



## National Museums in Hungary

Péter Apor

### Summary

The national museums in Hungary are relatively easy to define. The term covers a set of institutions connected to a structure of state owned, centrally financed institutions, which came into existence during a process of expansion and specialization of the collections of the original Hungarian National Museum. The Hungarian National Museum (1803) was founded with the idea to follow the model of imperial capital Vienna as well as other major European capitals as an institution to foster national culture and civilization in the Kingdom of Hungary, which its elite considered a largely independent cultural and political unit within the Habsburg Empire. The museum, hence, was meant to promote national identity and all its subsequent expansions and branches were considered parts of a homogenous national culture and erudition. Consequently, governments and elites ordinarily stressed their connection to the state and the importance of central funding.

Through a systematic exploration of the main turning points in its history, the current report addresses the foundation of the National Museum in Hungary, its implications for its further development, the structure of ownership, the history of its collections, the process of professionalization both in terms of staff skills and the generation of specialized museums. Besides, it follows the trajectories of the various identities – national, civic, historical, revolutionary and communist – these museums intended to shape.

The National Museum was founded in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as a civic, aristocratic and middle class initiative. Originally, it was owned by the nation, governed by a board of trustees and supervised by the imperial administration via its Hungarian commissioner, the Palatinus (*nádor* in Hungarian). Its collections were enriched by various private donations coming from various segments of the society, such as aristocratic or middle class urban families.

Since the emergence of civil constitutional administration, 1848 in Hungary, the National Museum has been supervised by one of the ministries of the national government, regularly ministries of culture or education. It was considered an autonomous institution governed by a board and maintained by an endowment, but also benefited from state sponsorship up until 1949, the introduction of communist dictatorship. During the 1870s, a professional system of collection was developed. Professional art historians were responsible for acquisitions funded mostly by the state, whereas archaeologists were employed and excavations were sponsored. This led to the rapid expansion of collections and the foundations of specialized museums at the turn of the century: Museum of Natural History, Museum of Ethnography, Museum of Applied Arts, Museum of Fine Arts, National Gallery.

These museums together created the system of the Hungarian National Museum under various titles, thus transforming the original National Museum into a historical museum, as it was actually called in certain periods. The structure of the National Museum included the National Library and Archives until the end of WWII. In 1949, the National Museum and all the other

specialized museums became state owned, state funded individual museums. They lost their autonomous governance, and received annual central funds. This institutional structure virtually remained in effect following 1989. The network of national museums are supervised by the Ministry of Culture or Education and governed and funded by the state.

Summary table, Hungary

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
National Museum	1803	1802	Aristocracy	National, central supervision	Art, Archaeology, Numismatics	National and universal	History of civilization	Purpose built classical style, city centre, Budapest.
Museum of Applied Arts	1872	1872	Government	State	Industrial Design	National and universal	19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> c.	Purpos built, fin-de-siècle, downtown Budapest.
Museum of Fine Arts	1906	1896	Government	State	International Art	Universal	History of civilization	Purpose built historicist style City centre, Budapest.
Museum of Ethnography	1947	1947	Parliament	State	Non-European cultures, Hungarian peasant culture	National and universal	18 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> c.	Former eclectic court building, city centre, Budapest.
National Gallery	1957	1957	Government	State	Hungarian Art	National	Middle Ages onwards	Former historicist royal palace, castle, Buda Castle, Budapest.
Natural History Museum	1996	1991 (1890s)	Government	State	Science, minerals and fossils	National and universal	Geological and Pre-history	Former neo-classicist military school, former <u>Ludovika Academy</u> , Budapest.
House of Terror Museum	2002	2000s	Government	Conservative party	History of Fascism and Communism	National and European	Post-war history	Former security police headquarters, city center, Budapest.

## **Introduction**

The historical context of the establishment of the National Museum in Hungary already marks many of the most important problems that emerge in front of any historical and sociological analysis of the institution. First of all, the historian has to tackle the trouble with comprehending the term ‘national’ in this specific context. Whereas, national museums ordinarily are taken for granted to equal the centrally founded, state funded institutions frequently associated with national ruling dynasties, the Hungarian one was established independently of and, to a certain extent, even against the representatives of the state and royal court.

The accurate assessment of the historical contexts of the founding period, therefore, requires a comparative analysis in two respects. First, a comparison with museums founded in close association to political centres and elites can eloquently elucidate the level that the desire of demonstrating national particularities in relation to other national representations affected the birth of these museums, which, as a consequence, appear inherently having transnational agendas from the period of their genesis. Second, a comparison with other East-Central European small nations sheds light on how their imperial contexts and the accompanying need for manifesting national particularities defined the context of their respective museums.

The extent and quality of historical scholarship on the National Museum in Hungary is very uneven. The best studied aspect is the shaping of national identity, particularly in the late nineteenth century historicist period, through art, especially fine arts and architecture. The National Museum in this approach is usually considered either a work of art in itself or an institution framing the uses and consumption of art. The focus of scholars is usually on various symbols and symbolic activities, whereas their main interpretive means is culture. As a consequence, there are abundant opportunities to explore the connection of the shaping of national identity in its association to the practices and concepts of civilization, education, science and humanistic scholarship.

In general, there is very little social history that has been written concerning the National Museum. Questions related to the sociology of owners, curators, staff and visitors are virtually seriously understudied due to the fact that the museum has been hardly conceived an object of social history or institutional sociology. This fact provides the historian with stimulating research perspectives into the various concepts, aims, expectations and mentality of various social and cultural groups connected to, networked in, or used the museum in any other ways.

## **The foundation of the National Museum**

Since the late Middle Ages, the history of Hungary, or more precisely of the Kingdom of Hungary, has been inherently entangled to the Habsburg dynasty. Following the Ottoman military advance during the mid-sixteenth century, the Turks occupied two-thirds of the medieval kingdom directly or indirectly. The Hungarian political elite of the Western and Northern parts sought support and defence with the Habsburgs and ordinarily supported the ascendancy of the dynasty to the Hungarian throne. Yet, usually encouraged by the Transylvanian elite, the Ottomans or other European competitor dynasties to the Habsburgs, the Hungarian nobility succeeded in preserving its feudal autonomy and rights, occasionally as a consequence of recurrent popular revolts and wars of independence. Hence, parts of the Hungarian Kingdom –

following the war with the Ottomans at the end of the seventeenth century – had an ambivalent status within the Habsburg Empire. Formally, the country remained an independent kingdom having members of the dynasty as kings, but preserving institutions of self-government. Yet, central imperial institutions set in Pozsony-Bratislava and Pest became the crucial foci of policy making in the country. The Hungarian elite normally integrated with the imperial aristocracy, were educated in Vienna and usually took positions within the imperial administration and the army since the mid-eighteenth century.

Enlightenment ideas and the rise of nationalism generated a new wave of Hungarian movements of autonomy, this time embedded in the context of liberalism, constitutionalism and desires for modernisation. Following the wave of revolutions in 1848 and a domestic revolt in the city of Pest, the Kingdom of Hungary was transformed into an autonomous, constitutional state having its own independent parliamentary government with the king in Vienna as the head of the state. The defeat of revolutionary nationalism in 1849 and the weakening of the Empire in European international politics during the 1860s led to a compromise between the dynasty and the Hungarian elite. The Empire was transformed into a quasi-federal state of Austria and Hungary in 1867, in which the Kingdom of Hungary enjoyed broad domestic autonomy, but endowed important rights such as foreign policy and defence to the central imperial administrations. Following the defeat in 1918, the imperial state was dismantled and Hungary, having lost two thirds of its former territories, became an independent country carrying the burdensome legacy of imperialistic nationalism. After the collapse in World War II, a communist dictatorship was established in 1949 and Hungary remained part of the Soviet bloc until 1989.

