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## The Resetting of the Main Historical Group from the Millennium Exhibition to the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1900

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As Anthony D. Smith revealed in his writing *National Identity* (1991), Central-Eastern European and Asian conceptions of the term Nation are envisioned with a special emphasis on community-based common origins and on a common culture. Even though Smith later criticizes the divisive concept of civic and ethnic nationalism (*Romanticism and Nationalism*, 2004), this latter component is crucial in the competing nation-building strategies in the region. In the work entitled *Imagined Geographies*, the author Edward Said argues that, from a Western political and cultural position, geographies are perceived as instruments of power for controlling and subordinating areas in colonized territories. From the time of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 onwards, the newly re-emerging Hungarian-language administration needed a strategy to modernize and “Magyarize” the country, especially in border regions. The south of the country, almost completely divested of historical edifices, served as the main setting for an accelerated reshaping of urban textures. It resulted in the construction of something that had been *missing for so long* in those lands: a *national aspect of architecture*, which was now brought about in a modern way, with the use of an ‘ornamental language’. Apart from, among other measures, expanding the nationalized railway system and embarking on a wide-reaching program of building schools, modernization began to use a new tool, in the form of the constructed vernacular, the national ornamental language. This was worked out in precise detail, especially in non-Hungarian ethnic regions. The Hungarian State was determined to be omnipresent. Contradicting this political agenda, “Hungarianness” was not defined in the visual arts or in architectural terms by “official Hungary”. Institutional and educational measures were regarded as sufficient for modernization and for the process of building a nation based on common origin. Vernacular modernism in visual culture and architecture was promoted at a national level mostly by romantic patriots, artists and architects, and by influential mayors in cities and towns bordering ethnic zones. Ornamental and – as a new phenomenon – structural vernacularism began its career in the early years of the twentieth century in the two key forums for displaying state prestige: city halls, and ephemeral pavilions at international exhibitions.

The main thrust of this paper is that the reuse of certain architectural solutions, the re-exhibition of historical objects and the re-appropriation of the Hungarian peasantry’s vernacular heritage from the Millennium Exhibition of 1896 in Buda-

pest to the Universal Exhibition of 1900 in Paris represented an important shift in the attitude of the Hungarian political and intellectual elite, and a section of the general public as well. This intellectual change came to a climax in 1897–1898, when the Millennium Exhibition had closed and preparations for the Paris show were moving forward. It anticipated vernacularism in architecture, and shifted the temporal conception of official nation-building from the “past as master of the present” to the “present creating a new model for the future” by melding the notions of ‘vernacular’ and ‘modern.’ Exhibitions are made to display objects and attract visitors. The audience of the Millennium Festivities had been mainly nationals, with only negligible numbers of international visitors attending the event. The Millennium Exhibition in Budapest focused on the legitimacy of the State and involved all social classes. What was displayed and addressed at the Millennium were Hungarian citizens themselves.

The first universal exhibitions of the 1850s and 1860s had coincided with significant changes in Hungary’s political status and with the construction of its political and cultural identity. The Kingdom of Hungary was part of the Habsburg Empire until 1867, when the Compromise with Austria converted the Empire into the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy (Cartledge 2011). Hungary became one of the two political and administrative entities of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy. It was only within the legal and internationally recognized framework of the Dual Monarchy that Hungary was able to attain this relative degree of self-government. Apart from a few joint ministries (finance, foreign affairs and war), Austria and Hungary were led by separate governments under a single ruler: Emperor Franz Joseph I, based in Vienna, who was also the Apostolic King Franz Joseph, whose official seat was in Budapest. From the Hungarian historical and juridical perspective, Franz Joseph represented continuity from the medieval kings of Hungary (Unowsky 2004, 2005). (*Fig. 1*)

The gradual modernization of the Hungarian economy and its culture increased in pace after the Compromise. From this moment, one of the major aims of the Budapest-centered new national administration was to present Hungary internationally as having its own economy and culture, clearly distinct from those of Austria. The question of how to establish and promote the national culture did not end with claims for political independence. This happened to coincide with a proliferation of exhibitions in Hungary and elsewhere – either on a general theme, or with an industrial or other special profile – and an accompanying rise in their popularity. Exhibitions became major venues for propagating visions of nation-building strategies. The combination of a notable historical event with a major exhibition – whether national or international in scope – therefore proved both attractive and successful.

