



Visual Resources

an international journal on images and their uses

ISSN: 0197-3762 (Print) 1477-2809 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gvir20>

Displaying the Periphery: The Upper-Hungarian Museum and the Politics of Regional Museums in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

Nóra Veszprémi

To cite this article: Nóra Veszprémi (2019) Displaying the Periphery: The Upper-Hungarian Museum and the Politics of Regional Museums in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, *Visual Resources*, 35:3-4, 266-294, DOI: [10.1080/01973762.2018.1483309](https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.2018.1483309)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.2018.1483309>



Published online: 02 Jul 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 99




View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Displaying the Periphery: The Upper-Hungarian Museum and the Politics of Regional Museums in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

Nóra Veszprémi 

The Upper-Hungarian Museum of Kassa/Kaschau/Košice was established in 1872 as one of the many ambitious but severely underfunded regional museums coming into being in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This article examines how the museum negotiated the delicate balance between maintaining good relations with the capital, necessary for the sake of survival, and following its own local agenda. It discusses the history of the institution in the context of the complex political and administrative structure of Austria-Hungary, as an example of the dynamics between the Monarchy's "centers" and "peripheries." After 1867, Hungary's governments took the course of centralization, curtailing the political agency of the counties, while increasingly forcing non-Hungarian speakers in multi-ethnic regions such as Upper Hungary to adopt the Hungarian language. The article examines the museum's place in these processes, arguing that, rather than simply disseminating the narratives of the center, the museum conceptualized its own role in a more autonomous and multi-faceted way. Finally, it seeks to use the museum as an example of the "periphery" as an autonomous entity, and to question the usefulness of a simple binary of center and periphery in researching Austro-Hungarian culture.

Keywords: *Periphery; Museums; Collecting; Austria-Hungary; Hungary; Nineteenth Century; Nationalism*

Introduction

1872 was an exciting year in the intellectual life of Kassa, a town in Northern Hungary (today Košice, Slovakia).¹ In 1871, a group of local schoolteachers and artists had endeavored to establish a museum. Supported by Kassa landowners, clerics, and the city council, they had founded the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association, and – having gained exhibition space from the municipality and submitted the necessary paperwork to the Ministry of Culture – they were now building a collection. By February 1874 the museum owned more than 14,000 objects, thanks to generous donations from the Kassa public and to research trips and archaeological expeditions undertaken in the region.²

Rummaging through attics and derelict mansions on one of these trips, Béla Klimkovics, one of the museum's founders, came upon three interesting seventeenth-century finds: a large oil painting depicting the city of Buda – now part of Budapest – and two engravings showing the 1686 recapture of Buda Castle by the Habsburg

armies from the Ottoman Turks. Although the objects were found in the region, their subject matter pertained to the capital of the country, and Klimkovics decided to donate them to the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest instead of keeping them for the local museum. While the decision was logical, there was more to it than the different subject coverages of the two institutions. Klimkovics's aim was to "help dispel worries that the Upper-Hungarian Museum would work to the detriment of the National one."³

There was a power dynamic at play here, and the Upper-Hungarian Museum was not the one holding the power. Several Budapest personalities, including Ágoston Trefort, Minister of Religion and Education, and Ferenc Pulszky, director of the Hungarian National Museum and National Chief Inspector of Museums and Libraries, possessed the authority to hinder the establishment of the museum in Kassa if they were not convinced of its usefulness. As we shall see later in this article, the necessity of regional museums was a contested topic in Hungary, and one of the main arguments against them was that they would drain resources from national institutions by acquiring objects of national interest and driving up prices. Hence, the donation of the three Budapest-related objects to the National Museum was a useful tactic in garnering support. It proclaimed that the Upper-Hungarian Museum was only interested in collecting objects from its own region and did not lay claim to shaping narratives on a national level. In other words, the museum defined itself as an institution on the periphery.

As demonstrated by Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg's seminal essay on the artistic geography of Renaissance Italy, the unequal relationship between cultural centers and peripheries is not simply a result of the greater creativity of the former and the "backwardness" of the latter.⁴ Places with greater political power exert a stronger cultural influence on politically peripheral regions, and the mechanism for this is provided by their institutions. To quote Foteini Vlachou, "one significant feature that distinguishes [the periphery] from the center is that the periphery does not possess those institutions or mechanisms that would allow it to reproduce stylistic traits, innovations or aesthetic ideals and disseminate them beyond its own borders – however these may be defined – over a specific period of time."⁵

The special difficulty of using the binary of "center" and "periphery" as an analytical tool is that any critical study that is aware of it is aimed at its dismantling; it is a conceptual framework that has to be constantly questioned even while it is being employed.⁶ If institutions are instrumental to the production of the binary, their investigation is a necessary part of this deconstructive process. That said, while institutions are part of the framework, they also have their own histories, and those histories are themselves fraught by the power relations that create centers and peripheries. The Upper-Hungarian Museum was, on the one hand, certainly an instrument, and a double-edged one at that: it was used by a town that regarded itself as a regional center to institutionalize its influence, and at the same time – as we shall see – it was also instrumentalized by the central government in its quest to disseminate its own narratives. On the other hand, the museum was a cultural product created by the enthusiasts who set it up and the local public who supported it. Its officers were determined to develop its independent profile, actively and tactfully navigating the

limits set by governmental policies in order to advance this goal. This article will examine the museum from both of these angles, interrogating the significance of regional identities in the age of nation building, but also the museum as an instrument that sometimes disobeys. It offers a revealing case study for investigating the periphery “as a structure distinct from the center, with its own characteristics and priorities.”⁷

The Empire, Its Regions, and the Museum Landscape: The View from the Center(s)

The nineteenth-century process of nation building inevitably involved some degree of centralization. Nationalist ideologies postulated an undivided and eternal nation, but in practice, the formation of modern nation states required the unification of culturally diverse populations under the umbrella of the state, which disseminated the idea of a common identity through its institutions. Regional identities were relegated to a secondary status, although they remained significant to the ordinary citizens who lived them. In Austria-Hungary, where the modernizing processes of nation building unfolded within the essentially premodern framework of a multinational empire, the necessity of negotiating a balance between national identities and the unity of the Empire awarded regional identities a special significance.

Austria-Hungary came into being in 1867, when the Habsburg Empire was redefined as a dual state by the Compromise – an agreement signed between Hungary (until then a province with limited rights) and the Austrian government. The two halves of the dual Empire had their own government and parliament, but both were ultimately ruled from Vienna, the imperial city. Both constituent countries were divided into smaller administrative units: crownlands (*Kronländer*) in Austria and counties (*vármegye*) in Hungary. This simple-looking hierarchical structure was complicated by the fact that in both parts of the Empire some regions and even cities were awarded a degree of autonomy, for instance Galicia within Austria, and Croatia within Hungary. Other regions, such as Upper Hungary, did not exist as official administrative units but were firmly rooted in the popular consciousness.

As both Austria and Hungary had a history of federal governance, the question of centralization provoked intense political debates in both countries.⁸ The outcomes were, however, markedly different. In Austria, federalism prevailed: crownland diets remained relevant and could decide on a host of local affairs. Hungary, by contrast, took the course of centralization. Before the failed revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849, the counties of Hungary had possessed considerable political autonomy.⁹ After the Compromise, this traditional framework was redrawn: county assemblies could still legislate, but lost their judicial power, and the aim of the administrative reforms of the 1870s was to place them under the oversight of the Budapest-based government, finally leading to the almost total “nationalization” of county administration by 1886.¹⁰ These developments fitted into the process of forming a modern liberal state, but centralization had a sinister side too. In 1886, when a range of further rights were revoked from counties and municipalities, this was done with the express intention of repressing local movements such as those of ethnic minorities and the proletariat.¹¹

The difference between Austrian and Hungarian policies is exemplified by the regulation of regional museums in the two parts of the Empire. The Austrian point of view is well expressed by an essay on regional museums published in 1872 by Rudolf Eitelberger von Edelberg (1817–1885), director of the Vienna Museum of Art and Industry, professor of art history at Vienna University, and widely respected doyen of Austrian art history writing.¹² Eitelberger began by extolling the autonomy of the provinces as a traditional feature of the Austrian Empire, contrasting this structure with France, where regional museums had already been brought together under a central organization headed by the Inspector of Museums.¹³ Being a centralist liberal, he went on to advocate for a degree of central control, but he was well aware that this control could only be intellectual, not administrative. Lamenting the chaotic management and arrangement of most provincial museums, he suggested their rearrangement according to modern standards by professionals educated at the university – in Vienna, of course.¹⁴ An official instrument of such intellectual control was the Imperial and Royal Central Commission of Artistic and Historical Monuments, which provided advice but did not serve as a regulatory body.¹⁵

Given the dual structure of the Empire, all this was practically irrelevant to the Upper-Hungarian Museum. In Hungary, developments steadily pointed towards centralization, even though the state initially lacked the means to completely achieve this. In the first decades after the Compromise, regional museums needed official permission from the government to operate and were overseen by the Chief Inspector of Museums and Libraries, but the latter's control was mostly restricted to giving advice. From 1898, however, the Chief Inspectorate functioned as a larger body that distributed funds to regional museums. While participation was voluntary, financial pressures compelled the majority of small museums to comply.¹⁶

Although Budapest accepted the necessity of regional museums and even encouraged their establishment, there was also a fear that these institutions would threaten the cultural dominance of the capital. Such worries were listed and countered in an article written in 1872 by Imre Henszlmann (1813–1888), a well-respected art historian who had just been appointed professor of art history at the University of Budapest.¹⁷ Henszlmann grew up in Kassa and wrote his article in support of the museum newly established there. Nevertheless, despite his goodwill towards regional museums, virtually all of his arguments were formulated from the perspective of the center. Regional museums, he wrote, were useful because they could train curators who could go on to work at larger national institutions. Museums could also educate members of their public from a young age so that when they traveled to Budapest they could properly appreciate the treasures of the national collections. Furthermore, regional institutions could provide venues for traveling exhibitions organized by national museums or the National Hungarian Fine Art Association. Henszlmann juxtaposed regional collections, which stuck to their own geographical area, with national collections, which aimed for completeness. He argued that, due to this fundamental difference in scope, regional collections would pose no real competition to the large national ones.

