

Andrea KOCSIS: *Iconography and Nationalism: The comparison of the First World War memorials in Budapest and Prague*, MA Thesis, Budapest – Prague – Paris 2016, 198pp.

Report by co-supervisor

The master thesis by Andrea Kocsis is the final product of a very ambitious research that wished to address the issue of World War I memorials in comparative and macro-analytical perspective: the author analyzed memorials – including their broader mnemonic context – in two countries, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and in each case included a considerable number of memorials for the quantitative large-scale analysis, and a couple of specific cases for a more detailed study of semantics of Czech(oslovak) and Hungarian WWI memorials (Vítkov memorial, Sword of God). The scope was limited to the capital cities and narrowed down to memorials with a clearly public meaning.

How was this challenging task addressed? In my view, Andrea successfully mastered her complex topic and carried out an impressive piece of excellent scholarship. Especially praiseworthy is the scrupulously elaborated analytical framework. The selection of the cases for comparison is quite legitimate and is well-explained and justified: besides common points (e.g. the Central European context), the cases are contrasted as regards the national story (birth/trauma of the nation), with specificities in each case, such as the institutionalized memorial policy in Hungary. On this broad canvas, the thesis unfolds with the careful examination of the iconography of the memorials (e.g. shape, symbols, or inscriptions) and the semantics of their spatial context, i.e. location in the city space.

From the classes in Prague, I still remember Andrea as very attentive student, who has enormous capacity to absorb many ideas and inspirations and apply them in turn meaningfully for her own research, while avoiding any sort of eclecticism or over-theorization. I am convinced that for the studies which deal with meanings and interpretations, this kind of broad scale of perspectives is quite essential. Of course the interpretations may be sometimes far-stretched and thus become easy targets for critique, yet they open new horizons of thinking about the issues. This pertains to comparison as well: comparative approach is adventurous undertaking in historiography that has been often criticized for schematization; but Andrea resolutely managed to demonstrate many of its benefits.

To make the final assessment, the thesis by Andrea Kocsis is a highly valuable contribution to the memory studies in Central-European context that delivered many findings and fresh perspectives and, what is more, it stimulates readers to rethink old themes and invent new research topics. If any minor shortcomings appear here and there, they can be attributed to the scale and difficulty of the research and thus be partly excused as regards the grading. For that reason, I recommend the thesis for the successful defence and suggest the highest grades: 1 in Czech, 5 in Hungarian, and 18 in French.

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