both in space (at the memorial sites) and in time (on national holidays).

The rearrangement of the Hungarian national calendar was as selective as the choices made about memorials. Not all of the holidays celebrated by the Communists were discontinued. New Year's Day, Christmas, and Easter were all maintained, as was May Day, which is still celebrated widely as Labor Day. However, the three holidays most closely associated with the Communist regime were discontinued: the Communist Youth Association Day, Liberation Day, and the anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Constitution Day, which was celebrated with the Festival of the
New Bread, a harvest celebration, was returned to the traditional Saint Stephen’s Day. Here a link was reestablished with the past: Stephen was the Hungarian king who converted the Magyar peoples to Christianity and accepted his crown from the pope. Stephen’s reign (997–1038) is viewed as the turning point, the time when Hungary aligned its future with that of western Christendom. The 1848–1849 War of Independence was celebrated by the Communists and was retained as a national holiday (Gerő 1995, 238–249).
Two new holidays are the anniversary of the 1956 Uprising on 23 October and the revival of Pentecost. These celebrations—one political, one religious—maintain the trend seen in memorials; that is, to both create new secular monuments and revive older, effaced religious shrines. No national holidays presently exist to commemorate the end of either World War or of the soldiers who fought in those wars, a role filled by Armistice Day or Veterans’ Day in some countries. The Heroes’ Day established in 1924 was discontinued after 1945. But this Heroes’ Day, though not yet a national holiday, is celebrated again on the last Sunday in May by some local organizations and church groups. It is also not uncommon for World War I and World War II memorials to receive tributes of flowers and wreaths on 5 March and 23 October.

There have been changes in how holidays are celebrated, particularly 15 March and 23 October. During the Communist years grand parades and ostentatious displays of patriotism were the norm on the anniversaries of the Russian Revolution and of liberation in 1945. When these were eliminated as holidays, so too were the massive military pageants and school celebrations. Budapest’s major parade ground was along Dózsa Street, extending from near Heroes’ Square eastward past a review stand near the pedestal of the Stalin—later Lenin—statue where the Regnum Marianum church once stood. The review stand was removed after 1989, just like the Lenin statue and the statue that had been placed at the site of the Regnum Marianum church. Such grand ceremonies were not an invention of the Communists; they had a long history in Hungarian culture stretching back to royal ceremonies and state occasions as distant as Saint Stephen’s funeral in the eleventh century. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw some of the largest public ceremonies in Hungarian history, including the reburial in 1870 of Lajos Battyány, the first prime minister of the free government in 1848, and the burials of Lajos Kossuth in 1894 and of Rákóczi in 1906, both of whom had died in exile.

Even these celebrations were scaled back considerably after 1989. On the anniversary of the 1956 Uprising held in 1998, a ceremony was conducted at the Parliament Building. It included a flag raising by a small detachment of soldiers, the lighting of the flame at the monument to the 1956 Uprising that now stands before Parliament, and a small recessional march to music performed by a military band. The politicians and dignitaries adjourned to the nearby Nagy Memorial to lead the public in laying flowers on the statue. A delegation then departed for the distant Parcel 301 for an abbreviated service. Throughout the day, smaller ceremonies were held across Budapest’s many districts, organized by different political parties and veterans’ groups. These were sometimes on the site of particularly heroic events, as at Corvin Alley, near the Killian Barracks, the scene of intense fighting in 1956 (Figure 8). Though limited in scale, these ceremonies were occasions for dedicating memorial plaques and tablets. Each ceremony had a different patriotic, political, and religious flavor, a far different situation from that under the Communists.
Distancing the Present from the Past

The rejection of grand, Communist-style ceremonies highlights an important point: In their new rituals of commemoration, and in the placement and design of new memorials, Hungarians are establishing a certain symbolic distance between the present and selected events in their past. That is, in addition to the removal of statues and monuments dating from the Communist years, new memorials are repositioned to reject alignments and parallels with that period and with the ceremonial spaces that were defined by the Communist regime, like the parade ground on Dózsa Street in Budapest. In the late 1950s, for example, the Communists began to celebrate their own historical traditions, with a number of memorials to the 1919 Republic of Councils and other events of the Communist past. Some of these memorials remain, though not always with their original inscriptions. Among the largest was the Pantheon of Communist Heroes that was dedicated at Kerepesi Cemetery in Budapest in 1959. Though still maintained, the pantheon is no longer the site of public ceremonies. The remaining Republic of Councils memorials still attract a few wreaths on holidays, but they are largely out of the public eye, and their sites have drawn none of the new memorials.

