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Constructing a Hybrid Memoryscape. Hungarian Topography of Memory in Habsburg Galicia During the First World War

Konstruowanie hybrydowego pejzażu pamięci. Węgierska topografia pamięci w habsburskiej Galicji podczas I wojny światowej

Abstract

This article examines the cultural and spatial practices of commemorating Hungarian soldiers in Galicia during the First World War, focusing on the Battle of Łapanów–Limanowa (2–12 December 1914) and two competing models of remembrance within the Habsburg Monarchy: national and imperial ones. The battle, a rare military success on the Eastern Front, was quickly appropriated by Hungarian propaganda and turned into a symbol of heroism, sacrifice, and national identity. Commemoration began during the war itself, unfolding in two parallel frameworks: the Hungarian national narrative, glorifying and heroizing the soldiers, and the imperial narrative, which sought to sacralize the fallen within a supranational vision of dynastic unity. The first part analyzes Hungarian wartime narratives produced by correspondents and a military physician, showing how their accounts framed the battle as an act of sacrifice and brotherhood,

transforming trauma into national myth. The second part focuses on imperial commemorative practices, particularly the construction of the war cemetery on Jabłoniec Hill near Limanowa, designed under Habsburg administration. Although an imperial initiative, the cemetery emphasized the role of Hungarian soldiers, symbolically highlighting their contribution to defending the monarchy. These practices aimed to strengthen imperial cohesion by honoring all constituent peoples and reinforcing loyalty to Vienna. Former battlefields thus became contested memoryscapes where imperial and national narratives intersected.

Keywords: First World War, Hungary, Galicia, remembrance, wartime narratives, war cemeteries.

Abstrakt

Artykuł analizuje kulturowe i przestrzenne praktyki upamiętniania węgierskich żołnierzy w Galicji podczas I wojny światowej, koncentrując się na bitwie pod Łapanowem–Limanową (2–12 grudnia 1914) i dwóch konkurujących modelach pamięci w monarchii habsburskiej: narodowym i imperialnym. Bitwa, będąca jednym z nielicznych sukcesów militarnych na froncie wschodnim, została szybko zawłaszczona przez węgierską propagandę i przekształcona w symbol bohaterstwa, ofiary i tożsamości narodowej. Proces upamiętniania rozpoczął się już w trakcie wojny i rozwijał się równolegle w dwóch narracjach: węgierskiej, gloryfikującej żołnierzy, oraz imperialnej, sakralizującej poległych w duchu ponadnarodowej jedności dynastii. Pierwsza część omawia węgierskie relacje wojenne autorstwa korespondentów i lekarza wojskowego, ukazujące bitwę jako akt poświęcenia i braterstwa, przekształcający traumę w mit narodowy. Druga część skupia się na praktykach imperialnych, zwłaszcza budowie cmentarza wojennego na wzgórzu Jabłoniec koło Limanowej, zaprojektowanego przez administrację habsburską. Choć była to inicjatywa imperialna, mocno podkreślano w niej rolę Węgrów, symbolicznie akcentując ich wkład w obronę monarchii. Praktyki te miały wzmacniać spójność imperium i lojalność wobec Wiednia. Dawne pola bitew stały się przestrzeniami pamięci, gdzie krzyżowały się narracje narodowe i imperialne.

Słowa klucze: pierwsza wojna światowa, Węgry, Galicja, upamiętnienie, narracje wojenne, cmentarze wojenne.

Introduction

During the First World War, the battlefields of East-Central Europe witnessed the clash of multiethnic imperial armies. On the Eastern Front,

soldiers of the Austro–Hungarian Empire and the German Reich stood against the forces of the Russian Empire. These confrontations were not only military operations but also moments of symbolic significance, where the deaths of soldiers – especially in the early stages of the war – became instrumental in shaping emerging cultures of mourning and public memory. The commemoration of the fallen served dual purposes: it emphasized imperial humanitarianism and military sacrifice, while also cultivating patriotic loyalty among the empire's diverse citizenry. This dynamic was clearly visible in Galicia, a key theatre of operations on the Eastern Front, where multiethnic imperial units clashed with Russian forces. In the opening months of the war, Russian troops occupied Lemberg (Lwów), besieged the fortress of Przemyśl, which, surrounded by enemies, fell in March 1915,[1] and advanced towards Kraków, which, as a fortress, had a defensive role in protecting Vienna. At the beginning of December 1914, the Austro–Hungarian Army launched the Łapanów–Limanowa operation (2–12 December), which successfully repelled the Russian threat from the approaches to Kraków. Hungarian military units played a significant role in this victory, and their actions were quickly appropriated into Hungarian national propaganda and the mythologization of heroic sacrifice.

This article investigates the construction of memory surrounding the Battle of Limanowa during the First World War and does so through two different commemorative frameworks: the Hungarian nationalizing narrative and the Austrian imperial model. The first part analyzes textual sources, mainly wartime accounts, that reinterpreted the battlefield experience from the perspective of Hungarian heroism. Although the battle was fought by multiethnic Habsburg forces, Hungarian narratives reframed it as a national myth, emphasizing the sacrifice of Hungarian units and appropriating Limanowa as a symbolic site of national identity. Since these texts were published during the war, they are saturated with propaganda and present only those narratives that were permitted for public distribution – an aspect that will also be addressed in this analysis. The second part examines the Austrian state's efforts to institutionalize commemoration through mechanisms such as the War Graves Office by constructing military cemeteries and monuments. These aimed to transform the battlefield into a network of orderly, sacralized cemeteries that served as a supranational space of mourning and instrument of

1 Cf. Alexander Watson, *The Fortress: The Great Siege of Przemysl* (London: Allen Lane, 2023); John E. Fahe. *Przemyśl, Poland: A Multiethnic City During and After a Fortress, 1867–1939* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2023).

loyalty and belonging, according to pre-war traditions, in which ceremonies (including funerary rites, commemorative events, and monument unveilings) were carefully choreographed and served an integrative function, offering a narrative of shared loyalty to the monarchy. They created spaces of political community among the empire's diverse nationalities and functioned as public performances of imperial belonging.[2] The juxtaposition of national and imperial modes highlights the fragmentation of wartime memory within the Habsburg realm and reveals the varied ways multinational soldiers perceived their contribution to the war. While the Viennese authorities aimed to centralize symbolic meaning, Hungarian actors promoted a narrative of heroic distinctiveness focused on defending Hungary. The case of Limanowa illustrates how both cultural and spatial practices of commemoration were shaped by broader struggles over identity and sovereignty within a crumbling imperial framework. The former battlefield was transformed into a site of memory intended to serve both a national narrative and an imperial one, particularly through commemorative architecture. This example enables an analysis of how sites of memory, as theorized by Jay Winter, became arenas of narrative contestation, where multiethnic battlefields were reimagined as unambiguously national commemorative spaces.[3] Limanowa was also deliberately chosen as an example, as considerable attention in the memory landscape has been devoted to Przemyśl, while significantly less has been given to the cultural references surrounding the commemoration and heroization of those who fell during the Łapanów–Limanowa operation in December 1914.

This article argues that, in the context of intensifying nationalism before the Great War, the aim of memory-making was no longer solely the integration of remembrance under the banner of imperial unity. Instead, there was an increasingly explicit articulation of national distinctiveness in the construction of wartime narratives and commemorations of the dead. A crucial role was played here by peripheral actors – war correspondents, soldiers, and the families of the fallen – whose agency actively shaped the landscapes of memory, often independently of central political projects, and who were not merely passive recipients of top-down imperial commemorative practices. As Pieter M. Judson has

2 In this matter cf. research by: Daniel L. Unowsky, *The Pomp and Politics of Patriotism: Imperial Celebrations in Habsburg Austria, 1848–1916* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005); see also: *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, eds. Maria Bucur, Nancy M. Wingfield (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001).