Conventionally, the foundation of the National Museum in Hungary is accurately attached to the 25 November 1802, when Count Ferenc Széchenyi, one of the richest magnates of the Westernmost parts of the Hungarian Kingdom, declared the donation of his formidable collection of prints, works of arts and numismatics to the nation. Ordinarily, his act of generosity is related to the birth of the modern Hungarian nation. In fact, the first decades of the nineteenth century generated the first wave of overarching projections and debates among members of the political, social and intellectual elites on how to improve the economic, social and spiritual state of the country and its inhabitants. ‘The nation’ was the term Széchenyi himself used, in reference to the fact that his intended institution was envisaged as independent and distinct from both the dynasty and the imperial state.

The term ‘national’ in this context meant in principle a civic, that is to say an openly accessible institution, at least in theory by all citizens of the country. Nonetheless, the concept had ethnic connotations as well since it sought to establish the idea of a ‘Hungarian nation’ distinct from ‘Austria’, but embracing all citizens of the Kingdom to the imagined community of Hungarians. The foundation of the museum, thus, was part of the emerging Enlightenment emancipationist liberalism, which sought to realize ‘civilization’, ‘modernization’ and ‘progress’ within the political communities of ‘nations’. Yet, these projects of nation-building were not corresponded by manifest state-building attempts, at least not in terms of statehood independent of Austria or the Habsburg dynasty. The National Museum in Hungary was an initiative of the national elites, but not of the state. Count Széchenyi was part of the group of modernising aristocrat families at that time with a typical Enlightenment erudition and interest. Members of these families frequently ambioned political and courtly careers in Vienna by the Habsburg dynasty, kings and queens of

Hungary. Since the opportunities for independent critical political projects were restricted, many of them subsequently turned to other spheres of public career like art connoisseur, scholarship or economy.

Ferenc Széchenyi himself was educated in Vienna between 1774-1776, in the Theresianum College, founded by Queen Marie-Therese to gather and train the future multinational imperial elite. He was particularly interested in archaeology, bibliographical studies and history and married to the daughter of a similar aristocrat family, Julianna Festetics. His professors included contemporary highly erudite scholars such as the Italian, Martini, in philosophy of law, Joseph von Sonnenfels in political science and István Schönwieser, a distinguished archaeologist of the period. After finishing his education, Széchenyi pursued the career typical of young aristocrats at that time. He occupied a position in provincial legal administration in 1776. Subsequently, in 1784, he was elevated to the office of the Royal Commissioner (*őispán*) of Győr county. These services opened opportunities for him to enter the sphere of high politics: in 1785 Széchenyi became the Royal Commissioner (*bán*) of Croatia.

Nonetheless, he resigned from his offices the next year due to his disappointment with the rigidity and resistance of the imperial administration to modernizing reform initiatives. The failure of a political career turned Széchenyi's interest towards other types of public activity, mainly promoting activities and programs of erudition. He became one of the most important sponsors of literary culture in Hungary during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The count supported such important authors, poets and literary scholars as Ferenc Kazinczy, Mihály Csokonai Vitéz and János Batsányi. Besides generating exceptional creative art, literature was also the area shaping radical political ideas in the period. The authors Széchenyi supported were radical critiques of the Habsburg administration influenced by Enlightenment rationalism. He employed József Hajnóczy as secretary, a man who was the most important legal theorist of Enlightenment rationalism in Hungary, a future conspirator in the Hungarian Jacobin republican movement, subsequently executed in 1795. As a consequence, Széchenyi created the core of civil society and public sphere in his own court.

This particular society of intellectuals directly influenced Ferenc Széchenyi to begin collecting books, antiquities and numismatics, and seriously consider the foundation of a public library. His collections, when the count donated it to the nation, consisted of 11 884 printed works, 1150 manuscripts, 142 volumes of maps and lithography, 2019 paintings of coat of arms and 2675 coins including 702 golden pieces. His deed of founding a public institution of erudition, the museum, won the general sympathy and appreciation of European learned societies for him. The learned societies of Warsaw, Brno (contemporary Brünn), Jena and Göttingen as well as the Academy of Arts in Vienna elected him as their member.

The idea of the national museum seems to emerge from an establishing modern type of civil society; even if exclusively aristocrat and noble families originally formed it. Civil initiatives, private funding like collections or estates and networking completed by an idea of self-education and civilization made the museum an opportunity for shaping a new modern type of public sphere in Hungary. Private libraries and collection activities created sites of public societies, hence, generated an early form of clubbing. Aristocrat families became involved in systematic collection activities in the second half of the eighteenth century. Members of the Teleki or Esterházy families accomplished regular journeys abroad, appropriating models of collection and

purchased objects. The focus of interest was on antiquities, stone works, numismatics and art. Well-to-do urban middle-class collectors soon followed their example. Sámuel Bruckenthal's and János Fáy's chambers in Brassó-Brasov-Kronstadt and Debrecen, respectively soon gained fame among their audiences. Collections of colleges, like the one in Nagyenyed and Debrecen played a great role in disseminating a culture of historical interest and Enlightenment erudition.

As a matter of fact, this emerging civil society provided the background for the establishment, sustaining and using the museum. The growing interest in the Pest middle-class in antiquities and collection during the first decades of the nineteenth century provided both the audience and some of the donors of the new museum. The Brunszvik family in the 1820s and Matyas Kindli, the famous furrier, who was the first donor following Ferenc Széchenyi, played such a role. Nonetheless, the major sponsors of the museum remained of aristocrat origin. István Marczibányi enriched the collection of antiquities by chalices, glasses, china, mosaics and weapons, whereas the archbishop of Eger, László Pyrker laid the foundations of a future gallery by the donation of his gallery of 190 paintings including 113 Italian works of art.

The first exhibition of the National Museum opened in 1803 in the cloister of the Order of Paul in Pest. The Museum Hungaricum, as it was frequently called during the early nineteenth century, was considered the institution of National Collections, which was envisaged to embrace all components of national scholarship and art. A treatise on the future of the museum from 1807 called upon upper class families to grant public access to their private galleries meant to be the ornaments of the nation.

The central authorities had already had a building planned in 1807 by the famous classicist designer of Pest, József Hild. Nonetheless, this plan was subsequently rejected due to the relative inaccessibility of the original construction site. As new land was difficult to acquire, the second plan by Mihály Pollack was made ready only in 1826. The enormous costs of its construction broke the principle of noble non-taxation and made a step towards comprehensive public taxation: Act no. 36 of the general assembly of 1832-1836 decided to finance the building from specially levied noble taxes. This raises the second important question: how did the national museum contribute to the formation of this civic publicity and modern type of mentalities and to what extent was its genesis the result of such aspirations?

The issue of ownership forms an inherent part of this aspect. Whereas the museum formally was made a property of the whole nation, it had strong connections to the central government in Vienna, as well. Although the museum was born due to a private donation, turning it into a public institution required royal approval. Salaries for its original small staff were secured through state funds. As a national institution, the government of the museum was attached to the office of the "*nádor*" of Hungary, who was a person mediating authority between imperial and regional Hungarian organs. Although the *nádor* was officially elected by the Hungarian orders, he was also considered the representative of the Viennese court in Hungary and, in fact, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this office was occupied by Habsburg archdukes.

Modern museums, generally, became the sites of embodying the myth of progress and civilization. These institutions collected and exhibit history, art and ethnography to provide a spectacle of the process of Western civilization and a temporalized vision of self-confident progress. They intended to reveal these achievements to the broader masses, while providing education in the principles of modern civility for them. The National Museum in Hungary made

no difference in these regards. Its founders longed to develop the institution into a site of national education and for the good of the fatherland. Nevertheless, the focus on improving a *national* civil culture and community made the relationship of universal civilization and national education problematic. How did the ‘nationalisation’ of erudition contribute to the appropriation of ideas of universal progress and how did its eventual modes shape national political cultures? The National Museum in this respect embodied the intentions of the Hungarian political and intellectual elite to shape national culture in terms having ethnic implications. The museum envisaged a set of institutions that disseminate Hungarian linguistic culture, a historical sense of Hungarian noble-classes and the identity of the Hungarian royal state.