This distancing applies to other eras and events. Only a few new 1956 and World War II memorials have been placed near World War I memorials. The problem is not only that many World War I memorials were badly maintained during the Communist years and make poor settings for new memorials but also that unease remains about interpreting World War I in the same light as the 1848–1849 War of Independence, the 1956 Uprising, or the more distant Rákóczi War of Independence. The Kingdom of Hungary reached a zenith of power in the early twentieth century that was completely undermined by its defeat in World War I. The Trianon Treaty of 1920 dismembered the kingdom and set the stage for political developments of the interwar period as Hungary recovered some of its lost territories as gifts from the Nazis. Indeed, Hungary remains the only country to have been permanently “punished” for its role in World War I; its current territory still holds to the limits of the Trianon accords. Given the equivocal meaning of World War I, efforts to commemorate it are usually confined to paying respect to the dead rather than to projecting the war in an overtly heroic light. This issue of equivocal meaning may also explain why memorials to World War II focus on the human losses. Their inscriptions seek to honor the dead without attempting to explain the complex causes or consequences of the war.

Unresolved Meaning

The meaning of the events leading up to World War II, the war’s direct consequences, and its aftermath remain difficult to resolve. Among troubling events are the Horthy regency period before World War II, the Holocaust, Hungary’s liberation by Soviet troops in 1945, and the long period of postwar Communist government. Sites associated with these episodes are hard to interpret. The desire to forget, or to at least distance these episodes from the present, creates tension with efforts to acknowledge these events as part of Hungary’s twentieth-century history.
The Horthy regency period has been particularly difficult to assess because of its mixed legacy. The regime was a conservative dictatorship that came to power by helping to crush the 1919 Republic of Councils. During the 1920s—a decade in advance of Germany—the Horthy government began to implement anti-Jewish laws. And, though not formally allied with the Nazis until the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the Horthy government was drawn into increasingly close economic and trade partnerships with the Axis powers during the late 1930s. In contrast to these dark developments, the Horthy government made great strides during the same period in education, health, public works, civic improvements, and the economy. This

Fig. 8—The memorial service at Corvin Alley on 23 October 1998, the anniversary of the 1956 Uprising. Corvin Alley, in Budapest’s Eighth District near the Killian Barracks, was the scene of intense fighting during the uprising. Memorial services such as this are now organized by local district councils and political parties rather than by the central government. (Photograph by Kenneth E. Foote)
legacy has been hard to interpret and, indeed, might be easier to ignore today if Hor-
thy and his government had not been so preoccupied with their own aggrandize-
ment in statues, monuments, and buildings.

Pervasive symbols of the period were World War I memorials and flag stands set
on formal pedestals to fly the national banner. Both were used on ceremonial occa-
sions to rally support for the Horthy regime and its efforts to reclaim Hungary’s lost

Fig. 9—The restored national flag stand in the small town of Tápé, in Csongrád County. Dedicated in 1936 under the Horthy re-
gime, this stand is typical of many raised during the interwar period as rallying points for the regime’s ambitions to reclaim Hungary’s
lost territories. It was converted into a liberation monument after World War II, then back into a flag stand in 1990. Out of the photo-
graph to the left is Tápé’s World War II memorial, erected in 1989. (Photograph by Kenneth E. Foote, May 2000)
territories. Many of these memorials and stands were effaced after World War II or converted into liberation monuments. Many of those that remain are in poor condition, and only a few have been restored (Figure 9). Other World War I memorials have been restored, but there has been no groundswell of interest in the widespread renovation of these monuments. Two of the somewhat controversial restorations occurred in Székesfehérvár's Town Hall and at Szeged's Heroes' Gate (Figure 10).
Both were frescos completed in the 1930s by Hungary’s great mural artist, Vilmos Aba-Novák, to celebrate the irredentist aspirations of Horthy and his government. Because both were covered with paint and plaster after World War II, their restoration owes more to revival of interest in Aba-Novák’s work than in the subject of the frescoes. Some of the grandest memorials of the Horthy years, such as Gellért Hill monument in Budapest and the Kossuth University campus in Debrecen, were simply altered or renamed.