The idea of completeness is important because it was central to the program of Ferenc Pulszky (1814–1897), director of the Hungarian National Museum from 1869. In the 20 years that followed his appointment, Pulszky was undoubtedly the

most influential figure in the Hungarian museum world. Besides being museum director, he was also Chief Inspector of Museums and Libraries, as well as a Member of Parliament.¹⁸ In 1875, Pulszky published an essay “On Museums” outlining his vision for the national collections in Budapest.¹⁹ He envisioned an art museum with a universal scope, collecting Hungarian as well as foreign art, and displaying it chronologically by national schools. Pulszky’s ideas played an important role in the ongoing reorganization of the state-owned art collections, which culminated in the opening of the Museum of Fine Arts, a chronologically organized collection of Hungarian and international art, in 1906.²⁰

Pulszky’s essay described national museums as sites where the great competition between nations was played out, arguing that “the cultural level of different nations is demonstrated by the number and richness of their museums,” and furthermore, that museums “also display what kind of political status a certain nation lays claim to in the world.”²¹ At a time when Hungary was asserting itself as a semi-autonomous state within the Monarchy, the setting up of a universal collection to rival famous collections in Paris, Berlin, or – indeed – Vienna was an obvious display of national aspirations.

The establishment of a universal art collection comparable to Vienna’s imperial collections was precisely the kind of competitive act that Budapest authors disapproved of when it came to *their* peripheries. In his essay, Pulszky ignored the central role of Vienna completely, and envisioned the Budapest museum landscape as one appropriate for the capital of an autonomous state. At the same time, he restricted the role of provincial museums in Hungary to the research and preservation of objects from their own regions. Ideally, these small museums would report their acquisitions and research findings to the National Museum, which would keep central records.²² In Pulszky’s essay, the word “provincial” was not a neutral descriptor of the administrative status of a museum, but contained a strong negative value judgment, which in turn justified the positioning of these museums under the watchful eyes of the National Museum and the Chief Inspectorate.

By the mid-1870s the existence of regional museums was generally accepted by Hungarian decision makers, even if with the caveats outlined above. Local enthusiasm for the establishment of such institutions was in bloom, and the 1870s and 1880s saw the foundation of one museum after another in larger cities and county towns. These initiatives were encouraged by the government, but it took some time for that moral support to be translated into financial subsidy. Due to the lack of funds, not all institutions survived. The Upper-Hungarian Museum of Kassa was among the most enduring ones.

A Town and Its Museum

The town of Kassa is located in what was then Abaúj-Torna County, part of the region once known as Upper Hungary. This region, which included present Slovakia, as well as smaller parts of today’s Ukraine and Hungary, was then situated in the northern half of the Kingdom of Hungary, bordered in the southwest by the Danube, and in the southeast by the Mátra and Bükk mountains and the river Tisza.²³ Its name did not, however,

derive from its location on the compass. It was called “Upper” Hungary because of its mountainous landscape, often contrasted in nineteenth-century thought with the plains that characterized the lower part of the country. Kassa lay in the eastern part of the region, by the river Hernád, and was one of many Upper-Hungarian towns where industry and trade had prospered since the fourteenth century, resulting in the emergence of a proud and industrious bourgeoisie. These towns provided a fertile ground for intellectual life from the eighteenth century, and many literary and artistic endeavors that are now staples in the mainstream narrative of Hungarian cultural history originated in the region. Until about the mid-nineteenth century, when Budapest began to assume its status as a unique and dominant center, Upper Hungary was by no means a periphery.

In terms of ethnicity, Upper Hungary was a highly diverse region, with Slovaks, Hungarians, and Germans constituting the three largest ethnic groups. Ruthenians, Roma, and Yiddish-speaking Jews also lived there, along with many other ethnicities. The ethnic and social composition of Kassa and its surroundings has been the subject of a number of studies in recent years. Scrutinizing statistical evidence from the first half of the nineteenth century, historian Gábor Czoch has described how the steady influx of new inhabitants, mainly from the vicinity of the town, gradually changed its social makeup. At the beginning of the century, the majority of those who had acquired citizenship were handworkers, but by the middle of the century they were outnumbered by merchants and intellectuals.²⁴ By this time, a number of aristocratic families had also requested and acquired Kassa citizenship. In terms of ethnicity, Slovaks constituted the largest group, but this did not match their social status: they were usually poorer and were not represented in the local government.²⁵ The subsequent changes in ethnic composition have been traced by another historian, Joachim Puttkamer, in his study of census records from Upper Hungary, which concluded that while the number of Hungarian speakers was steadily rising throughout the period preceding the First World War, this did not necessarily mean the adoption of new ethnic identities, but rather a rise in bi- and trilingualism.²⁶ Most recently, Frank Henschel’s new monograph has provided a thorough analysis of the social history of the town, underscoring the above findings and offering a rich discussion of the urban culture that grew out of these demographic characteristics.²⁷ The history of the Upper-Hungarian Museum has to be examined in this context.

Like many other small museums in the Empire, the Upper-Hungarian Museum (Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum) was founded by a civil association, supported by the municipality.²⁸ The social makeup of the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association – as it was called – reflected the processes described above. The driving force behind the project was provided by the four Klimkovics brothers, who belonged to the local intelligentsia – the *Bildungsbürgertum* – which had, as Henschel has shown, become dominant in the political and cultural life of the city by the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁹ They were by no means affluent, but they possessed cultural capital: Béla Klimkovics (1833–1885), director of the museum from 1876, was a teacher of drawing at the local secondary school; Ferenc (1825–1890) was a painter who lived in Budapest; Flóris (1831–1907) was a painter and sculptor; while Gábor (1833–1891) was a retired lieutenant. Once the museum was founded, the four of

them provided the bulk of the everyday labor required for its maintenance. The list of founding members, however, also included others who did not take on such practical roles due to their social standing: the Forgách brothers and Count Rezső Zichy (1833–1893) were local aristocrats, while the president of the Association was a local nobleman and landowner named Ödön Bárczay (1836–1903). Later on, the presidents were usually high-ranking clerics; Sándor Dessewffy (1834–1907), president from 1887, was Abbot of Vérteskeresztúr and came from an old aristocratic family, which had acquired Kassa citizenship only recently, as part of the mid-nineteenth-century influx.³⁰ The social composition of the Association reflects how such civil organizations bridged class divides and served as contact zones, but at the same time it also shows the limits of this process: representative functions within the Association were awarded based on social status, and this was evidently necessary in order to raise the status of the Association itself.

The municipality, which was officially a founding member of the Association, supported the project by giving over part of a publicly owned building, the Renaissance edifice known as the Gold Star, to the museum. In 1873, the founding documents of the museum were sanctioned by the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Religion. In that year, the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association loaned objects from its collection to the Universal Exhibition in Vienna – a sign that the collection was growing substantially. However, it could not be put on public display due to the lack of adequate exhibition space. To amend this, the town council put further spaces in the building at the disposal of the Association, and on June 25, 1875 the festive opening finally took place. Museum workers – mostly local schoolteachers volunteering in their spare time – labored tirelessly on expanding the collection and setting it up in a professional way. Consequently, they soon ran out of space again. It was realized that the only permanent solution would be the construction of a separate, purpose-built museum.

Despite its constant financial difficulties, the Association started making plans. Construction of the new building began in 1897, but the Association could not afford to furnish it, or to transfer the collections into the new spaces. In 1900 the organization and the council reached a long-discussed agreement: the Association handed over its remaining funds and the collections themselves to the town, which in return guaranteed that it would maintain the museum from then on, with the help of the reorganized Chief Inspectorate. The new building was finished in 1901 (Figure 1). With the change of ownership, the museum changed its name to the Museum of Kassa (Kassai Múzeum), only to change it again in 1909, when it was renamed the Upper-Hungarian Rákóczi Museum (Felső-Magyarországi Rákóczi Múzeum), in honor of Francis II Rákóczi (1676–1735), Prince of Transylvania and leader of the anti-Habsburg uprising of 1703–1711. In the same year, the municipality agreed to the nationalization of the museum, maintaining partial control via a supervisory committee.³¹

After the First World War, what was formerly Upper Hungary became part of newly formed Czechoslovakia. Since 1993, Košice (formerly Kassa) has been one of the major towns of independent Slovakia. Despite these historical changes, the existence of the museum has been continuous. Today called the East Slovakian Museum (Východoslovenské Múzeum), it encompasses several different sites in addition to its



Figure 1. The facade of the East Slovakian Museum today. Photograph by Marian Gladis, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

original building, and undoubtedly holds one of the most significant collections in the country.