The building of the Hungarian institution was the first purpose-built museum construction on the continent: a fact that was ordinarily exploited to enhance national pride of Hungarians, but generally stimulated no impact in its scholarly study. Scholars of architecture and design generally claim that Mihály Pollack, the architect, who directed the construction between 1837 and 1847, created a similar building to that of the British Museum in London and the Altes Museum in Berlin, but was more conscious of its future use as a museum. His classicist design appears to be more affected by Paris architect Nicolas Durand, than his British or German contemporaries.

In general, museums during the nineteenth century were considered temples of art capable of easing men exhausted by the struggles of everyday life and to elevate them to a higher plane by means of erudition. Contemporary museum architecture logically discovered a model in the temples of antiquity. This pattern provided a structure of easily accessible exhibition spaces connected to a central inner courtyard, which resulted in an architecturally homogenous and coherent block. The halls provided by this organization were envisaged to be organic parts of the system exhibition rooms in the logic of a successive set of hall of columns, entrance hall and vaulted hall. Such museum plans as, for instance Palladio’s ones, had been already made available and impacted on European architecture. The drawings of Valadier and Durand, published in 1807, obviously influenced Pollack himself.

In the 1840s-1850s, the director of the National Museum, Ágoston Kubinyi, considered his museum primarily as an institution of public education. He had 36 rooms at his disposal to realize this program of civilization. The first floor preserved the original Széchenyi library in 14 rooms reflecting the extraordinary importance of literate culture in the contemporary conceptions of public education. Eight further rooms housed the core of the would-be historical collections, the exhibition of antiquities consisted mostly of works of art and numismatics. According to contemporary ideas of distinguishing nature and civilization, the exhibition of natural history in 14 rooms displayed not only botanical, zoological objects and minerals, but also a few artefacts of ethnology or folklore bearing little significance for the museum at that time. In spite of the manifest relevance of the museum for erudition and scholarship, the first exhibition opened in the permanent building concerned industry. The National Works of Industry Exhibition organized by Lajos Kossuth, the liberal politician who shaped the modernization program of the country to a great extent, was launched on 11 August 1846, when decorative works were still going on in the architecture. The idea of the museum as a carrier of national civilization, and the importance of industry as the harbinger of national modernisation were inherently linked together during this period.



Considering these issues, it is fruitful to study the association of the national museum to other institutions of public civilization and education. The library as a site of scholarship and erudite humanistic discussions had been a long-awaited improvement among intellectuals in Hungary. Various workshops of humanistic scholarship started to operate early in the eighteenth century. As a matter of fact, the National Museum of Hungary was operating in close symbiosis with contemporary scholarly and art associations for a long period. What is more, the original foundation of the National Museum contained objects ordinarily associated with a modern museum like works of arts and historical or ethnographical artefacts to a remarkably little extent. The most important collection of the national museum in Hungary originally was its relatively significant library, which acquired the first permanent building among the entire holdings.

The initiative of founding an Academy of Sciences in the early nineteenth century was closely associated to the parallel project of the museum. It was suggested that the Society of Scholars be located in the Museum where the library, a collection of antiquities and other extraordinary sources was considered to be available for scientific research in 1809. Consequently, it is very tempting to explore the connections of the Hungarian National Museum with the idea of the classical Museion as a site of general erudition and investigate its transfers as well as its regional comparable counterparts or contrasts.

### **The birth of professional museums**

In reality, the National Museum functioned as the centre of all learned and other public activities in the capital and in Hungary in general up to the 1870s. As the foremost public building in the capital, it hosted the House of Lords of the Hungarian Parliament up until the new Parliament building had been finished in 1904. The first constitutional government of Hungary in 1848 incorporated the National Museum into the central administration under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Education. As the autonomous-independent Hungarian government fell in 1849, the commander of the imperial troops, Haynau proposed to transport the property of the museum to Vienna. His idea was, probably, the first instance that generated a sort of heritage war as the public in the capital and the country was outraged, which eventually hindered the realization of the plans.

During the period of absolutist-interventionist imperial administration, the National Museum, in practice, existed as a non-governmental civic organization maintained by private donations and funding. Yet, the imperial administration recognized its importance as a public institution and tried to cope with its constant deterioration by the means of ad hoc commissions sent by the Royal Governor's Office in Hungary. The museum, in general, remained unable to substantially develop its collections or public activity, therefore its gallery kept being the main attraction.

In 1872, the property of the museum included 90 000 numismatics, 4038 Stone Age objects, 383 Egyptian, 3087 Roman, 568 early medieval objects and 654 weapons. This decade witnessed the first genuine professional directors organizing museum activities, Ferenc Pulszky as chief and Flóris Rómer as deputy. Flóris Rómer organized a network of provincial museums attached to the National Museum, which contributed to the improvement of professional collection and preservation activities in the country. The National Museum opened its first permanent archaeological exhibition in 1870, and this year 140 000 visitors saw the museum. Albeit, these numbers seem truly impressive, one has to note that, in a period preceding the spread of

technologies of visual amusement (cinema, television, etc.), museum-going was a regular activity of the educated middle-classes that met their demand for ‘civilized’ forms of spectacle. Except a few articles in professional journals of history and archaeology about the recent collections of the museum, there is no evidence for any broad advertisement campaign related to the exhibitions.

The board of the museum managed to raise funds for buying the formidable art collection of the Esterházy family in 1871, which secured the founding core of the National Gallery (*Országos Képtár*) and led to the birth of the independent Museum of Fine Arts in 1902. Most probably, this significant acquisition contributed to the increasing interest in the National Museum, which a decade later in 1880 was visited by 330 000 persons.

Parallel to the increasing professionalization of the national museum, other thematically organized special museums were established: first, various exhibition halls for arts like the National Gallery, Museum of Fine Arts and the Hall of Arts, then scientific collections like the Museum of Ethnography or the Museum of Science. The appropriate assessment of this specialization demands a proper historical contextualization. This was a period of growing specialization of museums throughout Europe, which needs to be studied in the context of the establishment of professional scientific disciplines with their various methods of investigation, inquiry, sources, relationships to objects and representation. Museums were part of this process, while providing sites for developing these distinctions. Scientific achievements, at the same time, became objects of national pride and esteem. Therefore, specialized museums were also vested with the obligation of representing national identity.

In the midst of the Millennium years, in 1896, a few members of the Hungarian parliament suggested turning the National Museum into a pure, but professional historical museum of Hungary. Modern political thought was inherently connected to a philosophy of history based on the secular teleology of straight-forward progress and the general laws of human development. Modern states and political classes, therefore, incorporated their self-identities in a temporal logic as either outcomes or harbingers of universal history. Nations, as forms of modern political consciousness, planted their identities in the unbroken continuity of past, present and future. The politics and rituals of history, consequently, became inevitable in modern civic activities and politics. Hungarian society had developed a rich tradition of historicized political culture and an extraordinary sensitivity to historical culture at least since the suppression of its revolution in 1849. In Hungary, political rights and authority regularly are justified on the basis of solving or taking sides in pending issues and controversies of the nation’s past. Political culture and credibility were affected, to a great extent, by positions one occupied in questions such as catholic-protestant disputes, pro-Habsburg or pro-independence arguments and progressive or traditionalist political courses.

