# Building Nationalism: Monuments, Museums, and the Politics of War Memory in Inter-War Lithuania

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## I. Introduction

In the last decade, historians have begun to focus much attention on the role of monuments and other forms of commemoration (such as rituals and museums) in the development and operation of nationalism. This particular focus grew most of all out of a dynamic historiography on the First World War, exploring its status as a cultural breaking point and a defining moment of modernity.[1] It is a sign of the maturation of this field that now revisions and reconsiderations have also been advanced, notably by Jay Winter, in his "Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning".[2] The preeminent scholar working in this field was the late George Mosse, whose "Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars" is a defining work, setting the terms of later research.[3] Benedict Anderson's work on nationalism, "Imagined Communities", considered museums and constructed memory as attributes of modern nationalist consciousness.[4] Mosse's work, though concentrating on Germany, also addressed a broader European context, while Anderson's studies considered East Asian nationalisms as case studies. American conventions of memorialization are explored over three centuries in Piehler's "Remembering War the American Way".[5] There have also been burgeoning studies of Irish commemoration of the Great War, in all its ambivalence, given that Irish soldiers fought for what Irish nationalists saw as a foreign imperial power.[6]

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[1] Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory. London 1975; Modris Eksteins, Rites of Spring. The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age. New York 1989.

[2] Jay Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European cultural history. Cambridge 1995.

[3] George L. Mosse, Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars. New York 1990.

[4] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. Rev. ed., London 1991.

[5] G. Kurt Piehler, Remembering War the American Way. Washington, D.C. 1995.

[6] Nuala C. Johnson, The spectacle of memory: Ireland's remembrance of the Great War, 1919, in: Journal of Historical Geography 25 (1999), no. 1, pp. 36-56; Jane Leonard, Facing "the Finger of Scorn". Veterans' Memories of Ireland after the Great War, in: War and Memory in the Twentieth Century, ed. by Martin Evans and Ken Lunn. Oxford 1997, pp. 59-72.

The works of Gaynor Kavanagh on the social history of museums in Great Britain during and after World War I and especially on the Imperial War Museum provide a fascinating case paralleling the topic under discussion here.[7] The increasing geographic and temporal scope of all these studies offers the possibility of valuable comparisons. This paper aims to open a consideration of the Baltic case of the Republic of Lithuania between the wars and attempts there to build nationalism through memorialization.

The case of memorialization in interwar Lithuania is interesting because it highlights three particular issues. It reveals how World War I and its aftermath took on very different meanings in Eastern Europe, compared to the ways in which the Great War was understood and memorialized in the West (which has been studied in detail in a very rich cultural historiography of the last three decades, compared to a remarkable paucity of studies on the East). Second, it underlines important characteristics of Lithuanian nationalism, in particular its conscious relation to historical memory and, as an incidental corollary, yet again demonstrates the paramount significance of the city of Vilnius, the historical capital, to nationalist consciousness. Finally, it points to the uneasy relationship of Lithuanian nationalism with the state.

To appreciate how memorialization serves as a barometer gauging complicated interactions of state and society, it is necessary to address in turn the significance of the wars of independence, the uneasy challenge of statehood for the young Republic, what the interwar era's monuments reveal of nationalist ambitions, ambiguities, and tensions of this context, the role of museums as monuments, and finally to focus on one central exemplar of these issues, the War Museum in Kaunas.

## II. Wars of Independence

In the aftermath of the First World War (an experience of modern, industrial "total war" which left ten million dead and twice that number injured or maimed, with corresponding numbers of wid-

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[7]    Simon Jones, Making Histories of Wars, in: Making Histories in Museums, ed. by Gaynor Kavanagh. London 1996, pp. 152-162; Gaynor Kavanagh, Museum as Memorial: The Origins of the Imperial War Museum, in: Journal of Contemporary History 23 (1988), p. 77-97; idem., Museums and the First World War. A Social History. London 1994.

owed, orphaned, and bereaved civilians on the home front), both vic-
tors and the vanquished would seek to make sense of this man-made
disaster. For Great Britain and France, victory had come as such
a great cost that it called the purpose of the entire war into question
for many, who spoke of a "Lost Generation".[8] War poets' bitterness
could be heard in Wilfred Owen's denunciation of "the old Lie: *Dulce
et decorum est pro patria mori*." With repeated protestations of disil-
lusionment, men like Robert Graves bade "Goodbye to All That"–
the certainties and values of the Victorian age. Paul Fussell argues
that the English language itself would never be the same, acquiring
an ironic mode, so that words like honor and duty could never again
be spoken without a skeptical inflection. In Germany, the memory
of the Great War bore the additional burden of humiliating defeat,
which needed to be given some redemptive meaning.[9] Throughout
Europe, a "Cult of the Fallen Soldier" grew up in response to these
mournful imperatives, often centered on a national "Tomb of the Un-
known Soldier", a democratic and anonymous figure standing in for
the nation. In the case of Germany, projects for monumental *Toten-
burgen*, "castles of the dead" (for instance, the Reich monument at
Tannenberg, with its central crypt for Hindenburg, to lie surrounded
by his soldiers) put the accent on collective sacrifice, in rituals that
would later be taken up by the Nazis.[10]

