



**Diacronie**

Studi di Storia Contemporanea

**61, 1/2025**

**Memory, Perception and Politics of Empire Today**

---

## Let the squares speak: a comparative case of Taksim Meydanı (Taksim Square) and Szabadság tér (Liberty Square) in the interwar period in terms of continuity and rupture with the imperial past

**Veysel Can KARAKAŞ**

---

**Per citare questo articolo:**

KARAKAŞ, Veysel Can, «Let the squares speak: a comparative case of Taksim Meydanı (Taksim Square) and Szabadság tér (Liberty Square) in the interwar period in terms of continuity and rupture with the imperial past», *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea*, 61, 1/2025, 29/3/2025,

URL: < [http://www.studistorici.com/2025/03/29/karakas\\_numero\\_61/](http://www.studistorici.com/2025/03/29/karakas_numero_61/) >

---

**Diacronie Studi di Storia Contemporanea** → <http://www.diacronie.it>

ISSN 2038-0925

Rivista storica online. Uscita trimestrale.

[redazione.diacronie@studistorici.com](mailto:redazione.diacronie@studistorici.com)

**Comitato scientifico:** Naor Ben-Yehoyada – João Fábio Bertonha – Christopher Denis-Delacour – Tiago Luís Gil – Jean-Paul Pellegrinetti – Mateus Henrique de Faria Pereira – Spyridon Ploumidis – Andreza Santos Cruz Maynard – Wilko Graf Von Hardenberg

**Comitato di direzione:** Roberta Biasillo – Deborah Paci – Mariangela Palmieri – Matteo Tomasoni

**Comitato editoriale:** Valentina Ciciliot – Alice Ciulla – Federico Creatini – Gabriele Montalbano – Çiğdem Oğuz – Elisa Rossi – Giovanni Savino – Gianluca Scroccu – Elisa Tizzoni – Francesca Zantedeschi

**Segreteria di redazione:** Jacopo Bassi – Luca Bufarale – Fausto Pietrancosta



**Diritti:** gli articoli di *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea* sono pubblicati sotto licenza Creative Commons 4.0. Possono essere riprodotti e modificati a patto di indicare eventuali modifiche dei contenuti, di riconoscere la paternità dell'opera e di condividerla allo stesso modo. La citazione di estratti è comunque sempre autorizzata, nei limiti previsti dalla legge.

---

## 2/ Let the squares speak: a comparative case of Taksim Meydanı (Taksim Square) and Szabadság tér (Liberty Square) in the interwar period in terms of continuity and rupture with the imperial past

Veysel Can KARAKAŞ

---

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper compares the Republic of Turkey and the Kingdom of Hungary, two nation-states founded after respectively the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922) and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867-1918) collapsed, sets a striking example of opposite historical perceptions of imperial pasts during the interwar period. While Turkey, under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), rejected the imperial heritage for the modern secular state and the nationalization of history against the minorities, Hungary, under Miklós Horthy (1868-1957) did not only embrace its imperial past, but also strived to resurrect the Kingdom of Hungary (1001-1541) that had lost its sovereignty to the Ottomans. These opposite political motivations became evident through the public squares, both in the way of carving them in stone with monuments, and political gatherings performed by political power and the citizens. Taksim Meydanı (Istanbul, 1928) was constructed from scratch, and everything about it represented a rupture from the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, Szabadság tér (Budapest, 1897), was inherited from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and shows continuity with the Hungarian imperial past, as a space of Hungarian irredentism.*

\*\*\*

**ABSTRACT:** *In questo saggio si propone un confronto tra la Repubblica di Turchia e il Regno d'Ungheria, due Stati nazionali fondati dopo il crollo rispettivamente dell'Impero Ottomano (1299-1922) e della Monarchia Austro-Ungarica (1867-1918). Questi due casi offrono due esempi significativi di percezioni storiche opposte del passato imperiale durante il periodo interbellico. Mentre la Turchia, guidata da Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), rifiutava l'eredità imperiale a favore di un moderno stato laico e dei processi di nazionalizzazione contro le minoranze; l'Ungheria, guidata da Miklós Horthy (1868-1957), non solo abbracciava il proprio passato imperiale, ma si proponeva anche di far risorgere il Regno d'Ungheria (1001-1541), che aveva perso la propria sovranità a causa degli Ottomani. Queste opposte traiettorie politiche si materializzano nelle piazze, sia nella realizzazione dei monumenti che nell'uso dello spazio per incontri politici tra autorità e cittadini. Taksim Meydanı (Istanbul, 1928) fu costruita da zero con l'intento di esprimere una rottura con l'impero ottomano. Al contrario, lo stato ungherese ereditò Szabadság tér (Budapest, 1897) dalla monarchia austro-ungarica e porta i segni della continuità con il passato imperiale ungherese come spazio dell'irredentismo ungherese.*

---

## 1. Introduction

This paper explores the connection between the creation of public squares and the continuity-rupture dialectic of nation-states with their imperial pasts. Throughout history, ruling elites have

tended to create spaces according to their ideological preferences. As part of this act, political power has, since antiquity, (re)created public spaces in order to (re)produce its ideological, economic and social bases. Based on this, the present research focuses on the ideological and symbolic production of two squares in the interwar period under authoritarian regimes, taking into consideration their different approaches to their imperial pasts.

Comparing the Republic of Turkey and the Kingdom of Hungary, two nation-states founded after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922) and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867-1918), provides a striking example of opposite historical perceptions of imperial pasts during the interwar period. While Turkey, under the authoritarian leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), rejected its imperial past in the name of modern secular state while establishing a nation-state with Turkification policies against the minorities; Hungary, under the authoritarian leadership of Miklós Horthy (1868-1957) did not only embrace its imperial past, but also in many ways strived to resurrect the Kingdom of Hungary (1001-1541) that had lost its sovereignty to the Ottoman Empire.

These opposite political motivations became evident through the public squares, both in the way of carving them in stone with monuments, and political gatherings performed by political power and the citizens. Taksim Meydanı/Taksim Square (Istanbul, 1928) was constructed from scratch and; moreover everything about it represented a total rupture from the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, Szabadság tér/Liberty Square (Budapest, 1897), was inherited from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and represented continuity with the Hungarian imperial past, as a space of Hungarian irredentism. This paper presents the history of both squares through newspaper articles, maps and secondary literature, using comparative historical analysis as a methodology to analyze the squares in terms of the continuity-rupture dialectic of imperial pasts. Comparative historical analysis, as an acknowledged historical methodology, was introduced and encouraged mainly in the 1920s, in order to overcome destructive effects of solely national history<sup>1</sup>. Henri Pirenne, one of the initiators of comparative history, pointed out this destruction as follows in 1923:

During the course of the war, the belligerents requisitioned two sciences most: history and chemistry. The latter supplied them explosives and gas, the former one pretexts, justifications and excuses. These were, however, of a quite different stock. The necessity imposed on chemistry did not contradict the nature of this science: precious discoveries could be made while serving the army. History, on the other hand, lost two of its essential elements when jumping into the arena too often: criticism and impartiality<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> HAUPT, Heinz-Gerhard, s.v. «Comparative History», in WRIGHT, James D. (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 4, Amsterdam, Elsevier, 2015, pp. 405-410.

<sup>2</sup> PIRENNE, Henri, *On the Comparative Method in History*, in TRENCSÉNYI, Balázs, IORDACHI, Constantin, APOR, Péter (eds.), *The Rise of Comparative History*. Budapest, CEU Press, 2021, pp. 65-76, p. 70.

This paper employs a comparative historical analysis to elucidate the differences and similarities between the selected cases in Hungary and Turkey; however it also does not neglect the role of cultural transfer processes in this context. Although the two countries appear to be independent and isolated entities in terms of the creation of public spaces in the interwar period, it is still possible to locate some interactions and cultural transfers between the two countries, which will be detailed in the following sections. Furthermore, the creation of public spaces adorned with statues of national historical figures or national heroes also has a global historical context. «Statuomania» became widespread first in Germany at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was circulated in other parts of Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>, after the secularization and democratization of politics and after the church was eliminated and «kings were beheaded». The main motivation of serial statue erection was controlling and manipulating the ideas of “masses”, especially lower classes who demanded equal access to politics and elect their own representatives<sup>4</sup>.