3 Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

shown, the empire's cohesion was sustained not through uniformity but through negotiated pluralism, which nonetheless left space for competing national agendas, especially in moments of crisis.[4] While István Deák demonstrated that the imperial military system functioned as a tool of integration, fostering a shared imperial identity, he also acknowledged that the experience of war and the process of mobilization frequently reinforced national solidarity and a sense of ethnic belonging, with loyalty to the empire remaining fundamentally conditional.[5] These studies help contextualize the memory conflicts examined in this article, particularly the tension between Viennese attempts at imperial commemoration and the Hungarian appropriation of battle narratives as national myth. Mark Cornwall likewise demonstrates that the Habsburg Monarchy's efforts to maintain cohesion through wartime propaganda and symbolic politics were systematically undermined by emerging national narratives, which redefined loyalty and sacrifice in ethnic rather than imperial terms. In a time of imperial erosion during the war, grassroots narrators (though still monitored by censorship) reframed acts of combat as national rather than necessarily imperial deeds.[6]

From profane to sacred: Miklós Lázár and Hungarian heroization

Before acts of combat could attain the status of heroic deeds inscribed in national mythology, an interpretative and transmissive mechanism was required – one that functioned as a catalyst in the formation of collective memory. The actual events on the battlefield, recorded in staff reports and accessible only to a narrow circle of military decision-makers, had to be transformed into messages comprehensible and persuasive to the broader public. In this process, war correspondents played a pivotal role – not only in reporting from the front but also in actively co-constructing the official wartime narrative. Although their work was subject to strict censorship, this selective mode of communication fostered the emergence of a unified, heroic image of war that aligned with the expectations of state

4 Cf. Pieter M. Judson, *Habsburg Empire. A new History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016).

5 Cf. István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

6 Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria–Hungary: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

propaganda.[7] Narratives of this kind left no room for a comprehensive depiction of the war; they did not address the actions committed by soldiers of their own army against civilian populations – acts that are well documented in numerous wartime sources and have been thoroughly analysed by contemporary historians.[8] The war was therefore not only a military conflict, but also a great war of lies and a struggle over the interpretation of reality, in which disinformation and the solemn narrative of soldiers' sacrifice served to mobilize society and legitimize the state order, which remained under a state of exception (Ausnahmezustand). The heroization of soldiers' actions was the result of carefully orchestrated messaging, in which the war correspondent became one of the key agents, publishing observations in the press or as monographs.[9] Beyond shaping loyal and disciplined military attitudes within the monarchy's forces, such narratives played a vital role in the construction of national stories. Within the Habsburgs' multiethnic armies, the bravery of soldiers from particular national groups was highlighted in selected acts of courage – an effort not only to legitimize their participation in the war, but also to reinforce national pride and mobilize the national community on the home front. These narratives thus served an integrative and identity-building function within a multiethnic empire and in the context of a total war, which demanded mass participation and emotional identification with the military effort – producing, in effect, a hybrid form. In this part of the article, we examine the work of selected war correspondents who, during their stay in Galicia, described the heroic deeds of Hungarian soldiers fighting in the Austro-Hungarian army, focusing primarily on the Battle of Limanowa–Łapanów, fought between 2 and 12 December 1914.

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7 This is, moreover, a ubiquitous process, observable regardless of whether one refers to the First World War or other conflicts of the twentieth century. On this topic, see for example: Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Kosovo, 1975*, Revised edition, 2000.

8 Cf. Tomasz Pudłocki, "Honwedzi czy Hunowie? Obraz Węgrów w społeczeństwie galicyjskim 1914–1918 – pamięć a rzeczywistość," *Rocznik Przemyski. Historia* 54/1 (21) (2018): 59–70; Piotr Szlanta, "'Najgorsze bestie to są Hondy'. Ewolucja stosunku polskich mieszkańców Galicji do monarchii habsburskiej podczas I wojny światowej," in *Galicyjskie Spotkania 2011*, ed. Urszula Jakubowska (Zabrze: 2011), 161–179.

9 In this matter see more, eg.: *War, Journalism and History. War Correspondents in the Two World Wars*, eds. Yvonne T. McEwen, Fiona A. Fisken (Oxford–Berlin–New York: Peter Lang, 2012); Tim Luckhurst, "War Correspondents", in *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, eds. Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer and Bill Nasson (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2016).

Miklós Lázár, a 28-year-old war correspondent during the war, also devoted some attention to the cult of Limanowa in his narrative.[10] His narrative begins virtually with his departure for the front, where, already during the journey, he shares his reflections with the reader – making it clear that he is not a tabula rasa and that, despite his role as a reporter, he will not always be able to maintain full objectivity in his account. This is exemplified by his remark:

> The journalist swears to be honest and straightforward. Yet if, at times, a beating heart reveals itself in his words, and if tears of joy or sorrow overcome his strict impartiality, let that serve as his excuse – for never before has he felt so deeply and with such love that he is a Hungarian (…) Let us be proud of our Hungarian spirit. I saw Austrian officers, blushing and with misty eyes, expressing their admiration for us. It took a world war for them to realize that we are the backbone of the monarchy. This journey has helped me understand the freedom struggles of Rákóczi and Kossuth – now rewritten anew. The Hungarian people go to war as if to a wedding. The soldiers wear the jewels of national identity – they are wise, sober, determined, with small bouquets in their caps, and the echoes of their songs resound even in the damp tunnels.[11]

While travelling through Hungary and then across various towns in western Galicia from late August 1914 onward, Lázár constructed a narrative grounded in his observation of landscapes, processes, and, above all, the people he encountered along the way. He commented on their physiognomy, mental states, and emotions. He reflected on the economic condition of Galicia, described Russian prisoners of war, and included dialogues held with them. In doing so, the author attempted to present to his readers every observable aspect of the war and the individuals entangled in it. However, his narrative was shaped by the methodological limitation mentioned earlier – he was unable to portray the full brutality of war. His account omits references to the losses of his own units or the setbacks experienced by the Austro–Hungarian army, which were present from the very outset of the war. There is no space for stories of mass expulsions of civilians; instead, he merely notes deserted towns. Although the correspondent drew on his own observations and censored newspapers, he does not depict the suffering of his fellow soldiers, their sorrow, or homesickness. On the contrary, by describing *Kriegsbegeisterung*, he propagandistically portrays war as joy – a joyful and unifying

10 Cf. Miklós Lázár, *Fronton* (Budapest: 1915).

11 *Ibidem*, 5–6.

experience for the empire's subjects. In this respect, his account aligns with the canonical narrative of war permitted by state authorities.

The tone of the narrative shifts when Lázár turns to his account of Limanowa, which he later described as "the bloodiest battle of the war." In this section of his war correspondence, he constructs a notably heroic representation of this segment of the front, likely informed by national sentiment – a dimension that will be addressed in more detail below. The chapter opens with a sombre and enigmatic depiction of war. As he observes:

> This is not a peace-time train, vanishing into the night like a golden ribbon. Its path is clear – there is no train ahead or behind – yet it moves cautiously, groping its way forward like a man not yet accustomed to the dark. This uncertain train is heading toward Nowy Sącz. We are its passengers – war correspondents. No one knows how long we will travel like this. Some say as far as Chabówka or Marcinkowice. Twilight falls, stars appear in the sky, yet the surroundings feel terrifying and full of secrets. Children are not playing near the ditches; wandering journeymen and cart drivers on their way to market no longer wave their caps or handkerchiefs at us. The railway line feels like an abandoned child, exiled by a stepmother into the night. The railway posts – those lanterns that flickered half-asleep – have gone dark, now resembling charred wicks, burned to the end (...) It may already be midnight. Frost and mist draw fantastic shapes on the windowpanes. Just six months ago – or even less – a passenger with a cigar in his mouth, stretched out on a comfortable seat, could interpret these white riddles however he pleased: one saw the outline of a woman's face, another thought of sleeping children, yet another frightened himself with the image of a beloved lying in repose on a catafalque. Today, millions of weary eyes see only battlefields, meadows steaming with blood, charging lancers, white puffs of shrapnel, a soldier clutching his chest, releasing his rifle, and falling face-first into the trench. Even the landscapes – once enchanting – have lost their innocent charm. On the slopes of hills, where the setting sun moves like a bloody tongue, we spot concealed artillery. Between the bare branches of winter forests, machine guns lie in wait.[12]

In this way, the correspondent stationed in Galicia serves not only as a source of information for his readers but, more importantly, as a medium of cultural memory and affective representation of the war. The narrator contrasts the memory of peace – still vivid just a few months earlier – with the vision of a dehumanized, militarized world, in which the railway, once a symbol of modernity and comfortable travel, becomes

12 *Ibidem*, 59–60.

a metaphor for exile, disorientation, and fear. The landscape, previously perceived as aesthetic and secure, loses its innocence, becoming a space contaminated by violence. The transformation of the "fantastic shapes" appearing on the frosted windows – from outlines of female faces to visions of death and battlefield horror – reveals how profoundly war alters the perception of everyday reality. This reflects not so much direct trauma as its aesthetic prefiguration: an emotional condition of a society immersed in the realities of total war, in which even ordinary sensory experiences are dominated by fear, violence, and imagery of death. This omnipresent death is further emphasized through descriptions of scattered unburied bodies, exhumations, and the search for soldiers' corpses, as well as the prevalence of graves of the fallen. To stimulate the readers' imagination, Lázár includes the description of a mass grave located near the railway station in Limanowa, marked by the inscription: "Here rests János Szabó, corporal of the 20th Infantry Regiment, with three comrades."[13] The narrative of the former battlefield permeates every page of Lázár's war correspondence:

> I cross a ditch and walk uphill to view the field of the Limanowa slaughter from above. But how to proceed, when the path is blocked by three soldiers' bodies – one hussar, two old Austrian reservists? They lie on their backs, faces to the sky, cold and aloof. What could possibly concern them now? They have passed through everything – agony and death. Their faces are smooth – not serene, but calm, at peace. There is no need to look far – hundreds of dead Russians lie along the trenches. The December night has frozen their uniforms; they have not changed since death.[14]

Miklós Lázár describes a "Totenlandschaft," a motif that would later become ubiquitous in other narratives. This serves to further emphasize the soldiers' sacrifice.[15] At the same time, he offers modes of aestheticizing death and simultaneously nationalizing suffering, in which fallen compatriots are depicted as noble and serene – often named – while the enemy remains an anonymous mass. The post-battle landscape becomes a site of memory, where violence is muted and death is inscribed into a framework of contemplation and sacrifice. Rather than deconstructing the horror of war, the author domesticates it – through metaphor, the softening of corporeal imagery, and a silence surrounding brutality. This mode of

13 *Ibidem*, 62.

14 *Ibidem*.

15 About this term in the context of WW1 cf.: Sabina Tanović, *Designing Memory. The Architecture of Commemoration in Europe, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: 2019), 21.

representation reinforces a shared national emotional community and transforms trauma into a component of collective memory. This function is also evident in the next chapter of his Galician war correspondence, titled tellingly: "How a Hungarian Hussar Dies at Limanowa." The entry, dated 18 December 1914, offers another emotionally charged battlefield scene, presenting the apotheosis of the death of the 28-year-old hussar József T. (notably the same age as the correspondent himself):

> I sit at the edge of a trench on the battlefield near Limanowa. The blue of the clear sky smiles down on me between the dry branches of two old birch trees, and in front of me, on the bare ground, lies a dead Hungarian hussar. For two days and nights now, his bed has been the clay soil of Galicia, and a molehill his pillow. He is a hussar of the Nádasdy regiment, a brave soldier of the Royal 9th Regiment, Corporal József T… Can you hear me? Far from your homeland, a Hungarian son bids you farewell (…) That's how I ended up here, at the edge of this trench. I met József T. early in the morning, and now the sun is at its zenith. He lies exactly as before – dead, motionless by his own will. I shook him – I thought he had fallen asleep, tired, lying on his back. I looked around – there are four of us: on either side of the hussar lie two Russian soldiers, face down. The corporal lies on his back, head raised proudly, arms placed along the red stripes of his trousers, legs straight in attention. I bend over his face – his small brown moustache charmingly curled, his hair neatly combed and pomaded, freshly shaved – a handsome Hungarian lad, as if crafted by the good Lord at the bottom of a fragrant, soft sheaf. If only his eyes were open – perhaps I could read from them what he thought, what hurt most in that final moment when the Russian bullet pierced his chest. His face is yellowish, lips parted, white teeth gleaming – his last breath has escaped – where is it now? Perhaps it turned into a white dove, pecking at grain… His sabre and rifle were taken, but his fur coat still rests on his shoulders, his blue uniform is clean and fitted, and over his heart a small burn – no larger than a wedding ring – marks the spot where death sealed him as its bridegroom. His comrades unbuttoned his coat – under two shirts and a woollen sweater, his darkening blood has congealed. His white csákó, with its black band, rolled into the trench – I pick it up, wipe it clean, and place it by his head. On the plume, a narrow ribbon in national colours and a gilded medallion bearing the images of our king and Emperor Wilhelm.[16]

Lázár proceeds to interpret the circumstances of the hussar's death based on gathered testimonies. He recounts the beginning of the attack and the first casualties – a captain and a lieutenant – before focusing on a single hussar who engaged in a brutal hand-to-hand struggle with two

16 Lázár, *Fronton,* 64 et seq.

Russian soldiers who had charged at him with bayonets. Despite losing his weapon and being forced into a fight for his life, he managed to kill both opponents, only to be fatally shot moments later. A fellow soldier rushed to his aid, unbuttoning his uniform in an attempt to dress the wound, but the hussar "died firmly, with dignity, as befits a Hungarian hussar. You in the middle, the two Russians beside you – thus the three of you appeared before the Lord's throne," the correspondent wrote in a pathos-laden tone. He continues with anatomically and visually detailed descriptions of the dead Russian soldiers lying next to the Hungarian hussar. One is portrayed as a young blond volunteer with delicate hands and narrow feet; the other, an older reservist with greying hair, is described as a simple dockworker from the Volga. According to the correspondent's interpretation, the latter probably did not understand the meaning of the war and was merely an anonymous cog in the machinery of the Russian mass mobilization. While Lázár does not demonize the Russian soldiers, he removes the brutality and realism of death through aestheticization and ceremonial narration, emphasizing their passive role as participants in the conflict. This symbolic rendering turns death into an object of contemplation and defuses its horror.

The chapter further personalizes the experience of the fallen hussar. Lázár notes that he found a crumpled letter in József's trouser pocket, sent by his wife Zsuzsi and dated 10 November 1914. Its content – emotionally charged and reflecting a strong bond between husband and wife – contains a plea for news from the front. She reassures him that things are well at home, but implores him to write back, as she has no idea what has happened to him. The correspondent includes the letter to symbolically connect the Hungarian "home front" with the battlefield and to convey the tragedy of war from the perspective of those left behind. This narrative choice serves to complicate the one-sided heroic account of male martial valor. The woman's letter – full of sorrow, faith, and longing – stands in stark contrast to the elevated descriptions of battlefield deeds. In doing so, the author reminds readers that war is not only about heroic sacrifice, but also about shattered domestic lives, loneliness, and the suffering of women. This confrontation invites reflection on the cost of heroization, highlighting that every glorious death on the battlefield constitutes a personal tragedy for someone at home, caught in the limbo between hope and despair.

Lázár describes the hussar's burial, writing that his body was placed in a mass grave alongside twenty-three comrades, marked by a commemorative plaque: "Here died a heroic death, 24 hussars of the Nádasdy

Regiment, 16 December 1914." He then links this image to the letter he had found on the body, writing:

> But will Zsuzsi find you, when she puts on her black shawl, boards the train, and comes here to Galicia to search for her beloved? Your name is not on the cross – only: Heldentod (heroic death). She will bend over the grave, watering it with tears: 'Beloved husband, Józsi – so you are the Hungarian Heldentod!' Rise, good woman, return to your small family, for your beloved is a true Hungarian Heldentod. And now farewell, hussar of Nádasdy – I bid farewell to your mortal body, your national ribbon, your rakish moustache, your boots with spurs – forever.[17]

In this way, the imagined scene of a woman mourning and searching for her husband introduces the perspective of the war's domestic hinterland, reflecting the fate of families during these turbulent times. Through the narrative assignment of the status of a "Hungarian Heldentod" to the fallen soldier, private loss and personal grief are subsumed into national mythology, and individual death is no longer framed as tragedy, but as honor. As this illustrates, Lázár interweaves battlefield descriptions with the heroization of the fallen, national identity and pride, as well as a cult of masculinity. As Joanna Bourke has emphasized, death on the battlefield played a central role in the construction of modern models of masculinity. Heroic death was perceived as the ultimate culmination of a soldier's life, affirming values such as honor, duty, and loyalty to the nation.[18] Thus, the battlefield is transformed from a profane space into a sacred one, and the mass grave in which the hussars were buried no longer signifies an anonymous collection of conscripts, but rather a symbolic altar of national sacrifice, where the boundaries between individual and collective are blurred.

Between individual experience and collective national myth: Ferenc Molnár's war narrative

Ferenc Molnár, who was 36 years old at the outbreak of the war and experienced the Galician front as a war correspondent, also visited the battlefield near Limanowa shortly after the fighting in December 1914.

17 *Ibidem*, 78–79.