Yet the Great War had a different significance in Eastern Europe,
where it often was understood as the penultimate act before a na-
tional resurrection, whether in Pilsudski's Poland, in Hungary, or
Ukraine's brief independence. The same was true of Lithuania in the
Baltic region, where the passive experience of 1914–1918 was followed
by the active engagement of the Wars of Liberation from 1918–1920.
Four years of war had imposed great hardships on Lithuania un-
der German military occupation, in the military state of Ober Ost,
and the often wrenching experience of finding soldiers of Lithuani-
an descent fighting each other, in the Tsar's army or in the German
Kaiser's army (in the case of Lithuanians from East Prussia). Lithuani-
an national activists had declared independence while under German
occupation on February 16, 1918, but had not been allowed active
political roles. With the collapse of Germany's war effort and revolu-

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[8]   Robert Wohl, The Generation of 1914. Cambridge, Mass. 1979.
[9]   Bernd Hüppauf, Langemarck, Verdun, and the Myth of the *New Man* in Germany after
      the First World War, in: War and Society 6 (September 1988), no. 2, pp. 70-103.
[10]  Sabine Behrenbeck, Der Kult um die toten Helden. Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten
      und Symbole 1923 bis 1945. Vierow b. Greifswald 1996.

tion in Berlin, the Lithuanian government under President Antanas Smetona began to form in earnest from November 11, 1918. The new democratic Republic faced formidable military challenges: the advancing Red Army, German *Freikorps* mercenary freebooters under commander Bermondt, and strife with Lithuania's larger southern neighbor Poland. The formation of a Lithuanian army was announced on November 23, 1918 (after a brief and strange interlude of Wilsonian delusion when Lithuanian activists hoped that Lithuania would not require a large army in a world now made "safe for democracy" after the "war to end all wars") and 3,000 volunteers rallied, especially motivated by the promise of land reform and land grants. Even after orders for mobilization and conscription, the "volunteer-creator" (*savanoris-kūrejas*) became an archetypal figure in the nationalist pantheon, and perhaps even occupied the mythic, sacral status elsewhere accorded to the "Fallen Soldier" described by Mosse (substituting a "Myth of the Living Volunteer" for the "Myth of the Fallen Soldier").

With Allied assistance, Bolshevik forces were expelled by late 1919 and the Peace of Moscow signed on July 12, 1920, while the *Freikorps* marauders also were thrown back into East Prussia by December 1919. Soon after however, Lithuania and Poland clashed in a conflict which would deeply affect Lithuanian politics for the coming decades, battling over Vilnius-Wilno, which fell to General Zeligowski's Polish troops in October 1920. Poland claimed Wilno as the "Pearl in the Polish Crown", while Lithuania claimed Vilnius as the historical capital of the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania and saw the ruined castle tower of Gediminas rearing up over the city as the focus of their attempts to link their new statehood to ancient glories. Bitterness over the loss of Vilnius was an abiding, determining, and radicalizing factor in Lithuanian politics, domestic and international, for all the interwar period, as Poland and Lithuania continued their tense confrontation. Kaunas, in Lithuania's center, was made the Republic's emphatically "temporary" capital. Frustrated by these events, insurgents coordinated by Lithuania's government seized the Prussian port city of Memel (renamed Klaipèda) from Allied troops in January 1923 to gain access to the Baltic and "compensate" for the perceived injustice.

Many viewed the conflicts of 1918 to 1920 and 1923 as "Wars of Liberation" and a baptism of fire for independence and statehood, though the outcome had been a bitter one in the case of Vilnius for many Lithuanians. The new army remained an important factor

in society and politics. In society, the army understood itself as the school of the nation, teaching recruits and vowing to eliminate the initially high rate of illiteracy (15-20%) by a program of education (indeed in the late 1930s, the incidence was down to less than 1%). Courses in history and geography, army libraries, and visits to the War Museum as the most popular site for army field trips, were parts of this ambition. Socially, the volunteer organization of the Riflemen's Union (Šaulių sąjunga) was an important fixture of the new Republic. Politically, the army's role was an ambivalent one, to say the least. On December 17, 1926, army officers overthrew the democratic government and installed leaders of the increasingly marginal nationalist party, the "Lietuviu tautininkų sąjunga" or "Tautininkai". The earlier democratic president Antanas Smetona now was declared *Tautos Vadas*, the "leader of the nation", and an authoritarian regime was built up (from the 1930s taking on the outward signs of the fascist totalitarian aesthetic, but remaining essentially a conservative regime). The army's role remained an uncertain one, for in the coming years and especially in the 1934 coup attempt involving the army's chief of staff, the potential for another coup remained, as the more radical authoritarian figure of Augustinas Voldemaras found adherents among more junior officers. In 1939, however, after ultimatums from Poland and Nazi Germany and consequent revelations of Lithuania's weakness in foreign affairs, it was the army that pushed the dictator Smetona towards the formation of a coalition of national unity under General Černius, which many hoped presaged a return to democracy and liberalization. In fact, the country was soon overtaken by the storms of the coming World War II and Soviet and Nazi occupations.