Returning to methodology, it is crucial to demonstrate how the comparative historical method works. How does it select its units for comparison? Asking in a colloquial manner, how does it avoid comparing apples to oranges? Marc Bloch tries to answer this as follows:

First, what do we mean in our field of study by comparison? No doubt about it, we mean this: to choose from one or several social situations, two or more phenomena which appear at first sight to offer such certain analogies between them: then to trace their line of evolution, to note the likeness and differences, and as far as possible explain them. Thus, two conditions are necessary to make comparison, historically speaking, possible: there must be a certain similarity between the facts observed – an obvious point – and a certain dissimilarity between the situations in which they have arisen<sup>5</sup>.

In the above-mentioned quotation, Bloch defines how comparative historical research works. In order to employ the comparative method, two conditions must be met: 1) «certain similarity between the facts»; 2) «a certain dissimilarity in which they have arisen». If the cases of this paper are examined in light of Bloch’s definitions:

1) Although Turkish and Hungarian nation-building processes do not match chronologically, the founding of the Republic of Turkey and the Kingdom of Hungary (1920-1944) as independent

---

<sup>3</sup> VARGA, Bálint, *The Monumental Nation*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2016, pp. 26-49.

<sup>4</sup> HOBBSAWM, Eric, *Introduction: Inventing Traditions*, in HOBBSAWM, Eric, RANGER, Terrence, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 1-14.

<sup>5</sup> BLOCH, Marc, *A Contribution Towards a Comparative History of European Societies*, in TRENCSENYI, Balázs, IORDACHI, Constantin, APOR, Péter (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 89-124, p. 92.

nation-states almost overlapped. Before World War I, both Hungarians and Turks were significant elements of multi-ethnic empires (the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, respectively). Both empires were among the defeated powers of World War I and after the war, first in 1918-1920, an independent Hungarian nation-state, and then in 1919-1923 an independent Turkish nation-state was formed and founded. From the very beginning of the founding of these two states, political life was imbued with personal cults (Miklós Horthy in Hungary, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, who had been military leaders originally).

Moreover, in the period between 1920 and 1944, both states were ruled by single political parties (Unity Party – Egységspárt– or National Unity Party – Nemzeti Egység Pártja– which became the Party of Hungarian Life – Magyar Élet Pártja – in 1939 in Hungary<sup>6</sup>; and the Republican People’s Party – Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi/CHP – in Turkey). Even though there were more than one political parties in Hungarian political life in the interwar period, conservatives (Unity Party/National Unity Party/Party of Hungarian Life) ruled the country by means of a significantly restricted electoral system and Horthy appointed prime ministers among the members of the conservative party<sup>7</sup>. In the same way, Atatürk and after his death, İsmet İnönü (1884-1973) appointed prime ministers from the Republican People’s Party (CHP) in Turkey, the only political party that participated in the elections during this period<sup>8</sup>.

These two authoritarian political regimes (re)created their own spaces, including public squares: Szabadság Square and Taksim Square. These two acts provide a «certain similarity» in the sense of being produced by two authoritarian regimes in the interwar period.

2) These two public squares were products of the political atmosphere of the time and they reflect the selective memory of the authoritarian regimes towards their imperial pasts. This very phenomenon, detailed in the following sections, presents the «certain dissimilarity», between the cases of this paper and provides a ground for historical comparative analysis.

Since the paper compares the squares in terms of continuity and rupture with the imperial pasts, rather than focusing on their political-economic dimension or daily usage, it will only mention some examples of their role in public life. The main questions of the paper are as follows: 1) What insights can be gained from a comparative historical analysis of Taksim Square and Szabadság Square regarding the vision of the political regimes of Hungary and Turkey in the interwar period, particularly in terms of continuity and rupture with their imperial pasts? 2) What can the

---

<sup>6</sup> ROMSICS Ignác, *Hungary, in the Twentieth Century*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 1999, p. 183.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 183-191.

<sup>8</sup> KOÇAK, Cemil, *Tek Parti Yönetimi, Kemalizm ve Şeflik Sistemi: Ebedi Şef/Milli Şef [Single Party Governance, Kemalism and The System of Chiefdom: Immortal Chief/National Chief]*, in TANIL, Bora, GÜLTEKİNLİGİL, Murat (ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce: Kemalizm [Political Thought in Modern Turkey: Kemalism]*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2009, pp. 119-121.

creation/re-creation of Szabadság Square and Taksim Square tell us about the tendencies of the political regimes of the era in Hungary and Turkey?

## 2. A Total Rupture from the Imperial Past: The Creation of Taksim Meydanı (Taksim Square)

Taksim Square, one of the comparative cases of this study, will be examined here in terms of both its physical and symbolical properties. Although the space was perceived as a square only after August 8, 1928 with the unveiling of the Taksim Republican Monument<sup>9</sup>, the history of the region (surroundings of the monument's location) stretches back to the Ottoman Empire. Etymologically the name of Taksim originates from the verb of «taksim etmek», meaning «distributing» or «dividing» in Ottoman Turkish. The name comes from a water distribution system which was established in the area by Sultan Mahmud I in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first building of the area came into existence for this purpose in 1732: a water reservoir, built in the classical Ottoman architectural style which was drastically different from the Frankish and Levant architecture, the dominant style in the neighboring region, Pera<sup>10</sup>. Pera, the district that eventually gave birth to Taksim, was predominantly inhabited by Europeans and the non-Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire, including Greeks, Armenians and Jews<sup>11</sup>. Not only the architecture, but also the lifestyle, daily habits and the products that can be found in the region were significantly different than the other parts of Istanbul. Taksim and its neighborhood, Pera and Galata, has always been the Western face of the city. Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682), the most famous Ottoman traveler of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, repeatedly mentioned about this non-Islamic lifestyle of Pera and Galata, which he deemed “sinful”<sup>12</sup>. As a matter of fact, non-Islamic lifestyle did not change in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as Arus Yumul puts it into the words as follows: «Istanbul's Pera, ‘the Frankish town’ as it was designated, was a meeting point for strangers in the late nineteenth century, a suburb of difference and diversity, and a heterogeneous public space of multiplicity where a society of strangers came together».<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> ÇELEBİ, Mevlüt, *Taksim Cumhuriyet Anıtı [Taksim Republican Monument]*, Ankara, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, 2006, pp. 99-124.

<sup>10</sup> GÜLER, Çelik, s.v. «Taksim Meydanı» [«Taksim Square»], in AKBAYAR, Nuri, *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi From Past to Today Istanbul Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, İstanbul, Kültür Bakanlığı ve Tarih Vakfı, 1994, p. 198.

<sup>11</sup> ÇELİK, Zeynep, *The Remaking of Istanbul*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993, pp.29-35.

<sup>12</sup> ÇELEBİ, Evliya, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi: İstanbul Cilt-1 [Travel Book of Evliya Çelebi: İstanbul vol. 1]*, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008, pp. 387-395.

<sup>13</sup> YUMUL, Arus, «“A Prostitute Lodging in the Bosom of Turkishness”: Istanbul's Pera and its Representation», in *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 30, 1/2009, pp. 57-72, p. 58.

Therefore, the image of the district was not a positive one in the eyes of many Turkish/Muslim intellectuals before and during the interwar period<sup>14</sup>.

The second landmark building defining Taksim was Topçu Kışlası/Taksim Kışlası (Artillery Barracks/Taksim Barracks) erected in a vacant area, in 1806, on the edge of a graveyard<sup>15</sup>. These two buildings (the water reservoir and the military barracks) were important monumental buildings which provided the northern and southern borders of the future Taksim Square. Moreover, in terms of the physical expansion of the city, these two buildings marked the northern border of the urban area of the city for quite long time and even in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were only few urban settlements more northern than them.

In the late Ottoman period, Taksim was not considered a square in the conventional sense, but rather an open-air space. Nonetheless, the fate of the space changed dramatically under the new regime of the new state. The secular, modernist bureaucracy of the recently founded Turkey came up with the idea to turn the open-air space into a landmark space which would represent the new values and ideals of the new regime against the old symbolism of the capital city of the Ottoman Empire.