18 Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

The original edition of his work was published in Budapest in 1916.[19] Prior to that, extended excerpts from his account had appeared in the press.[20] This facilitated the relatively rapid dissemination of information about Limanowa, while also contributing to the heroization of Hungarian actions. The landscape Molnár encountered and described reveals to the reader the scale of losses sustained during the fighting. He writes:

> Limanowa, December 1914. Since four in the morning we have been moving among wounded prisoners, resting hussars, and listening to stories of the Battle of Limanowa. But we Hungarians, with our questions, keep returning to the night charge of the Nádasdy Regiment. In the Battle of Limanowa, which constituted the epicenter of our victory in Galicia, the night engagement of the Nádasdy hussars deserves the highest – and most painful – admiration. These Hungarian boys, in a night black as pitch, received the order to leave their horses in the village, reach a trench running up a steep hillside to the ridge, and relieve the troops fighting there. The hussars, led by their officers, cautiously advanced on all fours toward the trench. The enemy held the advantage on that hill, so by the time the hussars reached the position, the Russians had already captured it. In the pitch-dark night, they lay in wait with machine guns aimed at our boys. As soon as the Russian volley rang out, the officers immediately understood the situation and led the hussars in an assault. These young Hungarians, armed only with rifle butts, went against the Russian army equipped with bayonets and machine guns. They were under fire from midnight until eleven in the morning, continuously fighting against enemy bayonets and machine guns.[21]

In the subsequent part of his account, Ferenc Molnár continues to develop the narrative of the heroic struggle of the Hungarian hussars, focusing both on the brutal nature of the fighting and on the valorous conduct of the officers. When describing the fallen Russian soldiers, he emphasizes that most did not die from gunfire but from the brutal blows delivered with rifle butts and shovels – tools of improvised hand-to-hand combat. He devotes particular attention to the commanding officers, who – according to the soldiers' testimonies – did not lead from behind but remained at the front of the charge throughout the engagement. Molnár recounts how two hussars proudly led him to the site where

19 Ferenc Molnár, *Egy Haditudósító Emlékei: 1914 November - 1915 November* (Budapest: 1916).

20 Cf.: *Der Sieg bei Limanowa*, "Tagespost", 20 December 1914, 1 (Linz).

21 Quotation after Polish edition: Ferenc Molnár, *Galicia 1914–1915* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Most, 2012), 43.

Colonel Othmar Muhr had fallen, where a makeshift memorial plaque had been erected and decorated with fir branches. They pleaded with him to publicize their message: that the world should know Hungarian officers fought side by side with their men, with courage and honor. This type of account – highly emotional and imbued with patriotic sentiment – fits squarely within Molnár's characteristic heroic narrative, in which the battlefield becomes a space of national exaltation, and the direct experience of violence is transfigured into a myth of bravery and sacrifice.[22] Molnár goes on to describe the battlefield after the fighting had ended: around eleven o'clock, the infantry arrived to relieve the hussars and delivered the decisive blow to the Russian forces. The direction of the Russians' panicked retreat, he notes, could be read from the positioning of bodies strewn along the slope. At the edge of the forest, burials of the fallen were already underway, while Hungarian territorial soldiers were clearing the battlefield, removing remains and captured equipment by wagon. Yet within this same space, contrasting scenes emerge: on the hillside, hussars swing playfully in a garden, half-naked, laughing, warmed by the sun. A calm midday atmosphere prevails. Through his binoculars, Molnár sees individual hussars praying at graves, others strolling across the field hand in hand. From a distance, a soft song can be heard – Hungarians, it is said, always sing, even in the trenches of northern Poland, even at night. In this way, the author paints a mood-laden, almost lyrical portrait of the post-battle landscape – a space marked at once by horror, silence, and memory.[23] The correspondent concludes his report with a note of elevated heroism:

> This victorious battlefield is a heart-wrenching mixture – a tragic landscape that brings tears to the eyes: the joyful calm of laughing hussars swinging, pain, cheerful singing, prayer, Russian corpses gazing up at the sky, creaking carts carrying bloodied remains, poor Hungarian hussars fallen to the ground – perhaps not even knowing that here, on the hills of Limanowa, by pushing the Russians northward, they had secured peace for the frightened towns of Hungary. Over this landscape, a veritable divine miracle – here in the north, just before Christmas – the sun shines warmly and brightly".[24]

Molnár then records a vivid and personal account of his first encounter with death on the battlefield. As he walks among the fallen, he initially

22 *Ibidem*, 44.

23 *Ibidem*.

24 *Ibidem*.

regards the sight of Russian soldiers' corpses with detachment – they are strangers to him, their faces and uniforms evoke no emotional response. At a certain moment, however, he experiences a turning point: the gaze of a dead Russian soldier profoundly unsettles him, confronting him with the stark reality of death. The literary imaginings of war give way to brutal truth – a moment that paralyzes him, until he is aided by the Viennese painter Karl Hollitzer. Molnár is forced to walk between the bodies of two fallen hussars, through a pool of blood; he closes his eyes and crosses this symbolic threshold "like a narrow footbridge over an abyss." The correspondent thus dismantles the romantic image of war – not as a glorious pursuit of the enemy, but as a mundane, laborious aftermath: the cleaning of the battlefield, the collection of remains, the burial of the dead, and the erection of wooden crosses. He observes all this as "a guest lingering in the banquet hall after everyone has left." This description reveals not only the material but also the psychological weight of war, exposing its hidden dimension – the dirt, the blood, the refuse, the silence, and the anonymous labor of those who did not fight, but who were tasked with restoring order in the wake of death. Molnár continues, noting that around three in the afternoon, after descending from the battlefield, the group reached the train station where a train awaited them. In an atmosphere of relaxation and under the warmth of the sun, soldiers, officers, and journalists ate their meal from field mess kits. Yet in this seemingly peaceful moment, the author experiences a sudden shock – he notices a dried bloodstain on the toe of his boot. Although he had taken great care not to touch the fallen on the hillside, blood – most likely from the hussar he passed with closed eyes – had nonetheless settled on his shoe. This discovery triggers a deep sense of guilt and revulsion at his own role; he feels wretched, worse than "a stray dog being chased away." Confronted with this trauma, he is unable to eat, withdraws from the group, and walks toward the locomotive. There, discreetly and in solitude, he attempts to wash off the blood, pretending in front of the engine driver that he is merely cleaning off mud.[25] This scene reveals the tension between the everyday reality of war and its deeply personal and moral weight. The experience left a lasting impression on Molnár; the sight of the post-battle landscape was the first of its kind in his life. As he himself reflected: "If I want to pursue this profession, I will have to get used to many more things."[26]

25 *Ibidem*, 48.

26 *Ibidem*.

Ferenc Molnár's narrative of the battlefield at Limanowa clearly aligns with a pattern typical of Hungarian war correspondents: the heroization of the fallen and the sacralization of the battlefield. However, it also contains elements of personal reflection and emotional ambivalence that distinguish it and render it more complex. Molnár constructs a narrative consistent with the dominant national discourse: he glorifies the charge of the Nádasdy Regiment, portrays the officers as leading from the front, and emphasizes the bravery of the "Hungarian boys" who risked their lives in close combat. The battle scenes are mythologized, and anonymous violence is transformed into a story of sacrifice, loyalty, and masculinity in the service not necessarily of the empire, but of the Hungarian nation. At the same time, Molnár offers readers an emotionally charged account of his visit to the former battlefield, thus connecting the collective myth and communal memory of the Hungarian people – which he helped to construct through his narrative – with his own individual, traumatic experience of confronting death and witnessing the war.

Béla Landauer – a Hungarian Catholic war correspondent on the Eastern Front

Among the many war correspondents, particular attention should be given to the lesser-known figure of Béla Landauer, who to this day has not been the subject of a full biography. He served as a war correspondent on the Eastern Front, reporting for the Catholic newspaper "Alkotmány".[27] He first published his wartime observations in this newspaper.[28] He later published several books based on his experiences during the First World War. These include "A nagy esztendő. Egy haditudósító naplójából. 1914–15" (The Great Year. From the Diary of a War Correspondent. 1914–15),[29] followed by "Gloria",[30] and "Népek csatája: a nagy háború húszhónapos históriája" (Battle of Nations: A Twenty-Month History of the Great

27 Information about his work can be found, for example: *Élet*, Year 7, No. 18, 2nd May 1915, 435.

28 Report from Limanowa, December 1914, *Alkotmány*, Year 19, No. 323, 21 December 1914, 1.

29 Cf. Béla Landauer, *A nagy esztendő. Egy haditudósító naplójából. 1914–15* [The Great Year: From the Diary of a War Correspondent, 1914–15] (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1915).

30 Béla Landauer, *Gloria* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1916). Review see: *Világ*, Year 7, No. 322, 19 November 1916, 24.