## III. Nationalism, the Past, and the State

Another factor in the formation of the new state and a consciousness of citizenship in that state was the distinctive character of the nationalist movement. The two chief defining characteristics of developing Lithuanian nationalism before the war had been an emphasis on the Lithuanian language (and education), and an especially emphatic stress on historical continuities to the medieval state of the Grand Duchy and a preceding mythic, prehistoric epoch of tribalism. Moreover, this cultivation of continuities was not unconscious, but articulated clearly by intellectuals. One contemporary Lithuanian study of "Prehistoric Archaeology and National Consciousness"

declared that historical research had awakened the people, playing a crucial role: "Then came the year 1918. The historians of the land could carry into the new age the awareness that they had not only written history, but had also fulfilled a historical task."[11] While these were traits obviously shared with the cultural and political nationalisms of surrounding Eastern European ethnic groups, the way in which they functioned in counterpoint to one another was distinctive. In a sense, these two defining characteristics existed in tension with one another. The emphasis on the medieval state (centered on the Vilnius of the Grand Dukes) in particular set Lithuanian self-understanding off from that of their Latvian and Estonian neighbors, whose pasts were dominated instead by memories of Baltic German overlordship. Yet on the other hand, the emphasis on language was curiously in counterpoint – the ethnic marker of the archaic Lithuanian language had been preserved among the peasantry, the poor, far removed from any participation in statehood, more given to rural populism. It was also largely from this class of independent farmers that the new nationalist elites came.

This dialectic within the national movement produced a recurring ambivalence about governmental authority and an uneasy relationship with the state. Volker Blomeier's study of Lithuanian politics in the interwar period examines the challenges of new statehood under the rubric of difficulties of a "modernization process".[12] The presumptive elites of Lithuanian politics lacked experience in modern democratic politics of compromise as well as in centralized, technocratic bureaucratic organization. The ambivalence toward state authority could be traced in the social history of interwar Lithuania. The 1926 coup was symptomatic of this tension, frustrated with parliamentary democracy. Also symptomatic of this deep-seated tension was what followed the coup: the relative ineffectiveness of the *Tautininkai* regime's artificial attempts at creating a myth of the state which would command enthusiastic allegiance, as well as social constraints (whether from the Catholic church or civil society at large) on the regime's coercive power or claims to central authority.

Perhaps one curious iconographic detail illuminates this tension between the nation and the state present in Lithuanian nationalist

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[11]  J. Puzinas, Vorgeschichtsforschung und Nationalbewusstein in Litauen. Kaunas 1935, p. 104.

[12]  Volker Blomeier, Litauen in der Zwischenkriegszeit. Skizze eines Modernisierungskonflikts. Münster 1998 (Arbeiten zur Geschichte Osteuropas. 6).

tradition and thought. The official flag of the Lithuanian Republic (as
it is today) is the tricolor of yellow-green-red. This flag was criticized,
however, for what some called its nonstandard and informal colors,
lacking in decorousness. Thus, another new flag gained currency at
official functions, called the "State Flag", though it did not have legal
standing (the tricolor was the official state flag) – this was a red banner
with two medieval emblems: the white *Vytis* emblem of a charging
knight on horseback on one side and the pillars of Grand Duke
Gediminas on the other. In popular parlance, then, the tricolor came
to be called the "national" flag (*tautinė*), used in conjunction with the
"state flag" (*valstybinė*), uneasily expressing the distinction between
nation and state. This dilemma can also be traced in the monuments
and rituals in interwar Lithuania.