The story of Taksim and Istanbul in the post-Ottoman times begins when the decision was made that Istanbul should no longer serve as the capital of the country on October 13, 1923. Due to the fact that Istanbul was seen as the supporter of the “ancien regime”, it was punished by the leaders of the Turkish nationalist movement who fought the war against Greek armies and founded a new form of state after revolting against the Ottoman dynasty.

On the one hand, the decision of moving the capital from Istanbul to Ankara was symbolically important and considered as a rupture between the new Republic and the “ancient” Empire and on the other hand, Ankara, the headquarters of the Turkish nationalist army during the Turkish Independence War (Turkish-Greco Wars), represented a new and fresh start for the new state<sup>16</sup>.

Apart from that, the leader of the movement, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk, after 1934) did not even set foot in Istanbul for four years (1923-1927) after the foundation of the new state –even though in 1924, he crossed the Bosphorus on a ship. It was his despise towards the elites of Istanbul, those who had collaborated with the occupying forces of the city (The British, French and Italian forces) between 1920 and 1923, in order to keep their positions in the “old order”, that played a crucial role in his decision<sup>17</sup>.

Nevertheless, the new bureaucrats of the city, appointed by the government in Ankara, strived to gain the leader’s trust. One of the milestones of the rehabilitation process of

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem, passim.*

<sup>15</sup> CEZAR, Mustafa, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul [Istanbul, the Capital City of Ottomans]*, İstanbul, Erol Aksoy Kültür, Eğitim, Spor ve Sağlık Vakfı Yayınları, 2002, p. 480.

<sup>16</sup> TEKİNER, Aylin, *Atatürk Heykelleri [The Statues of Atatürk]*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2010, p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 71-72.

Istanbul's image in the eyes of Mustafa Kemal was erecting his statues in Istanbul. Particularly, Emin (Erkul) Bey (1881-1964), the mayor of Istanbul between 1924 and 1926, was decisive for making Istanbul the first ever city that erects a statue of Atatürk<sup>18</sup>. Emin Bey was a visionary administrator who had been to Europe and was deeply impressed by the statues of Budapest in particular:

In the following months of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, for the first time of my life I had been to Europe, and had attended the Medical Congress in Budapest. In those fifteen days I had been in Budapest, it was the beauty and height of the bridges on the Danube River and the statues in Budapest that attracted my attention the most. Although I went to Vienna, Berlin and Hamburg and later to other European cities and to USA, the statues I saw in those cities never could make me forget the statues of Budapest which had been engraved on my mind and I was inspired to have those kinds of artworks in my country too<sup>19</sup>.

The idea of the ruling elites for turning Budapest into a city with statues had been imported from German and Austrian practices. In an anecdote related by the German emperor Wilhelm II (who ruled between 1888 and 1918), it is recorded that upon his visit to Budapest in 1897, he found the city to be aesthetically pleasing, yet lacking in statues<sup>20</sup>. In his country, the series of erecting public statues had already begun a century ago. In Germany, statuomania started with the erection of statues of kings or generals before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and went on with the statues of national poets and writers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>21</sup>. Eric Hobsbawm draws our attention to serial statue erecting - especially between 1870 and 1914 - as a widespread phenomenon in Europe. Along with primary education and public ceremonies, «the mass production of public statues» was heavily employed by the European ruling elites in order to create false sympathy and hijack the real problems of the “masses”, or lower classes, e.g. universal suffrage, who became enthusiastic to enter politics<sup>22</sup>.

Although public statues were visible in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire as part of the modernization process of the empire, they were subject to certain limitations. Due to religious

---

<sup>18</sup> DERE, Umut, «Cumhuriyetin İlk Yıllarında Eski Başkentte Yeni Rejimin İlk Sembolü: Sarayburnu Atatürk Heykeli» [«The First Symbol of the New Regime in the Old Capital City during the First Years of the Republic: Sarayburnu Atatürk Statue»], in *Atatürk Yolu Dergisi* [*The Journal of Atatürk's Way*], 67, 2/2020, pp. 117-142, p. 125.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> LIBER, Endre, *Budapest Szobrai és Emléktáblái* [*The Statues and Plaques of Budapest*], vol. 1, Budapest Székesfőváros Statisztikai Hivatala, 1934, pp. 223-224.

<sup>21</sup> MOSSE, L., George, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich*, New York, New American Library Press, 1975, p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> HOBBSAWM, Eric, J., *Mass Producing Traditions: Europe: 1870-1914*, in HOBBSAWM, Eric, RANGER, Terence, (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 263-307.



reasons, these statues were never depicted in anthropomorphous manners<sup>23</sup>. The only exception was Egypt where the statuomania process developed under the direct control of Western powers<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, being aware of exploiting visual arts for the sake of secularism and spreading the new values of the recently founded Republic in a predominantly illiterate society<sup>25</sup>, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) delivered a speech in 1923 about the importance of erecting statues as follow:

When our prophet told his people the laws of God, those people had idols both in their hearts and in their brains. To draw these people to the way of God, he first had to break those stone idols and remove them both from their hearts and their pockets... Thus, it dishonors Islam to assume that enlightened people are going to believe in idols again. Our enlightened and devout nation will improve the art of sculpting – which is one of the main signs of cultural progress – to its highest point; and every corner of our country will speak out the deeds and memories of our ancestors and descendants to the entire world through these magnificent statues<sup>26</sup>.

Guided by Mustafa Kemal's enthusiasm, Emin Bey, as the mayor of the city, erected a statue portraying the leader. In doing so, he made Istanbul the first city in the whole country to boast a statue of Mustafa Kemal – preceding even the new capital. Nevertheless, his master plan was to design a square dedicated to the new Republic<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, he decided to transform the open space of Taksim into a square which would include another statue of Mustafa Kemal<sup>28</sup>. In time, the idea of having a solo statue of Mustafa Kemal evolved into erecting a monument advertising the republican values after a mutual agreement reached between the sculptor, Pietro Canonica (1869-1959), and the monument committee which was established in 1926<sup>29</sup>.

The unveiling ceremony of the Taksim Republican Monument took place on August 8, 1928 with the presence of a crowd, ca. 30.000 people (**Fig. 1**). The ceremony commenced with the national anthem and proceeded with the delivery of speeches by prominent political figures and well-known individuals on a stage situated adjacent to the monument.<sup>30</sup> These speeches provide valuable

---

<sup>23</sup> GÜR, Faik, «Sculpting the nation in early republican Turkey», in *Historical Research*, 86, 232, 2013, pp. 342-372.

<sup>24</sup> KREISER, Klaus, «Public Monuments in Turkey and Egypt 1860-1916», in *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World*, XIV, 1997, pp. 103-117.

<sup>25</sup> ACUNER, A. Münir. «Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Okur-Yazarlık» [«Literacy in Republic of Turkey»], in *Uludağ Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakülteleri Dergisi Cilt* [Education Faculties Journal of Uludağ University], V, 2/1990, pp. 161-167, p. 162.

<sup>26</sup> GÜR, Faik, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

<sup>27</sup> ÇELEBİ, Mevlüt, *Taksim Cumhuriyet Anıtı*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> ÇELEBİ, Mevlüt, s.v. «Taksim Cumhuriyet Anıtı» [«Taksim Republican Monument»], in *Atatürk Ansiklopedisi* [Encyclopedia of Atatürk], URL: < <https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/taksim-cumhuriyet-aniti/> > [accessed 2 april 2024].

<sup>30</sup> ÇELEBİ, Mevlüt, *Taksim Cumhuriyet Anıtı*, cit., pp. 99-124.

insights into the ruling elite's motivation for selecting the space to erect the monument and create the square.



