

Theses of doctoral (PhD) essay

**World War I Memorials in
Szabolcs and Szatmár Counties Between the two World Wars
(1918-1938)**

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I. Objective of the Thesis, Definition of the Subject

The primary objective of my doctoral essay is to provide an accurate and comprehensive view of the World War I memorials erected in the period from 1918 to 1938, that is, in the interwar years, found in the territory of the (then administratively temporary) counties of Szabolcs, Ung, Szatmár, Ugocsa and Bereg. I wish to present the history of these monuments, from the original concept to the implementation, sometimes including references to the present state and role of these memorials. I also attributed importance to presenting the major elements of the relevant international literature, the result of preliminary domestic research, and sources found in various archives. Since these sources have come into being over a period of several decades, they provide a chronological story of how the general attitude of the local communities changed in connection with the memorials. A new research project is often embarked upon in order to refine or confirm the findings of previous research, to record and process the changes that have taken place since the previous project. Whereas the relevant literature only requires improvement and amendment at certain points, in the history of the specific memorials there are considerable gaps, and often serious mistakes. In my experience, these mistakes were often handed down from older studies to new ones, as the authors did not always check the validity of the data they used. In my doctoral thesis I made efforts to correct the smaller and larger mistakes, to fill the gaps, trace the names of the yet unknown makers, and the dates of inauguration of the monuments, in an overall description as colourful as possible.

I started my research in 2012, in order to learn more about the WWI memorial of my former home village, Kótaj. During the research, I encountered contradictory information, and that is why I decided to extend my examinations to all the WWI memorials in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, so as to eliminate contradictions and erroneous information. My major objective was to provide a concise summary of the history, characteristics and artistic background of the monuments, as well as the changes in the attitude of the community to them. A study of all the heroes' monuments in the county, however, presented a large amount of data, impossible to be included all in one study, so I introduced a time limit, restricting the report to the interwar period. The title of the doctoral thesis also requires explanation, since "Szabolcs and Szatmár counties" does not refer to the two counties that existed before 1918, but to the counties of Szabolcs and Ung, and Szatmár, Ugocsa and Bereg, which were temporary district of administration, created with Act XXXV/1923. The temporary counties officially came into being on the 1st of January 1924. Despite this, it was necessary to survey

all WWI memorials, since I was eventually able to narrow down the scope to the memorials I intended to write about specifically.

From a geographical aspect, my primary objective was writing in detail about the memorials within the present state borders, and I decided not to include the ones in the territories that temporarily returned to Hungary as a result of the Vienna Arbitration. Similarly, the memorials standing in battlegrounds of the Great War, are not included in my research. On the other hand, the settlements that administratively belonged to Szabolcs or Szatmár, but have since been given to the neighbouring countries as a result of the rearrangement the territories, are part of the survey.

Furthermore, my thesis intends to provide a foundation for further, detailed research. To that end, I needed to discuss all the war memorials located in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, to summarize research findings of previous projects, and to provide specific data regarding the location and the date of creation of the memorials. The reason why my doctoral thesis does not deal with the memorials erected during or shortly World War II is that these memorials were often added extra dimensions, extra content, or the attitude of the community to them changed. Our knowledge of these period, especially of the memorials created in the years following 1938, is meagre, a number of important issues has not been addressed yet. It might be worth dealing with these issues in the form of a new thesis, a new research project.

II. An Outline of the Methods Used

Out of the heroes' memorials of Szabolcs and Szatmár counties, only those found in Nyíregyháza were a subject of processing and publication, thanks to the efforts of József Margócsy and Gábor Ilyés. There is still no comprehensive work on the WWI memorials located in the settlements of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg outside the county town. That is the reason why I undertook to achieve that goal in my doctoral thesis. Research was made difficult by the fact that not every settlement had a reading book on local history, or any monograph, shorter or longer. I therefore had to rely on contemporary press releases, materials found in archives, primarily the documents from the offices of the vice-grangers, and the minutes of the meetings of local governments.