Starting in the 1870s, public discourse had long focused on the historical and political aspects of the Millennium Celebrations, including debates not only on the

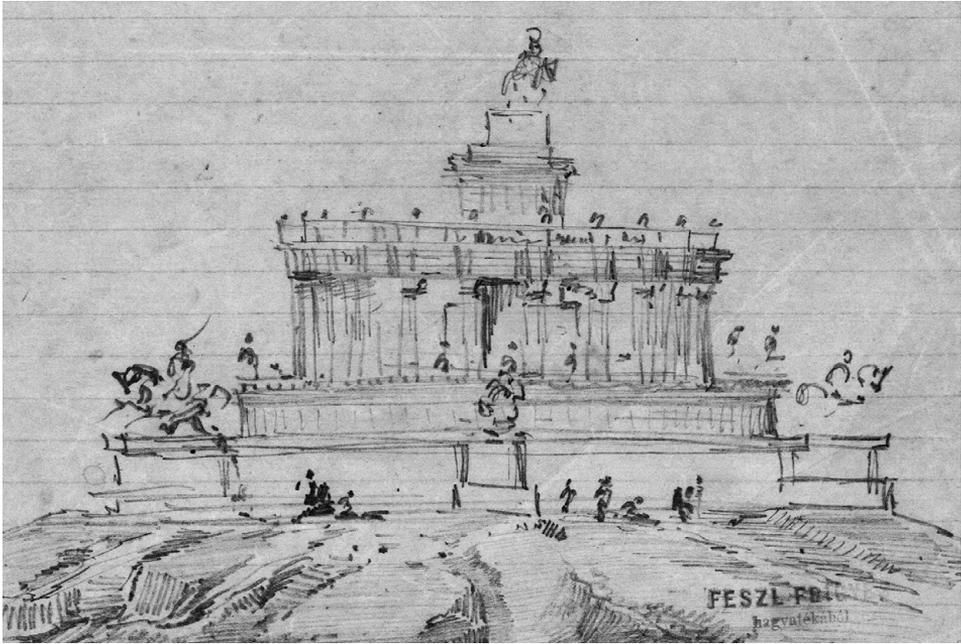


*Fig. 1. The Hungarian Csarda at the Universal Exhibition in Vienna in 1873*

nation's origins, but also on the circumstances, heroes and possible timeframe of the Conquest. Once agreement had been reached on when the Millennium would be commemorated, it became clear that the exact date of this important event was uncertain, even among contemporary historians. The arrival of the Magyars, referred to as the Hungarian Conquest, had taken place at the end of the ninth century. Determining one precise and historically justifiable moment for this crucial event was the subject of intense speculation in historiography and, due to the tensions and differences of opinion in Hungary at the time, in political circles as well. Among the many publications dealing with the issue of the Millennium, one by Szilárd Blána<sup>1</sup> was rooted in his time's popular positivist historical concept of the Millennium, as he refers to the 'thousand years of existence of the Hungarian kingdom in the year 1883' (Blána 1874: 1). (*Fig. 2*)

In June 1890, one of the key figures in the Millennium preparations, Count Jenő Zichy (1837-1906), produced a draft program for the celebrations, the printed version of which became the fundamental conceptual document for organizational matters. Soon after its publication, the idea of the Millennium bubbled into an event that aroused great national enthusiasm. Intellectuals, politicians, clergymen, noblemen

<sup>1</sup> The former army captain Szilárd Blána (1826 - ?), a political refugee who left Hungary after the 1848-1849 War of Independence, visited the 1851 Great Exhibition in London and later, as a passionate patriot, took part in the preparatory works of the Hungarian section for the 1867 exposition universelle in Paris.



*Fig. 2. Plan for the Millennium Monument by Fygyes Fesztl. 1871*

and ordinary citizens put forward their own ideas on how to commemorate this event - one thousand years since the Foundation of the Hungarian State. Zichy foresaw a major role for the exhibition itself: opened for a period of six months, the exhibition was envisioned as a framework for a variety of commemorative events to be held nationwide. The events, to mention but a few, included symbolic political acts, such as a joint jubilee session of the upper and lower chambers of Parliament, inaugurations of national monuments and public buildings, numerous national festivals, religious celebrations, a ceremonial procession in the capital representing 'the ten centuries of Hungarian history', theatre and music performances, athletics competitions, and so on. (*Fig. 3.*)

