

## VALORIZATION OF MILITARY MONUMENTS IN BULGARIA IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL ATTITUDES

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**Abstract:** This article presents the process of valorization of military monuments in Bulgaria, analyzing their significance in the context of contemporary social attitudes and cultural transformations. The valorization of monuments is determined by the degree and importance they hold for society. Their historical value is defined by the historical events they commemorate. Therefore, they are closely related to national memory and the formation of societal identity. In Bulgaria, military monuments are significant symbols that reflect different historical periods – crucial for the Bulgarian people, such as the liberation of Bulgaria, the Serbo-Bulgarian War, Balkan Wars, World War I, and World War II. The article examines how contemporary social attitudes influence the perception and evaluation of these monuments, focusing on their current interpretation. The democratization processes and the changes they bring in Bulgaria lead to a rethinking of the role of military monuments and a reevaluation of their status as bearers of memory for various historical events. Various approaches are explored on how social groups and political governance use monuments as tools for shaping collective memory, and the efforts to reassess and integrate them into the contemporary understanding of national identity. The research also emphasizes the interaction between society and monuments in the context of the rapidly changing modern globalized world. In this context, new social and political movements that propose new interpretations and reconsiderations of their meaning are also discussed. In conclusion, suggestions are made for future research and policies that would support the sustainable and objective valorization of military monuments as an essential part of cultural heritage. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a sustainable cultural environment in which monuments are perceived not only as historical and material symbols but also as “living objects” that continue to shape social attitudes and identities in contemporary Bulgaria.

**Keywords:** valorization, military monuments, cultural heritage, memory, social attitudes, national identity, collective memory

### 1. INTRODUCTION

War monuments are not only material evidence of past events, but also significant symbols of national identity, memory and cultural value, which carry with them the deep meaning of historical memory and the lasting imprint of wars on society. Their valorization is a key process that is very dynamic, it is directly dependent on societal attitudes and cultural processes, which are usually triggered by political circumstances. There are different and varied perceptions, depending on different social groups and individuals, of these monuments, depending on their historical, social and political perceptions. Usually, war memorials are often erected in recognition of victims, participants in conflicts, as well as testimonies of respect for historical events. They can be objects of significant cultural value that unite generations. For example, during the period of socialism in Bulgaria, certain War monuments were revised and updated in order to reflect the official ideology and express the political affiliation of the country. Since the changes in 1989, new challenges have emerged regarding the interpretation of these monuments, and they are often seen as symbols of a particular political period. For some social groups, they are an expression of the nation's heroism and sacrifice, a symbol of national dignity, while for others, they can evoke feelings of pain and suffering, a reminder of the devastating consequences of wars. Monuments can be perceived differently depending on the historical context and personal experience of people, which emphasizes their polysemy and ability to evoke different emotions and interpretations in society. The perception and evaluation of war memorials should not be static, but should reflect current public sentiment and include a dialogue about their historical and cultural value in modern society.

### 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the report is to examine how modern public attitudes influence the valorisation of war memorials. The main tasks of the study are:

1. To analyze the differences in public perceptions of war memorials in different historical and social contexts;
2. To study the mechanisms of evaluation and perception of War monuments in modern society;
3. Consider examples from different countries and cultural backgrounds that illustrate trends in valorization of War monuments.

### 3. RESULTS

#### **Historical significance of War monuments**

War memorials are usually created to honor the sacrifices and victories associated with important military conflicts. Historically, these monuments have been used as symbols of national unity and patriotism. However, with time and the development of public attitudes, their importance may undergo changes reflecting new political and social attitudes.

#### **Contemporary public attitudes towards war memorials**

In the modern world, war memorials are not always seen as indisputable symbols of national pride. Depending on political and historical contexts, they can cause controversy, especially when they involve conflicts that leave painful memories or when they are perceived as an expression of militarism. In some cases, they can be seen as barriers to reconciliation and overcoming old conflicts. On the other hand, they can also serve as a reminder of the importance of peace and the protection of national sovereignty. An example of this is the perception in Europe after World War II, when some nations began to rethink the importance of war-related monuments and began to look for ways to interpret them in a new way, in order to promote reconciliation.

The process of valorization of War monuments is complex and involves many challenges, such as:

Political contexts: many War monuments carry symbolism that can be perceived differently by different political groups, and this process often leads to conflicts over their maintenance or removal.

Social attitudes: younger generations who have not experienced the conflicts to which the monuments refer may have different perceptions and attitudes associated with them. There is also a tendency to rethink national history and to be critical of militarism.

Technological innovations: with the development of digital technologies and virtual platforms, War monuments can be presented in new forms, creating opportunities for a new form of valorization based on innovations in education and cultural heritage.

#### **Valorization of War monuments in Bulgaria**

Valorization of War monuments can be defined as the process of assigning value and importance to these sites not only as historical artifacts, but also as cultural symbols. It includes both academic and research interest, as well as public initiatives for the preservation and promotion of the monuments. In Bulgaria, this process is dynamic and changes over time depending on political and social conditions.

#### **Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878)**

The Russo-Turkish War was a decisive event for the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule. The monuments related to this war, such as the Shipka monument, the monument of freedom in Ruse and the monuments of the Russian soldiers, are the main elements of the historical memory in Bulgaria. It is important to note that many of these monuments were built with the funds of the Bulgarian people. The valorization of these monuments has historical and patriotic value. They are part of the Bulgarian national identity and history, as well as sites of tourist and cultural importance. The problems associated with their maintenance are usually related to: climatic conditions, lack of sufficient funding for restoration, and the need for modern museum technologies for better interpretation.

