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ROADSIDE MEMORIALS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN 19th CENTURY SERBIA

Abstract: This paper is concerned with the development of the roadside memorial – a particular type of memorial erected in the Serbian rural environments in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As a new type of grave markers, roadside memorials first appeared in order to preserve the memory of the soldiers who died in the wars waged between 1876 and 1918. These memorials were considerably different from the Serbian memorials of the day, both in terms of their visual richness and their message. They were remembered for their recognizable representation of a soldier, chiselled in a stone relief in life size and decked with vivid colours. Positioned largely outside of cemeteries, at various crossroads, near springs, or in open spaces, they were intended to mark the death of a relative and memorialize the victim who perished in the numerous war conflicts. As a very popular form of memorial heritage in rural environments, roadside memorials gradually gained ground, spreading from the southwest of the country towards the north and east.

The roadside memorial tradition was aligned with the complex funeral rituals followed in the Serbian villages. However, very different memorials were developing at the same time in the urban environments as a result of a new, civic funerary culture. This represented a sharp break with many elements of the cult of the dead, still observed in the Serbian villages. Novo Groblje ('new cemetery') in Belgrade, built in 1884 as the biggest necropolis in Serbia, is a good example of the diversity of memorials, adapted now to the tastes of the town population. It was largely the representatives of the capital elite that were laid to rest in Novo Groblje in Belgrade – senior administrators, officers, successful merchants and wealthy entrepreneurs. Their burial plots were a sort of a status symbol, reflecting as they did the social position and success of the deceased, as well as a sharply increased financial power of the Belgrade citizenry. With monuments made exclusively from imported luxury materials, such as marble, granite, and brass, Novo Groblje was the engine of the local funeral industry, which flourished in Belgrade at the turn of the 20th century.

Keywords: grave, death, roadside memorial, the cult of the dead, the Serbian-Turkish War, Belgrade, memorials.

The development of the cult of the dead in 19th-century Serbia is a complex issue, tied to funeral rituals and ancient traditions. Frequent wars in the Serbian territory in the 19th and early 20th centuries resulted in a particular funerary culture, characterized by the appearance of military cemeteries and specific, artistically crafted memorials. These stone markers represent a part of a long tradition of commemorating the ancestors killed in wars.¹ Testifying to that is the fact that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries the graves of soldiers acquired certain typical and quite recognizable art forms. In addition to bearing witness to a gradual militarization of the entire society, the memorials were an important link between funeral customs and the cult of the dead.

The attitude to death and burial in 19th-century Serbian village underwent significant changes. Liberated from the Turkish rule, the population in the rural areas reverted to the ancient customs and felt freer to engage in their funeral rituals. In the words of the ethnologist Milan Đ. Milićević, Serbian villagers are not so much afraid of death; they prepare for it almost indifferently, as if for an inevitability. "Thus a villager with any capital to his name seeks to find a place of his burial: a place dear to his heart during his lifetime; or under a tree, in the shade that he preferred to sit in; or next to the grave of a beloved deceased one."² The practice of choosing special burial plots situated near the houses was very much alive in many rural areas of Serbia until the 1881 Law on the Sanitation Service introduced bans on individual (lone) burials, outside of cemeteries designated for this purpose.³

It was during the Serbian-Turkish War, which started a series of new bloodsheds in the region, that it became clear that cemeteries in a sense always represented a reflection of the world of the living. The 1876 war testifies to the many conceptions of memorials as products of two different cultures of memory. First of the rural one, and then of the urban, which coexisted one alongside the other. These two traditions had an abundance of significantly different memorials, as well as different symbolisms that reflected funeral customs. The rural cult of the dead was certainly more ancient, richer and more complex, as it arose much before the civic and urban funerary culture. Although they have many points of contact and cross-influence, these two cultures of memory are nonetheless considerably different, imposing their own picture of the past. They are to this extent a rich material for further analyses.

The First Serbian-Turkish War of 1876 was a turning point of sorts, important for understanding specific elements of the cult of the dead, which was practiced in rural

¹ The small cemetery for the rebels, who fell in the siege of Belgrade in 1806, is a contemporary of the new Serbian state. "The graves of these unforgotten Serbian heroes can be seen scattered all over Vračar to the present day." There are only about ten headstones left in this space today, decked with simple crosses and ornaments typical for that period. Л. Арсенијевић-Баталака, *Историја српског устанка*, I, Београд 1988, 222; Р. Веселиновић, *Жртве и надгробни споменици ослободилаца београдске вароши од Турака у Првом српском устанку*, Годишњак града Београда IV (1957) 181–193.

² М. Ђ. Милићевић, *Живот Срба сељака*, Београд 1894, 337.

³ *Зборник закона и уредаба у Кнежевини Србији*, XXXVI, Београд 1881, 427–431.

areas. This war provided a link between the memory of the victims of war and the popular culture of memory, represented through a unique type of memorials. As was noted by a number of contemporaries, in late 19th-century Serbia a custom had gained hold to erect special memorials, in addition to the ones at cemeteries, in visible locations for soldiers who were killed in foreign lands. "In the north-western areas of our country, it is customary to erect stone crosses with primitive portraits of the deceased and inscriptions by the roadside for those who died or were killed far away from home, for example as soldiers. Such roadside stone crosses are erected not only for soldiers, but also for those who perished in faraway lands."⁴

Milićević also observes that this tradition first appeared in the mountainous regions of western Serbia, between Rudnik, Čačak and Požega, the areas previously known for their rich stonemasonry tradition. The relatives of dead soldiers would erect special stone markers in memory of the soldiers who died in the many wars waged between 1876 and 1918.⁵ This is how roadside memorials first appeared as a specific type of memorial which remained very popular in the Serbian funerary culture in subsequent decades.

According to many contemporaries, the word *roadside memorial* is more recent in origin, as it was coined by the Serbian poet Branko V. Radičević. It is highly unusual that this word was soon accepted as ancient even outside Serbia, although it was fairly new.⁶ In the previous period, however, there had been no specific word for roadside memorials; rather, they were simply referred to as – roadside graves.⁷ Roadside memorials spread from the village areas to the urban ones – a direction somewhat unusual for the cultural exchange and the transfer of ideas in late 19th-century Serbia. In terms of specific details and symbolism, and especially by going outside the usual public spaces, roadside memorials stood apart from the other types of grave markers found in village cemeteries up until then.

Although they could be found in village cemeteries as well, roadside memorials were more often erected outside of these sacred grounds, singly or in small groups. For the most part, they were found by village roads, springs, or crossroads.⁸ The

⁴ Т. Ђорђевић, *Неколики самртни обичаји у јужних Словена*, Годишњица Николе Чупића I (1941) 171–172.

⁵ М. Ђ. Милићевић, *op. cit.*, 351.

⁶ Inspired by many memorials with visual representations of soldiers, Radičević wrote a book in 1961 – *Plava linija života* (*The Blue Line of Life*). It was an homage to the army of stone warriors which this poet encountered in his travels around the rural area of Serbia. В. Радичевић, *Plava linija života*, Београд 1961, 16–18; Р. Николић, *Камена књига предака*, Чачак 2018, 10.