Kassa was not only one of the largest towns in nineteenth-century Upper Hungary, but it had also enjoyed relative economic prosperity in the first half of the century, when most of the other Upper-Hungarian towns were in decline.³² At the same

time, its industry remained dominated by smaller workshops in the late nineteenth century, when larger factories were coming into being throughout Hungary, including Pozsony/Pressburg/Prešporok (today Bratislava, Slovakia), which had been the political capital of Hungary until 1848. Consequently, Kassa lacked wealthy industrialists who could finance a project such as the museum; its upper class was small and not overly wealthy, which explains the museum's constantly dire financial situation. The museum signaled an ambition on Kassa's part to become a cultural, if not economic center of the region. In this regard, competition was not only presented by Pozsony, which had a rich heritage and a unique place in Hungarian cultural memory, but also by nearby towns such as Eperjes/Eperies/Prešov, a vibrant cultural center in the early nineteenth century. Pozsony had its own municipal museum, and so did several other towns in the region, for instance Rimaszombat/Grosssteffelsdorf/Rimavská Sobota, the capital of Gömör-Kishont County, where the county museum opened in 1882.³³ In calling itself the Upper-Hungarian Museum, the museum in Kassa – whose collection was undoubtedly the largest of the three – extended its reach to all of these territories, declaring its superiority as a cultural center.³⁴

The rival cities would probably have contested this, but Kassa had good reasons to imagine itself as a center of Hungarian art history writing and museology. Not only was it the birthplace of Henszlmann, one of the handful of people who started practicing art history as a profession in 1840s Hungary, but Henszlmann had written the very first Hungarian art historical monograph about a Kassa landmark: the Gothic church of Saint Elisabeth.³⁵ Published in 1846, this book had established the reputation of the church as one of the most important monuments in the country. Sculptures from and drawings of the building were among the first objects in the collection, and Henszlmann's connection to the town and its church was a source of pride for the Association.³⁶ The aim to preserve these scholarly standards is evidenced by the annuals of the Upper-Hungarian Museum (*A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Évkönyvei*), published roughly every two years from 1874 to 1902, which contained scholarly studies on various subjects related to the museum's collections.

Nevertheless, no matter how strongly they believed in the central importance of their town, the museum's founders had to make peace with its provincial status and negotiate its complex relationship with Budapest. Their strategy was to display spectacular deference in some respects, while slowly building a collection that negated not simply the peripheral status of the museum, but the very binary of center and periphery.

Negotiations with the Center

Deference was best expressed in formalities. At the time of its foundation, the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association asked several Budapest-based art historians to become its honorary members, among them Pulszky and Henszlmann. In turn, the very first objects inscribed into the museum's inventories were "a number of different duplicates" donated by Pulszky himself.³⁷ Other acts of deference were less formal, such as when Béla Klimkovics handed over his Budapest-related finds to the National Museum. Ferenc and Béla Klimkovics had good contacts in Budapest and used them

to the advantage of the Kassa institution. The former persuaded artists and collectors to support the museum by donating artworks, while his brother used his friendly relationship with the officers of the National Museum to secure some old display cases from the national institution for the struggling regional one.³⁸ When he died in 1885, the obituary in the Association's annuals described how he had "measured, scrutinized, and tirelessly retested how these pieces, made for spaces with different measurements, could be most usefully placed into the museum's rooms."³⁹

Good contacts with Budapest were crucial to the museum's survival, but the Association was more ambitious than that: it aimed to find a place for the museum on the national, or even imperial stage. The best way to gain visibility was through outgoing loans. In 1873, when the Upper-Hungarian Museum loaned several objects to the Universal Exhibition in Vienna, they did so in the hope of receiving financial support from the government in return – unfortunately in vain.⁴⁰ They were also proud of having loaned nine objects to the large-scale exhibition on the history of Hungarian goldsmithry staged in Budapest in 1884.⁴¹

As the museum struggled with constant financial and logistical problems, it became increasingly clear that enthusiastic local donors and volunteers were not enough. The need to integrate into a wider institutional framework was recognized by the museum's officers, but such a framework did not really exist. Before the Chief Inspectorate was reorganized, Pulszky offered professional advice and visited regional museums regularly (he paid an official visit to Kassa in 1875), but he did not have the means to provide the museums with funding.⁴² Hence, in 1883 the officers of the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association tried to take the solution into their own hands. They sent a letter to Pulszky suggesting that the government should provide yearly funding to the museums, which would then use half of the sum and keep the other half in the bank, so that eventually the institutions would be able to subsist on the interest derived from this capital and would no longer need central funding.⁴³

The fate of the proposal submitted by the Association is unknown, but we do know that it was never acted upon. Instead of a system in which provincial museums could stand on their own without central funding, the reorganization of the Chief Inspectorate finally created one where funding was secure, but it also came with centralized control. This is exemplified by the Inspectorate's intervention in 1901, when funds in Kassa were running low due to the costs of the new building. The Inspectorate recommended the appointment of a ministerial commissioner, and the person chosen for the post was József Mihalik (1860–1925), a curator at the Museum of Applied Art in Budapest who was granted unpaid leave for the period of his tenure in Kassa.⁴⁴

This may seem like a prime example of the center imposing its officers on the periphery, but the situation was more complicated. Mihalik was no outsider: having grown up in Kassa he had successfully built a career that tied him both to the capital and his hometown. Working as a teacher in Kassa from 1892, his first job in Budapest was a four-month stint as a researcher and curator contributing to the monumental exhibition on the history of Hungary staged as part of the millennial celebrations in 1896. In the wake of this commission he was offered a job as a curator at the Kassa museum. Soon, however, he was appointed as curator at the Museum of Applied

Art in Budapest and participated in the organization of the Hungarian displays at the 1900 Universal Exhibition in Paris. Thus, when he became commissioner he returned to a familiar place, and his knowledge of the collections was invaluable to the large-scale rearrangement of the displays that followed his appointment.⁴⁵ In 1907 he went back to Budapest to work for the Chief Inspectorate as secretary and inspector.

Mihalik's example suggests a close, symbiotic relationship between Budapest and the counties. It is also an example of the brain drain envisioned by Henszlmann: even though he returned for a few years, Mihalik's journey undeniably led away from Kassa, towards Budapest. His story was, however, not quite typical. The counter-example was Viktor Myskovszky (1838–1909), teacher of geometry and architecture at the Kassa secondary school and curator of the archaeological collection of the Upper-Hungarian Museum from 1881. As his letters to Henszlmann demonstrate, Myskovszky was constantly trying to transfer to Budapest, but even though he was acknowledged as a scholar and had many contacts in the capital, his job applications were never successful.⁴⁶ He died in Kassa in 1909, having lost all hope. The brain drain existed, but – as all other elements of the wider framework – it was irremediably controlled by the center.

Curatorial Practices: Subverting the Narrative

In 1878, the Upper-Hungarian Museum petitioned the government to grant them some artworks from the storage rooms of the National Museum, and four objects were delivered the next year.⁴⁷ The selection was performed in Budapest, and the Kassa museum seems to have had no say in it. Two of the objects (a copy of Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia* and a history painting by Soma Orlai Petrics [1822–1880], an important, although by then somewhat old-fashioned, Hungarian artist) had no connections to Upper Hungary. After the reorganization of the Chief Inspectorate in 1898, the allocation of objects to regional museums became one of the institution's main duties. The process was formalized, and the small museums were given a say in it.⁴⁸ Most of the objects lent out this way were duplicates from the collection of the Hungarian National Museum or copies of important Hungarian and foreign artworks, often without any particular local connection.

This practice seems to reflect an inconsistency in Budapest's approach, as it contradicted the policy that expected regional museums to display objects from their own region. In reality, however, it fitted into a consistent discourse of centralized control. If they exhibited copies and duplicates, regional museums did not threaten to outshine the museums of the capital. Even if these objects allowed them to present "universal" rather than regional narratives, they did so under the supervision of the center, hence fitting into a centralized framework and ultimately serving as instruments disseminating the center's grand narratives. This was, at least, the model promoted by the center. In practice, the regional and the universal intersected in the permanent exhibitions of regional museums in unexpected, idiosyncratic ways.

The founders of the museum in Kassa had always stressed that the collection would focus on Upper Hungary. This was not just an act of deference to the center but a genuine museological goal. Nevertheless, there was always an ambition to aim for

more. When opportunities arose to acquire objects from lands other than Upper Hungary, even lands far away, the museum did not reject them. By 1903 it boasted a large number of prehistoric, as well as ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman finds, allowing curators to dedicate a room entirely to the prehistorical and ancient periods.⁴⁹ Apart from the Egyptian objects, most of the exhibits in Room VIII had been unearthed in Hungary, but the majority did not come from the vicinity of Kassa. And the Egyptian artefacts constituted a league of their own. Arranged in their own cabinet, they included ushabtis made of faience, a large bronze statue of a cat, several pieces of jewelry, the mummy of an ibis, and a mummified hand (Figure 2).⁵⁰

Henzlmann had warned against such transgressions in his 1872 article, which recommended that regional museums stick to collecting objects of local interest. Nevertheless, when he died in 1888 he bequeathed his art collection, as well as his books, notes, correspondence, and other documents, to the Upper-Hungarian Museum. The art collection consisted of engravings, woodcuts, and oil paintings, including prints by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), William Hogarth (1697–1764), and Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641), a painting then attributed to Guido Reni (1575–1642), and more than 100 engravings by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528).⁵¹

In 1903 the museum reopened with a new permanent exhibition, curated under the supervision of Mihalik, the commissioner now in charge. The detailed catalogue published on the occasion allows a fairly accurate reconstruction of the overall curatorial program, revealing the intention to unite local and universal in a system unique to Kassa, and yet open to the outside world. The overall taxonomy was usual for museums



Figure 2. Egyptian objects displayed at the Upper-Hungarian Museum in 1903. Image: *A Kassai Múzeum gyűjteményeinek leíró lajstroma* [Descriptive catalogue of the collections of the Museum of Kassa] (Košice: Koczányi, 1903), 135.

at the time: objects of natural history were separated from human-made artefacts and placed on the ground floor, with minerals and animals displayed in separate rooms. On the upper floor, products of human culture were grouped by technique, place of origin, and age. Within this generalized system, however, the actual categories were determined by the centers of gravity that had by then formed within the museum's collection. Hence, the exhibition began with the rich collection of prehistoric and ancient artefacts, subsequently switching to the categorization of objects by technique. A comprehensive display on the history of ceramics was followed by smaller displays of glass, goldsmithry, and a separate room dedicated to spurs. Arranged by schools, the display of ceramics began with Spanish, Italian, French, and German works, and led towards the history of ceramics in Hungary. The collection of Hungarian ceramics was categorized by place of production, with Kassa receiving its own section among many others (Figure 3). Rather than presenting Hungarian developments as the peak of progress, the exhibition continued with Viennese and Chinese porcelain and works from Meissen, concluding with the best-known Hungarian producer – the Zsolnay factory in Pécs – and a display of the products of the British-based Wedgwood factory.