War).[31] It is not possible here to offer a detailed analysis of Landauer's work; however, it is worth emphasizing that his writings remained within the boundaries of officially sanctioned representations of the war. They conformed to a pompous national narrative, fulfilled propagandistic functions, and reflected a vision of wartime reality that could be made accessible to the reader. Only a few remarks are warranted in this context concerning his portrayal of the events at Limanowa in December 1914.

In his account, the battle is presented as the culmination of a long-prepared military plan executed by the allied Austrians and Germans: "It was a fine plan, the successful execution of which was eagerly awaited... at both main headquarters." The German general staff manoeuvre to encircle the Russian forces failed due to reinforcements sent from Warsaw, but the southern front – Gorlice, Grybów, Nowy Sącz – became the arena of a decisive engagement. At its centre stood Limanowa, and as he noted: "On the field of Limanowa, brothers avenged the blood of brothers." A particularly vivid place is given to the dramatic scene of the night assault by the hussars of the Nádasdy Regiment. Then, the description of the battlefield is filled with brutal detail: "I walk a few dozen steps further and stumble over a corpse." He continues, recounting how he encountered a Russian private, bearded, dead, with arms raised toward the sky. Beside him lay four young soldiers, lined up in a row, face-down in the mud. As he emphasizes for the reader: the uniform rows of muddy boots and grey coats conceal the tragedy of four mothers and four wives. Some of the Russian bodies were torn apart. In the mud, the reporter finds rosaries, letters, notes, and papers – Russian and Hungarian – the last words from family members. The post-battle landscape is transformed into a cemetery, though for the time being, one without crosses. Landauer admitted: "I am ashamed to confess it, but I had the heart to anxiously look around to see if any of our own were among them. And may God forgive me – I was relieved to see Russian eagles, Cyrillic script." In the final scene, a "yellowish hand" protrudes from the mud, raised toward the sky, as if pointing to something above. The reporter instinctively follows its gesture: in the distance, doves fly over the Limanowa hills – white, blue, pink. "The doves fly over the corpses in Limanowa".[32] Nor does he refrain from employing national heroization, which fits within the broader narrative under examination – one

31 Béla Landauer, *Népek csatája: a nagy háború húszhónapos históriája* [Battle of Nations: A Twenty-Month History of the Great War] (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1916).

32 *Alkotmány*, Year 19, No. 323, 21 December 1914, 1–2.

centred on the protective mission of defending the homeland and the ideal of fraternal solidarity in arms:

> Brothers avenged the blood of brothers, and the result, which had been ripening for weeks, was wrenched forth by Hungarians, Austrians, and Germans. It was an extremely difficult battle, and the stakes were truly immense. In the far West, we held the enemy by the throat, the one who threatened us from beyond the Carpathians. Had we not defeated him, had he caught his breath – his far-reaching foot would have trampled Hungarian soil.[33]

In closing, the author shares a reflection with his readers – one that also carries a civic function:

> And those who died? Well – such is war. Can this really be? Is this truly a war of the twentieth century – a hypermodern, jaded, and cynical century? How is it possible that in this century – a century of scientific discovery, the collapse of ideals, and the betrayal of international justice – people, with superhuman devotion and the fervour of crusaders, are offering up their most precious possession, their lives, on the altar of the Fatherland?[34]

The author's reflection deepens and reinforces the myth of sacrifice. By portraying the soldiers' deaths as both tragic and exalted, he imbues their loss with a near-sacred dimension. It also carries a mobilizing message for citizens, suggesting that in the harsh reality of war, selfless sacrifice for the national community is of utmost importance, and that wartime violence is rendered acceptable under the pretext of a defensive mission to protect the homeland.

Beyond the frontline reports: collective narrative of heroism in soldiers' memoirs

Beyond the accounts of war correspondents, valuable observations were also recorded by various military personnel who experienced the Galician front firsthand, including participants in the Łapanów–Limanowa operation. Of particular interest is the wartime narrative written by the honvéd staff physician, Dr. Miklós Berend, who in his

33 *Ibidem*.

34 *Ibidem*.

„Frontline Diary"[35] devoted significant attention to Limanowa – the main focus of the present analysis. In this account, in which he emphasizes that he actively participated in the events, he opens with a militarized language of Austro-Hungarian and Russian troop deployments and combat maneuvers. He reports that during the intense fighting along the Tymbark–Jabłoniec–Limanowa line, a dramatic positional battle occurred, with the opposing lines situated at a distance of only fifty paces. Following a full day of artillery bombardment, the Russians launched a night assault, mistakenly believing that the opposing trenches were held by a poorly armed and sparsely manned unit. The accidental flanking of the Russian position by a detachment from the 13th Hussar Regiment triggered an immediate counterattack, reinforced by units of the 9th and 10th Hussars and Honvéd troops from the 3rd and 9th Regiments. The assault was led by a young lieutenant, Bauer, and conducted in close quarters – without sabres, which had been left with the horses. Soldiers advanced using pistols and entrenching tools, underscoring the improvised nature of the hand-to-hand combat and the intensity of the close quarters fighting along this section of the front. The narrative also highlights a key characteristic of hussar formations: their reluctance to engage in long-range combat and preference for swift, physical strikes. The account then transitions to a description in which human experience, rather than unit designations or ammunition, takes centre stage:

> It was a fight of man against man – or rather, a hussar against four or five Russians; a battle in monstrous darkness, of which those who survived still speak today in pale voices and trembling tones. One after another, the officers fell, but Russian bayonets were countered with small spades and pocketknives; the hussars pursued the retreating enemy until dawn. The Russian attack collapsed, and the enemy began their withdrawal that very night (…) It is true that during this 'adventure' – to name only a few – we lost Colonel Muhr, Bernolák, Baron Fiáth, and Baron Karg. Near Tymbark alone, we buried twenty hussar officers in a single day – for dying, we are remarkably skilled! How many were wounded, I do not know, but I heard it was two-thirds of the officers. My friend, Dodó Diószeghy, was also shot – two bullets passed through his arm. We also lost the pride and ornament of our fencing guard, my dear friend Jenő Szántay – he is the third Hungarian fencing champion to die in a short time: Szarvassy, Zulavszky, Szántay. Among our fencing guard, those still with us are Prince Lajos Windischgrätz, Filótás, Békéssy B., Ujfalussy, and me – one of the older ones. How much longer? And in what order will our turn come? Lately, we have even

35 Miklós Berend, *Harctéri naplója. Adatok a magyar honvédség, főkép az 5. h. huszárezred történetéből* (Budapest: 1916), 141–142.

> started placing bets. We hussars are not used to dying *en masse* as we did in this 'Limanowa ball.' Ours is a different fate than that of the infantry. Among us, it is the patrols that take losses – but they do so every day.[36]

This narrative is not a military report in the strict sense, despite the presence of specific data on units and commanders. It is, above all, a cultural text – one that represents a mythology of war and a nationalist rhetoric of sacrifice. Violence is euphemized, referred to as the "Limanowa ball," and death is portrayed as a ritual of passage, elevation, and sanctification. Moreover, in this passage, the narrator offers an example of masculinized war memory, in which war is depicted as a stage for the enactment of national ideals of masculinity, heroism, and self-sacrifice. The deaths of soldiers – particularly of hussar officers – are not presented as brutal consequences of conflict, but rather as symbolic acts of sacrifice embedded in a rhetoric of national heroism. The author individualizes the experience of death by naming the fallen – barons, fencing champions, personal friends – thus contributing to the elitization of sacrifice and imbuing it with a special significance in communal memory. Commemorating the names of fallen or participating soldiers was just as important as inscribing them on commemorative plaques – serving as individualized sites of memory.[37] This elitization is further reinforced by the contrast drawn by the military physician between the hussars and the infantrymen, emphasizing the superiority of the cavalry ethos: the hussar's death is not only more spectacular, but also more dignified.

Miklós Berend, continuing his service as a military physician, remained active on the Eastern Front. However, in the spring of 1915, following the Battle of Gorlice and the victorious Austro–Hungarian and German offensive of 2–5 May, he once again passed through Limanowa on his way to Kraków. At that time, he recorded the following reflection in his diary:

> From the train station in Limanowa, one sees a gentle hill – yet the last time I saw it, it was a frozen hell. Crows and ravens hopped through the hollow eye sockets of Russians stiff in death beneath the bare skeletons of birch trees. And now, these fresh, green, May meadows are so vibrant and unbelievably delicate in their green, like the landscapes of a young Corot. The birch trees have leaves again, the apple blossoms are even pinker, and

36 *Ibidem*.

37 Cf. Thomas W. Laqueur, "Memory and Naming in the Great War", in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 150–167.