⁷ *Архивска грађа за насеља у Србији у време прве владе кнеза Милоша (1815–1839)*, ур. Т. Ђорђевић, Београд–Земун 1926, 97–98; *Дело XLVII* (1908) 236.

⁸ According to popular belief, crossroads were places where various spirits would ordinarily meet, and as such they were ideal for the placement of roadside memorials in public spaces. В. Чајкановић, *Мит и религија код Срба*, Београд 1973, 106, 240–241; С. Петровић, *Српска митологија*, Ниш 1999, 86–89.

reason for erecting roadside memorials in specific locations, regardless of where the deceased was buried, is tied to the custom whereby “the relatives of the deceased bring out a stone marker with an inscription and plants it in a visible spot or by the roadside”.⁹

Single stone crosses, erected at village crossroads, appear as the predecessors of roadside memorials in local environments. They are part of an earlier tradition of stonemasonry, present in rural areas. Since the 18th century, *obrok* in eastern Serbia and *zavetni kamen* (*votive stone*) in western Serbia have represented a frequent detail in pastoral landscapes. They indicated the direction of movement of the village lity – festivities aimed at effecting a successful harvest, which the entire community depended on.¹⁰ Situated by ancient roads, votive crosses and roadside memorials had, nonetheless, two very different functions. While the votive cross was tied to the religious rites of the entire village community, roadside memorials were part of family memory, marking the tragic death of individual relatives.

Honouring the memory of the deceased who was killed in distant war-torn lands was revived during the Serbian-Turkish Wars, resulting in the creation of a specific type of memorial, known today as the roadside memorial. The soldier’s grave marked the place of family memory and of a particular respect for the fallen warrior. Funeral rituals dictated that a special headstone was to be erected for the deceased, as a sort of an eternal home where his spirit would dwell.¹¹ The stone roadside memorial was believed to offer a safe haven for the soul of the dead, thus preventing the danger of its eternal roaming.¹² According to the social mores of the day, it was advisable to erect a grave marker within a year of the deceased’s death.¹³ Roadside memorials were most often placed by the roadside, watermills and other locations, where it was believed that the souls of the deceased ancestors already had their abode.

Placing roadside memorials in public spaces and the role they had indicate the complex functions of memorials in the Serbian rural culture. In the words of the anthropologist Dušan Bandić, “the way a deceased is treated at the gravesite is identical to the way a holy, divine being is treated in its temple. This analogy gives us reason to assume that after death, man acquires in the popular imagination the traits of a supernatural, perhaps even a divine being, and that, as a result, his grave is a sort of a local, family temple”.¹⁴ Čajkanović also points out that, “the cult of the hero or the saint is always tied to their (created or imagined) grave and/or temple”, which cannot exist without it.¹⁵

⁹ Т. Ђорђевић, *op. cit.*, 172.

¹⁰ В. Караџић, *Живот и обичаји народа српскога*, Беч 1867, 29–30.

¹¹ Р. Николић, *op. cit.*, 317–318.

¹² According to Veselin Čajkanović, “it is a well-known fact that a dead man is unhappy without a grave. The grave is actually a house – that is, at any rate, the shape it is given; the dead man without a grave is destined to roam forever”. В. Чајкановић, *op. cit.*, 45.

¹³ Т. Ђорђевић, *op. cit.*, 171; В. Чајкановић, *Из српске религије и митологије*, I, Београд 1994, 159.

¹⁴ D. Bandić, *Koncept posmrtnog umiranja u religiji Srba*, Antropologija smrti I, ur. I. Kovačević, Beograd 2013, 45.

The funeral rituals observed in the Serbian villages in the 19th century are very complex and point to the magic-related origins of many procedures related to death and burial of the deceased. V. Karadžić's 1818 *Dictionary* reveals certain interesting details, important for understanding the cult of the dead in Serbia. Funeral proceedings began by a *wake* – the duty of guarding the body of the deceased to ensure that no “impure” animal – a cat, chicken, or turkey – would cross or fly over it. The fear of the deceased “corrupting”, i.e. turning into a vampire, was widespread and resulted in observing numerous, very strict rituals. One of the important markers of death was the *shroud*, a fabric used to cover the dead body before being lowered into the grave.¹⁶

The belief that in the first forty days the soul of the deceased dwells in the house where it drew its last breath or in the vicinity of the place of burial dictated the adherence to firmly entrenched procedures. Mistakes in handling the body of the deceased were particularly avoided, as it was believed that this might attract evil spirits and have very unpleasant consequences. The belief in the existence of evil forces, vampires, witches and other demonic beings lays behind such notions. These beliefs were very strong in the earlier centuries and can be noted in the research conducted by many Serbian ethnologists.

The resurrection of the spirit of the deceased, in the form of a supernatural being, is a danger that one needed to protect oneself against by using acts of magic.¹⁷ It is an interesting fact that in the mid-14th century Emperor Stefan Dušan felt compelled to introduce a strict legal ban on the excavation and burning of dead bodies.¹⁸ The practice of excavating a dead body to establish if it had in fact disintegrated is ancient and remained present not only in Serbia, but also in many other countries of the South Balkans.¹⁹ It was a source of rich material for the myth of the vampire, which spread through 18th-century Europe from Serbia.²⁰ Even the creator of the modern

¹⁵ В. Чајкановић, *op. cit.*, 74.

¹⁶ According to an ancient belief, vampires always left their graves with the shroud on their shoulders. В. Караџић, *Српски рјечник*, Беч 1818, 88–89.

¹⁷ It was believed that it was particularly easy for a man who was evil in his lifetime to turn into a vampire, while such a thing could never befall a man who lived the life of a righteous person. В. Караџић, *Српски рјечник*, 88–89.

¹⁸ Article 20 of Dušan's Code punished all those who dared to excavate graves and burn dead bodies. The punishment for such an act was a fee in the amount of 300 to 1,000 perpers and was paid collectively by the entire village. However, if such an event was attended by a local priest, he would be defrocked. Н. Радојчић, *Законик цара Стефана Душана 1349. и 1354*, Београд 1960, 94.

¹⁹ Milojević describes a custom in Old Serbia and Macedonia whereby the graves of the deceased would be opened a short while after the funeral, in order to check if the body had actually disintegrated. The bones of the deceased were then washed in wine and oil, and re-interred. М. Милојевић, *Песме и обичаји укупног народа србског*, I, Београд 1969, 106–107; G. M. Mackenzie and A. P. Irby, *Travels in Slavonic provinces of Turkey-in-Europe*, I, London 1877, 62.

²⁰ P. Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death, Folklore and Reality*, Yale University Press 1988, 5–9, 14, 16, 41.

Serbian state, Prince Miloš Obrenović, faced the practice of deliberate excavation and destruction of the deceased believed to have become vampires.²¹ For the better part of the 18th, 19th, and even 20th centuries, dead bodies were stabbed by hawthorn stakes and destroyed by fire, despite the persistent prohibitions by the church itself.

