



Chapter 3

Generational Approaches to National Monuments

“Our art began with the life of the Nation.”

Stanislav Sucharda, sculptor of the
František Palacký Memorial in Prague

WHILE controversy swirled around the Jan Hus Memorial design and festival, other associations of Prague’s Czech nationalists prepared additional monument projects to mark the city with a national narrative. In Prague, the Czech civic leaders focused on the Hus Memorial but also supported statues planned to commemorate patron saint Wenceslas, national historian František Palacký, and Hussite general Jan Žižka. Monuments to these historical figures did not carry the emotional weight of the Hus project, but they were part of a larger effort by Czech civic leaders to create national sacred spaces throughout Prague during the “era of monument fever,”¹ when the extension of voting rights for the lower classes persuaded the middle classes to reaffirm their political and cultural leadership by “mass-producing traditions.”² In Prague, these building projects would assert the Czechs’ primacy over the city’s Germans and German Jews, who had dominated Prague culture until the late nineteenth century. The projects would also reinforce the power of the middle-class elite, as working-class and student groups began to assert their own separate versions of Czech nationalism.

Like so much of the Czech cultural movement, each monument shared an important link connecting Czech nationalism to Bohemia’s complicated religious past. However, the monuments’ thematic similarities were not reflected in their artistic styles. Even though the Wenceslas, Palacký, and Žižka projects were planned at the same time, they represented three distinct generations of Prague’s art community. The Wenceslas Memorial was sculpted by Josef Václav

Myslbek, father of Czech nationalist sculpture, the Palacký Monument was created by his foremost student, Stanislav Sucharda, and another Myslbek student, Jan Štursa, who was fourteen years younger than Sucharda, submitted one of the two leading designs for the Žižka Memorial (a winner for that contest was never chosen). The Wenceslas Memorial, the Palacký Monument, and the designs submitted for the Žižka contest represent the period's rapid shift from neoclassicist historicism to art nouveau to modernism.

As Katherine David-Fox has demonstrated, exploring different forms of European modernism was another way for Prague writers and artists to discern what it meant to be Czech.³ Prague's artistic dynamism at the turn of the century made it a leading European creative center. Prague artists sought inspiration from other such centers of modernism—Paris, Munich, Berlin, and Vienna—where creative leaders often rejected nationalist politics or subjects for their work. In Prague, though, modern artists sought to marry these divergent trends, embracing new artistic styles for their nationalist commissions and creating unique, modern styles to commemorate the nation's past.

Replacing a Memorial to Saint Wenceslas

In 1891, the Emperor Francis Joseph Bohemian Academy of Arts, Humanities, and Sciences in Prague undertook a project to erect a Saint Wenceslas statue on Wenceslas Square. Wenceslas, the patron saint of Bohemia and Moravia, had long been a popular figure in Czech national mythology. Although his popularity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was eclipsed by Jan Hus's, Wenceslas remained present in national iconography throughout the Czech national movement. The Bohemian Academy raised funds primarily from the Prague city government and the Zemská Banka, one of the wealthiest banks in Bohemia and the foremost promoter of nationalist art.⁴ The bank and city each gave fifteen thousand crowns, which covered most of the monument's cost.⁵ Other voluntary associations contributed smaller amounts. In encouraging organizations to donate, the academy emphasized that the meaning of Wenceslas was "not only a regional question, or solely a religious question, or purely a question of patriotism, or only Czech." Instead, a statue on the important square would carry multiple meanings and speak to "the entire Prague community."⁶

Wenceslas was a key symbol for the legitimacy of a Bohemian political nation. He was the "Good King" of the English Christmas carol, itself an adaptation by J. M. Neale from a nineteenth-century poem written in German by Czech national revivalist Václav Alois Svoboda (1791–1849). The tenth-century King Wenceslas was the son of the Bohemian rulers Duke Rastislav and Duch-

ess Drahomíra, daughter of the chief of the Veletians, a northern Slavic tribe. Rastislav's parents, the previous Bohemian rulers Duke Bořivoj and Duchess Ludmila, converted to Christianity during their reign; however, most of their subjects did not convert and many powerful Bohemian families strongly opposed the new religion. Ludmila arranged to raise her grandson, Wenceslas, and teach him the Christian faith. Her personal chaplain, Paul, was a disciple of that St. Methodius who, with St. Cyril, brought Christianity to the Slavs. Paul baptized young Wenceslas and educated him in the Christian faith, as well as in Latin, Greek, and Church Slavonic. Wenceslas grew to become quite pious, and legends maintain that he wore a hair shirt and cultivated grapes and corn to make sacramental wine and bread.

Sometime around 920, Wenceslas's father, Rastislav, was killed fighting the Magyars. His mother Drahomíra, a pagan, assumed her husband's reign and began to pursue an anti-Christian or secularist state policy. When her mother-in-law, Ludmila, encouraged Wenceslas to depose his mother and establish a Christian kingdom, Drahomíra had the older woman murdered. Nonetheless, the noble estates supported Wenceslas over Drahomíra, and he assumed power in 922. Wenceslas immediately proclaimed that his kingdom would support the Christian law and church. Promising to rule with justice and mercy, he pardoned his mother for murdering Ludmila and welcomed her back to the court. According to legend, he was known for his high education, his suppression of the nobles' abuses of the peasantry, his compassion for the poor, and his combination of strict punishment of murderers and disapproval of the death penalty. He was also an excellent warrior. Encouraging but not enforcing Christianity, Wenceslas influenced many Bohemians to convert during his short reign. In 929 (some sources say 936), Wenceslas's brother Boleslav—perhaps motivated by the birth of a nephew who would have removed him from direct inheritance of the throne—associated with an opposition party of nobles, whose grievances included the clergy's influence in Wenceslas's court and the king's suppression of the nobles' powers over peasants. While Wenceslas was walking to mass at a religious festival in Stará Boleslav, Boleslav and his followers attacked and killed him.