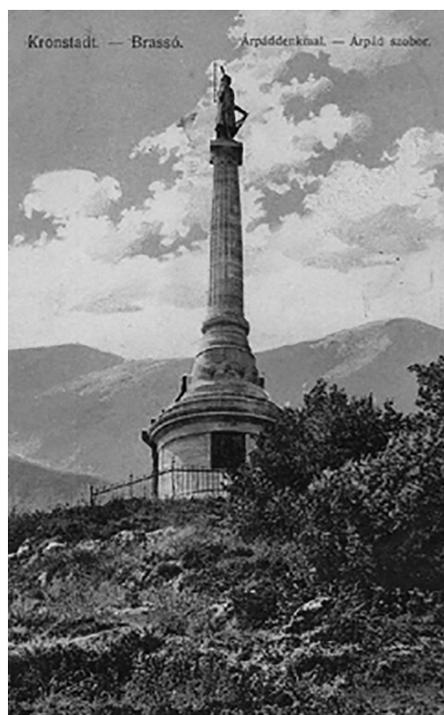
The Millennium Exhibition in Budapest, as the quintessence of the commemorative year, turned standard international practice in organizing exhibitions on its head. The exhibition not only set the timeframe of the Millennial Year, but also determined its international visibility. To hold such a large series of commemorations across the nation within a fixed period of time was rare in the international exhibition industry; exhibitions were usually concentrated in a single city, regardless of whether the theme was regional, national or international in scope.

In terms of the territorial aspect of the series of festivities, the foundation and inauguration of seven national historical monuments held prime importance: they articulated the legitimacy of the modern Hungarian State over its histor-

ical borders by commemorating the importance of the Conquest. Alongside the Conquest itself, the territorial legacy of the Hungarian State originated in the coronation of King Saint Stephen in the year 1000, with the foundation of Christian Hungary marking the beginning of a thousand years of development, as expressed by the retrospective part of the Main Historical Group. This aspect of the Millennium was mostly manifested through a number of events and the inauguration of monuments in the regions. The importance of community-based common origins in the Hungarian nation-building process irked the sensitivities of other nation-building processes in its own lands. Eventually, the loyalty of the non-Hungarian population towards the State was regarded as 'fragile' and questionable. Ethnic groups (Germans, Slovaks, Serbs and Romanians) constituted roughly 45% of the population, with low to medium level knowledge of the official language, Hungarian. The monuments were placed in zones where Hungarian and non-Hungarian linguistic communities met: one on the Serbian-Hungarian border at Zimony (today: Zemun, Serbia), near Belgrade; one in Brassó (today: Braşov, Romania) on the Hungarian-German community border, which coincided with the Hungarian-Romanian State border; one in Mount Zobor and in Dévény (today: Devín, Slovakia) near Bratislava, both at the Hungarian-Slovak ethnic and linguistic border at the former Western gate of Hungary; and one in Munkács (today: Mukacseve, Ukraine). The erection of the commemorative monuments



*Fig. 3. The Austro-Hungarian Exhibition at the Antwerp International Exhibition in 1885*



*Fig. 4. Árpád Monument in Brassó by Gyula Jankovich. Contemporary postcard, 1896*

had been initiated by Kálmán Thaly, a member of the gentrified middle classes, and the concept was a clear statement of intent against the separatism of non-Hungarian ethnic groups (Sinkó 1993: 134–136). Many of the border regions where the monuments were erected had significant populations of minorities who would have been ethnically closer to the ‘foreigners’ living in neighboring nation states. Combining the national, international and universal aspects, Zichy considered the arrival of the Magyars as an event of global significance, so a universal exhibition would provide the international framework for the commemorative festivities of the national jubilee. (*Fig. 4.*)

The Exhibition was conceived as an evocation of Hungary’s historicity as well as its modernity. The contemporary aspect of the Exhibition was encapsulated in the latest economic and cultural achievements of Hungary, displayed in the Main Contemporary Group, which consisted of, among others, industrial, ethnographic and art sections. Meanwhile, the retrospective part of the Main Historical Group, housed in a romantic pavilion composed of replicas of 22 different historic buildings, focused on historical development and culture.

The architectural competition of 1893 to design the Main Historical Group (part of the Retrospective Group) at the Millennium Exhibition resulted in 14 plans. Four

of the plans were approved by the jurors: one was Byzantine-Oriental, another Romanesque-Gothic, and there were also two neo-Gothic entrants with evident allusions to the neo-Gothic character of the Parliament building, then under construction. All four premiated architects (Ignác Alpár, Alajos Hauszmann, Ferenc Pfaff and Ottó Tándor) were invited to submit a new (second) plan, this time with one clear restriction: the new plans should be composed of *replicas* of Hungarian historic monuments, representing examples of the main stylistic periods of Western European architecture. The version that was ultimately selected, by Ignác Alpár, architect of the Byzantine-Oriental plan in the first round, centered around three main historic periods: the Romanesque, the Gothic, and the Renaissance/Baroque (covering architecture from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries). The monuments that Alpár copied stood in the western and northern parts of historic Hungary and in Transylvania, on territories under the continuous influence of Western architectural trends. Most of the 22 different historic buildings – the portal of Ják Abbey, the chapel from Csütörtökhely (today: Spišský Štvrtok, Slovakia), the main wing of Vajdahunyad Castle (today: Hunedoara, Romania), Renaissance buildings from Upper-Hungary – were copied in part or in their entirety for the Main Historical Group, while elements of the Baroque (Maria Theresa) wing reflected the architecture of Fischer von Erlach and