Contrary to the many actions tied to the observance of the cult of the dead, war as a time of great confusion and various forms of violence affected in particular ways the attitudes towards the bodies of the dead. Multitudes of unburied bodies in battlefields were a problem for the entire community, and especially for the families of the dead. Although it was respected as the greatest sacrifice, placed at the altar of the homeland, from a religious point of view, the bodies of dead soldiers were considered impure, even dangerous, as they were often buried outside of the official church rituals. Left to the elements and wild beasts, the bodies of the dead were unwanted in more ways than one, given the extraordinary circumstances under which they perished.

Not only is the disintegrating human body a source of possible infections, but it was also believed that the spirits of those who died a violent and agonising death were dangerous to the community, as they sought revenge.²² Sudden death at the battlefield imposed a number of very practical questions. What was to be done with the many unburied bodies of soldiers, or those who had been laid to rest in a makeshift charnel house? It should be said that in the earlier funerary traditions, a burial that took place away from the cemetery, at a desolate or distant place, was most often linked to an extraordinary event.²³ For example, in 18th and 19th-century Serbia, lone burials by the roadside were customary in cases of violent death or the death of a stranger, usually after an attack by highwaymen.²⁴

The bodies of those who died or were killed under unusual circumstances were handled similarly, whether their death was their fault or someone else's. Those who drowned were buried by the rivers and outside of cemeteries; the same practice was used for unbaptised children, those killed by a lightning strike or those who committed suicide, the executed highwaymen, and the Roma.²⁵ Evidently, there were

²¹ *Vampire-masters*, people who were believed by the local villagers to be able to locate a vampire, excavate him, and then destroy him, were part of the popular tradition that Prince Miloš attempted in vain to root out. Т. Ђорђевић, *Обичаји народа српског*, II, Београд 1909, 431–434.

²² Т. Ђорђевић, *Неколики самртни обичаји у јужних Словена*, Годишњица Николе Чупића XLVI (1937) 95.

²³ *Ibidem*, Годишњица Николе Чупића L (1941) 159.

²⁴ It is important to mention that during the Turkish rule the so-called *krvnina* (*wergild*) needed to be paid for each sudden death; *wergild* was a fee in the amount of up to 1,000 groschen and was paid by the nahije in which territory the body was found. It is therefore no surprise that many people tried to move dead bodies across the local nahije borders to avoid paying the *wergild*. В. Караџић, *Живот и обичаји народа српског*, 264–266.

²⁵ Т. Ђорђевић, *Неколики самртни обичаји јужних Словена*, Годишњица Николе Чупића L (1941) 150–151, 155; М. Вучковић, *Концепт „лоше смрти“*, Етноантрополошки проблеми, књ. 9, св. 2 (2014) 518–519.

many people that the local communities did not wish to share their burial ground with. Jews and lepers were treated similarly in medieval England, as they were interred outside of general cemeteries.²⁶ Generally speaking, all marginalized social groups, including those suffering from incurable illnesses, such as the plague or syphilis, were buried separately from other people.

What is also interesting in this context is the existence of the so-called *Turkish, Hungarian, Jewish or vampire* cemeteries. More specifically, they were cemeteries which had been abandoned or left desolate at one point and were subsequently avoided as cursed places.²⁷ The lone graves or entire cemeteries of the forgotten or extinct inhabitants of an area were very frequent in Serbia. As soon as the memories that tied the local population to specific graves would disappear, they were consigned to oblivion and local nature. Hence the term “Turkish cemetery” for locations subsequently given over to the vegetation and disuse.²⁸

The bodies of highwaymen sentenced to death were treated in a similar fashion. In early 19th-century Serbia, as well as all across Europe, the bodies of executed criminals were deliberately put on display and left unburied, as a warning for the others to steer clear of committing evil deeds. The bodies of those hanged and unburied were a warning for the passers-by about the absolute power of the state authority. Leaving bodies of criminals in a visible place, usually at a busy crossroads, to the point of full disintegration, is a practice known since the time of Karađorđe’s uprising.²⁹ It was used during the reign of Prince Miloš and stood quite apart from the usual funeral procedures. Such a disgraceful death represented, however, a great challenge for the families of those killed. Leaving someone’s body uninterred and without a memorial service led to the eternal roaming of his soul, which remained restless.³⁰ The presence of those buried in a non-prescribed manner would always instil a certain fear and unease. Desecrating a dead body, given over to the elements, as well as the loss of control over details important to the observance of funeral rituals, are particularly salient details. The families of those executed would therefore persistently petition the police authorities for a permission to bury their dead in line with the prevalent customs, even at a later time.³¹ The barbarian policy of putting the bodies of the executed on public display was not relinquished in Serbia until mid-1859.³²

²⁶ C. Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066–1550*, Routledge 1998, 199–202.

²⁷ Ф. Каниц, *Србија земља и становништво*, II, Београд 1987, 124–125.

²⁸ Т. Ђорђевић, *Незнано гробље у Жагубици*, Старинар (1908) 161–162.

²⁹ З. Мирковић, *Карађорђево законик*, Београд 2006, 85–86.

³⁰ It is a great sin not to light at least a memorial candle for the soul of the departed, as in this case their spirit would remain in the eternal dark. The one who “dies without a candle walks in darkness in the afterlife and cannot see the others. The one who dies without a candle can corrupt (turn into a vampire)”. Т. Ђорђевић, *Обичаји народа српског*, II, 242.

³¹ Т. Ђорђевић, *Неколики самртни обичаји у јужних Словена*, Годишњица Николе Чупића XLIX (1940) 72.

³² З. Мирковић, *Смртна казна и казна трчања кроз шибе у Србији 1804–1860*, Београд 2013, 133.

If the dead were buried within or outside of cemeteries, the funeral rituals were aligned with the observance of the cult of the dead. According to ancient customs, “the new grave is usually dug near or between family graves”.³³ In the traditional culture of 19th-century Serbia, it was ill-advised to bury a strange person in a family or village cemetery. Disturbing the spirits of the ancestors could result in various forms of revenge – from a long drought to a sudden hailstorm. Cemeteries and tombs were deemed a family matter and insulting an ancestor by placing a “foreign body” in the local cemetery was avoided as much as possible.³⁴

The practice was slightly different in burials of relatives who were killed as soldiers in distant battlefields. Their death was marked by erecting special memorials, aimed at ensuring a lasting memory of the deceased. This was the case with roadside memorials, which were deliberately placed in a visible and much-frequented location, in order to keep them from oblivion for as long as possible. It is in this sense that the appearance of the roadside memorial tradition meant the start of a new strategy of commemorating the unwanted, tragic, and untimely death, far away from the place of birth. Initially quite rare, this sort of burial did not become an important part of the everyday funerary life until the late 19th century in Serbia, at a time of frequent war conflicts (especially the 1876 war, known in the literature as the Javor War (the First Serbian–Ottoman War), which set off the first armed conflict with the Ottoman Empire in modern Serbian history).³⁵

Many soldiers fell in fights on Mount Javor, in an area which was handed over to the enemy as a result of military defeats. It was therefore impossible to transport many of them to their homeland and bury them according to ancient customs. This posed a particular problem for the relatives, whose dearest ones ended their lives in a mass charnel house, or lay in shallow graves, scattered across the 1876 battlefield.³⁶ The origins of roadside memorials can therefore be looked for in the very nature of the conflict at the Javor battlefield in the summer of 1876.³⁷ The sudden loss of that entire area, as well as the fact that many hundreds of soldiers remained on the battlefield, largely in unmarked graves, can be tied to the appearance of this entirely new type of memorial.