**Fig. 1.** The Opening Ceremony of the Taksim Republican Monument on August 8, 1928.

Source: Servet-i Fünun Dergisi, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons,

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5f/1928\\_08\\_16\\_Serveti\\_Funun\\_Taksim\\_Meydani\\_Heykeli.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5f/1928_08_16_Serveti_Funun_Taksim_Meydani_Heykeli.jpg)

The first speaker was the chief of The Commission of Taksim Monument, Istanbul parliamentary Hakkı Şinasi Pasha:

Hey, the most downtrodden square of Turkish Istanbul by the enemy soldiers!... Hey the square underwent a long and painful suffering period! It was you that deserved to carry this monument which depicts the history of salvation and rising with the greatest symbols; therefore we erected it in the middle of you...<sup>31</sup>

Due to his professional positions, being chief of the monument committee on top of his membership of national parliament, Hakkı Şinasi Pasha was someone who closely worked with Mustafa Kemal. In other words, his ideas and descriptions are rather important to grasp the symbolic meaning of the square and the monument. While he was mentioning the open, vacant space as a square retrospectively, he emphasized the concentrated presence of the soldiers of the

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 113.

Allies in and around Taksim, implying implicit collaboration of soldiers with the non-Muslim, non-Turk population of the region. In the same speech, he hinted on how the rupture from the Ottoman past was materialized in the monument as follows:

Up there [on the monument] on the one side, a desperate woman who cries for the tragedy of the homeland under a veil that captures and prisons her gender by the ignorant traditions, expresses grievance, whereas on the other side, a new Turkish woman whose veil fell apart by the prosperous wind of the great revolution, and on whose free face the joy of freedom and national independence can be found, contaminates her warm happiness to others<sup>32</sup>.

Hakkı Şinasi Pasha mentioned the difference between the medals stamped on the Western and Eastern sides of the monument. While the portrait that depicts the crying woman, installed on the Eastern side of the monument, represents the Ottoman Empire, the laughing and happy one, installed on the Western side, represents the Republic of Turkey<sup>33</sup>. It is interesting to see how the rupture from the Ottoman past and disclamation of the heritage left by the empire past was defined through women's bodies for the sake of secularism. This is a striking example of the secular modernist interpretation of gender issues among the Turkish ruling elites of the era. While establishing patterns and roles for women in the country, they effectively prevented them from pursuing independent political initiatives, including the forming political parties<sup>34</sup>.

The Republican Monument (see. **Fig. 2**) has four sides, each depicting different scenes from the history of the new young Republic. The northern side of the monument (seen on the upper right side of **Fig. 2**) portrays the Greco-Turkish Wars, with Mustafa Kemal dressed in military uniform, leading the other figures, who symbolically represent the nation, against Greek armies when the last phase of the attack took place on August 26, 1922. It had been rumored that Canonica sculpted this very scene using a journalist's photo taken during the Battle of Dumlupınar.<sup>35</sup> The other figures seen on the north side of the monument are soldiers or ordinary people who fought in or helped the Turkish army.<sup>36</sup>

The southern side of the monument, (seen on the upper left of the **Fig. 2**), represents a different phase of national history. This time, Mustafa Kemal is not depicted in military uniform but in a modern civilian outfit, in the act of addressing an imaginary crowd as the head of the recently founded new state. He has two important figures of the Greco-Turkish Wars neighboring him each

---

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 115.

<sup>33</sup> TEKİNER, Aylin, «Heykel [Statue]», in *100 Sene 100 Nesne [100 Years 100 Objects]*, URL: < <https://100sene100nesne.com/heykel/> > [13 april 2024].

<sup>34</sup> SANCAR, Serpil, *Türk Modernleşmesinin Cinsiyeti [Gender of the Turkish Modernization]*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2012, pp. 163-168.

<sup>35</sup> TEKİNER, Aylin, *Atatürk Heykelleri [The Statues of Atatürk]*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2010, pp. 104-105.

<sup>36</sup> GÜR, Faik, *op.cit.*, p. 368.

sides: İsmet İnönü the Prime Minister of the time and another important military leader of the Turkish army, Marshall Fevzi Çakmak.



Fig. 2. Taksim Republican Monument.

Source: Author's own images.

Moreover, there are two soldiers sculpted behind the first row: General Mihail Vasilyeviç and Marshall Kliment Yefremoviç, the generals of the Red Army, who were included in the monument

as a result of the direct intervention of Mustafa Kemal<sup>37</sup>, for the financial support from the Soviet Union to aid Turkish nationalists during the Greco-Turkish Wars<sup>38</sup>. In fact, as some research shows, around 10% of the war expenditure of the Turkish army against the Greek army was provided by the Soviet Union<sup>39</sup>. Apart from that, the figures that are not depicted in the military uniforms in the southern side of the monument were sculpted in Western-style outfits, such as suits, jackets, ties, providing another departure from tradition, in this case, from ethnic, Ottoman-style clothing<sup>40</sup>.

In the Western and the Eastern sides of the monument, (seen on the down-left and down-right sides of the Fig-2), two Turkish soldiers are depicted one each side holding flags. One of them holds the flag in the peace position, while the other one holds the flag in war position<sup>41</sup>.

Taksim Square hosted many events, demonstrations and gatherings throughout the 1930s. First and foremost, the square was chosen as one of the official ceremonial meeting points for the National Days by the ruling elite. Any official ceremonies taking place at the square started or ended with laying a wreath at the Taksim Republican Monument. Soldiers were an inevitable part of these ceremonies. In addition to the ceremonies directly organized by the governments of the era, the square also served as a venue for citizen gatherings, demonstrations, protests and commemorations. The primary motivations behind these events were both associated with the values of the recently established regime, principles of the nascent republic, and the promotion of policies aimed at fostering Turkish nationalism and Turkification. Taksim and the neighboring area (Pera, Galata or Beyoğlu) was still the odd one out in «Turkish Istanbul», as Hakkı Şinasi Pasha phrased in his speech. According to the countrywide census carried out in 1927, the non-Muslim population (Greeks, Jews, Catholics and other sects of Christians) constituted 51% of the region<sup>42</sup>. Moreover, the local businesses were predominantly run by either non-Muslim/non-Turkish population or foreign companies having names and shop signs in foreign languages which were despised by radical Turkish nationalists who had formed different organizations in the name of promoting the Turkification of the population.

On February 25, 1933, radical Turkish nationalist students gathered in Taksim and paid a visit to the Taksim Republican Monument carrying Turkish national flags chanting the following slogan: «Turkish language must be sovereign in Turkey»<sup>43</sup>. Their most significant campaign at the time was

<sup>37</sup> TEKİNER, Aylin, *Atatürk Heykelleri*, cit., p. 98.

<sup>38</sup> GÜR, Faik, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

<sup>39</sup> BORATAV, Korkut, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi (1908-2009) [The Economic History of Turkey (1908-1922)]*, Ankara, İmge Yayınevi, 2016, p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> TEKİNER, Aylin, *Atatürk Heykelleri*, cit., pp. 104-106.

<sup>41</sup> ÇELEBİ, Mevlüt, *Taksim Cumhuriyet Anıtı*, cit., p. 153.

<sup>42</sup> İNALCIK, Halil, s.v.«Galata», in *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi [Turkish Religious Foundation Islam Encyclopedia]*, URL: < <https://istanbultarihi.ist/4-galata> > [accessed 14 may 2024].

<sup>43</sup> «Gençler Şirketin Camlarını Kırdılar» [«The Youth Broke the Windows of the Company»], in *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi [Cumhuriyet Newspaper]*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1933, p. 1.

called «Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş (Citizen, Speak Turkish)»<sup>44</sup> and they seized the opportunity for performing their xenophobic campaign<sup>45</sup> on the streets after an incident that was reported in the newspapers: a Turkish employee was compelled to speak French, instead of Turkish, by his Italian supervisor in his workplace (Wagon Lits, a French railway company) and the conflict between them resulted in Turkish employee's 15-day-suspension fine<sup>46</sup>. Leaving the monument, students continued to protest by throwing stones multiple offices of Wagon Lits around Taksim, and demolished one of the offices completely. Although the events could also be viewed as an anti-colonialist reaction against an unfair manager who reminded the city's inhabitants of the humiliation of the occupation times, it was certainly an important milestone in the history of the Turkification of Pera and Taksim.