#### **The Serbian-Bulgarian war (1885)**

The Serbo-Bulgarian war is an important stage in the history of Bulgaria, and the war monuments related to this conflict are not so numerous, but they also play an important role in the collective memory. One of the main monuments of this war is located in the town of Slivnitsa, where a monument was erected to the Bulgarian soldiers who participated in the defense of the country. The valorization of the monuments of the Serbian-Bulgarian war should include a historical understanding of the relations between Bulgaria and Serbia in the context of Bulgarian-Serbian relations. Although this war is not so widely discussed compared to other conflicts, the monuments make a significant contribution to strengthening the national memory of the Bulgarian people.

#### **Balkan wars (1912-1913)**

The Balkan wars were extremely important to the Bulgarian people. Monuments from this period are located in almost every village in Bulgaria. These monuments are symbols of the Bulgarian struggle for national unification and territorial expansion. Valorization of these monuments should be based on historical justice and honesty in the interpretation of events. The Balkan wars are often presented with conflicting assessments, and monuments can be used to clarify the complexity of historical processes and prevent nationalistic manipulations.

#### **First and Second World War**

The monuments of the first and Second World Wars are numerous and located throughout Bulgaria. They cover various aspects of Bulgaria's participation in these global conflicts – from monuments to soldiers who fell in front-line battles to monuments dedicated to war victims, including civilians. The valorization of these monuments should take place in the context of modern interpretations of world history. In Bulgaria, as in many other countries, the

topic of the first and Second World Wars continues to be a serious topic of intense discussions, which include the assessment of Bulgaria's participation in these conflicts and their consequences.

Although War monuments in Bulgaria are elements of cultural heritage, there are some problems related to their maintenance and valorization.

Among the main challenges are:

- Insufficient funding and resources-many of the monuments are located in remote areas or do not receive the necessary attention and funds for maintenance.
- Insufficient historical interpretation-many of the monuments are not connected with modern interpretive centers or museum technologies to provide visitors with a deep understanding of the context of the events.
- Public disputes

Some monuments are the subject of public debate due to the political and historical significance of the related events. For example, monuments from the socialist era often provoke conflicting reactions.

#### **Post-World War II perceptions and attempts at valorization**

Examples of successful valorization of War monuments show how societies can rethink their past and use these monuments to promote national reconciliation, historical meaning and cultural identity. Although many of these monuments are associated with painful historical events, their reconsidered context can lead to positive social and cultural outcomes. The following are some concrete examples of successful valorization processes in different geographical and historical contexts.

After the end of World War II, Germany went through a long and painful process of rethinking its historical heritage. War monuments associated with the Nazi ideology of the Third Reich provoked large-scale public and political debate, and were then removed, a process called denazification. In this regard, Germany is making significant efforts to transform the memory of the war into the spirit of a peaceful and Democratic reconstruction process. After the end of the conflict, Germany went through a process of rethinking the historical events of the period 1938-1945. such as the post-war monuments that reflect not only the victory but also the tragedies of war, including the Holocaust. These monuments are now important cultural evidences that have helped restore national identity.

#### **Monuments of the Soviet army in Eastern Europe**

In recent decades, many of these monuments have been the subject of public and political debate and in some cases removed as they symbolize the Communist occupation. This is an example of a change in attitudes towards war memorials and their value to society. After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, many of the monuments dedicated to the Soviet army and its role in World War II became the subject of considerable public and political debate. Soviet Army monuments in former socialist countries are often seen not only as symbols of victory over Nazism, but also as symbols of Soviet occupation, causing divergent attitudes in different social groups.

#### **Example from Bulgaria**

In Bulgaria, after the changes in 1989 there is a growing trend towards rethinking monuments dedicated to the Soviet army, which have long been seen as symbols of liberation from Nazism. After 1990, however, many of them were criticized for their association with the communist government and the pro-Soviet orientation of the country after 1944. The monument of the Soviet army in Sofia, for example, has become a place for active social debates that raise the question of the balance between historical memory and contemporary political attitudes.

#### **Example from Estonia**

In Estonia, the removal or relocation of Soviet monuments, especially in the context of independence, shows how attitudes towards war memorials can change in the context of new national constructions. The removal of monuments in the country in 2007. This has led to protests among the Russian-speaking minority who see these monuments as part of their historical identity. Ethnic Estonians, on the other hand, saw them as symbols of Soviet power and demanded that they be dismantled. At the same time, local authorities are trying to balance preserving the memory of the past and building a new relationship with modern political reality.

#### **Example from United Kingdom (Great Britain)**

In the UK, for example, there is a virtual War Memorial Archive Collection project that uses modern digital technology to preserve and present the memory of the Second World War. These platforms not only allow citizens to interact with the monuments, but are also used for educational purposes while preserving historical evidence in digital format. Valorization and maintenance of war memorials are often funded through public and private initiatives. There are organizations, such as Apostille, that look after the condition of thousands of monuments in the country and provide funding for their restoration. In addition, local and national charities also play an important role in raising funds for the maintenance of the monuments.

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

##### **Modern approaches and technological innovations for valorization**

With the advancement of technology, valorization of war memorials is becoming more dynamic. New forms of representation, such as virtual and digitization of archives, offer new opportunities for interpretation and interaction with history. The key importance of this process lies in its ability to help society deal with the legacy of conflicts, build national identity and promote dialogue and reconciliation. Despite the difficulties, successful examples of valorization show that these monuments can play an important role in building the cultural and social fabric of modern societies.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

Examples of valorization of War monuments in different parts of the world show that the memory of the past is not only static, but also dynamic. The development of Social Attitudes, new political contexts and technological innovations pose challenges, but also provide opportunities for a new interpretation and understanding of War monuments. Despite the contradictions that sometimes arise, the process of valorization of War monuments proves that they can play an important role in building reconciliation and cultural understanding, as well as in creating a public consciousness that learns from the past.

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