## IV. Monuments

Monuments to the Wars of Liberation, viewed as the capstone to the
Great War in Europe, adopted forms often taken up from Western
models, but often turned them to other uses. The central example
here would be that of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. France had
interred an unknown poilu at the Arc de Triomphe on November 11,
1920. Great Britain and the United States emulated the French exam-
ple in following years. In Lithuania, by contrast, where the numbers
of fallen volunteers had been small (sources cite more than 4,000 dead
in the Wars of Liberation) relative to the vast bloodletting of Flanders,
Verdun, and the Somme, it seemed more urgent to instead memorial-
ize all the known fallen, rather than a hauntingly anonymous archety-
pal figure.[13] At the temporary capital, Kaunas, the "Monument to the
Fallen in the Wars of Independence" was erected on October 16, 1921,
according to a project of the architect J. Zikaras. It would be, as a re-
cent study points out, the archetype or model for other monuments
built around the country.[14] Standing six meters high, it was of pyra-
mid form, built up out of large, rough rocks gathered up from the
fields of individual battles, and topped with a half-meter high metal

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[13]   Steponas Gečas, Vytauto Didžiojo Karo Muziejui – 75 metai [75 Years of the Vytautas the
       Great War Museum] (a series of articles), in: Diena (November 25, 1995), Nr. 269 (398).
[14]   Adomas Butrimas, Denkmäler in Westlitauen: Errichtung (1928–1944), Zerstörung (1945–
       1954) und Wiederaufbau (1988–1991), in: Nordost-Archiv N.F. VI (1997), H. 1: Das
       Denkmal im nördlichen Ostmitteleuropa im 20. Jahrhundert. Politischer Kontext und
       nationale Funktion, ed. by Sven Ekdahl, pp. 167-183.

cross. At its base was an inset bronze plaque, situated inside a portal opening, showing a grieving young woman laying flowers at the grave of a soldier. A motto read, "1921 – For Those Who Fell For Lithuania's Freedom." The structure was surrounded by a ponderous metal chain and planted about with cypress trees and roses (provided by United States embassy officials, they were cuttings from the grave of George Washington). Nearby stood seven wooden crosses, intricately worked folk art, each brought from a different corner of the country. This monument was situated in the garden of the future War Museum, which would be turned into a ceremonial complex. Throughout Lithuania, independence monuments imitated the one in Kaunas, adding variations to highlight its symbolism.[15] A recent study counts more than 20 such imitations, sometimes more regular pyramids and sometimes executed in concrete, which seemed at the time a modern and attractive medium.[16]

One particular aspect of this monumental enthusiasm is puzzling, however, and that is the pyramidal form, which seems quite foreign to the Lithuanian context. In fact, it might be more proper to call this form not pyramidal, but that of the pagan altar, the "aukuras" of Romantic literature and visual arts, represented as a rough jumble of uncut field stones. Likewise, these stone structures also seem to echo the form of the Gediminas castle tower over the coveted and lost capital of Vilnius (one indeed bore a relief showing the Vilnius castle with a rising sun and admonished, "In the most difficult struggle for existence, O Lithuanian, do not forget Vilnius!"), while others included iconographic or verbal mention of Vilnius along with Klaipėda and other battle sites.[17]

The most elaborate national shrine in the form of a pyramid was the monument at Taučiūnai village, where the first Lithuanian volunteer casualty, Povilas Lukšys, had been killed in a firefight with Bolshevik soldiers. The monument was built in 1929 at local initiative and according to a plan by architect Landsbergis-Žemkalnis (the father of Vytautas Landsbergis, the former Lithuanian president and Sąjūdis leader during the independence movement 1988–1991), who has been called the "Frank Lloyd Wright of Lithuania" for his influence and ubiquity. The structure seemed a ziggurat-stepped pyramid,

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15    Paminklai, in: Lietuvių enciklopedija [Lithuanian Encyclopedia]. Vol. 21, Boston 1960, pp. 457 f.
16    Butrimas, Denkmäler (see footnote 14), p. 169.
17    Ibidem, p. 171.

an unlikely set of shapes in the Lithuanian context until one recalls that it imitates the symbolist paintings of Konstantinas Čiurlionis, which sought a monumentality in the otherwise modest forms of folk art, transposed by the artist into Romantic dreamscapes. A further point to note in this context is that the ways in which monuments or projects for monuments were represented or their images manipulated can also be significant. Contemporary photographs of the Lukšys pyramid try to make it as monumental as possible, shot from low vantages and set against backdrops of chiaroscuro clouds. One photographic montage showed a ghostly face in a steel helmet in the clouds hovering over the monument. In this case, the Lithuanian photographer had adapted a convention of German monuments, which showed the hardened face of a front fighter in a steel helmet, the "New Man" of industrial battles like Verdun, forged in "storms of steel." In this Lithuanian context, the same figure had to bear other connotations, of watchfulness, vigilance, and guarding. Transposition of conventions of memorialization and mourning from countries to the west could change their meanings in the process.

Local initiative produced many more monuments, not professionally designed or executed in suitable materials. Indeed, in the case of the allegoric Freedom Statue in Plungė, the statue's arm bearing a sword fell off. An official committee of architects and engineers was established in 1925, the Society to Beautify Lithuania, to rein in such enthusiasm, but these attempts did testify to popular initiative. Many more monuments sprang up in 1928 and 1938 at the anniversaries of independence, as well as in vast festivities of the year 1930, which was officially designated the "Year of Vytautas the Great," marking the 500 year anniversary of the Grand Duke's death and again accenting continuities to the medieval past.