Immediately, according to the legends, Wenceslas's people venerated him as a martyr.

Another aspect of Wenceslas's fame, however, made him less palatable to Czech nationalists: his political policy involved cultivating friendly relations with nearby German groups. By acknowledging the German king, Henry I, as his overlord and rightful successor to Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire, Wenceslas was able to preserve the unity of the whole region later known as the Crownlands of Saint Wenceslas, whose boundaries were used as late as 1919



when Czechoslovakia was carved out of Austria-Hungary. Although nationalists appreciated his unification of the kingdom, many questioned his apparent affinity for the Germans. In particular, Palacký argued that Wenceslas compromised with the Germans and allowed his nation to be exploited.⁷ In fact, Palacký claimed, Wenceslas agreed to pay an annual tribute to Emperor Henry of 500 silver talents and 120 oxen. Early-twentieth-century historian and Catholic Josef Pekař, who disputed Palacký's romantic version of national history, asserted that there was no evidence for Palacký's claim and that Wenceslas must be credited with fashioning Bohemia as a "full member of the community of Western nations."⁸

Despite Palacký's criticism, the powerful stories of Wenceslas's faith, reign, and martyrdom remained within the realm of national mythmaking, and Czech nationalists used the story of Saint Wenceslas to assert their political legitimacy in Bohemia. The saint's powerful though short reign reasserted the primacy of the Přemyslid dynasty during a period of clan conflicts; further, it tied Bohemia to European Christendom by providing the nation with a royal martyr and patron.

Wenceslas legends were used to foster enthusiasm for nationalist enterprises. Fundraising literature for the Wenceslas Memorial retold the legend that Saint Wenceslas and his knights lived on within Mount Blaník in Eastern Bohemia, ever ready to emerge and rescue those Czechs who remained true to their nation.⁹ Wenceslas was one of the few national heroes who appealed to Catholics and anticlerics alike. Seventeenth-century counter-reformers created a cult of Saint Wenceslas, but the Hussites had also venerated the man. They sang the "St. Wenceslas Chorale" at the Battle of Lipany and admired his martyrdom, the Wenceslas myth adding to the power and imagery of Hussite legends. Catholics could adopt Wenceslas as a hero since his reign predated the era of church reform and schism in Bohemia.

Palacký had written, about the Czechs, "We were here before Austria, and we will be here after it is gone."¹⁰ A monument to Wenceslas would acknowledge the presence of a Bohemian dynasty well before the Habsburg rise to power. According to the Bohemian Academy, the statue would also remind the Prague public that Wenceslas was soon to emerge from Blaník to support the nation's autonomy within Austria.

Unlike most of Prague's nationalist monuments, the Wenceslas project was not entirely new. It would stand on a site that had featured a Wenceslas Statue for two centuries. An equestrian statue of Wenceslas had stood there from 1678 to 1879, when it was removed because of weather damage; this original sculpture was by baroque master Jan Jiří Bendl, creator of the Marian Column in Old Town Square. However, although the seventeenth-century Wenceslas sculpture

had been sponsored by Jesuit leaders seeking to make Catholicism attractive to Prague residents, the nineteenth-century statue would represent the saint's national and religious contributions.

The location of the monument was significant beyond its replacement of the Bendl statue. Built in 1348, Wenceslas Square was the centerpiece of *Nové město* (New Town), the modernization project developed by King Charles IV (the Holy Roman Empire's Charles I) for Prague. Shaped like a long boulevard measuring 170 by 60 meters, the square had become Prague's nineteenth-century commercial center. Named the Horse Market for its original function, the square featured key landmarks of Czech nationalism. In particular, the square was the site of the beginning of the 1848 insurrection in Prague. In June 1848, nationalist students held a Catholic mass in honor of Saint Wenceslas and, when the celebration turned into an angry protest, Austrian soldiers fired on the students. The students responded by building barricades on the square, and six days of fighting ensued. Although the Czechs were defeated, 1848 remained a symbolic turning point in the national struggle. After the uprising, Czech residents renamed the square in honor of Wenceslas.