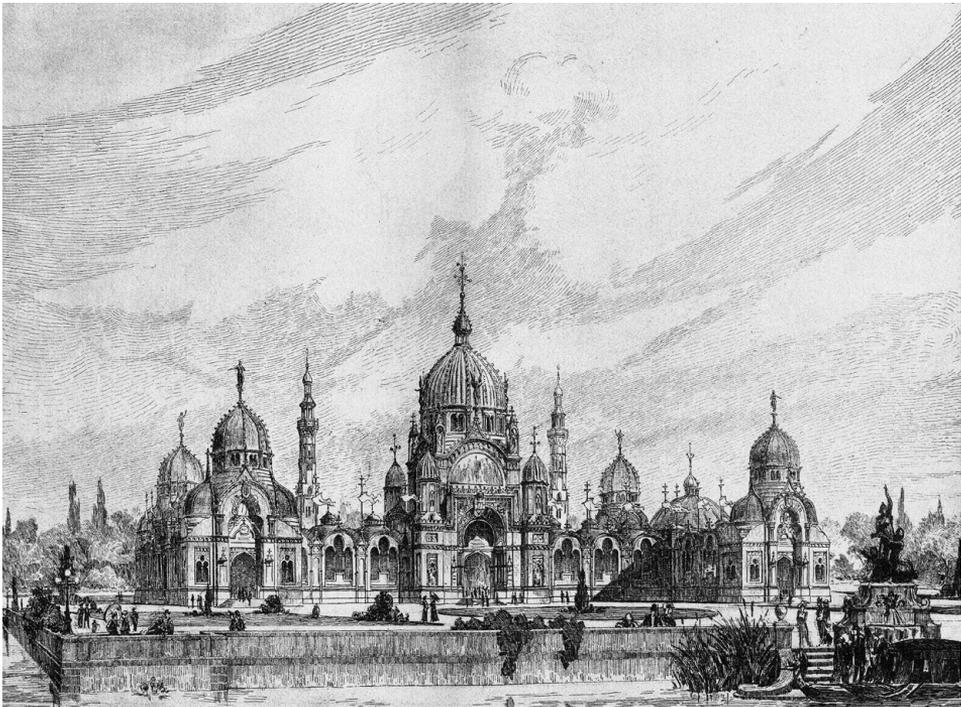


Fig 5. First (Oriental) Plan of Ignác Alpár for the Main Retrospective Group of the Millennium Exhibition. 1893



*Fig. 6. The Renaissance wing of the Main Retrospective Group of Ignác Alpár. 1896*

Lucas von Hildebrandt. The original constructions were all national monuments by that time (Lővei 2013). As exemplars of bringing together architectural motifs from diverse periods, we can point to the Bern Historical Museum or the Bavarian National Museum (Sisa 2013: 603). The interiors of the Main Historical Group displayed reconstructions of significant sites in Hungarian history, recreating a lively atmosphere in the spirit of a Western and Habsburg-oriented historiography (Sinkó 1993: 141). (*Fig. 5*)

The architectural paradigm of the pavilion complex shifted between the first drafts and the final plans from an oriental perspective to a western one, and from a medieval aspect to a modern one. The visual reference to the Baroque period was marked by neo-Baroque architecture in the style of Fischer von Erlach, previously appropriated as the ‘Austrian national style’, and felicitously coinciding with the Habsburg-oriented tone of the Millennium Festivities. The Renaissance period focused on the reign of King Matthias Hunyadi. His memory flourished after the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise in a complex and sometimes contradictory manner. The Hungarian historical narrative concentrated primarily on his role as a patron of the arts and as the first non-Italian Humanist ruler north of the Alps, in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. He served as one of the models for the new (post-Compromise) national cultural and educational policy. Matthias was also, as the last medieval Hungarian king, the link between the early period of

the Hungarian kingdom and the Habsburg dynasty's presence on the Hungarian throne. In spite of the conquest of Vienna, his role as a politician and a humanist was appreciated by mainstream Austrian historiography. The reconstruction of the Hunyadi family's famous castle in Vajdahunyad, as an architectural reference to the aristocratic Hunyadi family, also alluded to the fifteenth-century battles against the Turks and the introduction of the quattrocento to Hungary, and showed yet another instance of the attempts at modernization that were made in the course of history. Around the Millennium it served as a reference to the contemporary modernization process. (*Fig. 6*)