## V. Museums

Museums could not be overlooked as media for accenting nationalist messages of continuity with the past. Museums had been important to the national movement before 1914. The Kaunas city museum administered and fostered by Tadas Daugirdas, established in 1897, was a prominent site for activists. In the years before 1914, national activists in Vilnius planned a grandiose Lithuanian national museum and center of culture to be built there, the "Tautos Namas", the "House of the Nation", in which "all the cultural and artistic life

and work of a Lithuania returning to life would concentrate themselves."[18] In addition, there was also a sense that museums were necessary attributes of a modern country of the twentieth century, and thus efforts were soon underway to establish museums. If museums were, as the name suggests, homes to the inspiring muses, they had their uses for nationalist creation of the state and nationalists hoped a national spirit would inhabit them. Ten years after independence, the art historian Galaunė recorded the number of museums which had been established, but wished to see more, and complained that it seemed "as if some fatality persecutes attempts to found Lithuania's museums". Galaunė also tersely noted one museum that seemed not purely a museum. In his overview he observed laconically, "We will not speak here of the War Museum, which without doubt has a truly great significance in our society's life because of its specific rituals and solemnities, but not purely of the nature of a museum, seeking its own purposes".[19]

## VI. The War Museum in Kaunas

This mysterious statement referred to what was the paramount institution memorializing the Wars of Independence, the War Museum in Kaunas. While it was a military museum, it was also more broadly a ceremonial complex, surrounded by smaller monuments, where rituals were performed. The garden of the War Museum in particular can be called, without any exaggeration, a nationalist pantheon, with a proliferation of symbolic objects, flags, busts of notables, and allegorical statues. President Smetona's speeches refered to it as the "temple of the nation".[20]

Efforts to found the War Museum, remarkably, began even in the turmoil of the Wars for Independence, and testified to a will to give permanence and mythic significance to what was at the time "current events". The Defense Ministry, under Gen. Liatukas, issued an order on Dec. 15, 1919, authorizing Dr. Nagevičius, of the military medical service, to organize a museum and begin collecting artifacts. On January 22, 1921, a further order from Gen. Žukas authorized

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18   Paulius Galaunė, Lietuvos muziejai [Lithuania's Museums], in: Pirmasis nepriklausomos Lietuvos dešimtmetis 1918–1928. Kaunas 1990, pp. 359-366, esp. p. 359.
19   Ibidem, p. 366.
20   Antanas Smetona, Pasakyta parašyta [Written and Spoken]. Kaunas 1935, p. 41.

a military history seminar to help with the work of the museum and enunciated the intention behind these initiatives. The goal was "to create for coming generations an eternal monument" of the nation's struggle for freedom. Democratically, it was also intended that "every service to the Fatherland, whether that of an officer or of an enlisted man, would be properly recognized" therein. The museum was called "our common monument."[21]

The as-yet quite small museum was opened on Independence Day, February 16, 1921. Thereafter, it continued to grow more elaborate, aided by funds from the Lithuanian diaspora in the United States as well as government subsidies. At first, the museum was housed in the former regimental quarters of the III Don unit, and a former Russian Orthodox chapel annexed to it. The cupola of the chapel's tower was removed and the architect Dubeneckis worked to redesign it to resemble a castle tower, with crenelated battlements, more evocative of a medieval past.[22] Inside, exhibits were devoted to: history until independence; independence; the dead; army branches and units; the Riflemen's Union.

Outside, a ceremonial complex arose at the War Museum, near the Unity Square (as it was renamed – earlier this was "Horse Market"). This was sometimes refered to as a national pantheon or a "Forum Lithuanum, the Lithuanian school of statehood".[23] The monument to the fallen was installed in 1921. Lithuanian-Americans sent a Lithuanian Liberty Bell in 1922, bearing the motto: "O ring through the ages for the children of Lithuania / That he is not worthy of freedom who does not defend it!" The bell was hung in the museum tower and rung on ceremonial occasions, first inaugurated by a national hero and an invalid of the wars. Significantly, the occasions on which it would be rung included events that were political, anniversaries of military historical events, cultural anniversaries, and social and economic events, but not religious events. The distance between the state and the predominant Roman Catholic church remained. Once again, the symbolism of the Liberty Bell invited a territorial imagination of the nation. This included the diaspora; the official proclamation of thanks read, "I beg to announce to America's Lithuanian society.