Thus, the roadside memorial became the symbol of a lost war, as well as of the numerous victims who laid down their lives for their country. With these memorials,

³³ This is why when a new grave is to be dug, a family member must come out and say where it should be dug. Т. Ђорђевић, *Обичаји народа српског*, II, 246.

³⁴ Р. Николић, *Умирања животу једнака*, Чачак 1988, 34, 43.

³⁵ Although formally waged for the liberation of the entire Serbian nation, this was also the first war that Serbia lost. Much weaker than its enemy and forced to retreat at all points of the war zone, after only a few months of bloody fights, the Serbian army was forced to ask for Russia’s mediation and accept the truce. В. Ј. Белић, *Ратови српског народа у XIX и XX веку (1788–1918)*, Београд 1937, 75–82.

³⁶ М. Петровић, *Борбе у Топлици 1877–1878*, Београд 1979, 149–151.

³⁷ П. Борисављевић, *Са Јавора подаци за историју Српско-турског рата 1876. год.*, Београд 1890, 60–63; М. Петровић, *Ратне белешке 1876, 1877. и 1878*, Чачак 1955, 122–141.

executed by local stonemasons and stonecutters, the family marked its memory of the fallen soldier in a dignified manner. This local effort introduced new artistic means and enriched the funerary tradition by an original type of memorial.³⁸ It is a kind of testimony that we will search for in vain in official chronicles. However, the fact remains that the greatest number of roadside memorials were erected in just the areas which had previously been famous for their stonemasonry and stone cutting.³⁹

The attempt to pay tribute to those killed under extraordinary circumstances resulted in the development of new funerary practices.⁴⁰ Similar in form to the custom of erecting roadside memorials – themselves no more than cenotaphs – was the custom of erecting the *empty tomb*.⁴¹ The deceased needed to have a stone memorial even though he was not buried at that location.⁴² This was also the procedure for those killed but whose bodies could not be recovered. The aim was not only to honour the dead person, but also to allow his relatives to perform at least some of the required rituals at a specific location.⁴³ During the 19th and early 20th centuries in Serbia, if a person was killed away from home or in a war, personal items or clothes of the deceased were collected, a coffin was made and the memorial service performed, and then all the items were interred.⁴⁴

Roadside memorial art made plentiful use of the local traditions and interpretations of death found in Serbian villages in the 19th century. Naïve visual representations of youths, with clear elements of a military culture, have an air of monumental simplicity. Roadside memorials are always presented in an upright position, as perennial soldiers on watch, as their solemn eyes look intently at an accidental traveller.⁴⁵ More than a century later, the stone features of roadside memorials look even more ancient than one may think reading the inscription, itself worn away by time. The porous sandstone that most roadside memorials were chiselled from is brittle and deteriorating, as a result of which hosts of roadside memorials have been overgrown with the local greenery and moss.⁴⁶

³⁸ А. Савовић, *Срце у камену*, Београд 2009, 171.

³⁹ В. Симић, *Резање мермера у Студеници и Чемерном*, Гласник Етнографског музеја у Београду XIX (1956) 273–286; Р. Николић, *Камена књига предака*, 33, 102–103.

⁴⁰ J. G. Frazer, *The Fear of Dead in Primitive Religion*, III, London 1936, 279–283; Т. Ђорђевић, *Неколики самртни обичаји у јужних Словена*, *Годишњица Николе Чупића XLVI* (1937) 93–94.

⁴¹ According to an ancient custom, “if in ancient times someone were to die in a shipwreck, or perish but not be able to be buried, they would erect for him an empty tomb, a cenotaph. The aim of the cenotaph is offer to the soul, which roams without a grave, a place to rest”. В. Чајкановић, *Мит и религија код Срба*, 45.

⁴² Б. Јовановић, *Српска књига мртвих*, Нови Сад 2002, 121–122.

⁴³ М. Барјактаревић, *Празан гроб*, *Зборник Филозофског факултета V–1* (1960) 356–364; В. Чајкановић, *Мит и религија код Срба*, 45.

⁴⁴ М. Вучковић, *op. cit.*, 521–522, 528.

⁴⁵ В. Радичевић, *op. cit.*, 31, 34, 46, 52.

⁴⁶ А. Савовић, *op. cit.*, 93, 113, 116.

One of the peculiar features of roadside memorials are the chiselled attributes signifying belonging to the military class. The faces of soldiers in uniform testify to the efforts made to commemorate a family loss in a dignified manner and to honour the fallen. According to a widespread popular belief, the clothes and the full warrior's attire had a special significance during the funeral. It was believed that the deceased would appear in the "afterlife" in exactly the form in which he had passed away. This is why it was considered a sin to bury someone in old or unclean clothes.⁴⁷ It was in this sense that the representative visual details on memorials, such as a rifle, soldier's cap, medal, or canteen, had a special symbolic significance. Most often it was a stylised representation of the deceased at a point of his greatest glory, ready to fight.

Many such memorials were standardised, with little originality, while the epitaphs on roadside memorials often read: "This mark points to the body of the perished." It is a frequent and moving invitation for the traveller to spare the time to read the memorial inscription for someone who fell "fighting for freedom and homeland".⁴⁸ It is in this sense that roadside memorials became popular, containing layered symbolism.⁴⁹ By their formal features, the roadside memorials erected between 1876 and 1918 are part of one and the same tradition. The succinct messages of the memorial epitaphs are an additional means of idealising the image of the deceased, making it nearly perfect. The deceased fell as a brave warrior, a good soldier, a virtuous brother, son, or father, and became a kind of a martyr glorifying the country. The tragic death of the person is foregrounded and underscored as a very important detail. Emphasising such an event went hand in hand with the political use of death, alongside the praise of the dead.⁵⁰

Memorials often featured the chiselled data on those who erected it, the place of birth and death, as well as the names of military units that the dead persons were part of. Many of these stone soldiers are decked in vivid colours and set in an upright position, eyes wide open and meeting the arriving travellers. Imposing the role of witness to an accidental passer-by is an important characteristic of roadside memorials. It is an important detail of the memorial heritage which reveals the deeper significance of the sacrifice, an example to respect. Mass death during the Great War brought new energy and revived roadside memorial art, present in Serbian villages. Instead of the representation of the cross, so frequent in the previous centuries, roadside memorials feature a visual representation of the fallen warrior.