The peak point of the gatherings at the square and around the monument was November 13, 1938, three days after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's death. According to one of the most read newspapers tens of thousands of citizens rushed to the Taksim Republican Monument and the square was jam-packed with citizens. Emotional speeches were delivered, as people at the square swore an oath to protect the values of the republic at any cost<sup>47</sup>.

The new regime initiated the construction of numerous public squares in various urban centres across Turkey during the interwar period. However, none of them, with the exception of Zafer (Victory) Square in Ankara, could become as significant as Taksim Square in the interwar period. Furthermore, Taksim Square was constructed as the landmark open-air space of the new regime in Istanbul, unlike the squares in the city which were handed down to the Republic from the Empire, such as Sultanahmet Square and Beyazıt Square. While Beyazıt Square was identified with its landmark building, Beyazıt Mosque, built in honor of Sultan Beyazıt II in 1506,<sup>48</sup> Sultanahmet Square (also known as Hippodrome Square in Constantinople) had long been regarded as the symbolic center of the city, and was identified with the Ottoman Empire in the eyes of the new regime. In addition, both squares were situated on the historical peninsula, between the Golden Horn and the Sea of Marmara, where tradition and the eastern aspect of the city were represented<sup>49</sup>.

---

<sup>44</sup> A campaign, created by radical Turkish nationalist students in 1928, targeted primarily the minorities in the country as a part of Turkification. The campaign was created for promotion of Turkish language usage, however in practice it turned into an aggressively assimilation crusade. For further reading, see: GALANTİ, Avram, *Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş! [Speak Turkish, Citizen!]*, Ankara, Kebikeç Yayınları, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> ÜLKER, Erol, *Nationalism, Religion and Minorities from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey*, in DALLE MULLE, Emanuel, RODOGNO, Davide, BIELING, Mona, (eds.), *Sovereignty, Nationalism, and the Quest for Homogeneity in Interwar Europe*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2023, pp. 61-82, p. 75.

<sup>46</sup> «Gençlerin Heyecan ve İnfialine Sebep olan Hadise Nedir?» [«What did cause this emotion and indignation among the youth?»], in *Milliyet Gazetesi [Milliyet Newspaper]*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1933, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> NADİ, Nadir, «En Büyük Eseri» [«His Greatest Masterpiece»], in *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi [Cumhuriyet Newspaper]*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 1938, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> GÜLERSOY, Çelik, *Taksim: Bir Meydanın Hikayesi [Taksim: Story of a Square]*, İstanbul, İstanbul Kitaplığı, 1986, pp. 23-27.

<sup>49</sup> GÜR, Berrin F., *Arşivsel Mekan: Sultanahmet Meydanı ve Yakın Çevresi [Archival Space: Sultanahmet Square and*

In this context, Taksim Square was constructed as a new public space in the “Western” part of Istanbul, representing a break with the imperial past and a component of the Turkification process that occurred during the interwar period.

### 3. Resurrection of the Imperial Past: Redesigning Szabadság tér (The Liberty Square)

The story of the Szabadság tér (Liberty Square) starts with the construction of the Újépület/Neugebaeude (New Building), military barracks, built by the order of Habsburg emperor Joseph II (who ruled between 1765-1790), in 1786<sup>50</sup>. This massive building marked the northern edge of the city of Pest of the time, before it became a part of Budapest by uniting with other cities, Buda and Óbuda in 1873. However, the building had always negative connotations in the Hungarian collective memory. The reason for this negative association was not only its existence as a representation of the Habsburg monarchy, but also a tragic event that took place in the courtyard of the same building in 1849. Following of the suppression of Hungarian Freedom War (1848-1849) against the Habsburg Empire, the building was used as a prison for Hungarian freedom fighters, including Lajos Batthyány, the Prime Minister of the «Szabadságharc» (Freedom War), who were executed in the courtyard of the New Building. The building which evoked horrific memories was demolished in 1897 by the Hungarian authorities and instead a square was constructed named after the Freedom War as Szabadság Square<sup>51</sup>, whereas the streets arriving to the square were named after the generals of the War<sup>52</sup>.

A significant transformation in the political structure of the Habsburg Empire occurred between 1849 and 1897. In 1867, two distinct political entities, having their own constitutions, were created in the empire: Austria and Hungary<sup>53</sup>. It was the new order, materialized under the name of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, enabled Hungarian ruling elite to gain authority over the city of Budapest as well as some of the territories occupied by Ottoman Empire, including Transylvania<sup>54</sup>. This shift in the Empire’s political organization provided the rationale for the Hungarian authorities to

---

*the Surroundings*], in ALTAN ERGUT, Elvan, İMAMOĞLU, Bilge (eds.), *Cumhuriyetin Mekanları, Zamanları, İnsanları* [*The Spaces, Times and People of the Republic*], Ankara, Dipnot Yayınları, 2010, pp. 69-80.

<sup>50</sup> S.v. «Újépület» [«New Building»], in KOROKNAY, István, PUTNOKY, Istvánné, SOLT, Pál, SÜLE, Jenő, SZTANKÓCZY, György, ZSILINSZKY, Sándor (eds.), *Budapest Lexicon*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1973, pp. 1210-1211.

<sup>51</sup> LÁSZLÓ, Gerő, s.v. «Szabadság Tér» [«Libert Sqaure»], in TÓTH, Endréné (ed.), *Budapest Enciklopédia* [*Encyclopedia of Budapes*], Budapest, Corvina Kiadó, 1982, p. 357.

<sup>52</sup> BUZINKAY, Géza, *Budapest Képes Története* [*Illustrated History of Budapest*], Budapest, Corvina Kiadó, 1998, p. 101.

<sup>53</sup> MOLNÁR, Miklós, *A Concise History of Hungary*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 208-212.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 208-209.

demolish a structure erected by the Habsburg Emperor and construct a square commemorating their uprising against the Habsburgs.

The intention to demolish the New Building was already evident in Hungarian public opinion in 1867. However, it took considerable time to decide how to use the site, and what to replace the building with<sup>55</sup>. In the end, an agreement was reached to create a square with a green field. But why exactly a green square? In order to answer this question, the demolition of the New Building should not be considered only as an act of erasing the traces of the unpleasant past, but also as an act of city redevelopment, which was one of the most significant projects in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century - the century defined the contemporary appearance of Budapest<sup>56</sup>.

In her work, Luca Csepely-Knorr demonstrates that since the city of Pest (Budapest, after 1873) was suffering from the lack of public parks and green fields in the city during the 18<sup>th</sup> and in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>57</sup>, there had been an ongoing debate among urban planners and architects about creating more green fields in the city center in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century via the impact of Count István Széchenyi (1791-1861) who understood the social role of public spaces for the society<sup>58</sup>. Influential leader on the Hungarian political and social life, Széchenyi was propagating for more green areas in the city and moreover, he managed to create one next to the New Building already in 1845<sup>59</sup>. As Csepely-Knorr remarked, the new trend of moving the green spaces from the outskirts of the cities into the city centers in Budapest was also influenced by the urban development that took places in Berlin, Paris and Vienna<sup>60</sup>. Although her work is poor in showing the connection between political leaders' social projects and their wish for assimilating lower classes into bourgeois values, it reflects an important aspect of constructing squares in the center of the city: having more simple green spaces. Until the rule of Miklós Horthy, Szabadság Square remained as a green square with symbolic references to the Hungarian Freedom War; however, the square gained its further meaning in 1921 when the first irredentist statues were erected on it.

When Horthy entered Budapest in November 1919 as the leader of the National Army, the counter-revolutionary movement, consisted of nationalists and conservatives who would govern the country from that time on to 1944<sup>61</sup>, he declared the city sinful («bűnös város») for its support to revolutionary movements: first the liberal democratic revolution in 1918 under Mihály Károlyi's

---

<sup>55</sup> SIKLÓSSY, László, *Hogyan Épült Budapest? [How Was Budapest Built?]*, Budapest, Fővárosi Közmunkák Tanácsa, 1931, pp. 266-267.

<sup>56</sup> CSEPELY-KNORR, Luca, *Barren Places to Public Spaces: A History of Public Park Design in Budapest 1867-1914*, Budapest, BFL, 2016, p. 103.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 27.