The square's most prominent building was the National Museum, a landmark to Bohemian regional patriotism and Czech nationalism. Members of the landed aristocracy, most notably Count Kašpar Sternberg, a German speaker who nonetheless believed in reviving Czech language and culture, chartered the museum in 1818. In 1827 historian František Palacký became the editor of the museum's Czech-language journal. The museum sits atop the hill formed by Wenceslas Square as it slopes upward toward the south. Its building, an impressive neorenaissance domed structure, opened to great fanfare on May 18, 1891. Until then, the museum's collections had been housed in small palaces throughout Prague. Today the museum houses collections of the natural history of Bohemia, as well as a pantheon focused on Czech nationalism and featuring busts of prominent figures in Czech history. Demonstrating the relationship between nationalism and sacred space, National Museum literature calls this pantheon a "secular cathedral" where public functions have occurred since the museum's opening.¹⁷

Two months after that opening, the Bohemian Academy of Science, Humanities, and Art in Prague announced that it would sponsor a new statue of Wenceslas on the square, below the museum's grand staircase. When the academy decided on this sponsorship, it employed the prominent Josef Václav Myslbek, a professor at the School of Applied Arts in Prague, to create the statue. Myslbek was a highly respected nationalist sculptor whose work hearkened back to classical and renaissance traditions. One of the first Czech artists with significant contacts outside the Habsburg Lands, Myslbek had traveled to Paris

in 1878, examining French monumentalism, then at its peak in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. Just as French artists and politicians sought grand monuments to revive the nation's spirit after their crushing defeat, so Myslbek believed that sculpture could inspire Czech nationalists disheartened by Hungary's having achieved new autonomy in the empire at the same time that the Czechs had won few political rights. Upon returning to Prague, Myslbek had thus become a spokesperson for French neoclassicism.

Myslbek impressed art critics and nationalists through his series of sculptures of Jan Žižka and his statues for the National Theater. His romantic nationalist generation relied for thematic inspiration on the Královodvorský and Zelenohorský Manuscripts, the forged Slavic epics supposedly discovered earlier in the nineteenth century.¹² Myslbek's sculptures on Prague's Palacký Bridge featured legendary heroes from the forged epics, including Libuše and Přemysl, the seventh-century founding couple of Prague, Zábaj and Slavoj, the Bohemian leaders who defeated the attacking Franks in 805, and such notables as Lumír, Ctírad, and Šarka.

Even though Myslbek continued to receive commissions for important monument projects like the bridge and the (1891) Wenceslas Memorial, his career was beginning to suffer even by the mid-1880s. In 1886, Professors Jan Gebauer and Tomáš Masaryk exposed the Královodvorský and Zelenohorský Manuscripts as forgeries: rather than dating from the early medieval period, the manuscripts had actually been written in the early nineteenth century by romantic poet Václav Hanka. Gebauer and Masaryk's accusation caused tremendous controversy in the nationalist movement, as Myslbek's generation and the editorial staff of nationalist newspaper *Národní listy* defended the manuscripts and Prague's younger generation supported Gebauer and Masaryk. Soon after the manuscript crisis began, Masaryk and his associates founded the Realist Party, which decried the romantic nationalism of both the Old Czechs and the Young Czechs.¹³

Myslbek's crisis, however, was not only thematic and political but also stylistic. His work was prominently featured in the 1891 Prague Jubilee, an exposition of art and industry—which became a Czech nationalist showpiece after most German contributors pulled out. However, he was beginning to lose support from the artistic and nationalist communities. Progressive students, writers, and artists had become infatuated with French symbolism, the precursor to art nouveau, and other Bohemian artists—often fluent in German and Czech—studied in Vienna and Munich, where they experimented with Central European modernism.¹⁴ With the 1887 foundation of the Mánes Association of Fine Artists and the 1894 inauguration of the progressive art journal *Moderní revue* (Modern Review), young artists were demanding new approaches;

the faculty of the Prague School of Applied Arts also had begun emphasizing the new “secession” style (as it was called in Vienna and Prague). Myslbek and another nationalist artist, František Zenišek, left the Prague School of Applied Arts to join, in 1896, the faculty of the nationalized School of Fine Arts, which maintained a more conservative approach to art.

Myslbek did experiment with the new style in some of his more personal work, such as a symbolic sculpture of Music, depicted as a woman. Yet he refused to change his approach to public monuments. Instead, he actually accentuated the monumental style of his work, “particularly through the use of large amounts of drapery”;¹⁵ his work also exaggerated physical features and distorted proportion to make his subjects appear more powerful. The Palacký Bridge sculptures, unveiled throughout the 1890s, received considerable criticism in the press and from fellow artists; the man who had only recently been the most influential and popular sculptor in the Czech Lands was vilified by the new generation of artists, many his former pupils.

Nonetheless, Myslbek continued his work on the Saint Wenceslas monument, and retained its original plan for a traditional historicist statue. This plan reflected his renowned attention to detail, a key feature of neoclassical sculpture. For example, Myslbek borrowed an authentic chain mail suit as a model to create a costume for the king, did considerable historical and archeological research on his subject, and also studied Bendl’s original equestrian statue. Cast in bronze, Myslbek’s sculpture featured Wenceslas in full armor, sitting proudly on his horse, and flanked by four statues of the Bohemian saints Ivan, Anežka, Ludmila, and Prokop. On the base of the statue was a line from the “St. Wenceslas Chorale”, “May we and our descendants not perish.”

Myslbek’s equestrian statue was unveiled in June 1912, but the work never received the attention given other patriotic sculptures in Prague. By the second decade of the twentieth century, Myslbek’s style was outmoded. Contemporary artists called the work mundane, and the statue’s supporters never sought the publicity of the nationalist press that the Club for the Building of Jan Hus Memorial used so effectively to rally public emotion over Hus’s memory. Further, the historical figure of Wenceslas did not inspire the passion that other monument projects did, perhaps because Wenceslas had not confronted Austrian power, as had Palacký, or Catholic clericalism, as had Hus.