Whereas the Millennium ceremonies in 1896 proudly claimed the achievements of the country in modernization and civilization by suggesting for Hungarians a modern secular civic political identity, the second important component of the celebrations was a magnificent spectacular historical exhibition in the city park. Besides, the demonstration of progress and creativity of the nation, the political elite also desired to represent its long term historical continuity in terms of state building, political governance and high culture. The organizers of the Millennium historical exhibition constructed a palace unifying historical architectural periods, early medieval, gothic, renaissance and baroque, into one homogenous building. ‘Historic reconstruction’ in the

exhibition meant an ambivalent approach, though. On the one hand, the various parts of the palace integrated faithful replicas of original buildings. However, the entire structure was not an authentic facsimile of any historical buildings: rather it realized a mixture of different historical styles, structures and copies of details from different original buildings. Yet, it did not mean to represent the contingency and heterogeneity of a multi-cultural style in a 'post-modern' style. The castle itself was meant to represent the integrity and organic development of the historical development of the nation by means of displaying the succession of historical styles in an architecturally coherent structure. In turn, the building hosted a professionally organized, high quality historical exhibition displaying the characteristics of everyday life, high culture, military and political life in various periods of the history of the Hungarian nation.

The National Museum, when it was proposed to develop it into a historical museum, was imagined to continue exhibiting the Millennium concept of historical identity in a permanent form. The National Museum in Hungary, ripped of its original universal focus, gradually became an exhibition space of history and an institution of identifying objects of history. This development resulted in national identity becoming bound to historical representations. The National Museum claimed that the nation equalled its history. Whereas, this period marked the integration in a typical historicist European culture, a further comparative investigation could elucidate to what extent this partly accidental historical specialty of central National Museums contributed to this process.

### **The Museum of Applied Arts**

The Museum of Applied Arts was founded in 1872 based on the collections of the National Museum. In the late nineteenth century, these types of museums were considered more as exhibitions of industry or industrial production than art. As such, these, at the same time, reflected the belief in the progress of industrial civilization and the capacity of art to transform pure technology into aesthetic and means of culture. The museum was founded and financed by the central governmental budget. The government financed the construction of its new building designed by leading fin-de-siècle architects, Ödön Lechner and Gyula Pártos. Fin-de-siècle architecture and applied arts of Budapest and Hungary, in general, are considered the golden age of pre-WWI Hungarian culture and, indeed, this was a period of unprecedented national self-confidence based on the pride of civilization and prosperity. This was a period that was looking for a way of giving a national form to culture after believing it could establish the foundations of the modern nation. Architecture and applied arts were particularly regarded as the typical means of shaping special national culture by giving a unique form to it. Lechner's architecture, in an art nouveau style of ornaments aspiring to manifest this imaginary national spirit, was considered the perfect housing for applied arts, the characteristic objects of modern Hungarian national pride.

In between the two wars, public funds dried up, which triggered not only serious cuts in the budget of the museum, but also its incorporation back into the homogenous organization of the National Museum. The Museum of Applied Art became an independent institution following the end of WWII, in 1948. During the communist period, the museum received a castle building on the outskirts of Budapest to keep its considerable collection of furniture and the Museum of East Asian Arts. Yet, the fall of the communist system brought a period of stagnation. The budget of the Museum of Applied Art remained seriously insufficient so it was impossible to expand the

collections or reconstruct the building. As a consequence, although the museum enjoys a fairly considerable amount of popularity among the public due to its well-received temporary exhibitions in various topics like fin-de-siècle art and architecture, it still lacks a permanent exhibition.

Post-communist Hungarian culture, when seeking to re-establish connections to non-Communist traditions and pan-European canons, has rediscovered the fin-de-siècle period as an obvious choice. This sensitivity, which sprang also from the revitalized concept of Central Europe in the 1980s as an expression of the non-Soviet cultural roots of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, reshaped the history of the Habsburg Empire as the last multi-cultural European tradition of these nations taking the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the Golden Age of this particular 'Central European civilization'. The popularity of the Museum of Applied Arts, thus, is also an expression of the idea of Hungary returning to Europe as a truly civilized Western nation.

### **The Museum of Fine Arts**

As the original building of the National Museum became incapable of hosting the abundant collections of various objects, publications and works of art, the government decided to establish a new, independent gallery for housing paintings, sculpture and other works of art in public property of the nation. The Millennium Act in 1896 declared the foundation of the Museum of Fine Arts. The application process for architectural design was opened in 1898 and the construction works started in 1900. The new museum opened its gates in 1906.

Originally, the museum board purchased plaster casts instead of original antique works of art. However, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the museum has systematically expanded its collection of original Egyptian, Greek and Roman art. Besides the antique acquisitions, the curators had ambitions to set up a considerable classical statue and plastic collection. This was based on the purchase Károly Pulszky (the son of Ferenc Pulszky, director of the National Museum) had accomplished in the late nineteenth century in Italy.

The most important collections of the museum include the second largest Egyptian museum property in Central Europe, a considerable ancient collection exhibiting Greek and Roman art and the Old Gallery. The Egyptian collection originally was kept in various museums throughout the country and was brought together for the first time in 1939. Since Hungary does not pursue systematic excavations in Egypt, the collection is expanded mostly by irregular private donations. The antique collection even displays a sample of Greek and Roman, Hellenistic and Latin objects. Its most unique part is the works of art representing the early culture of Cyprus. The Old Gallery consists of formidable collections of Italian, Dutch and German renaissance and Spanish painting originally gathered by the Esterházy family, which the state bought in 1870. It contains 2400 objects, of which the internationally most significant part is the Spanish one. It is the most important European collection in the field together with the Ermitage in St. Petersburg. In addition, the museum houses a modern gallery of nineteenth and twentieth century works of art which are dominated by French romantic paintings and sculpture. Currently, the Museum of Fine Arts is sustained by the central budget. Its task is to collect, store and exhibit foreign art as a special museum, the National Gallery was established in 1957 to keep Hungarian works of art.

## **Museum of Ethnography**

The origins of an independent museum of ethnography in Hungary date back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Although, the National Museum as the central institution of scientific collection always possessed objects that qualify as ethnography, professional systematic ethnographic work started in the late 1860s as far as museum culture is concerned. Albeit, nowadays visitors and the broader public tend to consider the Museum of Ethnography as mainly an institution that studies folklore and peasant culture in Hungary, the foundation of ethnographic collections was linked to overseas expeditions of Austrian and Hungarian scholars in Asia. Thus, the ethnographic interest in Budapest appears to accord with contemporary general European tendencies to establish the discipline of civilization in terms of anthropological studies.

Corresponding to contemporary conceptions of anthropology meant to collect artefacts and objects of 'peoples of nature', the Hungarian initiative to study East Asia embraced the simultaneous study of nature and tribal societies. Accordingly, the government commissioned János Xántus, a distinguished scholar of natural history to participate in the Austrian-Hungarian East Asian expedition in 1868. Xántus spent a year in Borneo and Java and his collections provided the foundations of the ethnographical department of the National Museum established in 1872.

In spite of the fact that this anthropological concept met expectations to represent the Hungarian nation as part of civilization and empire, the collection was received with substantial criticism because of its ignorance of Hungarian national ethnography. Nineteenth century public discussions tended to consider national identity based on a continuous existence of original ancient national qualities allegedly preserved by peasant culture and mentalities. This comprehension generated the discipline of indigenous ethnography and exhibitions of folklore. Hungarian ethnographers started to systematically collect peasant objects from all over the country in 1873 and set a spectacular exhibition in 1885 as part of the National Exhibition in Budapest. The new head of the Ethnography Department of the National Museum, János Jankó, wished to establish an Ethnographic Village modelled on of the Swedish Skansen. His efforts proved to be successful when the national Millennial Exhibition in 1896 displayed a village of 24 peasant dwellings selected from 23 counties of the country.

Following the constant accumulation of objects and staff, the Museum of Ethnography became independent in 1947. The collection was moved to the centre of Budapest in 1973, to the building where it currently resides. The main task of the museum is to demonstrate the traditional culture of the Hungarian people, the conventional duty of national ethnography. Yet, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the museum staff made considerable efforts to develop an attitude of self-reflection and to re-think the origins, history and contemporary role of ethnography in society and culture. The museum regularly organizes exhibitions benefiting from its significant anthropological collections to shed light on such concepts such as time, among other things.