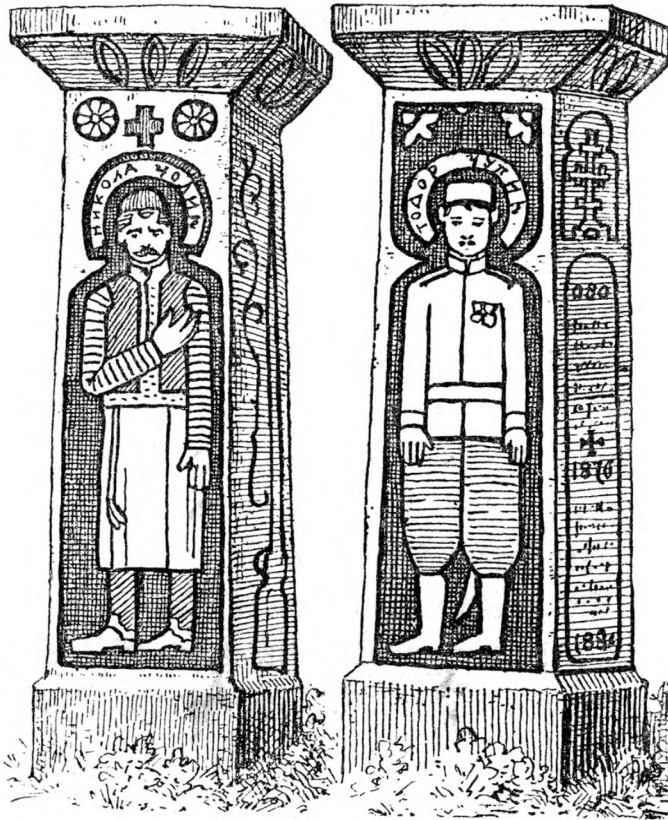
While the roadside memorials from 1876 levelled a veiled reproach at the aggressive and incautious state policy, resulting in war defeats and losses, the official interpretation of the past was considerably different. In contrast to popular art,

⁴⁷ С. Магдаленић, *Слике из наших ратова са Турцима и Бугарима 1876, 1877–1878. и 1885–1886. године*, Београд 1910, 43, 146.

⁴⁸ Н. Дудић, *Стара гробља и надгробни белези у Србији*, Београд 1995, 348–349.

⁴⁹ В. Чајкановић, *op. cit.*, 268.

⁵⁰ Т. Т. Кулјић, *Tanatopolitika – sociološkoistorijska analiza političke upotrebe smrti*, Београд 2014, 57–60.



exemplified in roadside memorials, the official propaganda presented the death of many soldiers in a way that only suited the regime. In other words, the political control of art and the censoring of the message itself led to a deliberate ignoring and neglecting of the roadside memorial tradition. The glorification of the idea of gaining state independence was presented as the main goal of Serbia's war efforts. Marking the date of gaining independence as a new state holiday was subservient to this. Interestingly, for political reasons, the Serbian authorities did not pay too much attention to the numerous victims of the 1876–1878 wars. Many thousands of soldiers maimed and killed in the war, as well as their families, were left to financial disaster and personal tragedies.

The proclamation of Prince Milan Obrenović of 10 August 1878 on the occasion of the end of the war operations was full of pathos, typical of the formulaic language of the day. The Prince's address to the members of Parliament rang with vacuous words

that brought no comfort, and the human toll was mentioned in passing only. The Prince said at the time: "Those heroes, whose destiny it was, as they shrouded our banners in glory, to remain in the field of honour and freedom, will live forever in the memory of the grateful posterity and be celebrated in the history of the eastern re-birth. We have already paid some of our patriotic dues to them, having issued at the last meeting of the national assembly a decree, whereby their widows and orphans are provided with sufficient sustenance, and our wounded, who have become incapable of work, with an opportunity to flourish."⁵¹ The great outrage of the Serbian public, caused by a negligent official policy towards the victims of war, was captured very well by the realist writer Laza Lazarević in his story *Sve će to narod pozlatiti* (*The People Will Turn All That into Gold*).⁵²

Another detail that indicated a deep rift between the popular view of the recent war past and the official policy was a bronze medal issued on the occasion of the liberation and independence wars of 1876–1878. This medal is full of recognisable classicist details. Its symbolism, in complete discord with the popular tradition at the time, was, rather paradoxically, in harmony with the European heraldic heritage of the day. The medal represents a complex artistic composition, filled with an abundance of hidden political messages. On its obverse is a representation of the crown of the Principality of Serbia, with the monogram M IV of the Serbian Prince Milan Obrenović. There is also a circular wreath formed by interlocking oak and olive leaves, with the inscribed names of the eight bigger towns conquered in these wars.

The reverse of the medal has a personified representation of Serbia, holding in her right hand the triumphant laurel wreath, and in her left the Principality's coat of arms and a cross. Her right foot is triumphantly trampling on the symbols of the defeated Turkish power – a banner with a crescent on it and a broken cannon. There is no doubt that the rural subjects of the Principality of Serbia, largely illiterate, could not easily interpret this fairly simple allegorical message. At any rate, the message was not intended for the rural population, but for the better educated citizens, as well as the few foreigners.

A sharp division between the civic and the rural held sway in the roadside memorial heritage. Established without any support from the official policies, the roadside memorial as a type of monument appeared and developed as an expression of a specific culture of memory, tied exclusively to the Serbian village. However, it is interesting that for a long time this type of memorial did not receive a great deal of attention from scholars, nor was it registered as a specific branch of the funerary tradition. On the contrary, it was interpreted as the result of *primitive* village art.⁵³

Foreign travellers visiting the Balkans exhibited a misunderstanding of this kind of popular art as well. The United Kingdom's Mary Durham, as one of the few foreign women who had the opportunity to visit the remote village cemeteries in northern

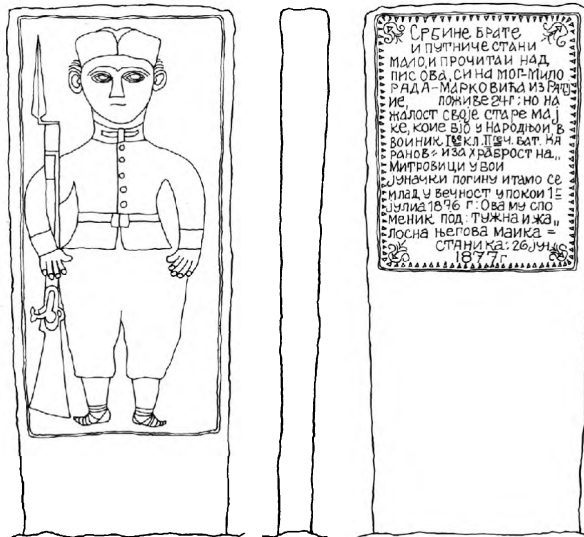
⁵¹ *Зборник закона и уредаба изданих у Књажеству Србије*, XXXIII, Београд 1878, 87.