Alpár's architectural solution, interlinking the characteristic styles of different periods in art history, served as the framework for the (mainly ambiental) display: the reconstitution of historical interiors was an early Hungarian example of the museological concept of Alexandre Lenoir and Alexandre du Sommerard. Even though the Millennium Exhibition had been planned as a national industrial and agricultural exhibition, the retrospective aspect eventually dominated the entire display. This was true not only in the historical section, but also in the fine art exhibition at the Hall of Arts (Múcsarnok), which contained a retrospective show on Hungarian art since 1800. The historical exhibition's starting point referred to Saint Stephen's coronation as Hungary's first Christian king. The Act of Foundation, a crucial moment of the Millennium Year, framed the exhibition itself.



*Fig. 7. Detail of Interior from the Historical Exhibition, the Renaissance Wing, Exhibition of Military History*

The interiors, in the spirit of a Habsburg-oriented historiography, emphasized, in eight periods, the results of the Act of Saint Stephen and the role of the aristocracy: the continuous arc of national history.<sup>2</sup> The exhibits in the Main Retrospective Group, referring to the Western orientation and patronage of their collectors, were composed of historical objects from the collections of major Hungarian aristocratic families. The modern period also referred to an act of foundation: Franz Joseph, as the Hungarian King, was conceived as the ‘Second Founder of the State’, in other words, the founder of modern Hungary. (Fig. 7)

In terms of the appropriation of objects, and the construction of the phenomenon of the vernacular, it was in the *ethnographic village* that the concept of ‘history’ and ‘historical time’ shifted from the retrospective to the modern. A total of 25 fully outfitted peasant houses were installed (half of them Hungarian, half representing ethnic groups). As a modern overview of the country’s population, the ‘Hungarian houses’ also framed one special exhibition: the collection of recently acquired objects from the Caucasus expedition of Jenő Zichy, which were exhibited in a copy of the church of Magyarvalkó, a village in Kalotaszeg, in a predominantly Hungarian region of Transylvania. A major promoter of exhibitions in Hungary, Zichy had always emphasized the modern aspect of national exhibitions. The recently acquired Caucasian objects he displayed, however, were labeled as “ancient Hungarian”. Zichy’s first two expeditions to the Caucasus region (in 1895 and in 1896) were aimed at discovering objects – arms, clothing, and finds from excavations – that had potential connections in form, motif and/or use to ancient Hungarian artefacts dating back to the time of the Conquest (Zichy 1897, 1899). In this – also very political – act, he anticipated the vernacular modernism of the following decades, especially in the idea of the peasantry as the custodian of the lost “original” Hungarian culture (Sinkó 1993: 136–141). (Fig. 8)

After 1900, the vernacular architectural heritage, the collection of peasants’ objects as a whole, and new archeological discoveries from the early centuries of Hungarian history, all came to be considered as surviving models for the mythical past. The appropriation of the Hungarian vernacular in architecture and the applied arts had its origins in displays of modern Caucasian objects, which referred hypothetically to the lost culture of the Conquest period. Regarding the origins of Hungarians, the way the issue was discussed in the last decades of the nineteenth century is a complex question. It is important to mention that a combination of romantic patriotism and primordial convictions promoted the idea, in opposition to official

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2 The eight phase of national history : 1. From the Conquest up to the time of Saint Stephen, 2. From Saint Stephen until the end of the Árpád dynasty (1301), 3. “The golden age of Hungary” until 1526, 4. The period of the Turkish occupation, 5. The new age until the arrival of Western influences (The age of Rákóczi), 6. The age of Western Influences until the activity of István Széchenyi, 7. The age of national awakening, the revolution and the restitution of the Constitution (Compromise), 8. The newest age, under the constitution until the jubilee of the coronation of Franz Joseph.