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21 Quoted in: Vincentas Liulevičius, Lietuvos muziejų istorija (1812–1933) [The History of Lithuania's Museums (1812–1933)]. Diploma Thesis, Kaunas 1937, pp. 63 f.
22 Akiras, Karo Muziejus [The War Museum]. Kaunas 1930, p. 19.
23 Quoted in: Gečas, Vytauto Didžiojo (see footnote 13), in: Diena, Nr. 22 (448) (January 27, 1996).

Our dear brother Americans...".[24] It also included the irridenta, as the proclamation continued, "the Liberty Bell which has been cast by your donations has been temporarily housed in the tower of the War Museum in Kaunas, until it can firmly establish itself atop Gediminas Hill in Vilnius".[25] The tower's clock was outfitted with radio signals to match the exact time broadcast from the Eiffel Tower in Paris, a symbol of the linkage of the country with Europe and the West.[26]

The presence of invalids, damaged war heroes, was a significant part of the museum's image. President Smetona referred to them as "our living monuments".[27] A troop of them, "more suited to the museum's guarding and most needing shelter", were attached to the museum.[28] They were outfitted in blue and red uniforms and steel helmets bearing the double-sparred *Vytis* cross. The invalids were a recurring feature in the elaborate, yet small scale rituals which evolved around the ceremonial complex. Every morning at 7 am and every evening at sunset, a troop of war invalids wearing steel helmets, bearing lances as well as canes and crutches marched out from the museum to the garden and the monuments. A band played the hymn, "Marija, Marija", a sacred song with nationalist significance, and then, to the sound of a march (often marches could be retooled folk songs), the three different flags would be raised – the national flag, the state flag, and yet another flag with the *Vytis* cross. When the flags were lowered in the evenings, the monument's electric cross was illuminated along with a message on the wall of the museum: "Having stood on guard for ages, we won freedom through sacrifice and dedication".[29] In addition, flames rose from the pagan altar before the monument, "making it appear like a cemetery". In a blend of Christian and pagan imagery, according to one account, "smoke rising from the altar to the heavens carries our prayers to the Most High for our brothers who fell for Lithuania's freedom".[30] This practice specifically emulated that performed in Paris and seemed a further stamp of legitimacy. On special occasions, the ceremony grew more complicated still, with funeral marches, laying of wreaths, and ringing of the Liberty Bell.

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24   Akiras, Karo Muziejus (see footenote 22), p. 27.
25   Ibidem.
26   Ibidem, p. 28.
27   Smetona, Pasakyta parašyta (see footenote 20), p. 47.
28   Akiras, Karo Muziejus (see footnote 22), p. 18.
29   Ibidem, p. 30.
30   Ibidem, p. 32.

The presence of invalids was significant, as a social message for and about the living. A contemporary account stated, "Looking from the side, it appears that a War Museum is not possible without the invalids, just as the invalids are not possible without a War Museum. One is intimately related to the other and together they make one remarkable document witnessing Lithuania's crusades". It avowed that it was especially the presence of the invalids which seemed to endow the rituals of honoring the state flag with meaning for the civilian population.[31]

In 1928, a Freedom Statue, designed by sculptor Zikaras, was erected upon a tall pedestal in the garden. It showed a female angel with wings carrying a flag, and trailing behind her broken chains. At the base of the slender column, the monument bore the motto, "To the Warriors," and the names of famous battles of the Independence Wars: "Širvintos Giedraičiai 1920", "Panevėžys Dauguva Radviliškis 1919", and "Klaipėda 1923". In an ode "Before the Freedom Statue", published in a booklet about the museum, this site and the Liberty Bell were linked to the "longing to knock at the gates of VILNIUS", ending, "God! Return Lithuanians' living heart – Vilnius! O, Heaven hears our prayer!"[32]

Even as the museum grew during the 1920s, its collections expanding, its physical facilities began to fall apart, "not having received help". It is unclear why the building was neglected, but this perhaps reflected the same turning away by ordinary citizens from the immediate memory of war recorded by Kavanagh in the case of London's Imperial War Museum, which fell on hard times and disrepair in this period. The museum in Kaunas "began to fall apart: the windows bent, the roof burst, and the floors began to break. The floors were attacked by fungus. For this reason, it was necessary to temporarily close the museum in 1924".[33] It was resolved to build a new structure for the museum. According to the plans it "should stand in a beautiful spot and its style should characterize the uniqueness of the Lithuanian soul and should be tied to Lithuania's past".[34] The nature of the museum as memorial was now stressed more emphatically: "Because the War Museum's content reflects Lithuanians' struggles for independence, the request was added, that the future building's exterior

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31   Ibidem.
32   Ibidem, p. 4.
33   Ibidem, p. 19.
34   Ibidem.