## **The National Gallery**

The National Gallery was founded in 1957 as a special institution to exhibit and study Hungarian art. In the year of its foundation, the museum possessed 6000 paintings, 2100 statues, 3100 numismatics, 11 000 drawings and 5000 graphic prints. First, it was situated in the current

building of the Museum of Ethnography, however, in 1959 the government decided to move the collections to the castle of Buda as part of its policy to construct an outstanding locus of national culture and education combining the National Library, a museum for contemporary history and the gallery.

The new exhibition site was opened in 1975 and currently it displays the entire history of art in Hungary from the eleventh century up to day. The museum exhibits medieval stone works, religious art, renaissance and baroque works, but its most important collections are the modern Hungarian art, paintings and sculpture from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and contemporary art, which includes works of art representing all important modernist movements such as expressionism, surrealism, constructivism, non-figurative art, and various avant-garde tendencies like pop-art.

Nineteenth and twentieth century works of art had been acquired by the former staff of the National Museum, predominantly through private donations, civil associations and the municipal body of the capital. Since 1945, contemporary art has been purchased through a centralized system operated by the Ministry of Culture. In 1974, the National Gallery decided to install a permanent exhibition of Hungarian contemporary art including domestic avant-garde of various kinds. This collection, which was set up by the sponsorship of the central government Art Foundation (*Művészeti Alap*), currently displays Hungarian avant-garde from the early twentieth century as well as a balanced sample of official and non-official art in the late communist decades.

### **Hungarian Natural History Museum**

The Natural History Museum was part of the National Museum in various institutional frameworks up until 1963, when it became an independent organization. As such, it was originated from the general collections of the early nineteenth century National Museum. In fact, its independence, as all other specialised disciplinary museums, was part of the process of professionalization and specialization of museum collections during the second half of the nineteenth century, which also affected the Hungarian state. During the founding epoch of museum culture in Europe of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, museums were generally considered as sites of erudition and culture to be rendered available for all citizens; hence, their collections embraced all fields of contemporary science or knowledge.

Accordingly, the core of the collections of the future Hungarian Natural History Museum was established by a donation from count Ferenc Széchenyi's wife, Julianna Festetics. Her 1803 'gift to the nation' meant the first collection of natural science in the modern sense in the history of Hungarian museums. It consisted of selected minerals from the territory of the contemporary Kingdom of Hungary. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, the National Museum gradually increased its natural history collections by donations and acquisitions and soon became able to exhibit botanical and zoological objects as well as paleontological fossils.

As the collection started to expand, professional staff and organization became necessary. In 1870, the natural history collections were turned into independent departments within the framework of the National Museum, while simultaneously the number of staff was tripled. Since 1870, the natural history collections had consisted of three departments: zoology, mineral and fossils and botanical. The departments used their increase in resources to raise the level of

scholarly work and started to publish a periodical, *Journal of Natural History (Természettudományi Füzetek)* in 1877.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the collections of natural history in the National Museums had already exceeded the capacity of the central building. During the last decade of the century, leading natural scientist and Member of Parliament in Hungary, Ottó Herman, regularly convened with the Ministers of Education and Culture to establish an independent museum and construct a new building. Yet, apart from sketching architectural plans and designs, funds remained insufficient for starting larger scale construction works. In 1933, the natural history departments within the National Museum became a semi-independent organization as the National Natural History Museum supervised by the National Museum.

Nonetheless, the acute lack of space was not fixed and remained the greatest issue troubling the museum staff up until 1989. That year, the government decided to move the collections into the castle of Buda. The museum was renamed the Hungarian Natural History Museum in 1991, but this measure did not speed up the process of transportation. In 1994, the decision to move the museum into the huge building of the former Ludoviceum, a military training academy, then used by the university of Budapest, proved to be crucial. The renovation and re-structuring of the building were started and the first exhibitions opened in 1996.

As natural sciences claim to be universal and their findings inimical to national particularities, the Hungarian Natural History Museum is not an obvious institution for constructing national identity either. Yet, its exhibitions, which in many cases focus on the geological history of the geographical areas of contemporary Hungary and the Carpathian basin, on the flora and fauna of these territories and pay respect to the achievements of renowned Hungarian-born scientists, contribute to the shaping of an awareness of national belonging and cultural intimacy.

## **Turning points in the twentieth century**

A short-lived communist dictatorship following the end of WWI when Béla Kun's First Hungarian Soviet Republic introduced a profound reorganization of the structure of the National Museum. The soviet government secluded the library and the natural history collections from the central body and sought to transform the National Museum into an institution with an ethnographical and cultural historical profile. The secession would conform to early Bolshevik concepts of progress based on scientific, technological and material increase, hence demanding the highlighting of natural history and sciences in distinct museums, whereas representing the development of human civilization as a cultural superstructure based upon these foundations. Nonetheless, as the Hungarian Soviet government proved to be short-lived (133 days) and was in constant war with its neighbours, it had no opportunity to pursue a concise museum policy in the country.

The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy triggered conflicts concerning the appropriate allocation of its museum heritage. The Hungarian National Museum was involved with two such competitions. The fall of the dictatorship of the proletariat was followed by a short period of Romanian occupation in Budapest. Since the Versailles treaties ending WWI granted large territories of the former Hungarian Kingdom to neighbouring states, particularly Transylvania to Romania, 1919 brought the most clear-cut conflict of museum heritage related to the National Museum. The commandment of the Romanian occupation forces declared the right

to objects that allegedly originated from the territory of Transylvania. The staff of the museum sought defence by the Entente Military Mission officers. Following a month of tensions, the Entente commissioner sealed the entrance of the National Museum, thus, preventing the transportation of objects up until the Romanian troops returned to their homeland. A second success for the Hungarian National Museum in conflicts concerning contested heritage occurred in 1921 when the Venice Treaty granted approximately 1000 artefacts to Hungary from the previous imperial collection housed in Vienna. This acquisition included the sword of king Ulászló II and the full plate armour of King Louis II from the early sixteenth century.

The interwar governments, while they followed the initiative of the Hungarian soviet leadership in re-arranging the museum structure, cultivated a distinctly nationalist agenda concerning museums, considering them as means to demonstrate the superiority of ethnic Hungarian civilization, culture and education in the Southeast European region. Two acts concerning the National Museum in 1922 and 1934 regulated the organizational structure of the institution. The 1922 act unified the various museums and central archives and libraries into the super-organization, University of Collections (*Gyűjteményegyetem*). In 1934, the authorities created the Council of the Hungarian National Museum as the body to supervise museum, archival and library collections. The National Museum was granted autonomy, but it was not completed with sufficient public funds. In fact, the small central support rendered the autonomy symbolic. The government established the Historical Museum in the central building of the National Museum in 1936. This Historical Museum still contained the Museum of Applied Arts and the Museum of Ethnography as its departments.

The Museum was clearly under-funded, therefore, the government attempted to balance the lack of public funds by creating a private foundation, the Association of the Friends of the Hungarian National Museum (*Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Barátainak Egyesülete*) in 1926. Although it proved unable to significantly sponsor the activities of the museum, enough funding was gathered to reconstruct and redecorate the central building in 1926-27. Private funding was acquired for archaeological research, as well. In 1931, the Savings Bank of Külső-Szolnok County sponsored excavations. Similarly, one of the periodicals of the museum was funded by the business sector, by the Guild of Breweries and the Society of Sugar Factories.

The cultural establishment actually cultivated a fairly elitist concept of museums considering them as basically institutions of high culture, scholarship and erudition and giving less weight to their general power of public education and civilization. The Historical Museum organized only three long-term exhibitions between 1919 and 1944. As a contrast, the museum issued three academic series in archaeology and cultural history during this period.

