

Dark Tourism

Monuments have had a significant impact on peoples and communities throughout history as they can be used to establish their heritage, identity, and memories.¹ The types of monuments and the way they are portrayed can vary greatly, from the Roman statue of Jupiter in the Hermitage Museum which has a clear interpretation of what it was meant to represent, this being the personification, promotion, and glorification of the Roman deities. To those with less powerful and enforcing meanings, such as the Little Mermaid statue in Copenhagen, Denmark, which was created out of the fascination Carl Jacobson had for a ballet about the fairytale.

The monument that this essay will discuss has had, in simple terms, two distinct uses as a means to represent history, one was to highlight the role of the oppressor and the second was to celebrate the history of a people. This piece is focussing on the Freedom Monument in the city of Bydgoszcz in Poland. Despite the image that the name of the monument suggests, one might think of a glorious overthrowing of an invader or oppressor, however, this name has only been used for the last 33 of the monument's 78 years of existence. Prior to 1990, it had the name "Monument of Gratitude to Soldiers of the Red Army".² This monument was, before the change in 1990, a dedication to the Soviet soldiers who died taking Bydgoszcz from Nazi Germany in 1945.³

¹Veysel Apaydin, *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage: Construction, Transformation, and Destruction* (London: University of Central London Press, 2020), p. 85.

² Henry Dubowik and Włodzimierz Jastrzębski *Kronika Bydgoska tom XXXII* (Bydgoszcz: Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2011), p. 350.

³ Dubowik and Jastrzębski, *Bydgoska*, p. 350.



Fig.1 The Freedom Monument, Bydgoszcz. This image depicts one whole side of the monument.

As can be seen from the image above, the monument is in the form of an obelisk. This gray monument has little in the way of information on it. The monument has three images, all of which can be seen in Fig. 1, the emblem of the city, something which was put on the original Soviet monument, the Polish coat of arms, and a depiction of Bydgoszcz being brought back into Poland. These images all belong to one of the four sides of this monument, the other three sides contain only lists of events with dates below them. These events and dates go as follows:

‘Wars with Teutonic Order

1330-1331

1409-1411

1454-1466

Polish-Swedish wars

1655-1660

1702-1709-1716

Kościuszko Uprising

1794

Duchy of Warsaw

1807-1815

November Rising

1830-1831

January Uprising

1863-1864
First World War
1914-1918
Greater Poland uprising
1918-1919
Return of Bydgoszcz to the Motherland
20 I 1920
World War II Polish underground state
1939-1945
end of the German occupation of Bydgoszcz
21 I 1945
Independence struggles in the Stalinist period
1945-1956
Social Protests
1956-1980
Third Republic of Poland
1989⁴

As a conscious decision was made to put these specific events and dates on the monument as a means to preserve national identity, it is necessary to briefly go through each of these and give a small bit of background information.

The Polish state had existed in some form by the time of the conflicts recorded on the monument for around 350 years since the famed baptism of Poland in 966 led by the actions of Mieszko I.⁵ However the freedom monument purposely excludes both the foundation of the first recognizable Polish nation as well as its early history which includes the 190 year period of when Poland became fractured after the death of Bolesław III (1107-1138) and only starts its narrative during the reign of Władysław I (1079-1102) when the kingdom of Poland was restored. This exclusion suggests that those who had say in the addition of these dates to the monument, this being the Bydgoszcz city council, did not want to acknowledge their pre-Christian history or the breaking up of their kingdom. The refusal to acknowledge their pre-Christian past could stem from how religious the country of Poland is, with 85% of the population of Poland stating at least some attachment to the Roman Catholic Church, and for many, religious belief and identity go hand in hand.⁶

The first Teutonic conflict noted on the monument, this being 1330-1331, was part of the 1326-1332 conflict with the nation. This conflict had its origins at the end of the thirteenth century, with the death of Mestwin II (1273-1294), the Duke of Pomerelia, and the desire for this land by King Wenceslaus II

⁴ These events were all in Polish but have been translated.

⁵Magdalena Kubow, 'The Solidarity Movement in Poland: Its history and Meaning in Collective Memory' *The Polish Review* 2 (2013), 3-14 (p. 5). <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/polishreview.58.2.0003>> [accessed 13/03/23]

⁶Brian, Porter, 'The Catholic Nation; Religion, Identity, and the Narratives of Polish History' *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 2 (2001), 289-299 (p. 289) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3086330>> [accessed 14/03/23]

(1278-1305) of Bohemia.⁷ The conflict, which officially ended with the Treaty of Kalisz in 1343, resulted in King Casimir III (1333-1370) of Poland relinquishing any claim on Pomerelia, Chełmno, and Michalow. For the loss of these claims, Casimir regained land in Kuyavia and Bobrzyń which had been conquered by the Teutonic Order in the conflict.