*Fig. 8. Detail of the Ethnographic Village, House from the Hungarian Transylvanian willage of Torockó. 1896*

historiography, that the nation and its people had ‘Eastern’, that is, oriental origins. The truth, for want of reliable written sources, remains uncertain, and is thus the subject of speculation and artistic creativity. For Ödön Lechner (1845–1914) and his pupils – and also for a large section of the Hungarian intelligentsia – this idea served as the starting point for a new architectural model. Hungarian vernacular culture, as the well-spring of authenticity and as the custodian of roots stretching back to the pre-literate times of the Hungarian Conquest, was represented on one of the newly inaugurated public buildings of the capital, the Museum and School of Applied Arts. The competition to design the Museum of Applied Arts had been launched in 1891, with construction work lasting from 1893 to 1896, while approval of Lechner’s plans was granted simultaneously with an upsurge in debates on the Millennium Exhibition. The inauguration of the Museum of Applied Arts – one of the concluding moments of the Millennium Celebrations in October 1896 – heralded the dawn of a new paradigm in the quest for a modern Hungarian architecture. (*Fig. 9*)

The completion of Lechner’s Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest marked the turning point when things shifted from Alpár’s late historicist exhibition concept towards what we might call modern Hungarian national architecture. The historicizing structure of the museum, a remnant of the architect’s years as a student in France, was decorated with ceramics from the celebrated Zsolnay factory. Although



Fig. 9. Caption: Detail of the Hungarian Exhibition of Applied Art in the Universal Exhibition, Paris, 1900

the final decision to use this material was not taken until quite late on, in 1894, its deliberate use echoed the original will of the architect: Lechner's vision was to create a uniquely Hungarian *Bekleidung* on the historicizing core – reflecting broadly defined oriental origins, and the modern role of the vernacular heritage.

Hungarian installations grouped around diverse themes in the great exhibition galleries followed the architectural visions of Ödön Lechner, whose quest for a Hungarian national language in architecture was inspired by the German architect and architectural theoretician Gottfried Semper's *Bekleidungstheorie*: the use of folk patterns and motifs on facades (Sisa 2002: 128–135). Oriental elements (Chinese and Indian outside, Indian inside) were mixed with Hungarian vernacular floral decorations on the panels of the internal façade (Sisa 2013: 628–633). The application of floral ornaments from Hungarian vernacular art on innovative Zsolnay pyrogranite ensured a cheap, easy to handle, quickly reproducible, very urban and modern, yet national ornamental architectural language. The promotion of the Hungarian vernacular as a national ornamental language became a widely used tool in the nation-building strategy. The first extensive use of (floral) vernacular ornaments came four years later, at the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1900, where they formed a strong visual frame for the exhibits, linking all Hungarian sections with a uniformity of appearance.

By definition, “nations are imagined communities because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” (Anderson 1983) Reinforcement of the image of Hungarian communion required not only printed but also visual language. Benedict Anderson, in his *Imagined Communities*, articulated the importance of “print capitalism”, that is, the use of vernacular languages in printed media in order to maximize circulation. He argued that the first European nation states were consolidated around their “national print-languages”. In my view, the transformation of vernacular ornaments into a national visual language contributed greatly to the feeling of a modern, desirable, achievable political community, and therefore to the promotion of a modernized Hungary.

## THE PARIS UNIVERSAL EXHIBITION OF 1900

At the turn of the century, patterns and motifs inspired by peasant art – sourced especially from the Hungarian-speaking region of Kalotaszeg in Transylvania, the Great Hungarian Plain and the Matyó land – decorated architectural elements as a common feature in the lands of Austria-Hungary and beyond. Architectural structures and peasant art objects were no longer considered autonomous exhibits. They were reinterpreted, and served as the basis for new structures and ornaments. In political terms, this new Hungarian art and architecture reflected the current concept of Hungary as a large and powerful, modernized historic state. This ambitious new image was based on the collective memory of the political and economic power of medieval Hungary, and combined with the economic and cultural achievements the country had enjoyed since the Austro-Hungarian Compromise.

In 1900 in Paris, the location of the Hungarian historic pavilion along the *Rue des Nations* was by far the most important question, as revealed by diplomatic correspondence. Placing Hungary’s pavilion in the first, most viewed row, just by the riverbank, was intended to prove that Hungary was an ‘equal’ partner of the other great European powers. This idea concurred with the ideas of the French organizing committee, and the decision to locate the Hungarian pavilion on the Seine, between those of Great Britain and the other two joint parties of the Monarchy, was taken by the organizers in Paris prior to any Hungarian request. The final location suggested the inter-dependence of the countries of Austria-Hungary (Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Hungary) and, through the presence of the British pavilions on the other side, guaranteed the desired “proximity” to powerful European nations. In general, location was not a determiner of any particular political or economic link between neighboring national pavilions (Wesemael 2001: 398–402). The privilege of erecting pavilions along the picturesque and most attended riverside of the *Rue des Nations* was accorded to countries that were amongst the most influential in terms of historical power and current political status.