<sup>61</sup> ROMSICS, Ignác, *op. cit.*, p. 129.



leadership and then the working class revolution under Béla Kun's leadership in the Spring of 1919<sup>62</sup>. In his memoirs, Horthy defined Budapest as follows:

When we were still far distant, when our hope of returning to this poor, ill-fated city, arms in hand, was the merest glimmer, we cursed and hated her, for from afar we saw only the mire into which she had sunk and not the persecution and martyrdom which our Hungarian brethren were suffering. The Hungarian nation has ever loved and admired Budapest, this city which, in recent months, has been its degradation. Here, on the banks of the Danube, I arraign her. This city has disowned her thousand years of tradition, she has dragged the Holy Crown and the national colors in the dust, she has clothed herself in red rags...<sup>63</sup>

His speech emphasized tradition over revolutionary ideologies and praised the imperial past and its symbols while despising socialist ideology for its anti-imperial, anti-traditional and anti-hierarchical stance. Thus, Budapest had to be redesigned according to the ideological orientation of the new political regime. Moreover, there was no room for those who did not act in line with this ideology.

One of the most important aspects of redesigning the city was erecting public monuments and creating memorial plaques of the national heroes. In 24 years, between 1920 and 1944, all in all, 256 statues, busts and memorial plaques were created for the public spaces of Budapest. This number was very high compared to the nearly 200 public statues, busts and memorial plaques created for the city's public places in 228 years, between 1692 and 1920, in the public spaces of the city<sup>64</sup>. Although, there were many religious ones among the 256 public statues erected in the Horthy era, the hegemonic theme was «hósi emlék/monument of heroes», the statues dedicated to the Hungarian warriors who fought in World War I, providing a deep contrast with the antiwar policies and agitations of the revolutionary regimes of 1918 and 1919.

The most significant political agenda of the Horthy era was the revision of the Treaty of Trianon, signed in 1920, which dismembered two thirds of the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, both in terms of land and population. It was not only «the most important aim» of the foreign policy in the interwar period<sup>65</sup>, but anti-Trianon sentiments were also propagated in daily-life practices, from primary schools to radios, in the speeches of politicians and public spaces<sup>66</sup>. Revisionist policies went hand in hand with irredentism and found their correspondence in the

---

<sup>62</sup> PRITZ, Pál, *A Trianoni Magyarország Képes Története [The Illustrated History of Trianon Hungary]*, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 2020, p. 64.

<sup>63</sup> HORTHY, Miklós, *Memoirs*, Safety Harbor (FL), Simon Publications, 2000, p. 124.

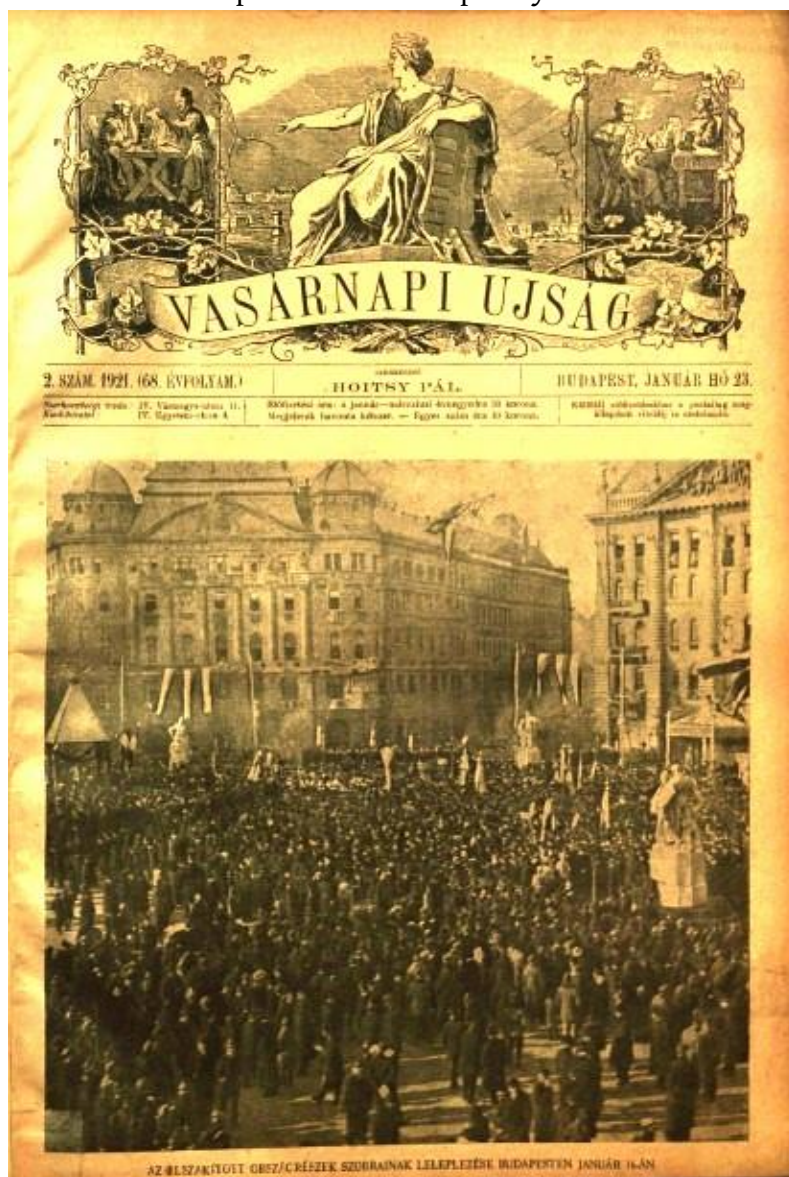
<sup>64</sup> SZÖLLŐSSY, Ágnes, SZILÁGY, András, HADHÁZY, Levente, *Budapest Közteri Szobrai 1692-1945 [The Public Statues of Budapest 1692-1945]*, Budapest, Budapest Galéria Kiállítóháza, 1987.

<sup>65</sup> HORTHY, Miklós, *Memoirs*, cit., p. 321.

<sup>66</sup> ZEIDLER, Miklós, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary, 1920-1945*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007, pp. 2, 41-63.

narration of historical Hungary, referring to the imperial past. For this reason, the Hungarian revisionism and irredentism, carried out by the counterrevolutionary political right, desired the full recovery of the lands of historical «Szent István birodalom/Saint Stephen Kingdom» using the slogans such as «mindent vissza/everything back», instead of focusing solely on regaining the lands inhabited by the Hungarian population<sup>67</sup>. And the irredentist, revisionist political agenda was materialized in the Szabadság Square, as an «irredenta skanzen/open-air-museum of irredentism»<sup>68</sup>.

The first attempt to create an explicitly irredentist memorial came from K. Róbert Kertész, a



member of the Council of Ministry of Culture in 1920. The exact reason for selecting this site for irredentist statues is not known, however, according to Miklós Zeidler, Szabadság Square's «central location, beauty, representative significance» played a crucial role in this decision<sup>69</sup>. The unveiling ceremony of the statues took place on January 16, 1921 with the participation of fifty thousand people (see. Fig. 3)<sup>70</sup>.

**Fig. 3.** The unveiling ceremony of the four irredentist statues at the Szabadság tér (Liberty Square).

Source: Arcanum Newspapers: *Vasárnapi Ujság* [Sunday Newspaper], January 23, 1921, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 70–74.

<sup>68</sup> PÓTÓ, János, *Az Emlékeztetés helyei: Emlékművek és politika* [Places of Remembrance: Monuments and Politics], Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2003, p. 61.

<sup>69</sup> ZEIDLER, Miklós, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary, 1920–1945*, cit., p. 189.

<sup>70</sup> «Négy Szobor: Az irredenta emlékművek leleplezése» [«Four Statues: The Unveiling of the Irredentist Monument»], in *Pesti Hírlap* [Newspaper of Pest], 18<sup>th</sup> January 1921, p. 2.