The second conflict noted on the Freedom Monument was the Polish-Lithuanian-Teutonic War of 1409-1411. This war was between the Teutonic Order and the allied Polish Kingdom and Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This conflict started with the two Samogitian uprisings in 1401-1404 and 1409, which led to a Teutonic invasion of Poland in Mid-1409. This conflict involved a brief nine-month truce brokered by Wenceslaus IV (1378-1419) of Bohemia and concluded with the Peace of Thorn 1411. The result of this conflict was the return of pre-1409 borders, and this unstable peace led to two further brief conflicts, the Hunger War in 1414 and the Gollub War in 1422. The third conflict with the Teutonic Order is the Thirteen Years' War 1454-1466. This conflict ended with the Teutonic Order becoming Polish vessels.

The second series of wars that the monument mentions are the Polish-Swedish wars of 1655-1660 and 1702-1709-1716. The first of these two dates is Poland's, which had been since 1569 the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, involvement in the Second Northern War against Sweden. A treaty was signed between the Polish and Swedish crowns with the Treaty of Oliva 1660, which resulted in King John II Casimir (1648-1668) renouncing his claims on the Swedish throne, as well as cede Livonian territory which included the city of Riga. The second dates mentioned, this being 1702-1709-1716, are part of the large conflict known as the Great Northern War 1700-1721, with the dates on the monument marking the Swedish invasion into Polish land in 1702 to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth joining an anti-Swedish alliance in 1709 and rejoining, and 1716 marked the removing of Swedish ownership and influence on all lands in the Baltics and within Germanic spheres.

The next major event mentioned on the freedom monument is the Kościuszko Uprising in 1794. The lead-up to this event was the major decline of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the eighteenth century, this fact, and the expansionist neighbours surrounding this nation, lead to two Polish partitions, the first in 1772, and the second in 1793. It was this second partition that led to the Kościuszko Uprising.⁸ The uprising was unsuccessful and resulted in the third Polish partition, this meant that any form of an independent Polish nation was gone and did not reappear until the birth of the Second Polish Republic in 1918.⁹

The Duchy of Warsaw is listed next on the monument, with the dates of its existence 1807-1815 written alongside it. The listing of this event marks a change in the way the Freedom Monument presents itself, up to this point the only things it mentions are conflicts, and while the Duchy of Warsaw was the result of warfare, and the dukedom was, as a puppet of Napoleon, involved in the Napoleonic Wars, the nation

⁷William Urban, 'The Teutonic Knights and Baltic Chivalry' *The Historian*, 3 (1994), 519-530 (p. 526)
<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24448704>> [accessed 14/03/23]

⁸Oswald Backus, 'The Problem of Unity in the Polish-Lithuanian State' *Slavic Review*, 3 (1963), 411-431 (p. 430).
<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2492488>> [accessed 15/03/23]

⁹Kubow, Solidarity Movement, p. 5.

itself was more, and the monument reflects this. The Duchy of Warsaw was the first attempt to re-establish Polish sovereignty, and while it was ended in 1815 with the Congress of Versailles, this would not be the last attempt to create a Polish state.¹⁰

The November Rising, otherwise known as the November Uprising, or the Polish-Russian War of 1830-1831, was a failed rebellion against the Russian Empire.¹¹ This rebellion against Russia resulted in harsh countermeasures by Emperor Nicholas I (1825-1855) who removed any sense of Polish autonomy and even closed major academic centers like the University at Warsaw. The January Uprising of 1863-1864 was an insurrection against the Russian Empire and an attempt to restore the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This was the longest-lasting uprising in partitioned Poland. This insurrection was eventually crushed and led to more widespread persecution of the Polish population.

The next date on the Freedom Monument is the First World War 1914-1918. As mentioned earlier an independent Polish nation did not exist during the First World War, as a result of this Polish lands, and subsequently, large amounts of Polish people, were spread across the German Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Russian Empire, and as a result of this Polish people fought on both sides of this conflict. This conflict saw some attempts at the emergence of a Polish state, like the creation of the Polish Legion. In 1917, as a result of the Russian Revolution, an Astro-German puppet was established in the Russian-owned Polish lands as a means to create a buffer state to prevent future conflicts with Russia. The end of the First World War saw the Treaty of Versailles recognize and guarantee the independence of a new Polish state with the territory given to the state from former German and Austria-Hungary lands, as well as those from the Polish puppet created in 1917.