Like the vestiges of the Horthy regime, the legacy of the Holocaust is a quiet presence in the Hungarian landscape (Figure 11). Abandoned synagogues and cemeteries are the primary evidence of Hungary’s once large Jewish population (Gerő 1989). The Holocaust came to Hungary late in the war: In just a few short months in the spring and summer of 1944, after the Horthy regime had been replaced by a Nazi puppet government, between 500,000 and 600,000 Hungarian Jews were killed outright or deported to death camps (Hercz 1993; Braham and Pók 1997; Braham 1998).

The Holocaust has not stirred as much public debate or memorialization as it has in Germany, Austria, Poland, and other countries. A large memorial has been erected within the compound of the central synagogue in Dohány Street, in Budapest’s Seventh District (Figure 12), but other markers are quieter or somewhat out of public view, such as the memorial to Raoul Wallenberg along Szilágyi Erzébet Avenue, in the Second District. In Szeged, the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust is inside the town’s restored synagogue rather than in a public venue. However, this situation may gradually be changing. The synagogue in the small town of Szentes was recently converted into a public library with a memorial prominent at its front entrance. Still, the lack of major public memorials may speak to a certain unease about confronting the Holocaust too directly. The Holocaust was implemented by the Nazis and their collaborators after they overthrew the Horthy government, but it required the help or at least acquiescence of others. France, Switzerland, and the Roman Catholic Church have in recent years conceded a far greater responsibility for allowing the Holocaust to occur than they once did. The same openness may emerge in Hungary as more synagogues and cemeteries are restored and as other memorials are created to honor the victims of this national tragedy.

Finally, it remains difficult to reach consensus on how to commemorate the end of World War II and the aftermath of Communist rule. The treatment of Soviet war memorials hints at an ambivalence toward the 1945–1989 period. Almost all of the Soviet war memorials in public places were removed quickly after 1989; those in cemeteries were maintained and protected according to international conventions and treaties governing war graves. There can be no question that the Red Army suffered very high casualties liberating Hungary from the Nazis, but the goodwill engendered by liberation was expended many times over during the four decades of Soviet domination that followed. Public war memorials were easy targets for destruction as soon as the Soviet Army withdrew. Remains discovered under a few of these were moved to cemeteries. Now the only major remaining Soviet war memorial is in Freedom Square in Budapest, near the Parliament Building, and is protected by an agreement
between the Hungarian and Russian governments. The end result is that most of the overt emblems of the 1945 liberation have been removed, whereas the dead continue to be honored in cemeteries. Fresh flowers are commonly found atop these graves.

It is not clear what compromises will be reached over the treatment of other artifacts of the Communist period. Relatively few statues and monuments were actually destroyed after 1989. This means that some very powerful emblems of the Communist period remain in public view, albeit somewhat off the beaten track (Prakfalvi 1999). Two of the largest of these lie within Budapest’s Kerepesi Cemetery; the Com-
munist pantheon dedicated to the international labor movement on the fortieth anniversary of the 1919 Republic of Councils (Figure 13), and a memorial to those who died fighting for the Communists in the 1956 Uprising (Sturcz 1983; Tóth 1986; Jenei 1993; Csernus-Lukács, Trifi, and Zsigmond 1999, 14–19). The only change implemented so far is that some of the remains collected in the pantheon have been reburied elsewhere at the request of families. Smaller memorials raised in the 1960s to the Republic of Councils in towns like Szentes and Szolnok simply had their inscriptions removed.

Less benign symbols of the Communist years are gaining new memorials. These include the prisons and forced-labor camps in which the Communists incarcerated and punished their opponents. Many of these prisons are still in use, so plaques and memorials have been affixed to the exteriors. One major memorial to all political prisoners of the postwar period has been erected in Budapest on the west bank of the Danube, just south of the Petőfi Bridge. Another has been erected on the site of the former forced-labor camp at Recsk, west of Eger. A small memorial on Hungary’s eastern border at Uszka honors victims of a forced-labor camp located farther to the east, in Ukraine (Figure 14).