The František Palacký Memorial

Although plans for a Hus memorial raised tremendous controversy and the Wenceslas statue attracted artistic criticism, another monument was widely celebrated: for František Palacký, renowned for his work as a historian and



Myslбек statue of St. Wenceslas in front of National Museum. Postcard from author's collection.

political leader of the Old Czech Party, and a principal voice of the Slavs in the Austrian parliament. In 1880, only two years after his death, Prague leaders began to discuss erecting a memorial to honor him. Even though Palacký represented the more conservative, earlier stage of Czech nationalism, Prague's Young Czech leaders viewed him as their beloved predecessor.

Even a monument to this relatively recent and seemingly secular figure conveyed religious connotations. Positivist historiography was an important step in the Czech nationalist movement in the nineteenth century: following the model of German historian Leopold von Ranke, František Palacký researched his six-volume study, *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a na Moravě* (History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia). Palacký's contribution to knowledge of Czech history earned him the epithet "father of the nation," and Hus became a central figure of his study. Palacký's interpretation of Hus was rather anachronistic; for Palacký, raised a committed Protestant by his minister father, Hus became a hero. Palacký, like many of his fellow nationalists, presupposed a national consciousness during the medieval period, when regional identity actually prevailed (Hus's promotion of the vernacular local Slavic language owed more to a religious conviction to reach more followers than to a nationalist conviction). Yet many of Hus's statements about the period's regional conflicts fed Palacký's interpretation of the Czechs' place in the Austrian Empire. Palacký's



thesis was that the Czech nation had struggled, throughout its history, in a cycle of conflicts with the German nation; understanding the long history of German domination over the oppressed yet defiant Czechs would enable the latter to regain their former greatness.

In his work, Palacký defined the era of Hus and his followers as the apogee of Czech history. When, in 1401, Bavarian and Meissen troops invaded Bohemia, the latter reaching as far as Prague, Palacký noted, Hus reproached Bohemian nobles for lack of resistance: "The Czechs are in this matter more wretched than dogs and snakes, for they do not defend their country, although their cause is just. Similarly, I say that the Czechs in Bohemia, according to laws, both the divine law and the natural instinct, should be first in offices of the kingdom of Bohemia, as are the French in the kingdom of France and the Germans in their own lands, so that the Czechs should rule their subjects and the Germans theirs."¹⁶

Thus, Palacký viewed Hus as a hero for the so-called Czech revival. Inspired by Palacký, other intellectuals began to create literature, histories, plays, art, and music about Hus and his movement. Masaryk was a great admirer of Palacký and believed it his moral obligation to follow in the historian's footsteps. Through Palacký's scholarship, Masaryk became convinced of Hus's primary place in the Czech pantheon; Masaryk believed that a scholarly study of Hus's teachings and Palacký's histories was essential for any Czech nationalist. Honoring Palacký with a monument, therefore, celebrated Hus as well.

The monument to Palacký was to sit on the Vltava River embankment, near the National Theater and looking out toward the Palacký Bridge. Although less central than the Hus and Wenceslas Memorials, the chosen location did create a sense that Palacký guarded the river that flowed through Prague. A contest for a Czech sculptor for this memorial was announced in 1897, six years after Myslbek was chosen for the Wenceslas statue. That half decade had remarkably altered the landscape of Prague as well as artistic trends within Czech nationalism and the Prague community.

One of the leading masters of the Prague secession style was the sculptor Stanislav Sucharda, who had studied in Vienna and under Myslbek at the Prague School of Applied Arts. Sucharda had won a celebrated reputation in Prague through his decorations for many of its new buildings, particularly the Zemská Banka. In 1899, he was appointed a professor at his Prague alma mater, and two years later he received word that, out of fourteen submissions, his was the winning design for the Palacký Memorial.¹⁷ Sucharda was the president of the Mánes Association, whose artists used ahistorical symbols to "give weight to the 'inner eye' of imagination and fantasy," while still idealizing figures from the new Czech national pantheon.¹⁸ They sought inspiration from France and



the pan-Slavism emanating from Russia; they also fused designs found in nature with scientific principles of geometry.

As president of the Mánes Association, Sucharda was instrumental in bringing the Rodin Exhibition (influential on Šaloun's design for the Hus monument) to Bohemia. Rodin's work seemed such a departure from Czech sculpture that the conservative press accused the association of staging the influential exhibition to eclipse the popularity of national sculptor Myslbek. The 1902 exhibition and visit by Rodin had such a profound influence on Sucharda that he reworked his entire plan for the Palacký Memorial (as Šaloun had reworked his for the Hus statue) to reflect these new views of art. Even before the Rodin show, Sucharda's column in the Mánes Association's journal, *Volné směry*, had praised Rodin for capturing human emotions "of love and suffering, hope and despair, abnegation and contempt."¹⁹ Indeed, Sucharda hired Josef Mařatka, a Czech sculptor who had studied with Rodin in Paris, to assist with the new memorial, so that Sucharda could learn to capture the emotions and psychology of his subject.