Data gathering usually started in non-line sources, especially in the large data bases that contain reliable material, including **Arcanum Adatbázis Kft.** (www.arcanum.hu) and the portal called **Hungaricana** (www.hungaricana.hu). These contain materials digitized by

libraries, and include documents such as national and local newspapers, encyclopedias, school reports, address lists, Lutheran documents etc. A lot of useful material regarding the history of interwar press in Hungary is found in *”Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg megye (a történelmi Bereg, Szabolcs, Szatmár, Ugocsa és Ung vármegyék) sajtóbibliográfiája* [Press Bibliography of Sz-Sz-B county, that is the old Szabolcs, Szatmár, Ugocsa and Ung Counties] (1845-2000), published in 2002. A lot of material from the paper of Szabolcs county, **Nyírvidék**, is found in a searchable format on Hungaricana, but only fragments of the paper of Szatmár county, **Szatmár és Bereg**, are stored on the websites. The missing issues—even whole years, from 1923-1925 and 1932-1940—were only accessible in the traditional microfilm format. In addition to the two leading county dailies, sometimes national papers also reported about the erection of memorials in the countryside. Missing information was often made up by the million-page data base of the contemporary news of **Magyar Távirati Iroda Rt.** [Hungarian News Agency, MTI] and **Magyar Országos Tudósító Rt.** [Hungarian National Reporter Inc., MOT], also accessible on Hungaricana.

Collections of pictures have also been significant sources, in addition to the textual material. Often a picture postcard was a special and informative source, since the image was either an artwork or a photograph, and the printed text contained valuable information regarding the memorial. Since in smaller settlements the heroes’ memorial is still the only piece of art in a public place, the settlements that wanted a picture postcard, almost always put the memorial on it.

My on-line sources included the website titled **Magyar Hősök** [Hungarian Heroes] (www.magyarhosok.hu), which is an immense data base of pictures, and deals exclusively with the memorials of the heroes of the two world wars. A similar website was established by Dr. József Varga, university professor (<http://www.agt.bme.hu/varga/foto/vh1/vh1.html>), and sometimes this website provides some information in connection with some of the heroes’ memorials. The collection concentrates on relics of the Great War, and most often there is a pictorial illustration. We need to note the military **gravesite register** of **Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum** [Institute and Museum of Military History], (<http://www.hadisir.hu/hosi-emlekmuvek>), where we find photos of military memorials from the whole country, in a breakdown according to settlements. The collection here also concentrates on the two world wars, and most entries are illustrated by a photo. A shortcoming is, however, that data and textual information are missing in most cases. The last and perhaps most important on-line source for researching war memorials, is the site name **Köztérkép** [Public maps] (www.kozterkep.hu), which is today Hungary’s largest digital data base of pieces of arts

located in public places. Closely linked to it is the data base of the doctoral thesis of Örs Somfay, titled **Hősi Emlék** [Memorials of Heroes] (www.hosiemlek.kozterkep.hu). Although these two web pages are the most comprehensive of all similar sites, there are still wide gaps, particularly in the material related to the memorials of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. My intention with this doctoral thesis is filling those gaps.

I have been able to collect the still missing information and pictures through telephone and e-mail from the local governments and ministers of several settlements in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. Here I would like to mention the local governments of Tiszaszalka, Kölcse, Csegöld, Penészlek, Nagyszekeres and Szatmárcseke, and the ministers of Méhtelek, Ökörítőfülpös, Kömörő, Kölcse, Nagyszekeres, Milota, Vámosoroszi, Majtis, Besenyőd and Nábrád for their enthusiastic and cordial assistance. I also visited memorials on location at several places, at Kótaj, Nyíregyháza, Újfehértó, Gávavencsellő, Dombrád, Tiszavasvári, Polgár and Nyírcsaholy among others.

Another major category of the sources was constituted by the items of related literature. A seminal work among these is titled *"Monumentumok az első háborúból"* [Monuments from World War I], published in 1985. The editor was Ákos Kovács, then the director of Lajos Hatvany Museum. He was the first to draw public attention to war memorials, and in 1980-81, when he worked at the museum, he launched a nationwide project that served as a starting point for my research. Another important work in the subject is János Pótó's *"Az emlékeztetés helyei"* [~The Places of Remembrance], published in 2003, that deals primarily with the effects of the changes of the political system on the memorials. The next volume I wish to mention is Gábor Gyáni's work that came out in 2016. Its title is *"A történelem mint emlék(mű)"* [~History as a Memorial] and it devoted an entire chapter to the memorials of WWI. We may narrow our focus to local history and include here a book by Gábor Ilyés, titled *"Beszél a márvány"* [Marble Talks], published in 2008. Both the illustrations and the historical discussion are valuable. A similarly good work by the same author is *"Hősök temetője"* [A Graveyard of Heroes] from 2014. It was also a good source for researching the war memorials of Nyíregyháza. József Margócsy himself, in volume III of his five-volume work *"Utcák, terek, emléktáblák"* [Streets, Squares and Plaques], dealt with the war memorials of Nyíregyháza in detail.