The display of ceramics promoted local traditions, while embedding them into a system conceptualized as universal and borrowed from international models. A quick comparison with a catalogue of the South Kensington Museum in London shows that the latter used roughly the same categories, such as *Hispano-Moresco Ware* and *Delft and Rouen Earthenware*.⁵² Hence, the Upper-Hungarian Museum asserted its aspiration to a professionalism of the highest level, transcending the



Figure 3. The display of faience from Kassa at the Upper-Hungarian Museum in 1913. Image: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, July 20, 1913, 574.

provincial status it was assigned by many decision makers in the center, while also proudly displaying its local focus and the uniqueness of its locally sourced collection.

The ceramics collection was given such a prominent position because it was especially rich, and therefore constituted an important element of the museum's identity. In the very first volume of the museum's *Annuals*, Myskovszky published a "Brief introduction to different types of old ceramics, majolica, faience and porcelain," aiming to provide a general overview, but using the opportunity to highlight the extent of the museum's holdings.⁵³ In expressing his firm conviction that the museum could help revive this branch of local industry, Myskovszky connected his praise of the museum's collection to mainstream discourse on the economic benefits of museums of art and design, an idea gaining increasing currency in Austria-Hungary. In the Austrian half of the Empire a network of handicraft schools was established, often in conjunction with museums, to provide local producers with standardized training.⁵⁴ In Hungary, a similar network was emerging, centered around the Museum of Applied Art in Budapest. The curators of the Upper-Hungarian Museum had to position themselves in relation to this project.

In 1888 Antal Stöhr (1841–1909), the secretary of the Association, published an article in the *Annuals* which performed the feat of simultaneous deference and self-assertion in a particularly remarkable way.⁵⁵ The text was occasioned by the decision of the Ministry of Education to present regional museums with a subscription to the journal *Művészi Ipar* [Artistic Industry] published by the Budapest Museum of Applied Art. Stöhr thanked the Ministry profusely for this generous gesture; the text is impeccably polite, but it is hard not to notice the hidden irony at a time when small museums' pleas for funding and other support regularly went unanswered. Stöhr then proceeded to discuss an article from the latest issue of *Művészi Ipar*. In that article, Jenő Radisics (1856–1917), one of the editors of the journal who would later go on to become director of the Museum of Applied Art, took a rather rigid position regarding small regional collections of applied art. In his view, it was

a completely unnecessary dissipation of energy and material to allow regional museums to acquire valuable originals. We are not saying this out of selfishness; it is, however, not quite clear to us how Hungarian artistic industry would profit from beautiful and precious products of artistic industry kept in the regional museums currently in existence. Forgotten, or perhaps appreciated by a few, but definitely condemned to play the role of dead capital, enjoyed only by local amateurs who show them enthusiastically to art lovers or foreigners who happen to turn up in their town. Should we content ourselves with assigning such a role to exemplary art objects today, when collections have ceased to be inaccessible assemblages of curiosities?⁵⁶

Stöhr needed to refute this without being overly confrontative. Quoting Radisics's opinion, he added a footnote stating that surely Radisics was referring only to purchases funded by the state; an intention to centrally limit regional associations and their

private donors in using their own funds would, after all, sound rather strange.⁵⁷ Stöhr then went on to emphasize Radisics's benevolence towards regional museums. "As we know," he continued, "ideas, intentions and possibilities rarely converge."⁵⁸ He then reiterated the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association's 1884 proposal regarding the creation of separate capital for each small museum. The proposal – which had been unsuccessful, as Stöhr sadly acknowledged – was the diametrical opposite of Radisics's idea that all regional museums with collections of applied art should be tied into a network centered around the museum in Budapest. By putting it forward again as an alternative, Stöhr asserted regional museums' wish for independence without openly confronting professionals in the center.

From the center's point of view, a regional museum such as the one in Kassa could make itself useful in two ways: by solely focusing on objects originating from its region and by setting up a "universal" display with an educational function, made up of duplicates, copies, and works of lesser value sanctioned by the center. The Upper-Hungarian Museum did neither of these things. Its collection of ceramics was built with the intention to create a display of high-quality objects from a wide range of geographical areas, within which local products had their own special place. The museum's tendency to override universal systems in favor of local interest was also exemplified by the hanging of paintings. Instead of displaying paintings as a separate category and arranging them into an autonomous art historical narrative, Mihalik partly dispersed them among other exhibits, hanging them in halls that contained guild chests, historic documents, embroideries, and other miscellaneous objects (Figures 4–5), and partly categorized them by provenance: the paintings donated by Zsigmond Bubics (1821–1907), art historian and Bishop of Kassa, were kept together and hung in the last room on the first floor.⁵⁹

In the center, professionals such as Pulszky, a staunch advocate of the model of the "universal survey museum," would certainly have seen this arrangement as provincial. In fact, it actually held up an alternative model, posing a challenge to universal collections.⁶⁰ In the latter, objects were mostly separated from their historical contexts, and especially from the circumstances in which they were acquired, in order to be placed into an abstract narrative of art historical evolution. In Kassa, the provenance of objects remained factored into the arrangement, and this allowed the museum to present an alternative idea of "localness," a different conceptualization of the relationship between regional and universal. Instead of focusing solely on objects originating from the region, it extended its scope to all that was consumed, used, enjoyed, and collected by people with local roots; this is how the Egyptian artefacts and the Dürer prints could equally find their place there. When the nineteenth-century paintings acquired by Ferenc Klimkovics from his Budapest artist friends were exhibited among objects from Kassa's earlier history, they became part of the history of the town, a history in which the establishment of the museum was itself a crucial and symbolic event. Instead of conceptualizing the local or the regional as a small fragment of a more complex larger whole, the museum in Kassa aimed to display the world in a grain of sand: the subtlety and completeness of life in the periphery.

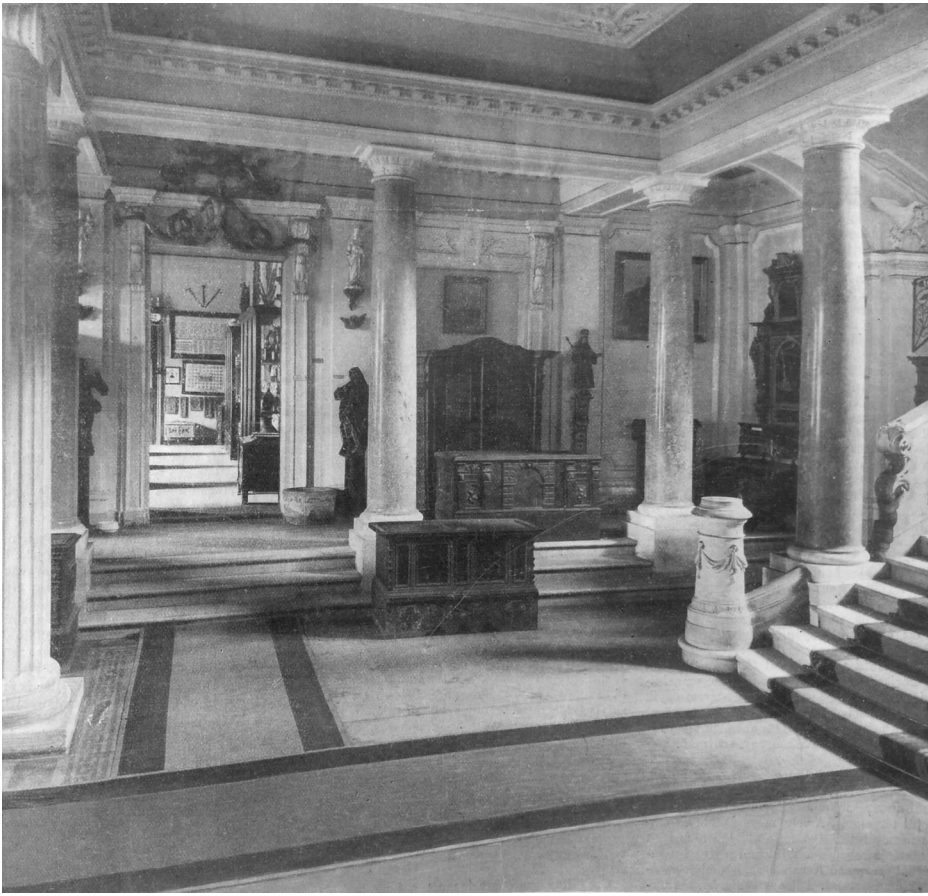


Figure 4. The foyer of the museum with paintings, guild chests, and other exhibits. Image: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, July 20, 1913, 565.