appearance should also be a monument to that fight".[35] The planning committee unanimously determined that it should be "built in the style of an ancient Lithuanian castle, with characteristic walls, towers, and so on." In 1930, during the anniversary year of Grand Duke Vytautas the Great, the foundations for a new museum were laid (a document placed in the cornerstone pledged to "renew the brave will of the victors of Tannenberg, to regain Lithuania's capital, Vilnius").[36]

In 1936 the renamed Vytautas the Great War Museum reopened in a new building, designed by Dubeneckis, which it had to share with the distinct Vytautas the Great Museum of Culture, headed by art historian Galaunė. The two separate museums were run by different ministries – the Defense Ministry and the Ministry of Education. Relations between the museums seem to have been not uniformly cordial, as the War Museum refused to turn over to the Culture Museum archaeological artifacts which in fact it had no legitimate right to keep. This expedient of shared quarters was felt to be unsatisfactory, but earlier plans to build a large castle-formed structure for the War Museum alone had been shelved. An official report from the Culture Museum complained bitterly, "Here one must recall the attempts of the Vytautas the Great War Museum officials to occupy as much space as possible for the activity of the Vytautas the Great War Museum, totally leaving out of account the most essential and minimal requirements of the Vytautas the Great Culture Museum in regards to space."[37]

The new building was built in a modern style, but nonetheless appeared to have crenelations recalling the battlements of medieval fortifications as well (other sources suggest its facade was to imitate the nationalist symbol of the Gates of Gediminas).[38] Some authorities had suggested giving the entire building to the War Museum, but the compromise was effected, and in 1936 a museum law was promulgated, allocating respective responsibilities.[39] An overarching

[35]   Ibidem, p. 19 f.
[36]   Gečas, Vytauto Didžiojo (see footnote 13), in: Diena, Nr. 22 (448) (January 27, 1996).
[37]   V. Kuprevičius, Vytauto Didžiojo Kultūros Muziejaus 1936.XI.1-1939.XII.31 darbų apyskaita [Record of the Work of the Vytautas the Great Culture Museum, November 1, 1936 – December 31, 1939], in: Vytauto Didžiojo Kultūros Muziejaus Metraštis I, ed. by Povilas Karazija. Kaunas 1941, pp. 331-391, esp. p. 332.
[38]   Gečas, Vytauto Didžiojo (see footnote 13), in: Diena, Nr. 22 (448) (January 27, 1996).
[39]   Vytauto Didžiojo Kulturos Muziejus [Vytautas the Great Culture Museum], in: Lietuvių enciklopedija (see footnote 15), Vol. 34, Boston 1966, pp. 391 f.

Vytautas the Great Museum consisted of the War Museum and the Culture Museum, whose purpose was "to cultivate national consciousness [*susipratimą*], love of the fatherland, and the determination to defend Lithuania's independence".[40] The 1936 law retained the awkward arrangement of shared quarters and control divided between the Defense Ministry and the Ministry of Education. Perhaps in a recognition of continuing friction, the law added that the distribution of bequests to the institution and of space within the building between the two parts of the museum would be made by the cabinet of ministers.

The War Museum apparently was popular with visitors. During seven months in 1924, some 90,000 visitors were reported. In 1938, the estimate ran to 67,973 visitors. In 1930, the museum contained more than 1,300 artifacts. Some of them underlined irredentist themes: photographs of the "rebels of Klaipėda", pictures of the former border between Lithuania and the parts of East Prussia known as Lithuania Minor, and an allegorical figure made of plaster apparently representing "Lithuanian-Polish struggle". In the garden, busts of national heroes proliferated: Basanavičius, Kudirka, Lukšys, historian Daukantas, Maironis, Žukauskas, and others. Statues of archetypal figures from the national movement were erected. The bust of Basanavičius, known as the "Father of the Lithuanian Rebirth", was set up in 1923 by the army, cast from "cartridge shells, which had been shot at Lithuania's enemies" and placed on "a rock, which divided Lithuania Major and Lithuania Minor", brought from the former Russian-German border between Palanga and Klaipėda.[41] In 1930, a black monument, the "Vilnius Mourning Monument" (also called "The Black Stone") was added to remind visitors of the historical capital city.[42] Transparently, this irredentism, and Smetona's frequent punctuation of his speeches, laden with pretensions to philosophy, with the assurance that Vilnius would be regained, were meant to integrate society under the leadership of the authoritarian state. Yet these incantations could also call the state into question, precisely because sovereignty was understood as still incomplete and imperfect. In one

[40]   Text of law reprinted in: Kuprevičius, Vytauto Didžiojo (see footnote 37), p.386.
[41]   Akiras, Karo Muziejus (see footnote 22), p. 21.
[42]   Liulevičius, Lietuvos muzieju istorija (see footnote 21), p. 68; Karo muziejus [War Museum], in: Lietuvių enciklopedija (see footnote 15), Vol. 11, Boston 1957, pp. 73-76; Nukentėję paminklai [Damaged Monuments], ed. by Marija Skirmantienė and Jonas Varnauskas. Vilnius 1994, p. 54.

speech, Smetona observed, "Until we will be in the capital of Gediminas, we will be not fully free, the worm of unease will gnaw at our consciences".[43] This contradiction was not resolved, but overtaken by world historical events.

