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# Leaving Siegfried Behind: Nibelung Monuments In The Cultural Infrastructure Of Contemporary Austria

By: **Alexandra Sterling-Hellenbrand**

## Abstract

This is part of a larger project called *Medieval Literature in the Modern Landscape: Culture and Heritage in Contemporary Austria*. It was begun at the Karl Franzens University of Graz, where I was the Fulbright Visiting Professor of Cultural Studies in the spring/summer 2020.

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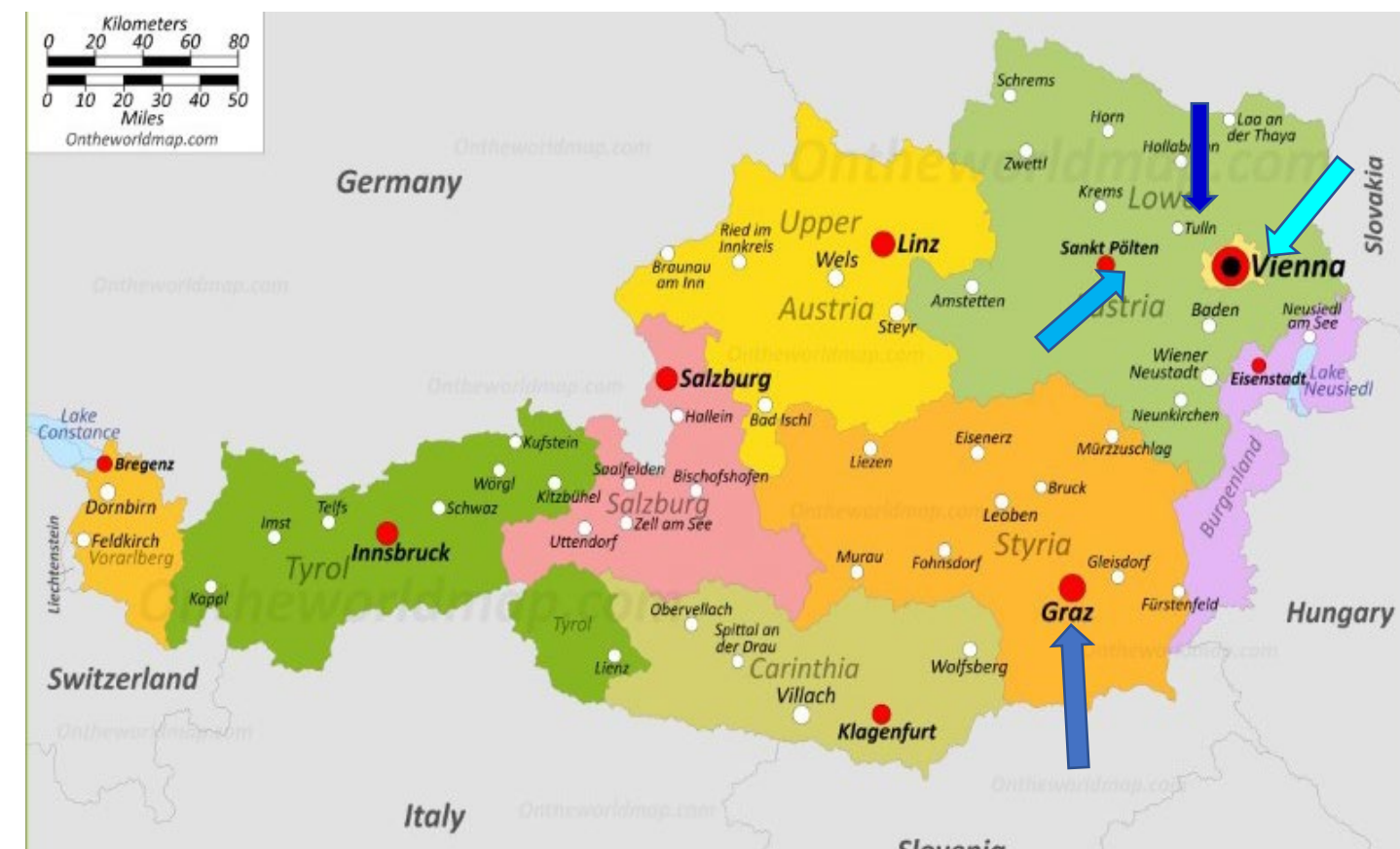
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Monuments are “values made visible.”\* This project examines Austrian literary monuments as reflections of community values in the twenty-first century. This presentation examines how contemporary Austria, like Germany and unlike the American South, re-imagines its cultural infrastructure in a framework of reconciliation.

I discuss three primary examples that take up the very politicized Nibelung legend: *the Siegfriedskopf* at the University of Vienna (installed 1923; reconstructed and moved 2006) and the Nibelung monuments in Pöchlarn (1987) and Tulln (2005). Each instance demonstrates a new cultural space where medieval texts and public memory intersect. The Styrian Literary Pathways of the Middle Ages offer another contrast showing medieval literature in a more local/regional landscape (Graz).

All of these monuments foster identity, inspire renewal, and cultivate “cultural sustainability.” Sustaining the past and embracing the future is part of the cultural program of the Second Republic. Furthermore, the monuments reflect a unique Austrian contribution to the emerging “memorylands” of Europe and the continent's collective memory work since 1989. Articles from this project are in progress for *Studies in Medievalism* and the *Journal of Austrian-American Studies*.



Pöchlarn



3. Vienna



The Siegfriedskopf /University of Vienna: Re-contextualizing an older monument for a new time and place. General Lee re-imagined on Richmond’s Monument Avenue in June 2020.



1. Pöchlarn: The reality of the Nibelung story

2. Tulln: The Nibelung story made reality



Tulln



Steirische Literaturpfade des Mittelalters



4. Graz/Styria: Old stories, new roots?



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Tulln: photo by author, June 2018  
 Siegfriedskopf, photo by author, May 2019  
 Graz, photos by author, February/March 2020  
 Richmond, photo by Larissa Tracy, used by permission, June 2020  
 Pöchlarn [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Nibelungendenkmal\\_P%C3%B6chlarn.jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Nibelungendenkmal_P%C3%B6chlarn.jpg)  
 \* Reference Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019) 265