⁵² Л. Лазаревић, *Све ће то народ позлатити*. Целокупна дела, I, Београд 1986, 127–137.

⁵³ М. Ђ. Милићевић, *op. cit.*, 351.

Albania, expressed wonder at the unusual wooden memorials, whose form resembled closely that of the Serbian roadside memorials. At the cemetery in the village of Vukli, Mary Durham saw an unusual visual representation – a wooden cross, with the image of the deceased carved in, armed with a rifle and a revolver. The entire composition was decked with a venomous snake, which indicated that this was a fierce warrior. Durham concluded that, although a perfectly non-Christian symbol, the representation of the snake on the memorial was not rare in these parts. She linked it to the Montenegrin cultural legacy, as a great warrior was referred to as an “angry snake” in Montenegrin epic poetry.⁵⁴ Some ethnologists pointed out a similar phenomenon, claiming that among the members of the Kuči tribe it is customary to place next to a headstone, right above the head, a special wooden pole made “in many forms from firewood, most often in the form of a man with his hand resting on a knife”.⁵⁵

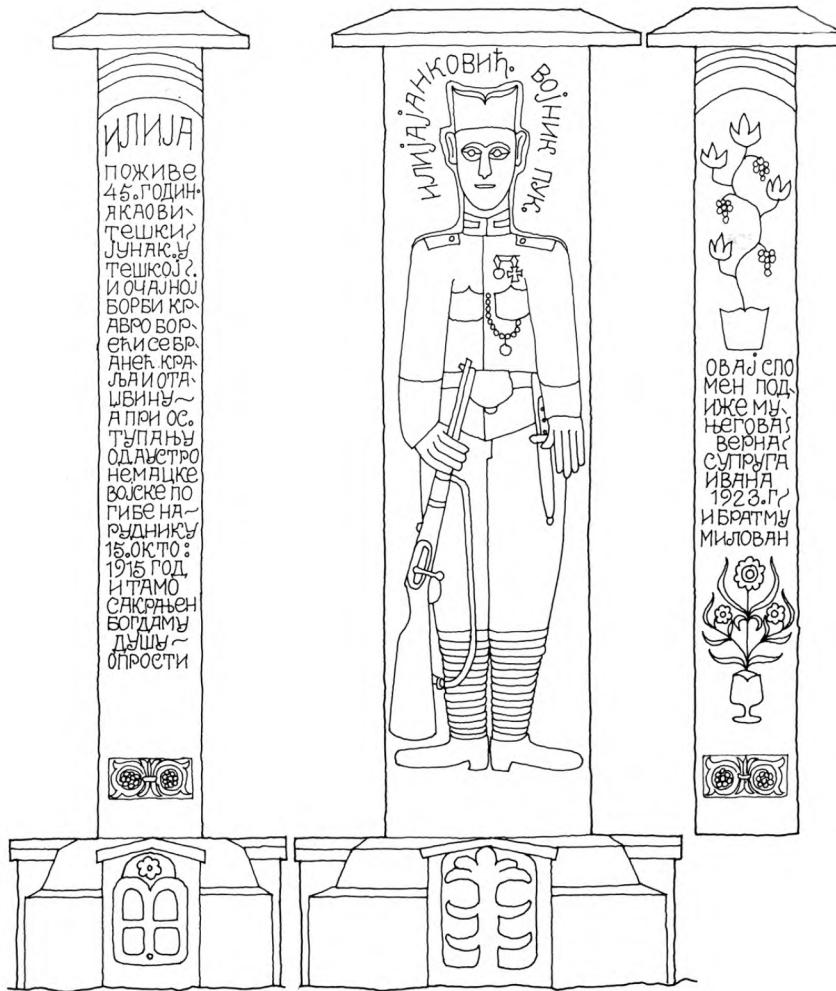
It was Felix Kanitz, author of travel notes and ethnologist from Germany, who first drew attention to the roadside memorial practices in Serbia. During his travels around the Rudnik region, Kanitz was very surprised to find a workshop operated by one of the local master stonemasons who made roadside memorials. Kanitz writes that the stonemason, “creates hundreds of those unusual stone memorials, mostly decked with figures of soldiers, whose stereotypicality drew my attention as I travelled down the Valjevo roads. The drawings contained herein illustrate their appearance better than any caption, except that one needs to imagine the rich colours of certain parts of the uniform, weapons, and inscriptions”.⁵⁶



⁵⁴ M. E. Durham, *High Albania*, London 1909, 98–99.

⁵⁵ С. Дучић, *Живот и обичаји племена Куча*, Подгорица 2004, 266; Т. Ђорђевић, *Неколики самртни обичаји у јужних Словена*, *Годишњица Николе Чупића* I (1941) 166.

⁵⁶ Ф. Каниц, *op. cit.*, I, 447.



Like Mary Durham, Felix Kanitz could not decipher the true function of the roadside memorials either. For him, the calculated promotion of the deceased by means of the roadside projection remained an inexplicable mystery. The sort of “recommendation” to the eye of the accidental passer-by, who would stand witness to the last message and fate of the deceased, remained understandable only to the local population. In this procedure, the soldier was transformed into a symbol of the immortal national hero, tying thus the idea of honouring the fallen warrior and cherishing the memory of a family member lost too soon.

The roadside memorials from 1876 are the first testimony of many sudden deaths, which would continue in later periods as well. It is in this sense that the sudden proliferation of that kind of memorial is understandable, with many of them appearing during the Great War. The roadside memorial remained a very popular type of monument in Serbia in the first decades of the 20th century, dedicated as it was to the warriors who fell or disappeared defending their country. Gradually, the space of roadside memorial practices spread from the rural west towards the north and east of the country. The tradition of erecting roadside memorials started to wane and disappear only in the mid-20th century.

The civic funerary culture was revived almost in parallel with the rural culture of roadside memorials. It was particularly noticeable in the towns that faced the burials of many warriors who perished during the Serbian-Turkish Wars. Processions of officers and masses of citizens would pass through the streets of Belgrade to mark these funeral ceremonies. If a dignitary or a senior officer was being buried, the funerals would take on the appearance of popular mass festivities. They would have the mandatory military honours, music, the transport of personal awards and decorations, the memorial service performed by the clergy, and other occasional attributes of a funeral ceremony.⁵⁷ The goal of this ceremony was to glorify the cult of the national hero, as well as to idealise the deceased, attaching the highest value to the life laid down for the country.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, as the popular tradition persistently leaned on family memory and a strict adherence to various funeral rituals, the civic variant of the cult of the dead was gaining ground in the 19th century. It represented an appropriation of the urban and European ways of shaping memories of the dead, typical of the town environment. Although some features of the civic funerary practices were markedly different from the rural ones, they too were essentially geared towards the strengthening of the status of the deceased. The luxury and power were demonstrated by erecting extravagant and expensive memorials, whose aesthetic form often stood apart from the existing popular tradition. The appearance of professional entrepreneurs, who approached the interment business as a fight for the market and profit, introduced mass production and competition in the lucrative funeral industry.⁵⁹ One of the better-known stonemason's shops in the Serbian capital

⁵⁷ The funerals of ordinary soldiers were more than modest, thrown together, and without any pomp. The burials of senior officer, however, were real spectacles, attended by a mixture of the locals and reputable officials. Many foreign observers would be very surprised by the fact that Serbia retained the custom of bringing out an open casket, so that everyone could see the deceased as he passed through the streets. Ђ. Барбанти-Бродано, *Гарибалдинци на Дрини*, Београд 1958, 111–112; P. H. B. Salusbury, *Two Months with Tcherniaieff in Servia*, London 1877, 78–79.