National Narratives, Peripheral Answers

Aiming to create the semblance of a nation state within the Dual Monarchy, the Hungarian administration used its country-wide system of political, educational, and cultural institutions to promote its foundational narratives. The most important one was a triumphant narrative of progress that started with the liberal reformers of the 1830s and 1840s (the so-called “Reform Age”), continued with the Revolution and War of Independence fought in 1848–1849, and culminated in the 1867 Compromise. Art historian Éva Bicskei has shown how, at the end of the century, the portrait galleries of county halls and local clubs across the country were shaped by this centrally dispersed narrative; the triad of the great reformer István Széchenyi (1791–1860), the revolutionary leader Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894), and the architect of the Compromise Ferenc Deák (1803–1876) appeared in virtually all of them, representing, as Bicskei writes, “the ‘national’ as a palpable visual and political ‘reality’ at local level.”⁶¹ At the same time, the influence of the center was not total: the range of personalities



Figure 5. The stairwell with late medieval wood carvings. The copy of Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia*, acquired from the Hungarian National Museum in 1878, is visible in the top right-hand corner of the wall. Image: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, July 20, 1913, 575.

commemorated in these spaces remained diverse and reflected local considerations. Regional museums such as the one in Kassa provide examples of a similar interplay between the national and the local.

The foremost national event in the foundational narrative was the Revolution and War of Independence. The permanent exhibition that opened in Kassa in 1903 included a display of “Weapons, flag ribbons, soldier’s hats and other relics” from that war.⁶² The fact that the objects were designated as “relics” demonstrates the extent to which the events had become mythicized by the turn of the century, an approach encouraged by the government and obviously adopted in Kassa. The town did not serve as the location for any particularly important revolutionary events; hence, on the surface, the display presented the War of Independence from a general, national point of view,

and not a local one. Nevertheless, the majority of the exhibited objects had been gifted to the museum by those who had used them, or by their families – members of the local public. Consequently, they told their own stories, for instance that of Gyula Fiedler, a Kassa accountant imprisoned in 1849 for two years due to revolutionary activity, whose delicate cardboard model of his Olomouc prison cell was displayed among the “relics.”⁶³ These stories were not only local, but highly personal: they spoke of lives lost in the war or irreversibly changed by it. Was this a case of weaving diverse life stories into a national narrative, or are we observing the exact opposite: the fragmentation of an abstract national narrative into myriads of unique stories? It can be seen as either, and it can be seen as both. Museum exhibitions make abstract narratives real and relatable through unique objects; at the same time, they threaten to blow such abstract narratives apart, precisely because their objects have their own unique histories.

Another case of bringing together national and local narratives was the commemoration of Francis II Rákóczi in Kassa, which inspired the museum’s name change in 1909. After the failure of the anti-Habsburg uprising led by him between 1703 and 1711, Rákóczi lived in exile in Tekirdağ, Turkey, until his death in 1735. In the late nineteenth century the idea of a ceremonial reburial in Hungary gained traction and political approval. Kassa was chosen as the new location of the prince’s grave because it had been an important center of the uprising. The significance of Kassa was highlighted by Kálmán Thaly (1839–1909), historian and prominent member of the radical nationalist Independence Party, who played a crucial role in the unfolding Rákóczi cult. Events in the city began with public fundraising for a statue of Rákóczi.⁶⁴ The funds were eventually spent on an exhibition organized for the anniversary of the Rákóczi Uprising in 1903. Due to the lack of space in the new building of the Upper-Hungarian Museum, the exhibition had to be organized in a separate location. Its success gave the fundraising efforts new impetus, and the end goal – festive reburial commemorated by a monument – was now in sight.

In 1906 Rákóczi’s remains were brought from Istanbul to Kassa and festively transferred to a crypt underneath St. Elizabeth’s Cathedral. Many objects related to the prince were brought to Kassa from Turkey along with his remains, and while the long-term plan was to establish a separate museum to house them, for the time being they were displayed in the municipal museum (Figures 6–7). Through the Rákóczi cult, Kassa took on a central importance in the national narrative while simultaneously building local traditions of commemoration. The city’s success in this regard, and the museum’s important role in the process, is evidenced by the constant preoccupation of the authorities in Budapest with the museum at the time of its nationalization in 1909.⁶⁵ This was helped by the fact that Mihalik, the museum’s former director, was now secretary of the Chief Inspectorate. Plans for another new building were in process (aborted during the First World War), and the museum had managed to secure a large number of objects from Rákóczi’s possession for its collection. This example reveals the importance of good connections with Budapest.⁶⁶

The Rákóczi commemorations were initiated by the ethno-nationalist Independence Party. During the celebrations, many of the participants equated Rákóczi’s anti-Habsburg struggles with a struggle for the prominence of the Hungarian ethnic

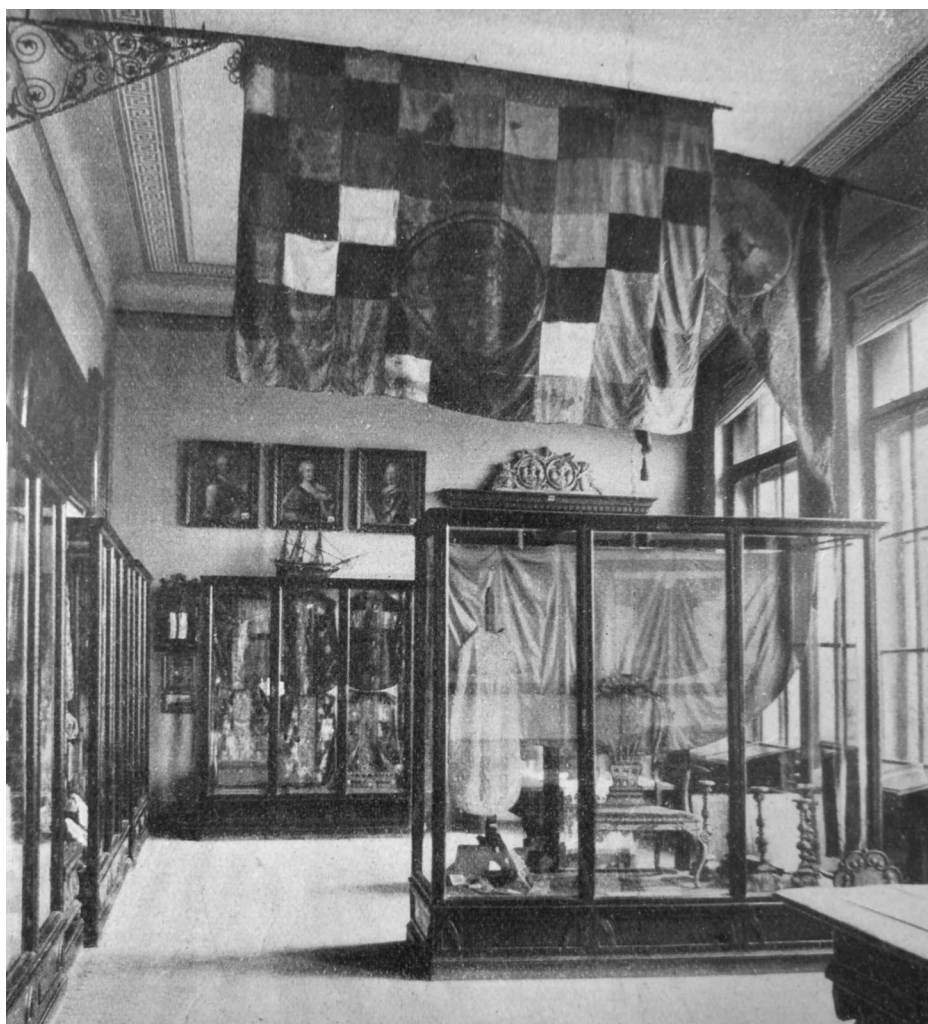


Figure 6. Room in the exhibition in 1913 with Rákóczi's armchair visible in the display case in the center. Image: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, July 20, 1913, 574.

group. Although the original committee raising funds for the monument was heterogeneous from a social, political, and religious point of view, the nationalist message of the project served as common ground and went uncontested at the meetings.⁶⁷ At the same time, although the ethnic “Hungarianness” of the prince became the dominant reading, other interpretations were possible. One German-language local newspaper, for instance, reminded its readers that the prince had represented a more inclusive concept of the nation and did not care for dividing his people by language or religion.⁶⁸ For all its ethno-nationalist connotations, the Rákóczi Uprising as a national site of memory and as a subject of local commemorations in Kassa could also be read as a non-ethnicized symbol of the multi-ethnic Hungarian nation’s struggle for independence.⁶⁹



Figure 7. Furniture from Francis Rákóczi's castle in Regéc, displayed at the Upper-Hungarian Museum in 1913. Image: *Vasárnapi Ujság*, July 20, 1913, 575.