The statue group (see. **Fig. 4**), consisted of four different pieces, the North (ÉSZAK), the South (DÉL), the West (NYUGAT) and the East (KELET), each symbolizing the lost territories of the Hungarian part of the Monarchy. In the statue named ÉSZAK (the North, seen up left), sculpted by Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl (1884-1975), the crucified woman figure symbolizes Hungary and the small child who hugs the woman (the motherland) tightly, symbolizes Slovaks, imagined as loyal people to the motherland; whereas the man with the sword in his hand represents the Hungarian freedom fighter («kuruc») who defends the motherland and Slovaks, a reference to the war fought for the freedom of the Hungarians against the Habsburgs, between 1703 and 1711<sup>71</sup>.

In the statue named DÉL (the South, seen up right), sculpted by István Szentgyörgyi (1881-1938) a Hungarian man is defending a Schwab/German woman with his sword and his shield which has a Hungarian coat of arms on it; and the wheat stands in front of the male figure symbolizes the two cities that belonged to the pre-Trianon Hungary: Bácska (Batschka) and Bánság (Banat)<sup>72</sup>.

In the statue named NYUGAT (the West, seen down left), sculpted by Ferenc Sidló (1882-1954) the young man represents the separated parts of the West of the pre-Trianon Hungary and is depicted on the ground while holding onto symbols of the Hungarian Kingdom, such as the Hungarian coat of arms, the holy crown and the double-cross; while a Hungarian fighter, with the bird «Turul» (a legendary figure in Hungarian migration mythology) at the side, is ready to fight against the fate that has befallen them at the hands of Western countries<sup>73</sup>.

In the statue named as KELET (the East, seen down right), sculpted by János Pásztor (1881-1945), another fallen figure is liberated by a Székely chieftain Csaba (a legendary figure of Hungarian national myths), representing the salvation of Erdély (Transylvania)<sup>74</sup>.

In the unveiling ceremony, the members of parliament, jurists, academicians and university students were present<sup>75</sup>. However, politicians were not among the speakers of the event, for Hungary was not ready to follow an openly revisionist and irredentist foreign policy in the international arena yet. This political position would change in 1927 after a series of international developments<sup>76</sup>.

---

<sup>71</sup> LIBER, Endre, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 310.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 310.

<sup>74</sup> ZEIDLER, Miklós, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary, 1920-1945*, cit., p. 190.

<sup>75</sup> LIBER, Endre, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>76</sup> ZEIDLER, Miklós, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary, 1920-1945*, cit., p. 191.



**Fig. 4.** Irredentist Statues at Szabadság Square.  
Source: Fortepan / Kelecsényi Kristóf [April 27, 2024].

The developments encouraging Hungary to propagate the revision of the Treaty of Trianon also paved the way for more irredentist monuments in the country, this time with more explicit connections between the imperial past, revisionism and Horthy. The great example of these

onuments was the National Banner with Relics (see. **Fig. 5**), erected at Szabadság Square on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1928, the anniversary of the day dedicated to Szent István (Saint Stephen), the founder of the historical Kingdom of Hungary (1001-1541)<sup>77</sup>.



**Fig. 5.** The National Banners with Relics Monument (Az Erekllys Országzászló).

Source: Fortepan / Pálincás Zsolt [April 28, 2024].

However, the date was not the only reference to the imperial past; the facade of the monument was decorated with the coat of arms of Hungarian kings and the following text: «Our country, Greater Hungary, is the country of the Carpathians. Founded by Prince Árpád, it will survive until the end of the world»<sup>78</sup>. The emphasis on the Hungarian migration myth was related to endeavors of proving the claim of the hegemony of the Hungarians over the other nations residing in the Carpathian Basin. In connection with this line of thought, the other side of the monument reads: «The foundation of our greatness is deposited in the greatness of our past».<sup>79</sup> More to the point, the international developments which encouraged Horthy and his conservative government to pursue an irredentist political agenda found their places on the monument. On the pedestal of the monument two marble plates could be read: «Hungary's Place in the Sun», an article written in 1927

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>78</sup> PÓTÓ, János, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>79</sup> LIBER, Endre, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

by Lord Rothermere (1868-1940), an English journalist supporting Hungary's irredentist claims in the international arena, and «I Trattati di pace non sono eterni/The peace treaties are not eternal», a declaration by Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) just two and half months before the unveiling ceremony of the monument<sup>80</sup>.

As seen above in the photo of the monument, the Hungarian flag flying at half-mast represented the mourning over lost territories. On top of the flagpole, a «silver hand modeled after Horthy's hand» was placed representing the «revisionist oath»<sup>81</sup>. At the end of the unveiling ceremony of the monument, the crowd took an oath altogether as follows: «There will be no rest until we regain the realms of Saint Stephen, until this flag flies up on full mast! God, help us!»<sup>82</sup>.



Fig. 6. «A Trianoni virágágy», the flower bed depicting Greater Hungary with «Hiszekegy».

Source: Fortepan / Archiv für Zeitgeschichte ETH Zürich / Agnes Hirschi.

In the same year, between the group of irredentist statues (The North, The South, The East, the West) and the National Banner with Relics, «A Trianoni virágágy», a flower bed depicting the map of the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and post-Trianon Hungary with flowers, was installed at the Szabadság Square<sup>83</sup>. «A Trianoni virágágy» (see. Fig. 6) was ornamented with the lines of «Hiszekegy», a revisionist oath which could be heard in any school or any irredentist gathering:

<sup>80</sup> ZEIDLER, Miklós, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary, 1920-1945*, cit., p. 193.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 193.

<sup>82</sup> PÓTÓ, János, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 55.

Hiszek egy Istenben/I believe in one God  
 Hiszek egy Házában/I believe in one homeland  
 Hiszek egy isteni örök igazságban/I believe in one divine eternal justice  
 Hiszek Magyarország feltámadásában/I believe in the resurrection of Hungary.

In 1932 another statue («Magyar Fájdalom/Hungarian Suffering») was added to the collection of irredentist statues of Szabadság Square. It portrayed a naked woman symbolizing Hungary, depicted as desperate and crying with an inscription that reads: «This statue represents the tearful suffering Hungary crying over the fate of her children torn away by the Treaty of Trianon...»<sup>84</sup>.

Irredentist memorials were not only erected at Szabadság Square, but also in other open-air spaces of the city, including the suburban areas<sup>85</sup>, as well as, and in many Hungarian cities and towns, such as Sátoraljaújhely, Szolnok, Balassagyarmat, Székesfehérvár, Pécs, Szeged, Balatonfüred and so on. In the squares of these towns National Banners with Relics or flower beds depicting the map of Greater Hungary appeared to protest Trianon<sup>86</sup>. However, none of these squares could become such a symbolic space of irredentism as Szabadság Square, the «irredentist and counterrevolutionary pantheon» as Miklós Zeidler terms it, did<sup>87</sup>. Moreover, not only the symbolic and visual investments, but also the irredentist gatherings and celebrations that took place before or after the territorial expansion of Hungary between 1938 and 1941<sup>88</sup>, turned the square into an irredentist pantheon. Even Lord Rothermere attended to one of these irredentist rallies, along with thousands of citizens (see. Fig. 7) on November 10, 1938<sup>89</sup>, eight days after the announcement of the First Vienna Award which enabled Horthy's Hungary to recover the south parts of Czechoslovakia.

---

<sup>84</sup> ZEIDLER, Miklós, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary, 1920-1945*, cit., p. 194.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 198.

<sup>86</sup> STEINER, Józsefné, *A Trianoni Békeszerződés és Követközményei a Két Világháború Között [The Treaty of Trianon and its Consequences Between the Two World Wars]*, URL: < <http://www.mvkkvar.hu/kiallitas/trianonkiallitas/indul.php> > [accessed 1 may 2024].

<sup>87</sup> ZEIDLER, Miklós, *Ideas on Territorial Revision in Hungary, 1920-1945*, cit., p. 195.

<sup>88</sup> KOC SIS, Lajos, *Országzászlók a Trianoni Magyarországon (1928-1938) [National Banners in post-Trianon Hungary (1928-1938)]*, Tokaj, Magyar a Magyarért Alapítvány, 2020, pp. 46-59.