Likewise, its major historical exhibition covering the periods from early medieval Hungarian history up until the nineteenth century could be rightly criticized for its elitist aristocratic perspective. This historical exhibition focused on the culture, life style and erudition of the noble classes, pursued a history of bellicose spirit and appreciated the eighteenth century Habsburg court civilization. In turn, it largely neglected the representation of the lower classes, particularly, peasants, avoided the interpretation of the peasant revolt in 1514 and also ignored the history of the Enlightenment and its impact on Hungarian political thought. It is remarkable that the permanent historical exhibition of the National Museum during the interwar period ignored the nineteenth century, identifying it still with a form of 'recent history' having direct political



implications for the present. As a consequence, national history was represented as a certain heroic continuity of national struggles for invaders like Ottoman-Turks or Habsburg related Germans. In general, it refused to deal with the nineteenth century, hence the recent past full of controversies and contradictions, by transforming this period as an object of art history to be displayed in the Museum of Applied Arts.

The end of the war in 1945 obviously meant a turning point in the history of the National Museum. This was triggered not only by the substantial damage the building and collections of the museum suffered, but also because the new democratic government introduced organizational modifications. In this year, the government started to establish the Museum of Applied Art and the Museum of Ethnography as independent institutions, which finally took place in 1948 and 1947, respectively. Nonetheless, in terms of organization, all the independent museums once formed parts of the collections of the National Museum, belonged to one super-structure, the corporation of the Hungarian National Museum. This central museum institution consisted of the National Archives, the National Library, the museums of Fine Arts, of History (the old National Museum proper), of Archaeology, of Applied Arts, of Ethnography and of Natural History. The corporation of the Hungarian National Museum was supervised by the Ministry of Religion and Education and, although, the majority of its funding came from state budget, formally it was sponsored by its own endowment that could also be enriched by private donations.

In the post-war period, the most important exhibition of the National Museum proper, the Historical Museum, was the centennial exhibition commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1848 revolution. Whereas, the event itself had already become the core of Hungarian historical identity in the late nineteenth century, the post-war democratic government hoped to benefit from its mythical capacities to create its own historical legitimacy. Nonetheless, when the anniversary finally arrived, the government was already dominated by the communist party, which abused the ceremonies in an attempt to construct its own national history and ideological purposes. Despite the communist dominance, the exhibition in March 1948 obtained enormous popularity and received 1 000 000 visitors.

The institutional structure established in 1945 proved to be temporary as, in 1949, soon after the communist takeover, the new government issued a new act on museums. This measure was part of the general process of nationalisations, taking all public institutions of education and culture into central organization and control. Although, this step limited the autonomy of the National Museum and incorporated its staff and collections into the system of centrally directed organs of transmission and mediation of political/ideological objectives, it also concluded the unpredictability of the financing of the museum. The 1949 act on museums created a new institution of supervision, the National Centre of Museums and Monuments (*Múzeumok és Műemlékek Országos Központja*, MMOK). First, the new communist authorities initiated professional training of museum specialists in 1949 and declared archaeological sites exclusive state property. This provided a certain level of protection for scholarly investigations, but also guaranteed party authorities could abuse state power in organizing historical studies and representations. The new state and party elite directed a profound re-formation of exhibition halls in the National Museum extending it to more recent periods and adding space for temporary exhibitions, as well.

In 1951, a new director, Ferenc Fülep was appointed to head the National Museum and two years later, in 1953, it became part of the institutional network of the Ministry of Public Education. The centralized structure and the relatively favourable funding resulted in spectacular professional achievements, as well. In 1958, the archaeological department of the museum installed an exhibition on life in the Stone Age, which used technical components that were largely experimental in their time such as mobile structures and flashing effects in order to create a more life-like representation of the period. As well, the museum leadership made an effort to attract more visitors by introducing such popular programs as special Sunday tours and prices.

The last new museum, so far, based upon the collections of the National Museum was found in 1964. The Museum of Contemporary History, which reflected the general concern of the communist parties to represent the period of socialism as a unique and exceptional period in the history of mankind, proved to be provisional. Following 1989, its collections including a significant archive of photographic records returned to the National Museum as it took over the communist created institution.

The National Museum organized more than 150 exhibitions and received approximately 4.2 million visitors between 1945 and 1964 and an additional 1.8 million between 1965 and 1977. In 1977, the museum consisted of eight departments: the Archaeology, Medieval, Modern, Numismatics, Historical Portrait Gallery, Central Archaeological Library, Database and Restoration departments. Whereas the main task of the museum was to prepare the presentation of objects related to the history of the country, the Archaeological Department contributed particularly to pre-history exhibitions. Yet, even these periods were associated to the framework of an abstract ideal national history and were depicted as the particular pre-history of Hungarians. The exhibition the department organized in 1961 was titled “The History of the Peoples of Hungary before the Conquest (of the Magyars)”.

A new, profoundly reorganized exhibition of the National Museum, titled “The History of Hungary since the Conquest to 1849”, was opened on 31 May 1967. Contemporary critiques praised the exhibition as the first one since the war that could benefit from the diverse collection of the museum and create a demonstration the quality of the institution deserved. Official criticism admitted that the exhibition could not unfold the entire course of Hungarian history in the space provided, but praised its competence to highlight the crucial historical turning points, thus, eventually, offered a thorough and balanced insight into its topic.

The displayed objects were, in general, selected and arranged to produce the impression of a temporal continuity of civilization and the national political unit. Archaeological objects evoked the various components and great periods of human civilization like work, leisure, religion and cultic life, household or war. Civilization in the exhibitions was seen as the progress of skill, taste and sophistication of elite culture: if those works of art or everyday objects once owned by the upper classes were chosen to be displayed. Spectacular examples were provided by objects like the Scythian golden deer found near the town of Mezőkeresztes in 1928, the bust of Roman emperor Valentinian II or the Langobard jewels from Szentendre. The most highly valued treasures of the museum from the Middle Ages included a Byzantine golden crown, the death jewels of Béla III, king of Hungary and his wife Anna of Antiochos, king Mathias’s glass and a lavishly decorated Ottoman leather robe. The most spectacular items in the collection of the

Modern Department were various objects of aristocratic families including weapons, clothes, furniture or jewels.

The historical exhibition remained in use up until 1996; hence, it reflects the official representation of Hungarian history of the post-1956 consolidated communist authorities searching for a compromise with the majority of Hungarian society. In fact, the museum exhibition seems to directly reflect the official consensus on the master narrative of Hungarian history that the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was working on. The initiative, which was meant to provide the public with a profound professional, Marxist history of Hungary in ten volumes, was actually in use throughout the last decades of the socialist dictatorship as the foremost authority regarding the knowledge of the past. The volumes, in fact, represented a curious consensus of positivistic, objectivist scholarship, the primacy of national state-centred history and a post-Marxist three layered perspective on the past based upon the hierarchy of economics, society, politics and culture.

In 1963, the institution incorporated five other museums of exceptional national importance: the pre-historic exhibition site in the village of Vértesszőlös, King Mathias's castle in Visegrád, the Rákóczi castle in Sáropatak, the Lajos Kossuth Memorial Museum in his birthplace Monok and the Mihály Károlyi Memorial Room in his former palace in Budapest. While these are doubtlessly significant sites of archaeological and historical heritage, the organizational structure embracing them into one institution created temporal associations among them. The Vértesszőlös part is situated on an important European pre-historic site of excavations with thousands of objects and a reconstructed Stone Age settlement.

In relation to important sites of national cultural and political heritage, this exhibition implied the continuity of civilization in the territory of the country. The Visegrád Palace is an exceptional renaissance architecture well known as the centre of culture during King Mathias's reign. Ferenc Rákóczi, the owner of the Sáropatak castle and leader of an anti-Habsburg revolt in the early eighteenth century together with Lajos Kossuth, the pro-independence revolutionary leader in 1848 were known as the harbingers of national liberty and statehood. Mihály Károlyi was the ill-fated President of the short-lived Republic of Hungary in 1918, just after the collapse in the war and before a communist coup by Béla Kun. The Hungarian communist leadership sought to transform his figure into a predecessor of pro-communist leftist progressive politics during its attempt at building broader social legitimacy in the 1960s. After the death of Károlyi while in exile, his corpse was brought home and officially reburied in 1962.

