War memorial architecture: Rossoshki military memorial cemetery, Russia

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Abstract. Memorial culture has undergone fundamental changes since the II World War. In place of bombastic victors’ monuments, sites arose in honor of heroically fallen soldiers. Recent memorials have in common an architecture that avoids emotional pathos of any sort by means of restraint and simple design. They possess a moral and ethical educational mission. The article is devoted to the study of the problem of the formation of new approaches to the architectural and planning organization of war memorials. The topic is revealed on the example of the military memorial cemetery ‘Rossoshki’ near Volgograd City (former Stalingrad), consisting of two parts — the Soviet cemetery and German burial grounds. The authors examine the symbolic, architectural, planning and landscape aspects of the concepts of memorial. Particular attention is paid to the Chapel of Peace, which linked together the composition of the complex.

1. Introduction

The modern period in our country is marked by a new attitude to the historical memory of the II World War and expression of this memory in an architectural and spatial form. Since the 1990s, amid the blur of national and cultural differences and the threat of loss of authenticity of the country history, the public interest in preserving the memory of the events of military history has been increased [1]. The Battle of Stalingrad is one of the greatest battles of world importance, it was a turning point during the Second World War. The memorial complex on the Mamayev Kurgan in Volgograd, completed in 1967, was the embodiment of the approach to the creation of memorials as the main public space of the city [2]. At the same time, along with this grandiose monument to the events of the Battle of Stalingrad in the late 1990s, the memorial complex was created, which by much more chamber means, but no less strongly on the emotional response, reflects the tragedy of events in 1942-1943.

This article is dedicated to the relatively unknown complex – military-memorial cemetery Rossoshki, located in the countryside, 60 km from modern Volgograd City (former Stalingrad). This complex reflects new approaches to the solution of the memory space, in which symbolism of architectural and urban concept became the main factor. It stands clearly apart from many monuments
erected in Russia at the end of the 20th and even 21st century, designed by typical standards of memorial design. It should be mentioned that this complex is the largest military burial site in Europe. The remains of almost 20,000 Soviet soldiers are buried here, the remains of more than 60,000 Wehrmacht soldiers are reburied, as well as more than 10,000 Romanian soldiers. The names of 120,000 dead German soldiers, missing soldiers and those whose place of death cannot be identified, are listed on name plates.

2. Theoretical research base
In the context of the present study the most relevant are scientific researches which study memorial culture in terms of history, sociology and culture [3-5].

A number of specialists dedicated their researches to study the problem of memorial architecture and memorial sites in the modern city. A large layer of work is devoted to war memorials and new design trends.

The entire range of these works can be divided into the following major features:

- formation of memory places and their preservation (P. Nora [6], A. Strelnikova [7], S. Tanovic [8]);
- historical and cultural landscapes as places of memory (E. Kolyada [9]);
- war memorials in the modern space of cities (I. Azizyan [10], A. Khomyakov [11], A. Mackie [12]);
- preservation of the historical memory of the II World War in the form of memorials and monuments (G. Bolsun [13], A. Cavalenja [14], N. Konradova [15], S. Palmer [16], A. Ryleeva [15]);
- artistic images of monuments and memorials of the II World War (F. Jaeger [17], O. Korshunova [18], A. Mackie [12], T. Malinova [19]).

3. Location
Before the analysis of the architectural and urban peculiarities of the memorial, it is necessary to focus on the question of the location choice. Today it is a remote place from inhabited settlements with a harsh steppe landscape, which is visited only by those who specially come to bow to the fallen and know how to get to this point on the map. Why was this place chosen, the place of two villages destroyed to the ground, Big and Small Rossoshki?

Firstly, this territory is inseparably connected with the tragic events of the Battle of Stalingrad, both from the defensive and offensive stages. In 1942-43 there were fierce battles. Here was one of the epicenters of the battle [20].

Secondly, the place of the memorial complex bears the memory of one of several death camps that were organized in the Stalingrad region, namely, the "Rossoshki" camp. Thousands of captured Soviet soldiers and civilians were tortured there.

Thirdly, it was here in Big Rossoshki in 1943 where a German cemetery was organized, and where about 600 German soldiers were buried.