> from the valley rises the scent of countless blooming lilacs. Only one thing reminds me of what once was: a tall, slender cross visible on the hilltop, bathed in the glory of the sun's rays – a poetic silhouette; and lower down, at the foot of the hill, small crosses entwined with flowers. From this snowy, icy, blood-soaked land, unnoticed, your grain has grown, your death has taken root – and the Battle of Limanowa was the cradle of the triumph at Gorlice. What you died for has now matured into full grain – your blood was not shed in vain, you may sleep in peace, dream peacefully, my comrade Szántay! I recall that terribly distressing journey in November, when I passed through here on my way to my regiment – the road then was filled with panic and the agony of retreat. How much the world has changed since then![38]

In this way, the narrator confronts his own experience of being at the epicenter of the Łapanów–Limanowa operation. His altered perception of the landscape and its surroundings reveals a kind of "afterimage of memory," in which he revisits a past, deeply unsettling encounter with death as part of everyday reality. This demonstrates how Limanowa became inscribed into the topography of trauma for many Hungarian soldiers – a place associated primarily with the sight of fallen comrades and the ubiquity of death on the battlefield.

Miklós Berend's narrative, much like the previously analysed accounts of war correspondents, participates in the process of ennobling the deaths of hussar officers. It does not present them as anonymous casualties of war but elevates them to the status of national heroes. The mention of names, ranks, and personal relationships serves to individualize the experience of loss, which simultaneously becomes a vehicle of collective memory. These accounts are not merely documentary in character – they serve a narrative and cultural function, co-constructing the foundational myth of the national community through the story of heroism and sacrifice. The mythologization and heroization of the Battle of Limanowa were not the result of top-down memory policies imposed by the state or the empire. Rather, they emerged from the actions of numerous parallel actors – officers, military physicians, and correspondents – who, through their agency and testimonies, constructed a coherent and emotionally charged narrative. Their texts became a key channel of memory transmission between the front and the home front, shaping an image of the war aligned with national ideals of masculinity, loyalty, and sacrifice, while entirely omitting the broader, imperial framework of allegiance to the Habsburg monarchy.

38 *Ibidem*, 275–276.

Beyond nationalism: war cemeteries as imperial arena of commemoration

As has already been demonstrated, the wartime narratives portraying the heroic deeds of Hungarians functioned as monuments in themselves – discursive constructs endowed with agency, intended to foster a deeper sense of national identification, often leaving little room for imperial frameworks. To further explore the duality and complexity of these issues, this section of the article examines how physical monuments to military glory were erected on former battlefields, focusing on the case of Limanowa, which serves as the central focus of this study. These monuments, as will be shown, embodied hybrid sites of memory: imperial – insofar as they commemorated the sacrifice of a multinational army in the service of the state and the emperor – and national, by creating a symbolic sanctuary for Hungarians on the soil of former Galicia.

As part of the imperial project of transforming former battlefields in Galicia into a landscape of memory and commemoration for the fallen, the area of 2–12 December 1914 battles – namely, the Łapanów–Limanowa operation – was also incorporated into these efforts.[39] This area, under the jurisdiction of the Military Command in Kraków – specifically the War Graves Unit (*Kriegsgräber-Abteilung Krakau*) – was incorporated into District X: Limanowa, where the cemetery architecture was designed by the architect Gustav Josef Ludwig.[40] His versatility also allowed him to adapt during the war, when he joined the War Graves Unit in Kraków and took on the task of designing military graves and cemeteries. He was also the author of the main monument at the war cemetery in Gorlice, constructed as a result of a design competition aimed at suitably honoring the soldiers who had fallen during the breakthrough Gorlice–Tarnów offensive in May 1915. Among the sites related to the Łapanów–Limanowa

39 Cf. Kamil Ruszała, "Conceptualizing the Post-Battle Landscape: the First World War Military Cemeteries and Monuments in Galicia", in *The Great War and the Anthropocene. Empire and Environment, Soldiers and Civilians on the Eastern Front*, ed. Kerstin S. Jobst, Oksana Nagornaia and Kerstin von Lingen (Brill, 2025), 292–329.

40 About architect Gustav Ludwig cf.: Agnieszka Partridge, "Artystyczna działalność Gustava Ludwiga w Kriegsgräber Abteilung Krakau i projekty cmentarzy wojennych w X Okręgu Cmentarnym "Limanowa" na tle jego twórczości architektonicznej," *Ochrona Zabytków* 1 (2023): 163–192; *Sztuka w mundurze. Krakowski Oddział Grobów Wojennych 1915–1918*, ed. Agnieszka Partridge, Beata Nykiel and Kamil Ruszała (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2022); Paweł Pencakowski, "Sztuka w hołdzie bohaterom. Austriacko-węgierskie cmentarze wojenne z lat 1914–1918 w Galicji Zachodnie," *Rocznik Historii Sztuki* 40 (2015): 129–162; Jan Schubert, *Cmentarze żołnierskie bitwy pod Limanową i Łapanowem (2–12 grudnia 1914): analiza form i przestrzeni* (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza KAAFM, 2020).

operation, Ludwig's most important work is War Cemetery No. 368 on Jabłoniec Hill above Limanowa. The cemetery is the burial site of 140 Austro-Hungarian soldiers from the 34th Landwehr Infantry Regiment, the 10th Honvéd Infantry Regiment, the 11th Dragoons, the 4th, 9th, 10th, and 13th Hussar Regiments, the 45th Landwehr Field Artillery Regiment, and the 212th, 215th, and 216th Ersatz Landsturm Battalions; one German soldier from the 219th Prussian Reserve Infantry Regiment; and 297 Russian soldiers from General Abram Dragomirov's Caucasian Division and General Fyodor Keller's 10th Cavalry Division.[41]

The imperial authorities were well aware that the military events near Limanowa had influenced the situation on the front, saving Kraków from sharing the fate of the Przemyśl fortress. They also recognized the crucial role played by Hungarian units in this sector of the front. This created an ideal foundation for an imperial project of celebration: instead of a traditional war cemetery, a memorial park was planned – spread across the entire hill, dominating the surrounding landscape and serving as a visible landmark. The location was not accidental. Efforts were made to incorporate the area where the original burials of scattered soldiers' bodies had taken place, emphasizing the site's authenticity and significance. Gustav Ludwig prepared the design for this project, though it was never fully realized due to financial constraints. The concept is known both from architectural plans and from a model, an image of which was published in the 1918 Vienna edition of "Die westgalizischen Heldengräber aus den Jahren des Weltkrieges 1914–1915".[42] This model was also exhibited at propaganda displays that toured throughout the monarchy, showcasing the work of the KGA-Krakau.[43] The envisioned memorial park featured, as its central element, a chapel containing the remains of Otmar Muhr[44] surrounded by a massive stone colonnade. In front of the chapel was to stretch an arterial pathway, doubling as a viewing terrace. Symmetrically positioned to the left and right were two lower, circular terraces. Behind the colonnade and a line of trees,

41 Jerzy J. P. Drogomir, *Polegli w Galicji Zachodniej 1914–1915(1918): wykazy poległych i zmarłych pochowanych na 400 cmentarzach wojskowych w Galicji Zachodniej*, vol. 3 (Tarnów: Muzeum Okręgowe, 2005), 304–307.

42 Rudolf Broch, Hans Hauptmann, *Die westgalizischen Heldengräber aus den Jahren des Weltkrieges 1914–1915* (Wien: Militär Kommando Krakau, 1918), 433.

43 Photography from exhibition with the model of the Limanowa-Jabłoniec memorial at the centre see: Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie (hereafter ANK), Wojskowy Urząd Opieki nad Grobami Wojennymi (hereafter WUOnGW), GW 62, Photos: 672, 677, 679.

44 Chapel-memorial design dated on 15 February 1916 and signed by Gustav Ludwiga zob. ANK, WUOnGW, GW 46, 311.

the soldiers' graves were to be located. Although this memorial park concept was later somewhat modified, Gustav Ludwig still made full use of the site's advantageous position at the summit of Jabłoniec Hill. The central artery divides the cemetery into two parts: the lower terrace, serving as a vantage point and marked by a 9.6-meter-high stone memorial cross as its main architectural accent;[45] and the upper section, enclosed by a stone wall, which constitutes the actual cemetery. This upper area includes a commemorative octagonal chapel-mausoleum with a planned crypt (slightly altered from the original plan), where Otmar Muhr was buried, as well as a monument marking the spot where he was believed (but this remains unlikely) to have fallen with a plaque in German and Hungarian.[46] This site was intended to serve as a vantage point over the former battlefield and was thus designed to embody the concept of a "speaking battlefield".[47] It was inscribed into the topography of memory related to the defense of the empire, with the space also meant to host imperial celebrations. While the lower terrace was conceived as a place for contemplating the battles themselves, the function of the upper terrace was to facilitate the contemplation of heroism. As can be seen, visual contemplation played a crucial role here.