From the aspect of local history, monographs dealing with the counties are indispensable. The most important ones include László Háger's *"Szabolcs vármegye fejlődése és kortörténete"* [The Development and History of Sz. County] from 1929, Emil Hunek's *Nyíregyháza és Szabolcsvármegye községei* [Nyíregyháza and the Villages of Sz. County] from 1931, and

"Szabolcs vármegye" [Sz. County] by István Dienes from 1939. Out of the works dealing with the history of Szatmár county, I wish to mention Miklós Dömjén's "*Szatmár és Bereg vármegyék fejlődés és kortörténete*" [Development and History of Sz. and B. Counties] from 1932, as well as "*Szatmár, Ugocsa és Bereg vármegyék (1924-1938)*" [Sz., B. and U. Counties], edited by Sándor Fábián, published in 1939. In addition to these, a number of local history readers are at the disposal of the researcher, from Újfehértó, Kótaj, Tornyospálca, Nyírlugos, Penyige, Szatmárcseke and Tarpa among others. In addition to monographs of local history, the papers of the individual settlements also constituted important sources. Such are "Keresztút" from Kótaj and "Bátor" of Nyírbátor. In 2014 and in 2018, the 100th anniversaries of the start and end of World War I respectively, I contributed articles about the war memorial and the heroes of the village to "Keresztút," the quarterly of Kótaj.

Special literature pertinent to the war memorials specifically helped my research considerably. For instance, the writings of Gyula Koroknay, art historian of the county or, to mention authors from other counties, Pál Hadobás, who wrote about the war memorials in the neighbourhood of Edelény, and Imre Makó, who explored the memorials of Hódmezővásárhely and the neighbouring network of farms.

The third major category of the sources that I used are the relevant materials in the public collections. The first I need to mention is Ákos Kovács's national survey that was conducted in 1981. I found the more than 1,000 pages of the documents, including 150 pictures, of the survey in "József Katona" Museum in Kecskemét in the summer of 2017. The material is not only important from the aspect of the war memorials, but it is also a unique source of the history of the period. Other sources from the public collections include the monographs dealing with the county at "András Jósa" Museum and at "Zsigmond Móricz" Town and County Library. The Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county branch and the Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county branch, Sátoraljaújhely subdivision of the Hungarian National Archives also contain relevant sources. The most interesting sources were the documents of the vice-grangers and the minutes of the meetings of the local governments.

I published two essays in connection with the topic of the doctoral thesis. One was titled "*A kótaji világháborús emlékmű*" [The World War Memorial of Kótaj], that came out in the yearbook of "András Jósa" Museum in 2017. The title of the other is "*A fehérgyarmati világháborús emlékmű története*" [The History of the World War Memorial of Fehérgyarmat] in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Beregi Szemle [Sz. Sz. B. County Review] in 2018.

III. A Systematic List of the Results

Since the majority of the sources was formerly uncharted and unpublished, and no detailed, synthetic summary has been published, containing aspects of history, military history, local history and arts, my essay is able to offer a range of partial results. I believe that the importance of my research and thesis is that I am able to provide a more thorough and detailed description of the heroes' memorials erected in the temporary counties of Szabolcs and Ung, Szatmár, Ugocsa and Bereg in the interwar period, than ever before.

I have been able to add a lot of new data to former research findings, to underpin former assumptions with specific data, and to eliminate a number of gaps from the map of the war memorials in the settlements of Szatmár county.

The doctoral thesis, produced with the use and processing of sources, consists of nine chapters. The first chapter contains the table of contents, and the second is in fact an introduction, whereas the objectives and methodology are summarized in chapter three. It was necessary to devote a subchapter to the system of administration in the areas concerned, since the administrative layout of the counties has undergone several smaller or bigger, sometimes even drastic, change over the past hundred years; settlements were merged, their names changed, so identification was sometimes difficult. There are four settlements with war memorials that used to belong to Szabolcs county in the interwar period, but were given to the neighbouring counties after 1945. I therefore found identification of the names of the places indispensable in this subchapter.

Chapters four, five and six are the most articulate parts of the thesis. In chapter four, I outlined the domestic and international policy related to the remembrance to the fallen heroes as well as the legal regulations related to building war memorials in Hungary, including here all the laws and regulations pertaining to the topic. Furthermore, the various types of the memorials are presented with the help of the sources, and I have even been able to add a new type, the "organ of the heroes," found at the villages of Nábrád and Tarpa among others. It was also necessary to introduce here the national flag movement, as it emerged in parallel with the heroes' monuments in the 1920s. A number of settlements in Szabolcs and Szatmár counties erected a national flag, separately or together with a war memorial. I ascribed importance to include the short involvement of sculptors and hewers because their biographies tell us which artists worked at which parts of the country and when, what kinds of monuments they produced, and what impressions they had during their work. The chapter is concluded with successful and unsuccessful examples of the war memorial movement in

Szabolcs és Szatmár counties, and I also presented descriptions of some of the inauguration ceremonies.