Sucharda was primarily concerned with capturing the *meaning* of Palacký for future generations. While earlier sculptors, like Myslbek, had researched the physical appearance and appropriate costumes of their subjects, Sucharda committed to capturing Palacký's "essence, his innermost existence."²⁰ Sucharda emphasized the link between the national body and its spirit. The secessionist monuments in Prague, particularly the Hus and Palacký memorials, were not designed to instruct on history but rather to create a "sacred" bond between spectators and the nation's history. The inscription on the Palacký Monument—"To our awakener and leader of the resurrected nation!"—celebrated the dynamic relationship between the national past and its future.²¹

Sucharda extensively read Palacký's histories and articles in the journal of the National Museum. In turn, the sculptor wrote prolifically on the symbolism he hoped to convey. He used Bohemian granite to connect Palacký with the nation's natural world, he noted. A realistic rendering of Palacký, he said, constituted "the heart of the whole monument," but the historian was not merely "a man of meat and blood." Sucharda chose instead to "unite him with something deeper, bringing a different truth to light."²² Sucharda's memorial combined a portrait of Palacký, sitting sternly in the center gazing toward the Vltava River and the bridge that bears his name, with symbolic human figures that "grow from the pain of the Czech people's wretched spiritual condition, as a result of the ferocious Germanization."

Sucharda's Palacký Monument used gendered symbols, prevalent in the secessionist movement, to express strong emotion. The dominant cultural conception associated women with nature and the irrational, men with culture and



Stanislav Sucharda's Palacký Memorial. Photo by author.

the intellect. The masculine central figure, famed for his cultural and intellectual contributions balanced with the fervor for the nation expressed by the female imagery. Sucharda chose to include a range of feminine symbols familiar to his contemporary audience: the violated, the procreative, the beautiful, and the threatening. Male symbols represented fatherhood and strength as well as oppression and danger.

In the center of the monument, overseeing his city, Palacký himself clearly represents the *otec národa* (father of the nation), as he is called in the commemorative pamphlet for the statue's unveiling.²³ Palacký is the only historical character; the sculptural groupings surrounding him are allegorical figures representing the struggles and triumphs of the nation. The sculptures on Palacký's right feature two separate groupings, one male and one female. The sculpture "Oppression," which represents the victims of Austrian political and cultural domination, appears as two angry and deeply tormented men lying beneath an abstract arch of earth and stone; they struggle to push away the source of their oppression, revealing strong and virile muscles. Male figures also dominate the sections of the memorial called "History Tells the Story" and "The Awakener," which represent Palacký's historiographical and intellectual contributions.

Female figures create the emotional impact of Sucharda's work. A nude woman clings to the floor of the monument; painfully thin, she weeps in anguish and tightly clenches her legs together, as though she has been raped. Sucharda called this violated female "White Mountain" to express the nationalists' view that Czech culture and spirituality was desecrated at the 1620 Battle of White Mountain, where the predominantly Protestant Bohemian nobility met total defeat at the hands of Austrian and allied forces, ushering in the counter-reformation and Habsburg hereditary rights in Bohemia. It has been said that within secessionist art, "gestures of submission . . . denote a realm of masculine dominance,"²⁴ and Sucharda's White Mountain figure represented such a spiritual violation of the nation by imperial powers.



"White Mountain" sculpture on Palacký Memorial. Photo by author.



Another female image, described by Sucharda as the “witch” or a “hundred-year-old hag,” represents the forces that oppressed Czech national awakeners. Sucharda wrote, “Alarmingly enormous, powerful through her terrible beauty, the Witch soars up between heaven and earth” and “hates every awakener.” She terrorizes the nation’s youth, who thus “daydream” rather than build the nation.²⁵

Although these and other female images convey the Czech national tragedy, a sculptural grouping of women at the top of the monument tells the story of victory and triumph. This group spirals up the pillar behind Palacký and culminates in a beautiful robed woman, her left arm triumphantly raised. Another young woman, who Sucharda describes as personifying “softness and humility,” stands above the witch. Although this young woman catches her garment and is thus poised between the nation’s future and the hag’s past, a young man stands ready to catch her. “The man, her companion, . . . touches her arm, aspiring for something more—where he has a strong foreboding of a clear future.” This couple represents the hope for the new nation. As Sucharda explains, “In them shoots are already sprouting.”²⁶

The figure of “Victory” rises atop the monument. Sucharda implies that she is the offspring of the young couple. Her arms, he writes, emerge from the man’s eyes and the woman’s full breast. This “ascending woman, almost still a child, [is] the new woman, awakening through a new spring.” The New Woman (Sucharda capitalized this name throughout his narrative) appears “jubilant,” as her “soul flies high through the country, with thirsty longing.” She is the “resurrected soul of the nation the soul that strove for existence,” and she stands in “powerful reverence,” lifting her shoulder to reveal her simple and pure “Slavic heart.” Sucharda announced at the end of his essay that his New Woman “gives from her heroic body, the kiss of the sun blazing as it sets over White Mountain.”²⁷ The Czech nation has triumphed.

The “new woman” was a powerful symbol at the turn of the century, as feminism gained ground and women took their places in the public sphere. In art, Sucharda’s “New Woman” conveyed contradictory meaning to its audience: women participated in the national movement but did not overturn traditional gender roles. As a symbol in art nouveau, the “new woman” conveyed communal strength but simultaneously inspired male “anxieties over this proactive female.”²⁸ Sucharda’s national “New Woman” simultaneously sent a victorious celebratory message to the nation and emphasized that the battle had not yet been won. Czech society’s identity was still uncertain.