With growing international stresses and crises in Europe in the 1930s, nationalist ceremonies around the War Museum grew more elaborate still, apparently to reinforce a flagging sense of national confidence. In 1934, long after other Western countries, Lithuania interred an unknown soldier next to the monument to the fallen. He was awarded the Vytis Cross, Third Class, and his resting place was dedicated by the dictator, President Smetona, and two bishops. Smetona's dedication speech ended, "Moreover, we will not forget Vilnius".[44] In 1937, the so-called Bells of Battle were installed in the complex, a carillon of 35 bells, each christened with the name of a battle of the Independence Wars or of a military hero or medieval Grand Duke.[45] The museum also established a Crypt of the Fallen inside the museum, in 1938. This was a room furnished with walls imitating black marble and covered with bronze lettering to list the names of fallen heroes, dimly visible in the light of flickering lights, studded with national imagery.[46] The door before the Crypt is topped with a steel-helmeted face of a soldier, eyeless and turned upward (a common trope in German war monuments).

## VII. Conclusions

In general, what seems notable about the nationalist mobilization of monuments and memorial institutions in Lithuania is its comparatively modest scale, relative to the gigantism of totalitarian architecture abroad, in Nazi Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union, or Fascist Italy. This tentative note perhaps reflects the ambivalence in the society-state relationship already present in the broader nationalist movement. Likewise, a sense of irresolution or impermanence might derive from the sense that Kaunas was considered the temporary capital, militating against pretensions to monolithic permanence expressed in architecture or monument.

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43   Smetona, Pasakyta parašyta (see footnote 20), p. 43.
44   Ibidem, p. 51.
45   Gečas, Vytauto Didžiojo (see footnote 13), in: Diena, Nr. 22 (448) (January 27, 1996); Karo muziejus (see footnote 42).
46   Gečas, Vytauto Didžiojo (see footnote 13), in: Diena, Nr. 22 (448) (January 27, 1996).

With the loss of independence in 1940, the new Soviet regime moved to change the monuments and institutions to its own propagandistic uses, a process completed after the war. The War Museum was changed to celebrate the Red Army's successes. One of its former directors was shot in the repressions. Throughout the country, monuments to independence or other historical monuments were destroyed. A recent study estimates that 90% of historical monuments were destroyed by the communists. The most active phase of this iconoclasm was from 1951–1954, but it had begun in 1945 and would continue into the 1980s. The Freedom Statue was toppled, and the grave of the unknown soldier and the Monument to the Fallen were both demolished in 1950, replaced by statues of Lithuanian communist leader Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas and the Cheka leader, Felix Dzerzhinsky.[47]

Curiously, a coda needs to be added to this episode. Many of the monuments of the interwar period, built then with state funds or for the purposes of the state, were rebuilt by citizens' initiative groups in the Sąjūdis period leading up to independence in 1991.[48] The meaning of these monuments has been transmuted by this act of civil initiative from the population at large, without the direction of a centralized authority – indeed, in opposition to it. The Freedom Statue and the Monument to the Fallen have been rebuilt and are now prominent settings for state ceremonies. The War Museum today still has significance, but it has drastically changed. The museum's own transition to independence was not easy, due to problems of financial support and a question of its mission. Many displays remain the same as they were in previous decades, but with captions altered. The facade of the museum is crumbling in places. Museum administrators explain that Vilnius is now being built up into a "city of presentation", the official image of the present nation-state, leaving fewer funds for the museum at present. But significantly, the ceremonial complex outside was rebuilt to recreate the interwar reality, as well as the crypt inside. Crucially, no Black Stone of mourning for lost territories is included. The site is valued now for the often idealized memory of the interwar period. On Lithuanian currency, the 20 litas bill, the museum is featured as an attribute of history and earlier statehood. The museum

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[47]  Nežinomo kareivio kapas [The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier], in: Lietuvių enciklopedija (see footnote 15), Vol. 20, Boston 1960, pp. 303 f.; Nukentėję paminklai (see footnote 42), p. 47.

[48]  Nukentėję paminklai (see footnote 42), p. 49.

itself is now a historical artifact, the object of a new politics of memory. As a final note, the building of new monuments today in Lithuania continues at what seems to be a feverish pace. This wave of memorialization is part of a larger imperative, of facing a violent and difficult past in the twentieth century. The historian's task of "problematizing" monuments and their meanings and uses can ensure that the monuments' presence opens up fruitful discussion, rather than freezing the past.