

MEMORY AND MONUMENTAL REPRESENTATION OF THE GREAT WAR – BALKAN PROJECTIONS

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Abstract

The current article aims to present the main aspects of the memory of the First World War in the Balkan states in the light of its visualization in monuments and memorials, and with regards to the tendencies that these commemorative practices follow over the years. Based on examples from different Balkan countries the article traces the main types of war monuments (village memorials, mausoleums, monuments to the Unknown soldiers, etc.) and outlines their place in the general European tendencies of war's memorial representation as well as with regard to the national peculiarities and the "Balkan specificity" of such monumental imagery. Finding grounds in the abundant Western literature on monuments and memory of the Great War and applying a cross-national overview of commemorative policies in the Balkans, the article outlines the major characteristics of the memory of the Great War in the peninsula. The first of these characteristics is related to monuments' social function that is to say their role in coping with the trauma of death and war losses, as an element of the overall "democratization" of death in the beginning of the 20th century, and as a factor in the conditions of "cultural demobilization" after the war. As a second characteristic the text outlines the close connection of monuments and memorials with the policies of national identity – a connection that determines their function of materializing the memory of the dead and at the same time modelling the identity (political, historical, and cultural) of the living. The third characteristic emphasized throughout the text presents the place which monuments have in the visual history of the Great War – as sites where death is "tamed" and "eternalized," but also where – through rituals, commemorations, and visual testimonies – a post-war and post-traumatic realms of the visual memory of this First world conflict are formed.