The Palacký Monument was unveiled in 1912 as part of the enormous Sokol Slet (Sokol Festival), an international gathering of that patriotic gymnastics organization. One key theme of the Sokol Festival was to show off Prague,



“the jewel and mother of Czech cities and the pride of the Czech nation.”²⁹ The contrast between the Wenceslas statue’s quiet unveiling in June and the lavish festival only weeks later, on July 1, was palpable. The Sokol commemorative pamphlet from the unveiling ceremony emphasized the participation of delegates and journalists from Slovakia, the United States, France, England, Russia, Poland, Slovenia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Georgia, and Croatia. In particular, the Sokol emphasized the Slavic character of the event, highlighting the eight hundred Russian visitors and over one thousand Serb participants.³⁰ Like the Hus cornerstone ceremony, the Palacký unveiling ceremony included participants from other Prague political and voluntary organizations, such as the National Council, Association of Czech Women, and Mánes Association, as well as from educational institutions.

A Sokol member and local celebrity, Sucharda, dressed in top hat and tails, proudly presented his monument to the public. Underlying the stylized gymnastic performances, the Czech national costumes and music, and the celebratory unveiling of the Palacký Memorial, a militaristic tone suggested to the international community that the Czechs would be ready for battle if necessary. Claire Nolte has demonstrated that in the years preceding the Great War, Czech nationalism and the Sokol movement in particular asserted a radical, martial character.³¹ Like Sucharda’s victorious “New Woman,” the Sokol Slet and the Palacký Memorial unveiling of 1912 formed a show of strength in the face of rising international tensions in Europe.

The Žižka Monument Competition

Another monument project from this era more pointedly portrayed a strong and militaristic image of the nation. Jan Žižka had been a popular figure with radical nationalists, particularly from the working class, since the mid-nineteenth century. However, Žižka’s military connotations made Habsburg authorities apprehensive about approving commemorations to him; the medieval general had led the radical Taborite Army to victory against Emperor Sigismund, then king of Hungary. Crucial to that victory, the famed Battle of Vítkov, on the outskirts of Prague, was one of the few military victories Czechs could celebrate. Placed alongside martyrs Hus, Wenceslas, and the victims of the 1620 battle of White Mountain, Žižka stands out as a thoroughly masculine, triumphant hero.

As with other heroes from Bohemia’s past, religious connotations made Žižka a controversial idol—the Taborites had been the most radical sect of Husites, and their extreme anticlericalism and communal lifestyle had contrasted with the views of the more moderate Utraquists. Nonetheless, Žižka’s often so-

cialist nineteenth- and twentieth-century followers insisted that the religious ideas inspiring the general had metamorphosed over the centuries into faith in the nation.³² In 1877, Vítkov residents, largely from the industrial working class, renamed the Prague suburb Žižkov to honor their hero. Žižkov was one of the independent cities—along with Karlín, Smíchov, and Vinohrady—that many Czech nationalists wanted to incorporate into a Greater Prague to bolster the city's Czech-speaking population. German speakers still lived primarily in central Prague, yet the working class of Žižkov and Smíchov was becoming increasingly radicalized, and Young Czechs feared the political competition. Žižkov's leaders desired the respect and support of Prague but also wanted to assert a separate identity. A monument to Žižka, on the site of the Battle of Vítkov, would legitimate Žižkov's independent identity, yet link the suburb to Prague's "cult of monuments."³³

Although the Society for Building a Žižka Memorial in Žižkov was founded in 1883, it was not until 1913 that the voluntary organization had the resources and political backing to sponsor a monument competition. The Žižka monument society by that point had garnered tremendous support from the local community, collecting over ninety thousand crowns by 1907—three times more than was contributed to the Wenceslas Monument.³⁴ Residents were frustrated with the society, though, for continually delaying the project. In 1903, Žižkov residents watched the laying of the Hus memorial's cornerstone, and angrily questioned whether their own city's monument would ever rise.³⁵

When the Žižka contest finally took place, in 1913, Prague's artistic community responded enthusiastically. In early 1914, the fifty-seven submissions to the monument competition were displayed at the Palace of Industry, an art nouveau building at the Prague Exhibition Grounds. The majority of models were hackneyed designs, which avant garde painter Josef Čapek likened to plaster statues found in local pubs.³⁶ However, a handful of designs for the Žižka monument were so innovative that they attracted considerable attention from the daily press and from art journals. Following the European trend of insisting that modern style infuse all forms of creativity, the competition invited sculptural and architectural design or a combination of forms. Prague architects and sculptors paired to explore some of the most modern styles emanating from France, particularly cubism. Although cubism in Western Europe remained a preoccupation of an artistic elite, the movement attracted a wide array of young Bohemian and Moravian artists, who creatively employed the style in not only sculpture and architecture but even theater. Prague's avant garde believed it could use cubism, with its emphasis on dissecting and opening preconceived forms, to discredit the historicism still popular among the



Czech bourgeoisie. Ironically, these young artists, unlike their West European contemporaries, did not automatically snub monumental projects and public art. Just as art nouveau was infused by nationalism in such regions as Bohemia, Hungary, and Scandinavia, where the national question dominated public discourse, Czech cubists did not automatically dismiss national subjects for their work.³⁷