This brings us to the most sensitive and controversial aspect of the history of the Upper-Hungarian Museum: its place in the intensifying efforts of the Hungarian state to “Magyarize” non-Hungarian speakers – that is, to coerce them into switching to the Hungarian language. As a multi-ethnic region, Upper Hungary was a primary target of this nationalist project. Voluntary Magyarization had been happening since the early nineteenth century. A pertinent example is the art historian Henszlmann, who was born in Kassa in 1813 into a German family but learnt to speak Hungarian as a teenager and self-identified as Hungarian throughout his life. After 1867 the state exerted considerable pressure to drive such changes in identity. To cite two of the most drastic measures: in 1875 all Slovak-language secondary schools, as well as the Slovak cultural association the *Matica Slovenska*, were closed down, and from 1879 Hungarian was compulsory in all schools.⁷⁰ The effectiveness of these measures is debated by historians: it seems likely that they resulted in a rise in bilingualism, rather than the adoption of a Hungarian ethnic identity by non-Hungarian groups, and that changes in identity were mostly driven by the wider range of professional and social opportunities becoming available this way – a sort of “soft” Magyarization – than by the government’s politics.⁷¹

In order to understand the museum’s role in this process, it is useful to compare the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association with another local association, whose explicit purpose was the promotion of Magyarization. The Abaúj-Torna County and Kassa Association for Public Education (*Abaúj-Torna Megyei és Kassai Közművelődési Egyesület*) was officially founded in 1886, but it was rooted in earlier Magyarizing

activity. It organized reading groups, language classes, and other activities and used a hardline rhetoric of Hungarian cultural superiority in its communications. It is worth mentioning that, despite the political support it received, it struggled with similar financial problems as the Museum Association, even having to suspend its activities for a time in the 1890s, while the museum managed to survive throughout its difficulties.⁷²

There was some overlap between the people behind the two associations, especially at the top: Bubics, Bishop of Kassa and generous donor of the Museum Association, was the protector of the Association for Public Education, while Dessewffy, one of its vice-presidents, was president of the Museum Association from 1887 to 1892.⁷³ It was Dessewffy who, in 1889, made what was perhaps the strongest reference to Magyarization at the Museum Association's annual gatherings, arguing that one of the institution's purposes was to "transplant the patriotic feelings of Kassa's declining older population onto ... the town's more recent, mostly non-Hungarian-speaking citizens."⁷⁴ The statement openly identifies Magyarization as one of the main goals of the museum. The "patriotism" it speaks of is left – maybe deliberately – somewhat vague. The mention of "more recent" citizens of the town suggests that it refers to a local patriotism – allegiance to Kassa – rather than allegiance to the Hungarian nation. Nevertheless, in identifying those in need of patriotic education as "non-Hungarian speakers," Dessewffy equated patriotism with the adoption of the Hungarian language and culture, hence awarding local patriotism a higher significance in the grand scheme of Magyarization.

In the 1880s, more than three quarters of Kassa's population spoke Hungarian or Slovak as their first language in approximately equal numbers, while about 16% were German speakers, and the remaining citizens were principally Ruthenian, Romanian, or Serbo-Croat. Due to their numbers and social standing, Hungarian speakers were largely dominant in Kassa, in contrast to many other Upper-Hungarian towns, most importantly Pozsony, the former political capital of Hungary, where the dominance of German speakers in city life was often bemoaned by Hungarian nationalists.⁷⁵ By 1910 the number of Slovak and German speakers had diminished to 14.8% and 7.2% respectively, while 75.4% of the inhabitants identified their first language as Hungarian.⁷⁶ First language, however, did not mean their *only* language; the multicultural and multilingual nature of the town did not disappear.⁷⁷ Until the early twentieth century, municipal politics were not dominated by Hungarian ethno-nationalism and displayed a pronounced tendency of ethnic tolerance. Theodor (Tivadar) Münster (1833–1909), who served as the city's mayor from 1872 to 1906, was an ethnic German who pursued a politics of neutrality in questions of language and ethnicity, which evidently contributed to his longstanding popularity with the citizens of Kassa.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, Münster was a vice-president and supporter of the Association for Public Education,⁷⁹ a striking fact that highlights the ambivalent and complex status of Magyarizing efforts within the social and cultural life of the city.

It is in this context that the ethnic politics of the museum should be read. The original mission statement of the Museum Association, published in the first volume of the *Annuals*, defined its purpose in collecting, preserving, and displaying objects from the past and the present and in disseminating "ideas within the scope of the museum" to

the public.⁸⁰ The collection was to focus “mainly on objects of local significance,” that is, it was primarily defined by geography and not ethnicity, which resulted in displays documenting and showcasing the diversity of Kassa and Upper Hungary. For instance, objects and documents related to the history of Kassa’s guilds often bore German inscriptions, bearing witness to the long history of German-speaking handworkers in the town.⁸¹ Similarly, the displays of “Ethnographic artefacts from Hungary” contained several examples of Slovak folk art from Upper Hungary.⁸² Furthermore, extending its reach, the museum also collected and displayed products of Romanian and Hungarian folk art from elsewhere in the country. The display of playing cards even contained a deck of “Pan-Slavic” national cards produced in Pozsony, alongside French, German, and Hungarian exhibits.⁸³

Hence, it can be argued that the museum was successful because it was able to fulfill its patriotic mission according to the expectations of the center while demonstrating a respect for multilingualism and multi-ethnicity in the region. Its exhibitions seem to have reflected the same moderate stance that characterized the politics of Mayor Münster. Nevertheless, Dessewffy’s allusion to the museum’s role in Magyarization must give us pause. There is one tiny comment in the original mission statement that complicates the idyllic picture described above: the museum was to focus on objects from the region, “with special regard to products of the region’s once rich Hungarian literary culture.”⁸⁴ In other words, the institution clearly privileged the Hungarian language. It carried out all its administration in Hungarian and its *Annuals* and catalogues were monolingual. Operating in the blurred zone between regional patriotism as an antidote to ethnic nationalism and the instrumentalization of the same regional patriotism in the service of nationalism, it was one of the agents of “soft” Magyarization that persuaded speakers of other languages to adopt Hungarian because it helped them to succeed socially and gain cultural capital. In this regard, the museum certainly promoted the nationalist agenda of the center. Nonetheless, the resilience of unique objects and the stories of multi-ethnicity inherent to them could still provide a counterbalance to such overbearing narratives.

Conclusion: The Challenge of the Periphery

The aim of this article has been to examine the Upper-Hungarian Museum both as an instrument of cultural influence and as a cultural product. In discussing the former aspect, the binary of center and periphery presents itself as a useful conceptual framework. It is possible to describe, for instance, the allocation of copies of important artworks by the Chief Inspectorate to regional museums as an act of “symbolic domination” in the sense described by Castelnuovo and Ginzburg. Furthermore, the history of the museum speaks of the plurality and hierarchy of centers. Although peripheral in relation to Budapest, the Upper-Hungarian Museum was an instrument of Kassa’s aspiration to the role of regional center: the very name of the museum, as well as its geographically broad collection attest to this.

That said, these seemingly simple dynamics were complicated by a host of other factors. In theory, it should have been easy for the museum to assume an intermediate position, subordinated to Budapest but asserting its dominance in its own region, but

in reality such a situation could never be stabilized. The Rákóczi celebrations provide a revelatory example in this regard. When the idea of Rákóczi's reburial first began to gain traction, several cities came into consideration as his final resting place; Kassa's historical connection to his person was strong, but not unique enough to make the city a self-evident choice. In the end, Kassa was selected as the center of the commemorations, demonstrating the prominent position it had by then attained in the cultural life of the region. Thanks to institutions such as its museum, Kassa had succeeded in situating itself in a crucially important position within a grand national narrative. It is somewhat ironic, then, that the propagation of the Rákóczi cult culminated in the nationalization of the museum in 1909. By centering itself, the museum did not arm itself against the influence of Budapest, but, to the contrary, offered itself up for appropriation.

It would be possible to read the above example as a cautionary tale on the impossibility of avoiding central control, and to tell the story of the Upper-Hungarian Museum as leading from autonomy towards the loss of independence. In such a narrative, however, the very essence of the story would be lost. The first three decades of the museum's existence were shaped by a dynamic interaction between center and periphery, one in which the periphery was not necessarily destined to lose. Furthermore, was it really a question of winning and losing? And is it necessary to view the 1909 nationalization as the epitome of loss? Museum collections are not magically transformed by the changes in their management; they preserve the marks of the historical processes and curatorial intentions that had shaped them. After all, their basic purpose is the documentation of the past. Through the diligent labor of its early workers, Kassa's museum became a vessel of local and regional identity, and despite changes in ownership – which sometimes affected the collection itself – its main character never changed.

The Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary was a hierarchical structure, but one full of irregularities and exceptions. Its museum network was often intended to be put into the service of strengthening imperial, national, or regional identities, but control could never become total. This was partly due to the diversity and divergence of those political goals, but also to the fact that museums, as autonomous cultural products, tended not to fit into political agendas in a seamless way. The history of the Upper-Hungarian Museum was fraught by the tension between center and periphery. The unstable and changing nature of that tension resulted in a collection that promoted regional and national identities, but also revealed the complex processes behind them: it revealed that they were always in flux. Even when faced with the most suggestive questions, the museum offered its own answers, challenging us to query whether a dual model of center and periphery can be applied at all to a structure as complex as the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In this regard, it can serve as a model for rethinking the periphery as a center of its own.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Uršula Ambrušova of the Východoslovenské Múzeum, Košice for her invaluable help with documents in the museum's archives. I am grateful to Matthew Rampley, Markian Prokopovych, and the two reviewers for *Visual Resources* for their helpful comments on previous versions of this text, and to Barbara Pezzini for the careful

editing. Research for this article was carried out as part of the project *Promoting National and Imperial Identities: Museums in Austria-Hungary*, led by Matthew Rampley and funded by the Leverhulme Foundation. The article is dedicated to the memory of Foteini Vlachou, whose inspiring ideas on centers and peripheries have shaped it in countless, decisive ways.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

NÓRA VESZPRÉMI is currently a Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham, where she is completing a project on museums in Austria-Hungary. She specializes in Hungarian and Central European nineteenth-century visual culture. She has worked at the Hungarian National Gallery and taught at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. She is the author of a book on Romanticism and popular taste in early nineteenth-century Hungary (*Fölfűjt pipere és költői mámor: Romantika és művészeti közízlés a reformkori Magyarországon*, Könyvpont – L'Harmattan Press, 2015) and has published essays in *The Art Bulletin*, *Journal of the History of Collections*, as well as in exhibition catalogues of the Hungarian National Gallery.

ORCID

NÓRA VESZPRÉMI  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2449-0318>

Notes

- 1 The name of the town is Kassa in Hungarian, Kaschau in German, and Košice in Slovak. This article uses the Hungarian name for the sake of simplicity, as the administration of the museum was carried out in Hungarian.
- 2 Viktor Myskovszky, "Általános kimutatás a táruk műtárgyairól" [General report on the objects in the collections], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Első Évkönyve 1872/3-ról* [First Annual of the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association] (Košice: Upper-Hungarian Museum Association, 1874), 62–3.
- 3 "Titkári jelentés az egyesület 1872/3-ik évi működéséről" [Secretary's report on the activities of the Association in 1872–1873], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Első Évkönyve*, 38.
- 4 Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg, "Domination symbolique et géographie artistique dans l'histoire de l'art italien," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 40 (November 1981): 51–72. In English: "Symbolic Domination and Artistic Geography in Italian Art History," trans. Maylis Curie, *Art in Translation* 1, no. 1 (2009): 5–48.
- 5 Foteini Vlachou, "Why Spatial? Time and the Periphery," *Visual Resources* 32, nos. 1–2 (2016): 11.
- 6 See for instance Partha Mitter's thoughtful analysis of the avant-garde in art history: "Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery," *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 531–48.
- 7 Vlachou, "Why Spatial?" 3.
- 8 See Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 269–332. For an economic perspective on regional differences see Andrea Komlosy, "Innere Peripherien als Ersatz für Kolonien?," in Endre Hárs et al. ed., *Zentren, Peripherien und kollektive Identitäten in Österreich-Ungarn* (Tübingen: Francke, 2006).

- 9 The exact number of counties underwent several changes during the period examined here. In 1867, Hungary was made up of 56 counties; the administrative reforms of 1876–1877 raised this number to 65. In 1881, the unification of two respective pairs of counties lowered the number to 63.
- 10 Monika Kozári, *A dualista rendszer* [The dualist system] (Budapest: Pannonica, 2005), 196–202, 221–6, esp. 200.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 243–6.
- 12 Rudolf Eitelberger von Edelberg, “Zur Reform der Landesmuseen in Österreich,” in *Gesammelte Kunsthistorische Schriften*, vol. 2 (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1879), 241–52.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 243.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 The scope of the commission, which had originally focused on built heritage, was expanded in 1873 to include mobile artworks. See the new statutes: Anon., “Statut für die Centralcommission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Kunst und historische Denkmale,” *Mittheilungen des k. k. Oesterreich. Museums für Kunst und Industrie* 8, no. 96 (1873): 433–4.
- 16 See Vilmos Fraknói, *Visszatekintés a Múzeumok és Könyvtárak Országos Tanácsa és Főfelügyelősége egy évtized munkásságára 1898–1907* [A look back on a decade’s work of the National Council and Chief Inspectorate of Museums and Libraries] (Budapest: Stephaneum, 1908), 2–3.
- 17 Imre Henszlmann, “Der Landeskunstrath und die Provinzial-Museen,” *Pester Lloyd*, January 18 and 20, 1872, 5, 5.
- 18 On Pulszky, see *Pulszky Ferenc emlékére / Ferenc Pulszky Memorial Exhibition*, ed. Ernő Marosi et al. (Budapest: MTA Művészeti Gyűjtemény, 1997).
- 19 Ferenc Pulszky, “A múzeumokról” [On museums], in *A magyar művészettörténet-írás programjai* [Programs of Hungarian art history writing], ed. Ernő Marosi (Budapest: Corvina, 2000), 53–65.
- 20 On these processes, see Nóra Veszprémi, “An Introspective Pantheon: The Picture Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Collections*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhx041>.
- 21 Pulszky, “A múzeumokról,” 53.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 63–4.
- 23 As Upper Hungary was not an official administrative unit, its definition varies slightly from source to source. The description provided here comes from Aladár György, “Oberungarn,” in *Die österreich-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild* [The Austro-Hungarian monarchy in words and pictures (the “Kronprinzenwerk”)] Ungarn, 5. Band, 1. Abtheilung (Vienna: Kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1898), 3.
- 24 Gábor Czoch, “A polgárság és a polgárjog változásai Kassán a 19. század első felében” [Changes in citizenry and citizenship in Kassa in the first half of the nineteenth century], in “A városok szíverei”: *Tanulmányok Kassáról és a reformkori városokról* [Essays on Kassa and other cities in the first half of the nineteenth century] (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2009), 94–148, esp. 116–17.
- 25 Gábor Czoch, “A nemzetiségi megoszlás kérdései és társadalmi dimenziói Kassán az 1850/51-es összeírás alapján” [Questions of ethnic composition and its social dimensions in Kassa based on the 1850/51 census], in *A városok szíverei*, 156–9.

- 26 Joachim von Puttkamer, “Mehrsprachigkeit und Sprachenzwang in Oberungarn und Siebenbürgen 1867–1914: Eine statistische Untersuchung,” *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde* 1 (2003): 7–40.
- 27 Frank Henschel, “*Das Fluidum der Stadt ...*”: *Urbane Lebenswelten in Kassa/Košice/Kaschau zwischen Sprachenvielfalt und Magyarisierung 1867–1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2017).
- 28 The summary of the history of the museum provided here is based on the Annuals of the Upper-Hungarian Museum Society (*A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Évkönyvei*) published between 1874 and 1902, as well as documents in the Archives of the Východoslovenské múzeum, Košice. It concentrates on the facts necessary to the argument presented in this article. For further details, see Jozef Duchoň, *Východoslovenské múzeum v Košiciach: Sprievodca jubilejnou výstavou a dejinami múzea* [The East Slovakian Museum: catalogue of the anniversary exhibition and history of the museum] (Košice: East Slovakian Museum, 2002). The history of the museum was discussed most recently by Uršula Ambušová, “The Museum of Eastern Slovakia, Its Origin and Early History” (conference paper presented at the workshop *From London to Vienna and Central Europe: Museums of Art & Design in the Habsburg Empire*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, December 2017).
- 29 On the role of the *Bildungsbürgertum* in Kassa, see Henschel, “*Das Fluidum der Stadt ...*”, 51–2, 60–61.
- 30 Czoch, “A polgárság és a polgárjog,” 120.
- 31 *Magyar Minerva: A magyarországi múzeumok és könyvtárak címkönyve* [Hungarian Minerva: directory of Hungary’s museums and libraries], vol. IV, 1904–1911 (Budapest: National Chief Inspectorate of Museums and Libraries, 1912), 403.
- 32 Czoch, “A polgárság és a polgárjog,” 110.
- 33 *Gemersko-malohontské múzeum Rimavská Sobota: Az állandó honismereti kiállítás kalauza és A rimaszombati Gömör-Kishonti Múzeum története 1882–2002* [Guide to the permanent exhibition and history of the museum], ed. Olga Bodorová (Rimavská Sobota: Gemersko-malohontské múzeum, 2004).
- 34 To compare statistics on the three museums, see *Magyar Minerva*, 402–6, 752–3, 766–7. In its intended wide reach, the Upper-Hungarian Museum was similar to institutions such as the North Bohemian Museum in Reichenberg (Liberec), whose significance extended past the area it was officially supposed to cover. This tendency to “overreach” was one particular characteristic of some regional museums in Austria-Hungary, closely related to the imagined geographies that obscured official administrative borders in the minds of the Empire’s inhabitants.
- 35 Imre Henszlmann, *Kassa városának ó-német stílű templomairól* [On the churches of the town of Kassa built in the old German style] (Pest: Landerer and Heckenast, 1846).
- 36 See Henszlmann’s obituary in the Association’s annuals: Viktor Myskovszky, “Henszlmann Imre emléke,” in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Tizedik Évkönyve* [Tenth Annual of the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association] (Košice: Upper-Hungarian Museum Association, 1889), 1–13.
- 37 See the inventories of the Upper-Hungarian Museum, now held at the Východoslovenské múzeum, Košice.
- 38 “Titkári jelentés” [Secretary’s report], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Harmadik Évkönyve* [Third Annual of the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association] (Košice: Upper-Hungarian Museum Association, 1879), 105.