⁵⁸ Т. Кулјић, *op. cit.*, 105–109, 156–157.

⁵⁹ И. Борозан, *Култура смрти у српској грађанској култури 19. и првим деценијама 20. века*, Приватни живот код Срба у деветнаестом веку, Београд 2006, 942–964.

belonged to the Bertotto family. Leaving all false modesty aside, the owner claimed that the shop had been around for twenty years, as the “oldest and most branched-out shop in Serbia”.⁶⁰

Lastly, the Great War as a time of mass deaths brought about significant changes and broke with many elements of the funerary tradition of the day. The hyper-production of the memorial heritage, as well as the appearance of many new military cemeteries, represent a sort of glorification of the pointless mass deaths in the name of the country and the ruling ideology of blood and soil. This is why during the war new cemeteries were sprouting everywhere – places that no one would visit afterwards.⁶¹ These ghostly towns of the dead are scattered all across Europe and the Middle East, as a testimony of the new ways of conducting mass war operations. On the deserted heights of Macedonia, in the seething Sahara Desert, as well as in the fertile plains of the Ukraine, new military cemeteries sprang up. Some of them were visibly marked, but most were simply mass charnel houses, without any visible memorial marks.⁶²

The period between the two wars heralded many changes in the attitudes to the phenomenon of mass death, as well as in the artistic mediation of memorials all across Europe.⁶³ The memorial heritage of the late 19th century strove to transform the soldier into an immortal national hero, by idealising him and positioning him on elevated platforms and on columns at even greater heights.⁶⁴ In contrast to this, some post-1918 memorial spaces were based on an entirely different concept. They were inspired by a much darker vision of the horror of trench warfare, as well as the mud that swallowed millions of soldiers, who sank deep into the sodden earth. The German painter Otto Dix provided an inspiration for that thorough change by depicting the pointlessness of anonymous death. His perhaps best-known work, *War Triptych* (1932) is dedicated to the apocalyptic and monstrous visions of war, waged on the wet fields of Flanders.⁶⁵

New Serbian military cemeteries appeared during the Great War, largely in the proximity of the Salonika Front. Most of these cemeteries were simple and made in haste, such as the one on Mount Kožuh, built in early 1917. According to a testimony of a witness, “the mounds were neatly ordered, framed by clumps of green, marked by beautiful crosses with names of officers and soldiers written in oil paint; the

⁶⁰ *Велика Србија*, бр. 93 (17. XI 1903).

⁶¹ Many of these new tombs, erected during the Austrian occupation, were left to oblivion and destruction after 1918. This was the case with the memorial cemetery of the Austro-Hungarian soldiers from 1916, erected at the confluence of the rivers Sava and Danube. *Beogradske novine*, br. 237 (9. X 1916).

⁶² A. Rachamimov, *POWs Captivity and the Great War*, New York 2002, 36, 105.

⁶³ A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain*, Bloomsbery Academic 1998, 75–77, 106–110.

⁶⁴ H. A. Pohlsander, *National Monuments and Nationalism in 19th century Germany*, Bern 2008, 186–200.

⁶⁵ S. Michalski, *Public Monuments Art and Political Bondage 1870–1997*, London 1998, 79–82.

pathways between the mounds are made from white gravel, and in the middle of the enclosed space is a tall pyramid of whitish stone – the memorial to the fallen heroes”.⁶⁶

After 1918, mass-scale systematic marking of public spaces dedicated to the memory of the victims of past wars began in Serbia as well; efforts were made to preserve and protect the existing grave memorials. Article 20 of the 1922 Law on Military Cemeteries of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes stipulated that all existing military cemeteries in the new state were temporary. “When it becomes possible, cemeteries shall be concentrated in such a way as to erect reputable monuments in each area where they are located – chapels, churches, mausoleums, with an ossuary below. All the individual skeletons, buried in the cemeteries in these respective areas, whose names are known, shall be collected, their names marked, entered into records, and laid into their compartment in the ossuary, for the posterity to be able to find them; the remaining bones of nameless heroes shall be laid into a specially designated section.”⁶⁷

Numerous memorial ossuaries, erected throughout Serbia, testified to the mass killings and deaths of nameless victims during the previous war.⁶⁸ In the nation states of the 19th and 20th centuries, the memorial to the fallen soldier remained a powerful weapon in the hands of political regimes, tying the civic and the national to the ruling ideology. The figure of the Serbian warrior, symbolising hundreds of thousands of soldiers who perished in the wars waged between 1912 and 1918, would become a very frequent motif in many towns in Serbia. The majority of these memorials were given a place of honour in some of the town plazas and squares, built between the two world wars. The civic culture quickly embraced the habit of celebrating heroic deeds, as an artistic expression that followed the extant aesthetic patterns of European art.⁶⁹ The search for a way to symbolically mark the places of death was an inexhaustible source of artistic material, its subsequent mediation, interpretation, and dissemination.

The most important memorial to the fallen heroes of the First World War in the new state was certainly the Monument to the Unknown Hero on Avala, created by the sculptor Ivan Meštrović. Located in the immediate proximity of the Serbian capital, it represents the pinnacle of the new nationalist policy of Yugoslavism, cherished in the period between the two wars.⁷⁰ This majestic and massive monument was made entirely of the dark Jablanica granite, extracted near the town of Mostar. It was a giant leap compared to the humble roadside memorials made from soft sandstone, as predecessors of this ideology, prone to monumental stylization.

⁶⁶ *Ратни дневник*, бр. 44 (13. II 1917).

⁶⁷ *The Law on Arranging Military Cemeteries and Graves in the Country and Abroad / Zakon o uređenju vojničkih grobalja i grobova u otadžbini i na strani*, Belgrade 1922, 10.

⁶⁸ One of them is located in the Belgrade city centre, by the Ružica Church in Kalemegdan. O. Manojlović Pintar, *Arheologija sećanja, spomenici i identiteti u Srbiji 1918–1989*, Belgrade 2014, 212–214.

⁶⁹ *Споменици и гробља из ратова Србије 1912–1918*, ур. Р. Благојевић, Београд 1976, 89–136.

⁷⁰ O. Manojlović Pintar, *op. cit.*, 221–234.