The radical submissions to the Žižka competition illuminated a new generation of artists, in their twenties and early thirties in 1913. The only competitive submission from a slightly older sculptor, forty-one-year-old symbolist František Bílek, represented a bridge between the secession style and more radical modernism. In the 1890s, the man considered Prague's foremost cultural leader, the literary critic František Xavěr Šalda, had called for a new synthetism in art, a "concrete symbolism" fusing the artist's physical observations with an inner, spiritual essence;³⁸ for the 1913 competition, Bílek, a spiritual seeker who left Catholicism to explore the Hussite tradition, proposed an attenuated figure of Žižka surrounded by twenty abstract boulders, a grouping symbolizing the whole Hussite era. However, the jury rejected the overt religious tone of Bílek's design, which disregarded Žižka's military contributions; contemporary nationalists were insisting on secularizing the Hussite message, particularly through Žižka's warrior manifestation.

An equestrian statue by Jan Štursa better served the military image. Eight years younger than Bílek, Štursa also embraced synthetism. Štursa, a prolific sculptor who studied under Myslbek and contributed decorative sculptures to numerous Prague architectural projects, also experimented, unlike the older generation of decorative sculptors, with cubism. His fruitful partnership with the father of Prague modern architecture, Jan Kotěra, led to a powerful joint submission to the Žižka competition: Štursa and Kotěra's proposal featured a huge, somewhat abstract Žižka on horseback, flanked by soldiers wielding swords; the sculpture fragmented Žižka's commanding silhouette and broke the lines of his huge shield. The massive monument could only be viewed at a distance, becoming more abstract as the viewer neared it; this force and weight of the monument, however, led critics to call it Germanic and inappropriate for a Czech nationalist sculpture.³⁹

Although Bílek and Štursa's synthetic contributions still embodied some realist principles, other, young artists experimented with truly abstract forms. Czech cubism grew out of Šalda's earlier calls for a synthetism of art and life: in the second decade of the twentieth century, young artists indeed fused the French cubist model of Picasso and Braque with Šalda's synthetism. Czech cubo-expressionists used cubist fragmentation to express changes of mood

and inner spiritual and intellectual activity. The radical direction of these youth led to tremendous controversies in Prague's art community; generational conflict, and diverging concepts of abstraction in art, led fifteen artists to leave the powerful Mánes Association to form the Group of Plastic Artists. Even Šalda, though he still supported the young artists' radical experiments, began to criticize the "drastic abstraction" for becoming more "formulae and diagrams [than] works of art."⁴⁰

In spite of the censure of the older generation, however, the Group of Plastic Artists reenergized Prague art in the years surrounding the Žižka competition. The most radical proposal of the monument contest was that of twenty-three-year-old sculptor and painter Otto Gutfreund, a member of the Group of Plastic Artists, who had studied cubism in France. With thirty-one-year-old modern architect Pavel Janák, Gutfreund proposed a cubist monument that appeared revolutionary, seeming infused with movement, in contrast to the more traditional sculpture that Gutfreund disparaged as inert. The architect Josef Gočár, a fellow Plastic Artist member, also submitted an innovative cubist design—and Gočár, who had recently unveiled the House of the Black Madonna, his cubist café and gallery in central Prague, helped to bring yet more attention to the competition, through his newfound fame. Vlastislav Hofman, Ladislav Machoň, Čeněk Vořech, Vladimír Fultner, and Bedřich Feuerstein also submitted cubist designs.⁴¹

Although the competition attracted a wide array of proposals, the much delayed Žižkov monument continued to face disappointments. Intellectuals' negative response to the commonplace traditional designs, coupled with the public's intolerance for avant garde abstractions of a beloved hero, led the competition jury to avoid choosing a winner. Soon war engulfed Europe, and all new monument projects were postponed. A finished Žižka statue would not be unveiled until 1950. Yet, in spite of its failure to produce a tangible outcome, the 1913 competition revealed innovations in synthetism and cubism that would influence the rapid development of Prague modernism. The generation that revolutionized concepts of public art and monuments during the Žižka contest would lead independent Czechoslovakia's contributions to European modernism in the years to come.

Modernism and Nationalism

Although the monuments to Wenceslas and to Palacký, and the model submissions for a Žižka memorial, were unveiled within a one-and-a-half-year period, they epitomized vastly different artistic styles. Although linked by the

belief, common among Prague's artists, that art rendered public spaces sacred, the sculptors nonetheless engaged differing approaches in marking urban space with modern spirituality.



Myslbek's Saint Wenceslas statue is Prague's last great nineteenth-century monument. In it, the fledgling national movement sought to capture and glorify Bohemian history to lend legitimacy to the contemporary Czech struggle. The realism of the work imposed an uncomplicated picture of the past onto the contemporary world.

Sucharda's Palacký represented the uncertainty of the fin-de-siècle. Artists struggled to unite realistic historicism with inner spiritual and psychological essences of identity. Where Myslbek's message was unambiguous and celebratory, Sucharda's statue might be read on multiple levels. An onlooker had to engage intellectually and emotionally with the memorial and its subject, thus encouraging a spiritual connection between present and past. No longer only triumphant, national art could acknowledge struggle and suffering as well. Public art had become less didactic and more subjective, as the national movement had broadened and matured.

The cubist submissions to the Žižka contest asked what public art's purpose was to be in the twentieth century, and the art jury's inability to choose a sculptor suggested that Prague's nationalist community was not yet ready to answer.