Two important temporary installations completed the permanent exhibition during this period. The centennial demonstration of the 1871 Paris Commune opened in 1971 was meant to represent the international commitments of the Hungarian communist system as well as an attempt to anchor the history of socialism to a mythical foundation stone in the nineteenth century. The second important exhibition performed a similar function. The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of György Dózsa who was the leader of the 1514 peasant insurrection cruelly executed, also meant an opportunity to project the communist system backwards and provide a historical depth to the modern revolutionary movement as well as to inscribe the history of the system into a model of national identity based on peasant-populist ideas.

The focus on statehood and centralised power structures, as one of the important myths of the communist type of meta-histories, could comfortably integrate such classical elements of

Hungarian historical culture as the symbols of the medieval kingdom. The Sacra Corona and the accompanying regalia, which were commonly – and (partly) rightly - known as the property of the first king of Hungary, St Stephen, returned to the country from the United States where they had been kept since the end of WWII until 1978. These were situated in the National Museum in a centrally located exhibition hall and soon became one of the most favourite objects of museum-going Hungarians up until 2000 when they were transported to the hall of the Parliament. In a similar logic, the seat of Stephen's father - Prince Géza and the archbishop of Hungary - the castle of Esztergom joined the National Museum in 1985. Originally, these steps had a twofold aim: to strengthen the loyalty towards the state by emphasising the central role of a strong state in Hungarian history and to construct a controllable space for developing patriotism and national identity within the frameworks of the communist state. Nevertheless, the emphasis on these historical myths contributed to the emergence of a more conservative type nationalism that re-discovered pre-war identities connected to religion, Christian statehood and the supremacy of Hungarian civilization.

Apart from the general lack of public or private funds, this flexibility of historical culture in the late Kádárist dictatorship explains why the permanent exhibitions in the National Museum remained untouched up until 1996, the year of its profound refurbishing. The new permanent exhibition of the National Museum opened in 1996, as part of the national celebrations of the 1100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hungarian conquest. Conditions to install a comprehensive spectacular exhibition became favourable in 1993 when the collections of the Hungarian Natural History Museum were transported to its new location. This provided an opportunity to finish the technical modernisation of the museum building by installing micro-electronic equipment and up-to-date mechanics.

As a consequence, the entire formidable space in the museum became available for a grand historical exhibition. The conveners were hesitant whether to focus on the objects themselves and to situate them in the centre of the exhibition or to utilize them as illustrations to various displayed historical epochs. Eventually, as the ultimate purpose was to provide an overall picture on the historical development of the Hungarian people, they decided to design an exhibition that was able to convey a general comprehension of particular historical periods. The organizers desired an exhibition where the visitors, at first sight, encountered the totality of the spectacle of various rooms, which, as they hoped, could evoke the unique atmosphere of each represented epoch. Rooms dedicated to particular periods were decorated with different colours according to the desired emotional impact associated to each age. The conveners, thus, emphasized the sublime nature of the foundation of the state, the stubbornness of the people and the ability to look into the future of the generation of the 1830s' great reforms.

Part of the exhibition, which opened in March 1996, covered the history of the conquest itself. It was conceived as an opening, a sort of introduction to the historical exhibition proper, which consisted of two parts: one concerning the periods of eleventh to the seventeenth centuries (the founding of the medieval state until the re-conquest of the country from the Ottomans) and a second one covering the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (the anti-Habsburg revolt of Duke Rákóczi until the millennium in 1896). The concept underpinning the organization of the installations was based on the utilization of exceptional objects allegedly able to represent general

tendencies and the highlighting of connections of Hungarian history to broader European contexts.

The structure of the exhibition pursued a chronology of political periods and reflected the history of the idea of Hungarian statehood. Thus, the rooms were divided into the following sections: the age of the Árpáds (conquest and early medieval history, the country was ruled by the ancient Árpád dynasty), age of the Angevins (the conventional period of Hungary as a great power in the fourteenth century), age of Sigismund (conventional period of high culture and early conflicts with the Ottomans), everyday life in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries (renaissance high culture in Hungary), age of Mathias (the canonical culmination of national kingdom), the tripartition of the country (the Ottoman rule, the accession of the Habsburgs and the Duchy of Transylvania), Transylvania in the seventeenth century (canonically Transylvania as the defender of Hungarian statehood), Count Rákóczi's revolt ('kuruc' insurrection, conventionally the attempt to establish an independent Hungarian absolute monarchy), Hungary in the eighteenth century (conventionally the period of national stagnation, but peaceful civilization), the age of reforms (the canonical period of national awakening, first half of the nineteenth century), the war of independence in 1848 (failed attempt to establish an independent Hungarian republic), the second half of the nineteenth century (the period of modernisation, but dependence on Habsburg interests), Millennium (the golden age of Hungarian empire and civilization), the century of survival, 1900-1990.

This permanent historical exhibition in the National Museum emphasizes the homogeneity of the nation and is reluctant to highlight the multicultural context of the history of Hungary. It is not inimical to the multi-ethnic structure of the historical Kingdom of Hungary, that usually depicts this in terms of immigration to Hungary and the tolerance of Hungarian society to accept newcomers and which gives the impression of a continuous, ethnically homogenous Hungarian nation, the subject of history. Besides, the exhibition discusses the formation of the multi-ethnic Hungary in the context of the Ottoman conquest and the fall of the medieval national state, endowing the narrative with a clear tragic overtone even with implications of the dismantling of the national state after 1918, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The period that troubled most the conveners of the historical exhibition was, not astonishingly, the twentieth century, that is to say the contemporary past. The coordinator of this particular installation argued that it was virtually impossible to represent the history of the last ninety years, as it had been so abundant with dramatic turns and the number of events to be evoked drastically increased. Therefore, the organizers decided to confine the narrative to the frames of political history that determined the everyday experiences of Hungarian citizens. In general, this exhibition tried to avoid confronting controversial interpretations and rather chose to provide a patchwork-like organization of contemporary history, which clearly reflected the troublesome relationship of Hungarians to their recent past. The exhibition also discussed the Holocaust and the extermination of Jews in Hungary. Yet, it occurs in the context of the representation of the general tragedy of the nation – wartime losses, military defeat, starvation and the siege of Budapest – emphasizing the homogeneity of experience. In general, this is a typical strategy of museums in Hungary to avoid evoking past traumas that may raise the troublesome issues of social responsibility, but emphasizing an imagery of national solidarity, instead hoping to neutralize puzzling questions.

In spite of significant attempts by a few museums, notably the Museum of Ethnography and the National Museum proper, to re-arrange their exhibitions in order to reflect upon the increasing diversity of contemporary Hungarian society, the dominant impression one can obtain from Hungarian museums confirms the image of Hungary as a nationally, ethnically, culturally and fairly homogeneous country with a few regional variations. Whereas, the Museum of Ethnography successfully deconstructs this image by its thematic exhibitions demonstrating the diverse approaches to universal concepts or practices, its permanent exhibition, “The Traditional Culture of the Hungarian People”, forges the rural societies of the country into one homogeneous culture. Typically, ethnic minorities, most importantly the Roma and also Germans, Slovaks, Romanians and others are not integrated into mainstream permanent exhibitions in Hungarian national museums. Their cultures and history are normally represented in provincial local museums or temporary exhibitions in the central museums of the capital. This fact elucidates the typical approach towards the ethnic or linguistic diversity of contemporary Hungarian society, which ordinarily considers these cultures in terms of folklore and turning them into exotic, often curious additions to the core of the Hungarian body politic.

The representation of ethnic Hungarian groups in neighbouring countries, most importantly in Romania (Transylvania) oscillates between the approaches of the exotic and the ethnic. Often, Hungarian minority groups are depicted as resilient folkloric relics inimical to the impacts of modernization and globalization or simply as natural members of the homogenous ethnic body of the Hungarian nation ignoring the particular trajectories these societies ran since 1920. Yet, up to date the topic enjoys less popularity than it might have been expected: no national museum has installed any permanent exhibition devoted specifically to Hungarian groups outside the current borders of the country.