Chapters five and six of the thesis contain the individual histories of the heroes' monuments in 32 settlements in the temporary counties of Szabolcs and Ung, and 33 settlements of Szatmár, Ugocsa and Bereg. The individual memorials are discussed in the chronological order of their construction, from the initial idea to the inauguration, eliminating the gaps, and in many cases the later history and present-day situation of the memorials. Altogether, the thesis deals with 77 war memorials at 65 settlements. All these memorials were erected between the two world wars. The numbers of monuments and settlements are different, because, for instance, Nyíregyháza received 12, and Nagykálló 2 WWI memorials during the era of Regent Horthy. While researching the history of the WWI monuments of the two counties, however, I encountered some difficulties. While the compilation of the register of the soldiers lost in the First World War was initiated in Szabolcs county in the 1920s (and the register was published in a volume titled "*Szabolcsi Hősök névsora*" Register of the Heroes of Sz. County in 1929], Szatmár county was lagging somewhat behind. The main reason for that was, that as a result of the Versailles Treaty, a large part of the county had to be ceded to Romania, and those settlements were unable to supply the necessary data. Furthermore, in the portion of Szatmár that remained in Hungary, there was no county-level initiation to start the registration of fallen soldiers. Instead, villages and towns themselves made efforts to create their own registers. It is therefore only possible to deduct the number of lost soldiers in Szatmár county from the lists of the monuments located there, and from the local death certificates. It is possible to follow the history of memorials in the county in the local press fairly well in the Szabolcs-area, while the county paper only sporadically and briefly reported about the monuments erected in the Szatmár region. For instance, in the case of Vámosoroszi or Nagyhódos, the only source of their monuments is the information received from the local protestant parishes, as no archive or other source recorded the history of the monuments.

It is to be noted that Monument of the Secler Division erected at Kocsord in 1934 is not included in the thesis, since the unit, led by Károly Kratochvil was organized after the end of the First World War, so it does not belong to the WWI memorials.

Another advantage of the essay as I see it is that it does not stop at the time frame specified in the title but, in connection with the national flag movement, it looks out to the years of the Second World War, and there are even examples used from the period after 1945.

Although the Versailles Treaty drastically affected the territory of Szabolcs, and especially that of Szatmár, the movement of creating war memorials was powerful in the areas that remained in Hungary. This statement is illustrated by more than seventy memorials of the Great War that were created in the two counties in the interwar years, and also by their inauguration celebrations that matched the official remembrance policy of the period.

Chapter seven is devoted to the summary, chapter eight contains the references and sources, while the ninth is the supplement of pictures, showing the heroes' memorials of Szabolcs and Szatmár counties erected between the two world wars.

In addition to the original objectives, the framework of the thesis is provided by the dimensions of domestic and foreign politics of remembrance. The chapters describing the monuments may be interpreted as monographs, and they eliminate gaps in the art- and military history of the settlements concerned.



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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (4)

1. **Holmár, Z.:** A 80 éves szamoszegi világháborús emlékmű.
Szabolcs-szatmár-beregi Szle. Megjelenés alatt, 1-6, 2019. ISSN: 1216-092X.
2. **Holmár, Z.:** A fegyvergyári világháborús emlékmű története.
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3. **Holmár, Z.:** Első világháborús sisakok a Jósza András Múzeum gyűjteményében.
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4. **Holmár, Z.:** A kótaji világháborús emlékmű.
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List of other publications

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (4)

5. **Holmár, Z.:** 150 éves a nyíregyházi Jósza András Múzeum.
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11. **Holmár, Z.:** Bosszú a páston Trianonért.
Történelem portál. 2 (3), 26-29, 2014. ISSN: 2064-0536.
12. **Holmár, Z.:** Sportember a reformkorból.
Történelem portál. 2 (1), 12-15, 2014. ISSN: 2064-0536.
13. **Holmár, Z.:** Magyar legenda az első labdarúgó-világbajnokságon: Orth György a chilei válogatott élén.
Történelem portál. 1 (6), 28-31, 2013. ISSN: 2064-0536.

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