The Hungarian historical pavilion in Paris in 1900 was a reduced version of the pavilion complex at the Millennium Exhibition housing the Main Retrospective Group. It consisted of a set of 18 architectural elements from Hungarian monuments that covered the same historical and geographical timeframe as four years earlier in Budapest. The pavilion itself can be considered a scaled-down version of Alpár's architectural solution for the Main Retrospective Group from 1896. The pavilion and the installations within the exhibition galleries were designed by two of Lechner's pupils, Zoltán Bálint and Lajos Jámbor. The fourteen rooms of the pavilion held displays of historic relics. Resetting the interiors and objects from the Millennium Exhibition was more than simply a practical solution. The historic objects of the pavilion, coupled with the latest economic, industrial and cultural achievements exhibited in the galleries, reflected not the course of Hungarian history (as it had been in 1896 in Budapest), but the year of the Millennium itself as the end of a certain historical process in Hungary. It affirmed the present standing of a modern country. The fervor of the Millennium in Budapest lasted much longer than the events themselves, and led to the 'Exportation of the Millennium' to a large international audience in Paris. In essence, the Hungarian exhibit in Paris in 1900 was the 1896 Millennium itself. The features from the Museum of Applied Arts that were re-employed in the exhibition installations demonstrated Hungary's newly formulated modern language of architecture and ornamentation. Ephemeral architecture is often regarded as a chance for architects to experiment. The four designs for the Hungarian historical pavilion in Paris, dated 1897-1898, represent the first examples of the act of melding historical precedents with the architectural solutions used in the Museum of Applied Arts. Elements from iconic medieval buildings, Baroque structures, and floral panel decorations testify to the paradigm shift that was taking place in architectural thinking and the new model for a national architecture.

Exhibitions at the end of the nineteenth century, the Millennium festivities, and the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1900 fostered the emergence of a modern national architecture in Hungary. Compared with the time of the Millennium (1896), when historicism seemed to be providing an acceptable framework in which to devise a national Hungarian style, by 1902, following the paradigm of cultural modernization, the new national art was being based on a mixture of international art nouveau and vernacularism. The Millennium festivities opened the way to this new paradigm in national representation. After the Millennium celebrations, Hungary officially rejoined the series of universal exhibitions, and invested more financial, economic and intellectual resources than in previous decades. The concept for the 1896 Millennium Exhibition was transplanted to the Hungarian exhibition at the Parisian *Exposition Universelle* of 1900, but with major modifications. The installations within the immense galleries, with their distinctive, peasant-art-inspired floral decorations designed by Bálint and Jámbor, were conceived to highlight the original culture and economic strength of Hungary, a common endeavor of many European countries at the time. Alongside the economic and cultural sovereignty

exhibited in the galleries, the Hungarian historical pavilion in the *Rue des Nations* emphasized the country's officially appropriated historical narrative through a mixture of historical architectural elements – collected from half a dozen different historic monuments around the country.

At the turn of the century, the Hungarian folk art tradition was employed to serve a new paradigm, promoted as a feature of modern national art and architecture, and this became an important factor in pavilion architecture and decorative art objects (Csáki 2006). Behind this lay not only a political motive but also an important economic one: products decorated in the modern national style enhanced the country's international reputation and were successful on the market as part of a more general trend of the vernacular revival in the region. The promotion of vernacular modernism – through the interpretation of folk traditions – was based on a more organic way of conceiving national architecture and art (Stirton 2005: 166–179). Between 1906 and 1911 vernacular modernism was appropriated by the state as a way of affirming its prestige; its promotion in exhibitions was strengthened by the professionalization of the exhibition industry. Hungarian pavilions in Milan and Bucharest (both in 1906); Turin and Dresden (both in 1911) echoed this new concept (Magdó 2012; Hutvágner 2012).

The international presence of Hungarian architecture was thus ensured by its pavilions at international events. Internal architectural representation manifested itself mostly in town halls, especially across the Great Plain, where parts of the urban infrastructure only began to be modernized after 1900. The new town halls were mainly located in the Western Great Plain region, whose architecture would have been unsuitable as a source for the Main Retrospective Group, for no historic buildings had survived the Turkish Occupation between 1541 and 1686. This lack of historical national architecture was therefore converted into a new terrain for modern national architecture.