The next event noted on the Freedom Monument is the Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919. This conflict was between the newly emerged Second Polish Republic and the Weimar Republic. Germany was at this point very weakened and the conflict ended in 1919 with a Polish victory that Poland's territory in Posen, West Prussia, Upper Silesia, and the area of Działdowo. The next event listed on the Freedom Monument, this being the 'Return of Bydgoszcz to the Motherland 20th January 1920' celebrates the reunification of Bydgoszcz with its country due to the Treaty of Versailles.

The monument then covers the Second World War, with its title 'World War II Polish underground state'. Poland's role and the horrors it was put through have been well discussed in many academic circles so little attention will be given to it here. This conflict was devastating for the nation and the people, and in many regards, especially culturally, they are still recovering.¹² Due to the mass genocide and oppression of the Polish people during the Second World War by both Nazi Germany and the USSR, which includes the murder of countless victims as well as the widespread destruction of urban centers, Polish art, and history, which is often displayed in the form of heritage sites and monuments, were suppressed and

¹⁰Piotr Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918* (Washington: University of Washington press, 1974), p. 43.

¹¹Adam Lewak, 'The Polish Rising of 1830' *The Slavonic and East European Review* 26 (1930), 350-360 (p. 353) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4202527>> [accessed 12/03/23]

¹² Empty Frames exhibition, 2022, Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum, Bydgoszcz.

destroyed. The Second World War saw the eradication of one-third of Poland's urban population.¹³ The effect that this conflict had on Poland's cities was severe, with Warsaw, the capital of Poland, being nearly destroyed by 1945 with 85% of the city in ruins.¹⁴ This attempted destruction of Polish heritage and history has had a lasting effect on Poland's art and the way it portrays its past. In fact, estimates range up to 50% of Poland's pre-war museum holdings were, by 1942, lost.¹⁵

The next event noted on the Freedom Monument is the Independence struggles in the Stalinist period 1945-1956. This period saw the newly liberated Poland be under the control of Stalin, the person who ordered the Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939. This period ended with the death of Stalin in 1956. The Freedom Monument lists Social Protests 1956-1980 as the next section. This period covers the Polish struggle to shake off their Soviet overlords. While this event is listed after the Stalinist period in Poland, the likely start of this period would be just before the death of Stalin with the Poznań Uprising in 1956. This period could also have started with the Polish October, otherwise known as the Polish Thaw, which saw a dramatic shift in Poland's politics and affected its political direction for the rest of the Soviet period. The final date on the Freedom Monument is the birth of the Third Republic of Poland in 1989. This event, the most recent thing to be deemed worthy enough to be included on the monument is one of the greatest achievements for many Polish people, this was the freedom the people in Poland had been trying to achieve for decades.

The point of focusing so much on the background of Polish history and the dates that the Freedom Monument is to give appropriate context to it, especially as these are the conflicts and events that the monument is trying to invoke and make the viewer think about. Looking at the various events recorded on the monument, it is clear the purpose of the modern Freedom Monument is to portray a particular image of the Polish people, one in which it shows their resilience to the many difficulties the people and the different forms of Polish nations have faced.

As the original title of the monument was "Monument of Gratitude to Soldiers of the Red Army" it is no surprise that this monument was created under Soviet management. This monument fit into a pattern of many Polish monuments created under Soviet watch, this being the use of concrete to create simple displays.¹⁶ With the birth of the Third Polish Republic in 1989 it was only a matter of time before this Soviet monument was addressed. The Bydgoszcz city council was faced with a choice to either tear down and remove this monument that represented the Soviet footprint in Poland or to change both its physicality as well as its meaning. The council went with the latter, as can be seen with the renaming of the monument in 1990 and the inclusion of the historically important dates to Polish identity as well as the

¹³Magdalena Gross and Luke Terra, 'What makes difficult history difficult?' *The Phi Delta Kappan* 8 (2018), 51-56 (p. 55) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26552405>> [accessed 12/03/23]

¹⁴ Gladsky, *Polish Post-War*, p. 151.

¹⁵ Empty Frames exhibition, 2022, Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum, Bydgoszcz.

¹⁶Thomas Gladsky , 'Polish Post-War Historical Monuments: Heroic Art and Cultural Preservation' *The Polish Review*, 31 (1986), 149-158 (p. 150).
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25778206.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A28fd2df96249dc49f0dad7d32bf5bbcd&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=search-results> [accessed 12/03/23]

image of the reunification of Bydgoszcz to Poland which were done by Alexander Dętkoś in 1994 and 1995.¹⁷

¹⁷ Dubowik and Jastrzębski, *Bydgoska*, p. 350.

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