Analysis, Conservation, and Restoration of Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Carlo Inglese
*Sapienza University of Rome, Italy*

Alfonso Ippolito
*Sapienza University of Roma, Italy*
Chapter 6

Memory as Intangible Heritage: WW2 Cemeteries in Cassino and Montecassino

Arturo Gallozzi  
University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, Italy

Marcello Zordan  
University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, Italy

Michela Cigola  
University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, Italy

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the documentation and valorization of a special architectural heritage: the WW2 Cemeteries in Cassino & Montecassino territory. This is for the purpose of preserving and transmitting the memories of different people. Even today, these cemeteries are maintained by Polish, English, German, French and Italian governments and visited by many people of various nationalities. Our research is orientated to not only celebrate the sacrifice and identity of the soldiers who lost their lives in the war events, but also as a call for the reconciliation of peoples and the construction of a culture of peace. The cemeteries are studied by an architectonical point of view. Design aspects and aspects concerning the representation of projects are highlighted based on the documents found.

INTRODUCTION

The battle of Montecassino close to the German defensive Gustav line in central and southern Italy was considered one of the largest land battle fought in Europe and one of the most brutal events of WW2. This battle produced in total more than 250 thousand victims. The present work aims to document and promote the war cemeteries built in this area. In fact, these cemeteries celebrate the sacrifice and the identity of the soldiers who lost their lives at war in the Cassino area and constitute a significant architectural heritage that characterises the territory. War cemeteries in Cassino and Montecassino area are: the Polish Cemetery in Montecassino with 1052 graves; the Commonwealth cemetery in Cassino with 4271 graves.

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graves; the German cemetery in the village of Caira near Cassino with approximately 20,080 graves; the French cemetery in Venafro with 4345 graves and the Italian Cemetery in Mignano Montelungo with 974 graves. The cemeteries will be studied by architectonical point of view. Design aspects and aspects concerning the representation of projects will be highlighted based on the documents found. In some archives of the nations that participated in the Battle of Montecassino were preserved drawings of project of the cemeteries of war. For these reasons, the contribution focuses only on these Memory Heritage: Polish Cemetery, Commonwealth cemetery, German cemetery and the Italian Cemetery.

WAR CEMETERIES IN CASSINO AND MONTECASSINO AREA

This area was crossed by the defensive German Gustav line that divided Italy in two parts, from the Tyrrenian to the Adriatic. From 10 September 1943 to 18 May 1944 was the center of the battles of Cassino and Montecassino, culminating on February 15, 1944 with the destruction of the Abbey of Montecassino, and March 15, 1944 with the destruction of Cassino city. Victory to the Allies, employed in the area alongside Polish and Anglo-American troops came with a significant human toll on civilian and military lives. Soldiers of thirteen different nationalities participated in the Cassino battles. When the war ended it was estimated that 30,000 had died.

After the battles the bodies of soldiers killed in action were buried in makeshift spaces close to the combat areas in temporary cemeteries organised by nationality. The nations that took part in Montecassino battle decided that men who died on the Gustav line should be buried in the places where they had fought and died, and memorial shrines were to commemorate these locations. The establishment of

Figure 1. War cemeteries in Cassino and Montecassino Area, close to the German defensive Gustav line
CONCLUSION

One of the main aims of this research focuses on the recovery and dissemination of documentary material and especially of the original project drawings of the war cemeteries under examination. Material, which to date, has still partially been kept in archives or by associations of the respective countries in charge of maintaining the military cemeteries.

Another objective of our research is to elaborate on the analysis and the comparative study of cemeteries in the region of Cassino from an architectural and typological point of view. We also plan to study the various designers involved in greater depth and identify whether the projects for the Cassino Italian cemeteries are included in their habitual design or are atypical elements. And, if this should be the case, highlight how and in what way.

Obviously in a subject that touches the barbarism of war so deeply, this contribution aims to identify war cemeteries as testimonies of remembrance and above all as Intangible Heritage. Therefore, war cemeteries are destined to perpetuate forever the collective memory of the horrors of war and they are designated as messengers of peace.

‘We will not ask of Italy but a piece of land, enough to bury our dead’ (General Mark W. Clark, commander of US V Army).

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REFERENCES


KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Artistic and Historic Heritage: All works of art and monuments, movable and immovable, which have a recognized artistic value or a particular historical importance.

Cassino: Cassino is a modern town between Rome and Naples. It has been completely rebuilt after the destruction during the World War II on 15 March 1945. Cassino is located just below Montecassino Abbey. The history of the city of Cassino and Abbey are very closely linked. The historical center of Cassino and its monuments (Roman, Medieval, Renaissance) was erased by the WW2 bombing. Any traces of its past were lost.
Commonwealth of Nations: (Formerly the British Commonwealth), is an intergovernmental organisation of 53 member states that are mostly former territories of the British Empire.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC): is an intergovernmental organisation of six independent member states whose principal function is to mark, record and maintain the graves and places of commemoration of Commonwealth of Nations military service members who died in the two World Wars. The Commission was founded by Fabian Ware and constituted through Royal Charter in 1917 named the Imperial War Graves Commission.

Cosmatesque Pavements: The Cosmatesque school began in XII century, and was chiefly active in Rome during the Romanesque period. The Cosmati masters’ work featured square or rectangular decorated panels set off by ribbons of mosaic wrapped around porphyry disks to produce geometric designs. Cosmati work was applied most extensively for the decoration of church floors, but was also used to architectural surfaces and to church furniture. The name derives from the Cosmati, the leading family workshop of marble craftsmen in Rome who created such geometrical decorations. The first examples of Cosmatesque pavements were that of the basilica of Montecassino in XI century. Currently it is covered by another marble inlay floor, but it is drawn in some engraved from XVIII century.

Cultural Heritage: Cultural heritage sites include hundreds of historic buildings and town sites, important archaeological sites, and works of monumental sculpture or painting. We can consider tangible cultural heritage: architecture, paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures, and objects of the decorative arts (furniture, glassware, metalware, textiles, ceramics, and so on).

Landscape: Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

Montecassino Abbey: Founded by St. Benedict in 529 on Roman ruins. Montecassino lived the most prestigious period of its history in the eleventh century, with the election in 1058 of Abbot Desiderius of Benevento who became Pope Victor III (1086-1087). Each subsequent historical period left its mark on the monastery. On 15 February 1944 the abbey was completely destroyed by the allies’ bombs. Reconstruction started the following year and was officially completed in 1964.

Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge: The German War Graves Commission (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge in German) is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of German war graves in Europe and North Africa. It was founded as a private charity in 1919.

War Cemetery: A burial place for soldiers of the armed forces who died during military campaigns or operations.

WW2: Conflict that involved virtually every part of the world during the years 1939–45. Principal belligerents were the Axis powers: Germany, Italy, and Japan, and the Allies: France, Great Britain, United States, Soviet Union. The 40,000,000 or 50,000,000 deaths incurred in Second World War make it the bloodiest conflict, as well as the largest war, in history.