Prague's avant garde believed that art must acknowledge the human struggle against individual and social chaos: whether on public squares, on hills overlooking the city, or in obscure journals or galleries, art must pull apart human experience to arrive at inner truth. Nationalist leaders, on the other hand, asserted that art should honor the past and inspire contemporary citizens to support the movement's political goals. Only a few persons were willing to accept a new modernist credo, that the Czechs could find a middle ground between historicism and abstraction. On the eve of the Great War, the possibility of completely reconceptualizing the modern national monument was not yet fully realized.



Chapter 3. Generational Approaches to National Monuments

Epigraph: Sucharda, *Historie pomníku Fr. Palackého v Praze k slavnosti odhalení*,

4–5.

1. Hojda and Pokorný, *Pomníky a zaporníky*, 79.
2. Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, 263–307.
3. Katherine David-Fox, “Prague-Vienna, Prague-Berlin,” 735–60.
4. On the patronage by Zemská Banka, see Howard, *Art Nouveau*, 80.
5. Letter from Emperor Francis Josef Bohemian Academy of Arts, Humanities, and Sciences to Prague City Council, July 5, 1891. Item no. 3/28/18, Folder: Pomník sv. Václava, 1891–1894. Praesidium. AHMP.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Palacký, *Dějiny národu českého*.
8. Quoted in Pynsent, *Questions of Identity*, 196.
9. Letter from the Czech Academy to the Prague municipal government, July 5, 1891. Item no. B/28/18, Folder: Pomník sv. Václava na Václavském Nám. 1891–1894. Praesidium. AHMP.
10. Quoted in Plaschka, “The Political Significance of Frantisek Palacky,” 49.
11. Web site of the National Museum in Prague, <http://www.nm.cz/english/historie.php>.
12. See especially Kimball, *Czech nationalism*.



13. See Garver, *Young Czech Party*, 142.
14. David-Fox, "Prague-Vienna, Prague-Berlin."
15. Wittlich, *Prague, Fin de Siècle*, 38.
16. Quoted in Spínka, *Jan Hus: A Biography*, 76.
17. "K soutěži na pomník palackého," *Volné směry* 9, no. 2 (July 1898): 406–36.
18. Wittlich, *Prague, Fin de Siècle*, 25.
19. *Ibid.*, 157.
20. Sucharda, *Pomník*, 9.
21. Zyka, "Slavnost," in *Památník sletu slovanského Sokolstva roku 1912 v Praze*, ed. Ocenawek, 312.
22. Sucharda, *Pomník*, 9.
23. Zyka, "Slavnost," 313.
24. Wood and Greenhalgh, "Symbols of the Sacred and Profane," in Greenhalgh, ed., *Art Nouveau*, 86.
25. Sucharda, *Pomník*, 10.
26. *Ibid.*, 10.
27. *Ibid.*, 11.
28. Wood and Greenhalgh, "Symbols of the Sacred and Profane," in Greenhalgh, ed., *Art Nouveau*, 85.
29. Zyka, "Slavnost," 311.
30. Nolte, *Sokol*, 175.
31. For a thorough discussion of the 1912 Slet, see Nolte, *Sokol*, 174–78.
32. *Věstník spolku pro zbudování Žižkova Pomníku na Žižkově* 1, no. 3 (January 1908): 2.
33. Riegl, "Modern Cult of Monuments," in *Oppositions Reader*, ed. Hays, 621–51.
34. *Věstník spolku pro zbudování Žižkova Pomníku na Žižkově* 1, no. 3 (January 1908): 4.
35. "Žižkuv pomník?" in *Narodní politika*, May 21, 1913.
36. Hojda and Pokorný, *Pomníky a zapomínky*, 151.
37. See especially Greenhalgh, *Art Nouveau*, and Lane, *National Romanticism and Modern Architecture*.
38. Wittlich, *Prague, Fin de Siècle*, 17.
39. On the 1913 contest, see especially Witkovsky, "Truly Blank," 42–60, and Wittlich, *Prague, Fin de Siècle*, 240–42.
40. Wittlich, *Prague, Fin de Siècle*, 239.
41. Witkovsky, "Truly Blank," and Wittlich, *Prague, Fin de Siècle*, 240–42.

PRAGUE

PANORAMAS



National Memory
and Sacred Space in the
Twentieth Century

Cynthia Paces

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St. Vitus Cathedral and Prague Castle ■

■ Strahov Monastery

Memorial to the Victims of Communism ■

Charles Bridge

Josefov/
Jewish Quarter

■ Franz Kafka Statue

National Memorial on Vitkov Hill and Jan Žižka Monument ■

■ Tyn Cathedral and New Marian Column

■ Old Town Square with Jan Hus Memorial and Site of Marian Column

■ Bethlehem Chapel

■ National Theater

■ Wenceslas Square and St. Wenceslas Memorial

Sacred Heart Church ■

■ Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church/Memorial to the Victims of the Heydrich Terror

■ František Palacký Memorial

Map of Prague



PRAHA - Pomník sv. Václava a muzeum

Myslbek statue of St. Wenceslas in front of National Museum. Postcard from author's collection.



“White Mountain” sculpture on Palacký Memorial. Photo by author.



Stanislav Sucharda's Palacký Memorial. Photo by author.