<sup>89</sup> «Rothermere lord ünneplése az Országzászlónál» [«Lord Rothermere is at the National Banner»], in *Budapesti Hírlap*, 11 November 1938, p. 4.



Fig. 7. The irredentist rally taking place at Szabadság tér in 1938.

Source: Fortepan / Bojár Sándor.

Finally, although Szabadság Square was one of numerous public spaces constructed during the Horthy era, it underwent a process of symbolic investment that elevated it to a position of considerable importance. While «Hősök tere/the Heroes' Square», planned and substantially built in the pre-World War I era, remained the most significant and symbolic open-air space of the



country, Szabadság Square, also was inherited from the Monarchy era, was transformed into the landmark public square of the Horthy era.

## 4. Conclusion

In this paper, the dialectic of rupture and continuity with the imperial past was studied in a comparative way through the histories of two squares. As demonstrated above, Taksim Square and Szabadság Square were among the most significant public spaces which reflected the spirit of their age perfectly. After their (re)creation, they did not only represent political power, but were also used heavily by the citizens for collective political purposes which turned them into landmark spaces of their eras. The findings of this research can be summarized as follows:

1) Taksim Square, in the interwar period, represented a rupture from the imperial past via its symbolical investments, ranging from anthropomorphous statues to secular messages conveyed by the monument, whereas Szabadság Square, inherited from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, was redesigned as a space that, figuratively speaking, resurrected the imperial past through propagating revisionism and irredentism while referring to the “imperial rights” of the past. Although Turkish nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk carried out revisionist policies between 1919 and 1923, this revisionism did not have a vision to recover the borders of pre World War I Ottoman Empire<sup>90</sup>. On the other hand, when this narrow revisionism clashed with the claims of different nations living in Anatolia, the new regime chose to repress these claims<sup>91</sup> and/or carry out Turkification policies<sup>92</sup>.

2) Taksim Square and Szabadság Square were the social engineering projects exercised by the authoritarian regimes where their values and future expectations were represented. Nevertheless, apart from the general messages and values that they were propagating, these symbolic spaces carried some local messages to Istanbul and Budapest. In the case of Istanbul, the target of these messages was not only the elite of the city who supported the monarchy against the republic, but also the minorities. In the case of Budapest, the sinful city («bűnös város») as defined by Horthy, the target was whoever refused to comply with the policies of counterrevolutionary right. The irredentist policies of the political right of the era represented a significant continuity with the imperial past, yet they also constituted a stark contrast to the anti-war and anti-imperial policies

---

<sup>90</sup> ORAN, Baskın, *Türk Dış Politikası 1919-1980 [Turkish Foreign Policy 1919-1980]*, Istanbul, İletişim Yayınevi, 2009, pp. 46-48.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 266.

<sup>92</sup> The new values of the new political regime went hand in hand with the harsh Turkification policies which had an impact on the Kurdish population of the new state and other minorities. See: ÜLKER, Erol, *Nationalism, Religion and Minorities from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey*, in DALLE MULLE, Emanuel, RODOGNO, Davide, BIELING, Mona (eds.), *Sovereignty, Nationalism, and the Quest for Homogeneity in Interwar Europe*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, pp. 61-82.

of the revolutionary powers that governed the city between 1918 and 1919. These squares were (re)designed as the counter spaces against the opponents of the two political regimes. They were also part of the general atmosphere of the countries where they existed. On the one hand, the nationalist atmosphere and the collective action created around Taksim Square and its symbolism, as a part of wider Turkification policies, posed a constant threat over the minorities of the region. And on the other hand, the irredentist and revisionist symbolism around Szabadság Square caused many traumas such as, entering the war as a result of revisionist foreign policy and intensive discrimination against the Jewish population of the country.

Finally, as an epilogue, if we have a look at the present situations of the squares, what can we gather related to this paper? The irredentist statues at Szabadság Square were demolished in 1945 by the order of Zoltán Vas (1903-1983), the mayor of Budapest of the time, following the arrival of Soviet army and changing political atmosphere. The city did not only remove the irredentist monuments from the square which symbolized the revisionist foreign policies, but also, in the same year, erected a monument dedicated to the Soviet soldiers who fought and fell during the removal of the Nazi soldiers and Hungarian collaborators from the power and the country<sup>93</sup>. During the socialist period between 1947 and 1989, the square was overshadowed by the Heroes' Square (Hősök tere) where almost all the official ceremonies were held. The Soviet Heroic Monument (Szovjet hősi emlékmű) is still present today at the Szabadság Square; representing Hungary's dramatic shifting towards the Eastern Bloc after World War II. Nevertheless, in 2011, a statue of Ronald Reagan was erected at the square<sup>94</sup>, which arguably fails to achieve a sense of equilibrium with the gigantic Soviet Heroic Monument. However, it does serve to diminish the symbolic significance of the latter by referencing a political figure with opposing ideologies. Today, the square is used as a space for social and cultural activities for the city dwellers, while the only reminders of the interwar period at the square the statue of Harry Bandholtz, re-erected in 1989<sup>95</sup>, and a controversial Holocaust monument erected in 2014.

On the other hand, Taksim Square, witnessing the largest civil disobedience actions (Gezi Protests) in the Republic of Turkey's history in 2013, became one of the most significant battlefields between the political power (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/AKP – Justice and Development Party) and the public opposition. During World War II years, the Taksim Artillery Barracks which had been used as a football pitch in the interwar period was demolished and on the same spot a park was installed as a recreation space: Gezi Park. In the 1950s, the radical nationalist collective action around the square and the district reached its zenith on September 6-7, 1955, when

---

<sup>93</sup> PÓTÓ, János, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-56.

<sup>94</sup> Ronald Reagan Szobor (Statue of Ronald Reagan), URL: < <https://www.kozterkep.hu/15259/ronald-reagan> > [accessed 1 may 2024].

<sup>95</sup> Bandholtz tábornok (General Bondholtz), URL: < <https://www.kozterkep.hu/2726/bandholtz-tabornok> > [accessed 1 may 2024].

a pogrom was perpetrated against Turkish citizens of Greek, Armenian and Jewish origin. However, in the 1960s and especially in the 70s the political activism around the square changed its character from radical nationalist tendencies to leftist/socialist tendencies. Although military coup overshadowed any political opposition all through 1980s, Taksim Square remained the center of political opposition up until AKP came to power in 2002. In 2013, Erdoğan decided to reconstruct the Taksim Artillery Barracks in a shopping mall form as a part of his master plan for Taksim Square, including a mosque and demolishing the Atatürk Kültür Merkezi (Atatürk Cultural Center). His plan for the reconstruction of the Barracks, which involved the erection of a shopping mall, already had neo-Ottomanist connotations. This was due to the fact that the Taksim Military Barracks had been the stronghold of the counter-revolutionary uprising against the 1908 Revolution, which toppled Abdülhamid II and was the first step towards the establishment of the Republican regime. In this context, it is evident that Erdoğan's aspiration for a continuity with the imperial past is easily perceived. However, his master plan had some further meanings as well, such as, removing a green field from the city center and capitalizing it, conquering the square from the social movements (especially from political left). Yet, when the first trees were uprooted at the edge of the park, this plan was met with a huge resistance by the city dwellers which even triggered countrywide uprising against Erdoğan's authoritarian governance<sup>96</sup>. The square became a symbolic space against Erdoğan's authoritarian regime and today still represents a battlefield between opposition and political power. While any political gatherings are strictly forbidden at the square and in the park by the political power, the oppositional institutions and public figures still strive for developing anti-government projects around the park and the square.

---

<sup>96</sup> BATUMAN, Bülent, *op. cit.*, 891-899.

## THE AUTHOR

**Veysel Can KARAKAŞ** studied Political Science (BA) at Istanbul University and graduated from Political Science and International Relations (MA) program at Yıldız Technical University. He is currently a PhD Candidate at Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem (ELTE) at Atelier-Interdisciplinary History program. His main interests are political, social and economic history, political ideologies, social movements, social and political history of Hungary and Turkey, comparative/international/transnational/global history, nationalism, political and symbolic usage of space.

URL: < <https://www.studistorici.com/progett/autori/#Karakas> >