## **The House of Terror**

The particular narrative of ethnic homogeneity is the most strikingly spectacular in the recently founded House of Terror Museum, an exhibition space devoted to the history of Fascist and Communist dictatorships in Hungary. The House of Terror was inaugurated on 25 February 2002 as a non-governmental organization administered by a public foundation, but benefited from an exceptional amount of tax-payers’ money. It was claimed that this museum was built to commemorate the victims of dictatorial rule in the country. In reality, the museum creates a history of continuous occupations by German and Soviet military forces, respectively, and the establishment of domestic Fascist and Communist dictatorships as a direct consequence of foreign intervention. On the one hand, the exhibition artificially isolates the short-lived Arrow-Cross rule from the longer history of domestic anti-Semitism and pro-fascist ideologies and politics. On the other, it depicts an entirely ahistorical picture of the socialist dictatorship turning it into a period of uniform barbarity and violence seceding from the history of oppression, therefore, the broader social and cultural history of constructing, reshaping and dismantling the regime. Hungarian society, as a consequence, appears an accidental victim of an ideological conflict as if it had homogeneously resisted those alien intrusions.

The exhibition on the House of Terror is embedded in a broader politics of history marked by the transportation of the Hungarian royal crown from the National Museum to the Parliament in 2000 and even by the preface to the new constitution accepted in 2011. This politics of history

imagines the Hungarian nation a set of eternal values continuously existing since the rule of St Stephen, first king of Hungary. These qualities manifested themselves in the times of national glory such as in the revolutions of 1848 and 1956 and fell victim to the tyranny of great powers in both world wars in Trianon and Jalta, respectively, and during the Communist regime.

## Bibliography

- Aradi, N. (ed.) (1978) *Művészet és felvilágosodás: Művészettörténeti tanulmányok* [Art and Enlightenment: Studies in the History of Art], Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Művészettörténeti Kutató Csoportjának kiadványa.
- Czobor, Á. (ed.) (1971) *A Szépművészeti Múzeum* [The Museum of Fine Arts], Budapest: Corvina.
- Entz, G. (1937) *A magyar műgyűjtés történetének vázlatja 1850-ig* [The Outline of the History of Hungarian Collection Activities until 1850], Budapest: Author's publication.
- Fodor, I., Kovalovszki, J., Kovács, T., Lovag Z. and Tóth E. (1992) *A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum* [The Hungarian National Museum], Budapest: Electa - Helikon.
- Fejős, I. (1964) 'A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum története 1802-1847' [The History of the Hungarian National Museum 1802-1847], *Folia Archaeologica* 16: 267-281.
- (1965) 'A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum története 1848-1944' [The History of the Hungarian National Museum 1848-1944], *Folia Archaeologica* 17: 285-301.
- Fejős, I. and Korek, J. (1971) *A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum története* [The History of the Hungarian National Museum], Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda.
- Fülep, F. (ed.) (1977) *A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum* [The Hungarian National Museum], Budapest: Corvina.
- Gaál, P. (1996) 'A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum épületének rekonstrukciója' [The Reconstruction of the Building of the Hungarian National Museum], *Magyar Múzeumok* 2 (Autumn 1996): 6-10.
- Gedai, I. (1996) 'Múlt és jövő' [Past and Future], *Magyar Múzeumok* 2 (Autumn 1996): 3-5.
- Gergely, A. A. (ed.) (2002) *A nemzet antropológiája: Hofer Tamás köszöntése* [The Anthropology of the Nation], Budapest: Új Mandátum.
- Hofer, T. (ed.) (1996) *Magyarok Kelet és Nyugat közt: a nemzettudat változó jelképei* [Hungarians in Between East and West: Changing Symbols of National Identity], Budapest: Néprajzi Múzeum – Balassi.
- Ihász, I. (1996) 'A túlélés évszázada (Magyarország 1900-1990)' [The Century of Survival (Hungary 1900-1990)], *Magyar Múzeumok* 2 (Autumn 1996): 40-42.
- Kemenczei, Á. (1996) ' "...megmentettem a Nemzeti Múzeumot..." Egy amerikai tábornok 1919-ben a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeumért' ["...I saved the National Museum...": An American General for the Hungarian National Museum], *Magyar Múzeumok* 2 (Autumn 1996): 21-24.
- Kerekes, A. et al. (eds) (2004) *Leitha und Lethe: symbolische Räume und Zeiten in der Kultur Österreich-Ungarns*, Tübingen: Francke.
- Kolba, J. (1996) 'Az államalapítástól a török kiűzéséig (XI-XVII. század)' [From the Foundation of the State to the Driving Out of the Turks (11<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries)], *Magyar Múzeumok* 2 (Autumn 1996): 36-38.
- Kollányi, F. (1910) *Az Akadémia és a Nemzeti Múzeum* [The Academy and the National Museum], Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia.

- Korek, J. (1965) 'A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum története 1945-1964' [The History of the Hungarian National Museum 1945-1964], *Folia Archaeologica* 17: 303-330.
- Zoltán Korsós – Horváth, C. (1996) 'A Magyar Természettudományi Múzeum rövid története' [A Brief History of the Hungarian Natural History Museum], *Magyar Múzeumok* 2 (Winter 1996): 5-9.
- Kovács, Á. (ed.) (1991) *Monumentumok az első háborúból* [Monuments from the First Great War], Budapest: Corvina.
- Körmöczi, K. (1996) 'A török háborúk végétől a milleniumig (XVIII-XIX. század)' [From the End of the Turkish Wars to the Millennium (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries)], *Magyar Múzeumok* 2 (Autumn 1996): 38-40.
- Lovag, Z. (1997) 'Száz éves az Iparművészeti Múzeum' [The 100 Years Old Museum of Applied Arts], *Magyar Múzeumok* 3 (Spring 1997): 41-43.
- Mányi, I. (1996) 'A Magyar Természettudományi Múzeum újjászületése a Ludovika Akadémia épületében' [The Rebirth of the Hungarian Natural History Museum in the Building of the Ludoviceum], *Magyar Múzeumok* 2 (Winter 1996): 10-12.
- Museum Hungaricum: A Nemzeti Gyűjtemények elintézése feltételei* [The Conditions of Arrangement of the National Collections], (Buda, 1807).
- Pataky, D. (1996) 'Nyílt level Széchenyi Bertalan gróf úrhoz. Gondolatok egy kiállítás belsőépítészeti tervéről' [Open Letter to Count Bertalan Széchenyi: Thoughts on the Interior Design of an Exhibition], *Magyar Múzeumok* 2 (Autumn 1996): 33-35.
- Rados, J. and Zádor, A. (1943) *A klasszicizmus építészete Magyarországon* [The Architecture of Classicism in Hungary], Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia.
- Selmezi Kovács, A. (1997) 'Fejezetek a Néprajzi Múzeum történetéből' [Chapters in the History of the Museum of Ethnography], *Magyar Múzeumok* 3 (Autumn 1997): 13-20.
- Szalay, I. (1902) *A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum alapítása és fejlődése* [The Foundation and Development of the Hungarian National Museum], Budapest: Hornyánszky Viktor császári és királyi udvari könyvnyomdája.
- Szinyei Merse, A. (ed.) (1993) *Magyar Nemzeti Galéria* [Hungarian National Gallery], Budapest: Corvina.
- Zádor, A. (1935) *Építészeti tervek a 18. századból* [Architectural Plans from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century], Budapest: Franklin, 1935.
- (1961) *A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum* [The Hungarian National Museum], Budapest: Képzőművészeti Alap Kiadóvállalata.
- (ed.) (1993) *A historizmus művészete Magyarországon: művészettörténeti tanulmányok* [The Art of Historicism in Hungary: Studies in the History of Art], Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Művészettörténeti Kutató Intézet.