An integral part of this architectural complex is a monument situated outside the cemetery grounds, in a meadow on the south-western side: a tall granite column commemorating Leonhard von Thun und Hohenstein, a captain of the 9th Hussar Regiment —the unit that fought to capture Jabłoniec Hill. The monument was erected at the very spot where the captain fell, and was funded by his family, who retrieved his remains from the cemetery in Tymbark. That cemetery had originally held the bodies of other notable figures as well, including Colonel Othmar Muhr, Captain Eugen von Szántay, Captain Josef Bernolák, Lieutenant Erwin Hartmann, Ensign (reserve) Baron Josef Kazy, and Ensign (reserve) Heinrich Baron. The monument, designed by Gustav Ludwig, is made of granite and bears an inscription along with the family coat

45 ANK, WUOnGW, GW 46, 265.

46 ANK, WUOnGW, GW 46, 309.

47 Cf. for military cemeteries in former battlefield: Kamil Ruszała, "Conceptualizing the Post-Battle Landscape"; followed by ideas of: Anthony Alofsin, *When Buildings Speak: Architecture As Language in the Habsburg Empire and Its Aftermath*, 1867–1933 (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

of arms. It was funded by the soldier's family, although his remains were later exhumed and reinterred in the family chapel in Milovice, Bohemia.[48]

As part of the construction of the war cemetery on Jabłoniec Hill near Limanowa – executed according to the design of Gustav Ludwig and under the auspices of the Imperial-Royal Garrison Command in Kraków (KGA-Krakau) – a parallel, bottom-up initiative emerged to commemorate not only the fallen Count Thun-Hohenstein but also all officers and soldiers who perished in the December 1914 battles for Limanowa. The Imperial and Royal 10th Hussar Regiment submitted a proposal to erect a larger, independent monument on the battlefield as an expression of regimental remembrance and tribute. The design for the monument was created by the Budapest-based artist Ede Kallós and submitted, along with visual documentation and a description, to the War Graves Department of the Ministry of War in Vienna for evaluation. Concerned about potential stylistic inconsistencies between the proposed monument and the architectural language developed by Ludwig's team, the KGA-Krakau formally inquired whether the project could be approved, noting in their own assessment that its execution would not be feasible due to its divergence from the simple, restrained architectural style characteristic of the cemetery's existing structures. In October 1916, Gustav Ludwig prepared an alternative monument in the form of a cube approximately 2.2 meters in height, dedicated to the memory of the fallen soldiers of the 10th Hungarian Hussar Regiment.[49] The monument, however, was never realized and remained only on paper. Ultimately, the Ministry of War rejected the proposal, citing the need to "preserve the harmony of such commemorative designs," which reflects a desire for visual and symbolic cohesion within the memorial landscape. At the same time, the hussars were invited to submit a new, "appropriately adapted" design, indicating a willingness to compromize and an acknowledgment of the regiment's commemorative initiative.[50] This case illustrates the tension between centralized memory politics and grassroots initiatives of commemoration.

As it was anticipated that the cemetery would be visited by numerous families of fallen soldiers, Ludwig also designed a special signpost.[51] It bore the inscription "Zum Heldenfriedhofe" (To the Heroes' Cemetery),

48 Correspondence regarding monument dedicated to Thun-Hohenstein in the area of Limanowa-Jabłoniec cemetery see: ANK, WUOnGW, GW 2, 621 – 622: GW 5, 983; GW 7, 161; GW 17, 688.

49 ANK, WUOnGW, GW 6, 1081.

50 Correspondence regarding this matter see: *Ibidem*, 1085–1091.

51 ANK, WUOnGW, GW 46, 329.

further emphasizing the significance of the site as a place of heroic burial – a notion that aligned with broader commemorative trends in German-speaking countries.[52] The architect Ludwig designed cast-iron crosses that were widely used in Galician war cemeteries, not only within his own district. These crosses feature Austrian and German symbols, or the double-barred Russian cross. For Limanowa, he intended to create a separate Hungarian version by adding the Crown of St. Stephen, as shown in archival drawings, but this plan was never realized. Although the Habsburg Monarchy presented itself as a supranational polity embracing the cultural and national diversity of its peoples, its commemorative architecture relied on a standardized visual language. The use of uniform cross types with Austrian, German, or Russian symbols indicated military affiliation rather than national identity, reflecting the imperial ambition to project cohesion and dynastic unity across war cemetery landscape. Introducing a Hungarian cross with the Crown of St. Stephen would have foregrounded a national symbol within an imperial space and risked setting a precedent for other groups to demand their own emblems. Fearing that this could fragment the carefully constructed visual and ideological unity and marginalize other nationalities, the administration chose uniformity to maintain a coherent commemorative language and symbolically hold together an increasingly fragile empire.

The war cemetery on Jabłoniec Hill above Limanowa served not only as a burial site for soldiers who died during the Łapanów–Limanowa operation in December 1914 but also as a key component of the Habsburg wartime commemorative strategy and propaganda through architecture. Its construction formed part of a broader imperial initiative to transform battlefields into landscapes of memory designed to give meaning to wartime sacrifice, create symbolic spaces of imperial unity, and reinforce loyalty to the dynasty. Although commemorative practices at Jabłoniec were multiethnic – honoring both various units of the Austro-Hungarian army and their adversaries – a particularly prominent place was accorded to the heroism of Hungarian soldiers. The creation of a separate mausoleum and monumental architectural elements dedicated to Hungarian troops reflected an intention to foreground their role in defending the empire. This emphasis also served to mitigate political tensions within the Dual Monarchy by reinforcing Hungarian loyalty at a time of military and political crisis.

52 ANK, WUOnGW, GW 46, 329. On the heroization of the war dead through references to heroic and medieval warrior figures, see the discourse as analysed by Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Unlike Hungarian nationalist commemorations, which often emphasized national martyrdom and exclusivist narratives of sacrifice, the Jabłoniec cemetery was conceived as a supranational imperial site. It embodied the monarchy's integrative vision of a shared military legacy and collective mourning, presenting war as a unifying trauma that bound the empire's diverse populations through the memory of heroism and loss. The cemetery also functioned as a propagandistic tool, promoting the image of the empire as a benevolent and just authority – one that cared for all its soldiers, regardless of origin, and upheld values of humanitarianism, dignified death, and proper commemoration. Such sites were envisioned not only as wartime memorials but also as lasting commemorative landmarks beyond the conflict, forming a symbolic route of imperial military glory. They were intended to mobilize society to visit former battlefields, reflect on past sacrifices, and engage in rituals of remembrance at soldiers' graves, and it was precisely the rituals that shaped political spaces, following the theory of Sandra Petermann.[53] In this case, it creates arena of political meaning, serving as a performative dispositifs of power, projecting a vision of unity, sacrifice, and dynastic legitimacy across multiethnic imperial territories.

The initiative of the 10th Hussar Regiment to erect an independent memorial – and its subsequent rejection by the military authorities – demonstrates the degree to which the centralized imperial apparatus sought to control the narrative and visual language of memory. This top-down decision reveals the state's commitment to maintaining symbolic and stylistic coherence across commemorative landscapes, while simultaneously asserting dominance over competing, potentially nationalistic, memorial agendas.

Conclusion

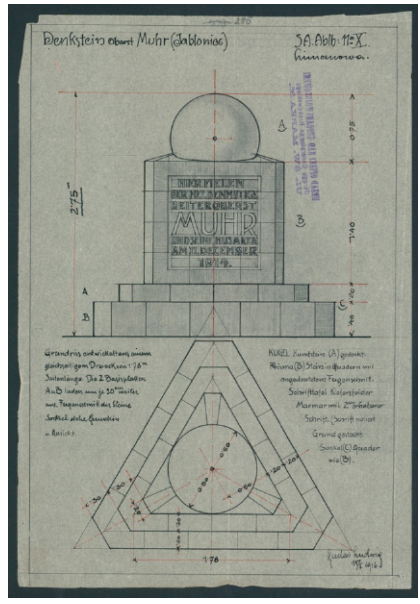
The case of Limanowa reveals the dual-track nature of First World War commemorative practices within the Habsburg Monarchy. This article has demonstrated that war memory was not solely a postwar phenomenon, but rather a dynamic process initiated already during the conflict itself, shaped through parallel narratives of sacrifice, loyalty, and heroism. This study has approached commemoration as a phenomenon embedded both in material space (landscape, monuments, cemeteries) and in narrative practices (texts, rituals, and cultural performances).