The location of the Uszka memorial highlights an important, though as yet unresolved, point about recent commemorative efforts. Thousands of the soldiers and

**Fig. 12**—The Holocaust memorial on the grounds of Budapest’s central synagogue, in the Seventh District. This is the major memorial to the Holocaust in Hungary; smaller memorials can be found in Budapest and other cities and towns, particularly in cemeteries and near synagogues. Questions about how to remember and honor the victims of the Holocaust remain. (Photograph by Kenneth E. Foote, March 1999)
victims of twentieth-century wars and violence died outside Hungary (Dunainé and Kanyó 1996; Bús and Szabó 1999). The World War I and World War II memorials inside Hungary pay tribute to soldiers who died on battlefields that are now in Slovakia, Russia, Ukraine, and other nations as well. Efforts to mark these graves raise sensitive, though not unique, international issues. Germany, Austria, Italy, Slovakia, Poland, and the Czech Republic, and with them nations that have emerged from the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, all face the issue of trying to honor war dead and other victims of violence whose remains still lie outside their own territories. Not until the 1990s, for example, were Germans allowed to visit the Stalingrad (Volgograd) battlefield to gather and bury the remains of the dead (Webster 1996, 81–129). The entire Hungarian Second Army of approximately 200,000 soldiers and workers was destroyed in fighting along the Don River as the Axis lines collapsed in 1943. No memorials to this loss were permitted in Russia until very recently.

This situation is gradually changing through the negotiation of international treaties addressing the treatment of war graves and memorials. A War Graves Commission, established in the Hungarian Ministry of Defense, focuses on conserving and restoring existing memorials and planning the new memorials allowed under
the treaties. An early agreement signed was between Hungary and Russia, permitting Hungary to erect memorials to its war dead in Russian territory. Two of the most notable of these were dedicated in 1997, one at Voronezh in the west, where the Sec-

![Fig. 14](image-url)

ond Army was decimated, and a second near Borovichi, southeast of Novgorod, where Hungarian soldiers died in a forced-labor camp (Békés 1998). Other treaties have now been ratified or are under negotiation with other countries.
These developments indicate that, in Hungary and in other nations as well, the process of reinterpreting and commemorating the past—particularly twentieth-century history—is spilling increasingly across national borders. Fifty years after the end of World War II, nations like Hungary are still confronting the meaning of their losses. Yet, as each nation grapples with its past, it must do so with its neighbors. The same difficult negotiations are yet ahead in coming to terms with the postwar Communist legacy in central and eastern Europe.

Inscription as Process

The Hungarian experience since 1989 offers several insights into the inscription of national identity in the landscapes of Hungary, central Europe, and elsewhere. First, it cautions against viewing the past ten years as a period of widespread iconoclasm in Hungary and elsewhere in the former Soviet bloc. Although additional, comparative cases in central and eastern Europe need to be analyzed, the changes that have taken place and are under way in Hungary involve a rather complex renegotiation of historical meanings, rather than any wholesale destruction of shrines. As part of the process of renegotiation, some sites have been effaced, but others have been restored, and some events have been memorialized for the first time. Spatial and symbolic alignments of new and old draw historical parallels between events. These parallels were avoided explicitly in other cases to distance the present from the past. The Communist legacy of shrines and memorials has not been wholly obliterated, and the fate of many has been left for future generations to decide.

Second, the Hungarian experience offers a picture of how the inscription of national identity in the landscape is affected by political and wartime upheaval. Nations with relatively stable political histories, such as France, Great Britain, and the United States, have developed commemorative traditions that stress continuity over long periods of time. Nations like Hungary, Germany, and others face disjunctures, breaks, and gaps that must be ignored or bridged. For Hungary this has meant assembling commemorative traditions from a variety of national, religious, and ethnic sources and linking together events from many different centuries. Events of equivocal or negative meaning may sometimes be commemorated as symbols of what Hungarians have endured to sustain the fabric of their culture. Given the political upheavals of the twentieth century, cases such as Hungary's may be more representative of how commemorative traditions develop than are examples drawn from countries with more stable political cultures.

Finally, the Hungarian experience points to the many questions yet to be resolved in facing the violence of twentieth-century European—and world—history. The twentieth was a century perhaps unparalleled in human violence, genocide, and atrocity. The causes and consequences of World War II and the Holocaust have been discussed for decades, but debate has hardly begun over the war's legacy of Communist rule in central and eastern Europe. The Hungarian landscape records the first steps in coming to terms with the postwar period. But these may be only the start of a long process of interpretation that will be faced by many countries in Europe, Asia,
and elsewhere. The answers to difficult questions about the causes and consequences of the twentieth century’s wars and episodes of genocide will have to be sought in the international arena, as is occurring with respect to war graves and the Holocaust. In the twentieth century, violence crossed many frontiers to scar many landscapes. The meaning of these places remains to be resolved.

References