The buildings of Ödön Lechner were at the origins of a profoundly functionalist architecture (Vujnovic 2013: 32–40). Basing his designs on the necessities of modern urban life, new technical inventions and, of central importance, the possibilities opened up by the new materials of the nineteenth century, Lechner and his followers transformed town hall architecture in Hungary into a much loved and appreciated promoter of the idea of the Nation. While historicism had remained the flagship of modernization, until 1896, town halls in the 1880s had been built in a neo-Classical style. The year of the Millennium was a turning point for rival architectural styles. Great architects of previous generations, such as Mihály Pollack, József Hild and Miklós Ybl, debated the opportunities for a Hungarian national style, with arguments based on classical architecture. The new concept, on the other hand, followed the needs of modern (especially urban) lifestyles, new functions and immensely diverse modern materials.

Lechner's only town hall building in this period was the one in Kecskemét, a dynamically developing former agricultural town in the middle of the country. Kecskemét Town Hall, built between 1893 and 1896, was conceived as a blend of Hungarian folk art traditions and historicist architecture. The town hall was built using the historical architectural language, with the addition of the vernacular decorative system. As a reminder of Lechner's study years in France, the voluminous mass of this explicitly Hungarian town hall building represented the heritage of French Renaissance architecture. Architectural vernacularism was added in the Hungarian folk art motifs placed as ornaments on the facades. While structural vernacularism did not play a role in the 1890s, architectural modernism was expressed in the use of faience decorations on facades, while the bright, colorful aspect of the building represented modern urban features. Modernism and national peculiarities coincided in technical terms, with folk art patterns in the recently (re-)invented pyrogranite (faience) pieces produced in the Zsolnay factory in Pécs. The commission in Kecskemét was followed by other town hall competitions in the rapidly developing central and southern parts of Hungary, in Kiskunhalas (1905), Kiskunfélegyháza and Szabadka (now: Subotica) (both in 1906). Unlike the Kecskemét building, these new edifices were built in line with the modern Hungarian architectural language. These buildings comprise a clearly identifiable group of town halls belonging to the trend of the so-called Alföld (Great-Plain) Secession.

## CONCLUSION

Thanks to Ödön Lechner and his followers, the understanding of the 'Hungarian vernacular' changed dramatically between 1891 and 1898. The presence of vernacular culture in the "village of nationalities" at the Millennium Exhibition, especially the houses related to Hungarian ethnic minorities, portrayed the peasantry as the genuine custodians of Hungary's authentic national cultural heritage. The use of vernacular ornamental language in the Hungarian exhibition installations in the Parisian galleries in 1900 became the promoter of modernity; the floral decoration on the installations in all parts of the Hungarian exhibition group, as a distinctive visual frame, sustained the image of modern Hungary: its latest products of industry and agriculture, and its recent achievements in education, culture and the arts. Both historicism and vernacularism offered modern visual solutions for nation-building strategies. They were indeed linked to different social classes. The gentry and the bourgeoisie made up a heterogeneous class composed of middle-aristocrats, foreign immigrants and assimilated Jews, who promoted essentially vernacular modernist thinking, while 'official Hungary', led mainly by upper-aristocrats, promoted historicist tendencies with a clear visual reference to their own historical traditions and significance. Although it appeared impossible to construct common origins after 1900, in Smithian terms, ornamental vernacu-

larism was intended to offer a chance for both emancipation and modernization, and these self-reflecting modern ephemeral constructions expressed the vision of Hungary as a modern country, built around a common culture.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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- Fig 5.** First (Oriental) Plan of Ignác Alpár for the Main Retrospective Group of the Millennium Exhibition. 1893. Source: Építő Ipar , XVII. 1893. Nr. 30. p. 53.
- Fig. 6.** The Renaissance wing of the Main Retrospective Group of Ignác Alpár. 1896. Source: Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library, Budapest Department of Photography. Author unknown. Inv. Nr. 021689
- Fig. 7.** Detail of Interior from the Historical Exhibition, the Renaissance Wing, Exhibition of Military History. Source: Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library, Budapest Department of Photography. Photo by Antal Weimwurn. Inv. Nr. 001598
- Fig. 8.** Detail of the Ethnographic Village, Church Village. Source: Metropolitan Szabó Ervin Library. Budapest Department of Photography. Author unknown. Inv. Nr. 080034
- Fig. 9.** Caption: Detail of the Hungarian Exhibition of Applied Art in the Universal Exhibition, Paris, 1900. Info: Detail of the Hungarian Exhibition of Applied Art in the Universal Exhibition, Paris, 1900. Installations by Zoltán Bálint and Lajos Jámbor. Archives of the Hungarian Museum of Applied Arts, FLT. 5025.

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