53 Cf. research regarding western front: Sandra Petermann, *Rituale machen Räume. Zum kollektiven Gedenken der Schlacht von Verdun und der Landung in der Normandie* (Wiesbaden: Lehmanns Media, 2007).

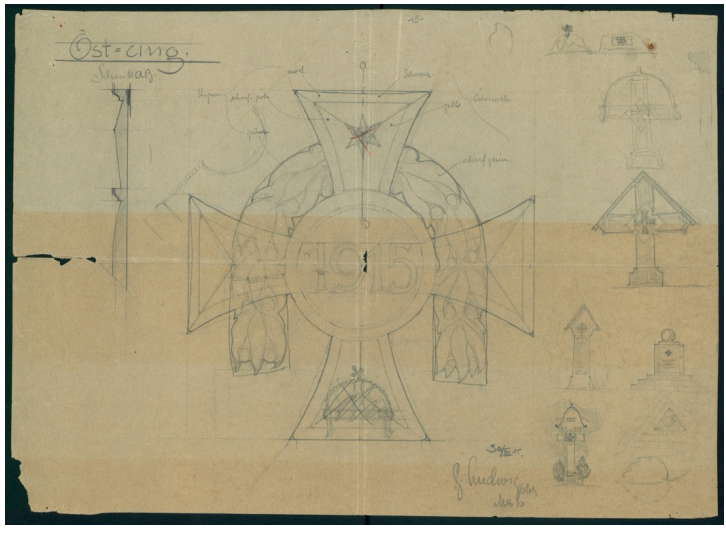
The Łapanów–Limanowa operation and the culmination of fighting near Limanowa in December 1914 became a site of hybrid memory, where imperial architectural forms intersected with national narratives—highlighting the fluid and ambiguous boundaries between "state" and "national" memory. The imperial administration sought to create a supranational, harmonized, sacralized space of remembrance, one loyal to the monarchy. War cemeteries were to serve as instruments for cultivating imperial unity and a humanitarian image of the state.

At the same time, already during the war, Hungarian war correspondents, writers, and military figures began to nationalize the memory of Limanowa, presenting it as a symbolic altar of Hungarian sacrifice and bravery. The analysis of Limanowa decentralizes the study of war memory, shifting focus from decision-making centers to peripheral actors who actively shaped and often instrumentalized memory for national purposes.

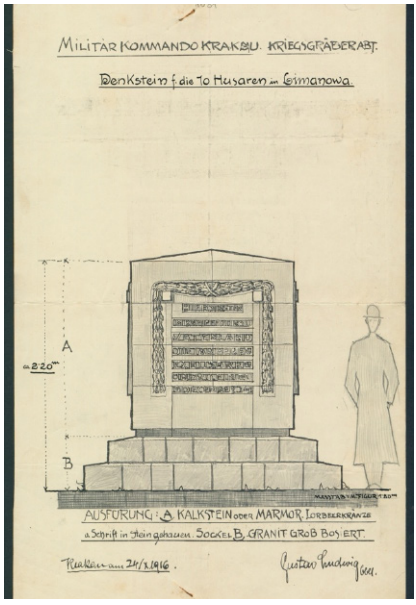
The apogee of this nationalizing process would only come in the post-war period—during Hungary's post-imperial and post-Trianon era – but that lies beyond the scope of this article. In broader terms, this case study shows the First World War not only as a military turning point, but also as a critical moment in the spatial politics of memory – a politics that arguably continues to this day, visible in the pilgrimages of Hungarians to Limanowa, Przemyśl, or the Italian Front, in search of symbolic connection to a national past.

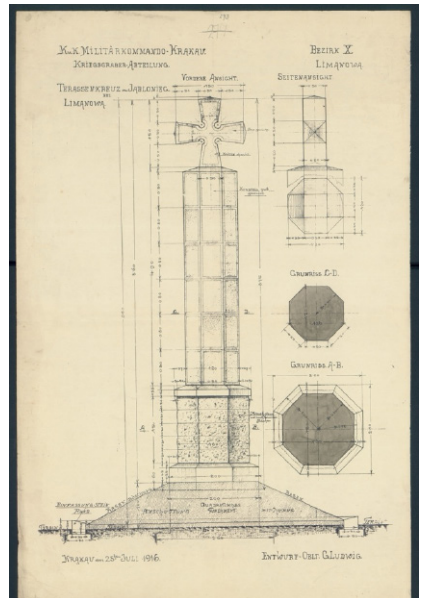


Left: Temporary grave of Otmar Muhr (National Archives in Kraków). Right: Monument dedicated to Otmar Muhr and the fallen soldiers of his regiment, erected in War Cemetery No. 368 on Jabłoniec Hill in Limanowa, designed by Gustav Ludwig, 15 February 1916 (National Archives in Kraków).

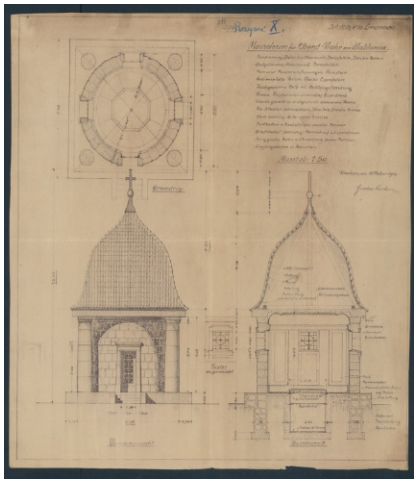


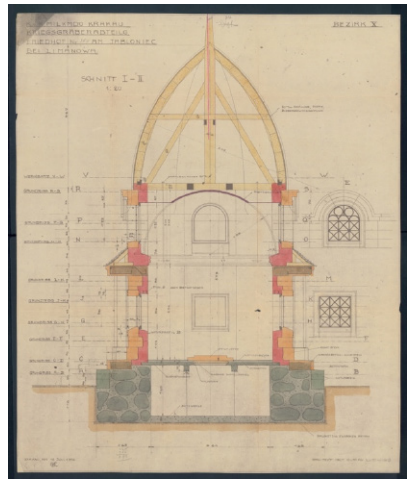
Archival drawings depict the proposed Hungarian cross as a cast-iron structure topped with the Crown of St. Stephen, by Gustav Ludwig, 30 Dec. 1915. (National Archives in Kraków).



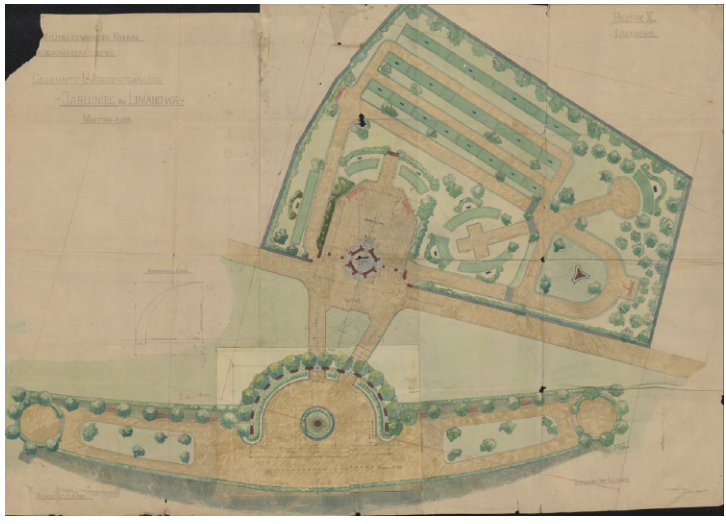


Right: Design of the monumental cross, realized and placed on the lower viewing terrace of War Cemetery No. 368 on Jabłoniec Hill in Limanowa, by Gustav Ludwig, 25 July 1916 (National Archives in Kraków). Left: Unrealized monument to the 9th Hussar Regiment in Limanowa, designed by Gustav Ludwig, 24 October 1916 (National Archives in Kraków).





Left: Unrealized design of the chapel-mausoleum for Otmar Muhr, designed by Gustav Ludwig, 15 February 1916 (National Archives in Kraków). Right: Realized chapel-mausoleum, the burial site of Otmar Muhr, 19 July 1916, by Gustav Ludwig (National Archives in Kraków).



Comprehensive design of the cemetery complex on Limanowa–Jabłoniec Hill, by Gustav Ludwig, 10 July 1916 (National Archives in Kraków).

War Cemetery. No. 368 on Jabłoniec Hill in Limanowa – general view, 1917 (National Archives in Kraków).

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