- 39 “Klimkovics Béla 1833–1885,” in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Hatodik Évkönyve* [Sixth Annual of the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association] (Košice: Upper-Hungarian Museum Association, 1885), 60–61.
- 40 “Titkári jelentés az egyesület 1872/3-ik évi működéséről,” 40.
- 41 This exhibition, organized under the auspices of the newly founded Museum of Applied Art, constituted a crucial milestone in the history of Hungarian museums: it was the first modern, scholarly temporary exhibition focusing on one specific branch of art and accompanied by a scholarly catalogue: *A magyar történeti ötvösmű-kiállítás lajstroma* (Budapest: Franklin, 1884). On the exhibition, see Erika Kiss, “‘Történelmi’ kiállítások a 19. században” [“Historical” exhibitions in the nineteenth century], in *Történelem-kép: Szemelvények múlt és művészet kapcsolatából Magyarországon* [History-image: examples of the relationship between past and art in Hungary], ed. Árpád Mikó and Katalin Sinkó (Budapest: Hungarian National Gallery, 2000), 516–17.
- 42 On Pulszky’s visit, see “Titkári jelentés” [Secretary’s report], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Második Évkönyve* [Second Annual of the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association] (Košice: Upper-Hungarian Museum Association, 1876), 59–60.
- 43 “A felső-magyarországi múzeum-egylet folyamodása, melyben az összes vidéki múzeumok felvirágoztatásának módja van kifejtve” [The Upper-Hungarian Museum Association’s petition, detailing the way to reinvigorate regional museums], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Hatodik Évkönyve*, 70–73. In 1886, when the director of the museum in Nagymarton in Western Hungary (today Mattersburg, Austria) asked the Kassa museum for advice, the suggestion was the same: aim to build up capital of your own so that you will always have something to rely on. See “Vidéki múzeumügy” [The business of regional museums], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Hetedik Évkönyve* [Seventh Annual of the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association] (Košice: Upper-Hungarian Museum Association, 1886), 48–51.
- 44 See the documents at the Hungarian National Archives, Budapest, MOL K736 161/1901, 168/1901, 333/1901, 216/1902, 222/1902.
- 45 Hungarian National Archives, Budapest, MOL K736 475/1901, 579/1901, 129/1902, 185/1902.
- 46 See Myskovszky’s letters to Imre Henszlmann, Kassa, November 22, 1876, September 22, 1881, Archives of the Východoslovenské Múzeum, Košice.
- 47 “Titkári jelentés,” “Tisztújító közgyűlés jegyzőkönyve” [Minutes of the gathering], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Harmadik Évkönyve*, 96, 100.
- 48 Hungarian National Archives, Budapest, MOL K736.
- 49 *A Kassai Múzeum gyűjteményeinek leíró lajstroma* [Descriptive catalogue of the collections of the Museum of Kassa] (Košice: Koczányi, 1903), 63–178 (Room VIII).
- 50 Many, but not all of the objects had been donated by József Csoma, a historian from Upper Hungary who had traveled to Nubia in 1879. See *A Kassai Múzeum gyűjteményeinek leíró lajstroma*, 110–45.
- 51 Viktor Récsy, “Azon gyűjtemények vázlatos ismertetése, melyeket Dr. Henszlmann Imre a felsőmagyarországi muzeumegyletnek hagyott” [Brief description of the collections bequeathed by Dr. I.H. to the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Tizedik Évkönyve*, 14–24. During the First World War, a substantial part of the collection was damaged or removed; some works were transferred to the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. See Uršula Ambrušová,

- “Henszlmann Imre írásbeli hagyatéka a kassai Kelet-Szlovákiai Múzeum gyűjteményében” [I.H.’s written bequest in the collection of the East Slovakian Museum in Košice], in *Musaeum Hungaricum 3*, conference proceedings (Boldog: Mátyusföldi Muzeológiai Társaság, 2010), 56–7. Today only 372 works from the Henszlmann collection can be identified in the Museum of Eastern Slovakia; see Anna Ecsedy, “Imre Henszlmann’s Collection of Prints and Drawings,” in Orsolya Bubryák et al., *Imre Henszlmann (1813–1888): Exhibition Honouring the 200th Anniversary of His Birth* (Budapest: MTA Művészeti Gyűjtemény, 2013), 54–6. See also Uršula Ambrušová, *The Dream of a Museum: Imrich Henszlmann and His Story* (Košice: East Slovakian Museum, 2013).
- 52 See *A Guide to the Art Collections of the South Kensington Museum* (London: South Kensington Museum, n. d. [1885?]), 8.
- 53 Viktor Myskovszky, “A régi agyagművek, majolica, fayence és porcellán különféle nemeinek rövid ismertetése” [Brief introduction to different types of old ceramics, majolica, faience and porcelain], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Első Évkönyve*, 1–13.
- 54 Matthew Rampley, “Design Reform in the Habsburg Empire: Technology, Aesthetics and Ideology,” *Journal of Design History* 23, no. 3 (2010): 247–64.
- 55 Antal Stöhr, “Művészi Ipar” [Artistic industry], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Kilenczedik Évkönyve* [Ninth Annual of the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association] (Košice: Upper-Hungarian Museum Association, 1888), 1–7.
- 56 Jenő Radisics, “A Simor-múzeum” [The Simor Museum], *Művészi Ipar* 2, no. 6 (1887): 221–2.
- 57 Stöhr, “Művészi Ipar,” 4.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 59 *A Kassai Múzeum gyűjteményeinek leíró lajstroma*, 1–46, 399–430.
- 60 Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, “The Universal Survey Museum,” *Art History* 3, no. 4 (1980): 448–69.
- 61 Éva Bicskei, “The Formation of the National Pantheon: Portrait Galleries of County Halls, City Halls, and Clubs in Nineteenth Century Hungary,” *Acta Historiae Artium* 49 (2008): 305–37, quotation from page 331.
- 62 Room XII, display cases 62–4. See *A Kassai Múzeum gyűjteményeinek leíró lajstroma*, 362–85.
- 63 *A Kassai Múzeum gyűjteményeinek leíró lajstroma*, 376 (Cat. No. 5077).
- 64 On these events, see Henschel, “*Das Fluidum der Stadt ...*”, 264–80.
- 65 Summed up in “A Felsőmagyarországi Rákóczi Múzeum új épületének ügye,” *Muzeumi és Könyvtári Értesítő* 9 (1917): 40–44.
- 66 Only a few years later, in 1913, the museum of Gömör-Kishont County, which was a recipient of some financial support from the government but still struggled to make ends meet, was fighting a losing battle to acquire the collection of Dénes Andrásy (1835–1913), a recently deceased local aristocrat, who had left the paintings to the state. (See official correspondence from the year 1913 preserved in the Archives of the Gemersko-malohontské múzeum, Rimavská Sobota.) As the war finally curtailed the museum’s plans to construct the new state-of-the-art exhibition spaces requested by the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, which acted as the government’s intermediary in this case, the collection remained in the latter institution.
- 67 Henschel, “*Das Fluidum der Stadt ...*”, 269.

- 68 *Kassaer Zeitung*, October 30, 1906, quoted in Henschel, “*Das Fluidum der Stadt ...*”, 276.
- 69 Henschel, “*Das Fluidum der Stadt ...*”, 278.
- 70 See László Kiss, “Magyar–szlovák kapcsolatok és konfliktusok a hosszú 19. században” [Hungarian–Slovak relations and conflicts in the long nineteenth century], in *A modern szlovák nacionalizmus évszázada 1780–1918: Párhuzamos nemzetépítés a multi-etnikus Magyar Királyságban* [The century of modern Slovak nationalism: parallel nation building in the multi-ethnic Kingdom of Hungary], ed. László Szarka (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2011), 161–2, 174.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 175; for a statistical analysis, see von Puttkamer, “Mehrsprachigkeit und Sprachenzwang.”
- 72 Frank Henschel, *Vereinswesen und Erinnerungskultur in Kaschau/Košice/Kassa zwischen Nationalismus und städtbürgerlichem Pragmatismus (1867–1918)* (Leipzig: Research Academy Leipzig, 2013), 12–18.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 74 “Jegyzőkönyv a felsőmagyarországi múzeum-egyletnek 1889. május hó 19-én tartott közgyűléséről” [Minutes of the meeting of the Museum Association on May 19, 1889], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Tizedik Évkönyve*, 48.
- 75 On Pozsony/Pressburg/Prešporok, see Eleonóra Babejová, *Fin-de-siècle Pressburg: Conflict and Cultural Coexistence in Bratislava 1897–1914* (Boulder, CO: Columbia University Press, 2013).
- 76 Henschel, “*Das Fluidum der Stadt ...*”, 53.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 52–4. Puttkamer, “Mehrsprachigkeit und Sprachenzwang” demonstrates this phenomenon through an examination of the statistics. That a local identity based on multi-ethnicity was possible in Upper Hungary in the nineteenth century is well demonstrated by the example of Pozsony; see Babejová, *Fin-de-siècle Pressburg*, 85–91 on “Pressburger identity.”
- 78 Henschel, “*Das Fluidum der Stadt ...*”, 73–5.
- 79 Henschel, *Vereinswesen*, 14–15.
- 80 “A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum-egylet alapszabályai” [Rules and regulations of the Upper-Hungarian Museum Association], in *A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum Egylet Első Évkönyve*, 28.
- 81 See for instance the eighteenth-century guild chest of the weaver’s guild with the inscription “WEBER INNUNG,” *A Kassai Múzeum gyűjteményeinek leíró lajstroma*, 44 (Cat. No. 268).
- 82 *A Kassai Múzeum gyűjteményeinek leíró lajstroma*, 49–50 (Cat. Nos. 85–118).
- 83 *Ibid.*, 60 (Cat. No. 289).
- 84 “A Felsőmagyarországi Múzeum-egylet alapszabályai,” 28.