Vladimir Jovanović, Biljana Vučetić

**I LAPIDARI AI BORDI DELLE STRADE
E L'IDENTITÀ NAZIONALE NELLA SERBIA DEL XIX SECOLO**

Riassunto

Rispettare la memoria del soldato caduto e segnare la sua tomba fa parte di una più ampia tradizione popolare tra i serbi nel XIX secolo. Legata alla morte e alla distruzione, la guerra è certamente un'occasione di sviluppare e nutrire una cultura del ricordo particolare. La guerra era una forte ispirazione per molti poeti e scapellini locali, che attraverso la poesia epica e i monumenti di pietra conservavano la memoria degli eroi caduti. Allo stesso tempo, la guerra è un collegamento importante tra il culto dei morti e il mondo dei vivi, che crea lo spazio per esprimere riverenza per i soldati caduti. Si tratta di creare spazi particolari nei quali i morti vivono nell'eterna memoria familiare, permeando simbolicamente l'idea di vita e di morte. L'innalzare una lapide come "dimora eterna" di un soldato caduto è una delle caratteristiche importanti della cultura nazionale serba durante il XIX e il XX secolo. Questa antica usanza diventerà sempre più diffusa proprio durante le guerre per la creazione dello Stato-nazione, combattute tra il 1876 e il 1918.

Da questa ricca tradizione legata alle usanze funebri, emerge un nuovo tipo di lapide, per lo più dedicata a un soldato morto in terra straniera. Si tratta di un monumento commemorativo lungo la strada scolpito in rilievo su pietra (in serbo – krajputaš). È un tipo di lapide visivamente riconoscibile, armata con un lungo fucile e un breve messaggio con i dati personali del defunto, il luogo della sua nascita e con i nomi di chi l'ha eretta che lo erigono. Decorata con colori vivaci, è accompagnata da un breve epitaffio appropriato, con il quale il defunto si rivolge solitamente in prima persona a coloro che visiteranno la sua tomba e forse trasmetteranno ulteriormente il suo messaggio.

Queste lapidi furono erette lungo strade, incroci, vicino a mulini e sorgenti, il più delle volte al di fuori dei cimiteri stessi. Create in modo completamente indipendente dalla politica ufficiale dello stato di commemorazione dei morti, col tempo diventano sempre più popolari. Grazie alla forma d'arte originale, così come al messaggio stesso, queste lapidi escono dalle solite forme monumentali. Essendo un'espressione particolare di arte popolare e del patrimonio lapidale, il monumento rappresenta un soldato in divisa. Questa lapide è la rappresentazione visiva di un giovane che osserva il viaggiatore con gli occhi spalancati, mentre il suo monumento in pietra testimonia anche il sacrificio fatto sull'altare della patria. Dentro la cultura legata alla costruzione di queste lapidi lungo le strade si trova lo sforzo di preservare il ricordo della perdita familiare, in relazione alle possibilità modeste di un ambiente rurale.

Questa tradizione locale, iniziata nella Serbia occidentale, gradualmente diventa molto presente, diffondendosi in tutto il paese. Insieme ad essa, quasi

contemporaneamente, è emersa una cultura della memoria dei soldati caduti completamente diversa, adattata al contesto civico. Il culto dell'eroe caduto, la cui forma ricorda molto la politica di glorificazione della morte militare, tipica della maggior parte delle monarchie europee. Così, durante il XIX secolo, sono emerse quasi in parallelo due tradizioni completamente diverse. La prima era locale e rurale, che conservava la memoria del soldato caduto attraverso la memoria familiare e attraverso il patrimonio culturale. La seconda era civile, urbana e ufficiale, il cui obiettivo era quello di radicare e preservare la memoria delle guerre per la liberazione e l'unificazione della Serbia con mezzi artistici e simbolismi significativamente diversi.

Parole chiave: tomba, morte, lapidari ai bordi delle strade, culto dei morti, guerra serbo-turca, Belgrado, monumenti.

Владимир Јовановић, Биљана Вучетић

КРАЈПУТАШИ И НАЦИОНАЛНИ ИДЕНТИТЕТ У СРБИЈИ 19. ВЕКА

Резиме

Поштовање успомене на палог ратника и обележавање његовог гроба део је шире народне традиције код Срба у 19. веку. Везан за смрт и уништење, рат свакако представља повод за развијање и неговање особене културе сећања. Рат је био снажна инспирација многим песницима и локалним каменоресцима, који су путем епске поезије и камених споменика чували сећање на погинуле хероје. У исто време, рат је важна спона између култа мртвих и света живих, стварајући простор за изражавање пијетета према палим ратницима. Реч је о стварању нарочитих простора у којима умрли живе у вечном породичном сећању, симболички прожимајући идеју живота и смрти. Подизање надгробног споменика као „вечне куће“ погинулом ратнику једна је од важних одлика српске националне културе током 19. и 20. века. Тај древни обичај постаје све распрострањенији управо током ратова за стварање националне државе, вођеним између 1876. и 1918. године.

Из те богате традиције везане за погребне обичаје настаје и нови тип надгробног споменика, махом посвећен војнику погинулом у туђини. Реч је о *крајпуташу* (Roadside memorial), надгробном споменику уклесаном у каменом рељефу. Крајпуташ је визуелно препознатљив тип споменика, наоружан дугом пушком и кратком поруком са личним подацима о преминулом, месту његовог рођења и онима који подижу споменик. Украшен живим бојама, крајпуташа прати и краћи пригодан епитаф, којим се покојник обично у првом лицу обраћа онима који ће посетити његов гроб и можда пренети његову поруку даље.

Крајпуташи су подизани крај друмова, путних раскршћа, воденица и извора, најчешће изван самих гробаља. Настали сасвим независно од званичне државне политике сећања на погинуле, крајпуташи временом постају све популарнији. Оригинално уметничком формом, као и самом поруком, крајпуташи искорачују изван до тада уобичајених споменичких форми. Као особен вид народне уметности и споменичког наслеђа, крајпуташ је представљао ратника у пуној униформи. То је визуелна представа младића који путника посматра широм отворених очију, док његов камени споменик уједно сведочи о жртви положеној на олтар отаџбине. У основи културе везане за подизање крајпуташа лежи настојање да се очува успомена на породични губитак, у складу са скромним могућностима једне сеоске средине.

Та локална традиција започета у западној Србији постепено постаје врло присутна, ширећи се по читавој држави. Уз њу готово истовремено настаје и једна сасвим различита, грађанским назорима прилагођена култура сећања на пале ратнике. То је култ погинулог хероја, који формом веома подсећа на

политику глорификовања војничке смрти, типичне за већину европских монархија. Тако су током 19. века готово паралелно настале две сасвим различите традиције. Прва је била локална и сеоска, која је кроз породично сећање и културно наслеђе чувала успомену на погинулог ратника. Друга је била грађанска, урбана и званична, чији је циљ био да битно другачијим уметничким средствима и симболиком укорени и очува успомену на ратове за ослобођење и уједињење Србије.

Кључне речи: гроб, смрт, крајпуташ, култ мртвих, српско-турски рат, Београд, споменици.