4. Landscape
The area where Rossoshki Memorial Cemetery is located is a flat table-like steppe, a deserted flat spot where it is impossible to hide. Around, as far as the view can be grasped, no human shelter can be seen, only scant steppe landscape far to the horizon and around. The only natural dominant is the steppe river Rossoshka, which almost dries up in summer. The basis of steppe vegetation are cereals – silk grass, narrow-leaved bluegrass, sheep’s fescue. In summer there are droughts, dust storms. Winter in these places is low-snow, windy with a predominance of winds from the north and east, with thaws, blizzards and fogs. In summer in hot August in these places there were battles of defense of Stalingrad, and battles in the "Stalingrad cauldron" took place in January, in the frost with the piercing wind.
In other words, the landscape is very complex, harsh, even hard. Here everything is fair, there is no retouching and gloss of famous memorials with birch groves, green lawns and illuminated fountains. This topographical truth became the basis for the creation of an extraordinary complex in its emotional expressiveness.

5. Cemeteries
The project of the military-memorial cemetery of Soviet soldiers who died near Stalingrad was developed by local artists. They are sculptor Sergei Scherbakov and architects Yuri Mokrov and Alexander Vyazmin. The general composition is built on the basis of the arc of the Wall of Memory, formed by a stone, and an earth mound that enclose the area. On both sides of the axis of this symmetrical composition are individual burials of Red Army soldiers.

In the center of the Soviet cemetery there is a 6th meter monumental figure of a grieving mother, against the background of the Wall of Remembrance. The figure of a petrified woman with a lowered head personifies sorrow for the fallen soldiers, and a Tom bell without a tongue in her hands symbolizes- deep stillness and silence (Figure 1). The laconism of the artistic language, its generalized form, the holistic dimensional solution combined with the tangible emotional tension, determine the creative handwriting of Sergei Scherbakov. The authors managed to create a memorial, memorable for its special atmosphere, by very simple and few means at first glance. The composition is filled with symbolism not of the triumph of Victory, which is peculiar in most memorials of The Soviet times, but of sorrow and tragedy. The wall of memory symbolizes the barrier that the Nazis met in the Volga and the Don, and expresses the deed of the defenders of Stalingrad. The graves located on both sides of the central square are marked by helmets of the Red Army, which were found at the excavations taking place in these places.

The author of the German cemetery project was the architect Jurgen von Reiss. The conceptual solution is based on the formation of a circle-mound, reminiscent of an ancient sacrificial altar, in which thousands of lives of German soldiers who came for victory, and who were defeated and found their death. If the Soviet memorial is perceived holistically and monolithically virtually at once at the entrance on the axis of composition, the German complex is perceived step by step along the symbolic “path of reconciliation”. In general, the theme of “reconciliation” was very cultivated by the German side throughout the creation of the memorial. It seems that the German graves were scattered by the wind throughout the steppe, granite cubes with the names of soldiers seem to get together as a “tumbleweed” and then run around the round new cemetery raised above the ground. The names of 120,000 German soldiers and officers who are missing are carved on granite cubes.

![Figure 1. “The Mourning Mother”. The central square of the Soviet cemetery (1997).](image-url)
There are about 900 names of German soldiers on each of the cubes. Inscriptions are placed on polished surfaces of granite cubes: name and surname, date of birth and supposed month of death in winter 1942/43.

The German cemetery is divided into two grave fields (old and new cemeteries) and covers the area of about 6 hectares. A paved road leads the visitor to the central memorial square with a high metal cross. On the left there is an old German cemetery. It has the form of a trapeze and here the remains of soldiers (more than 2000 graves), who died from September 1942 to January 1943, rest in peace. The old cemetery is fenced with granite slabs, there are the names of the dead, those that were found on them and identified (Figure 2).

At the entrance to the memorial you can read the inscription in German: «This soldiers’ cemetery was built on the ground, where in 1942 during the offensive, villages of Big and Small Rossoshki, which were founded in the 60s of the 19th century, were destroyed. The land here is soaked with the blood of tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians - their voices appeal to us: we died in the hard, terrible hours. We were not given the opportunity to live in this world. Living people, remember us and make sure there is eternal peace on this Earth».

6. Peace chapel
The Peace chapel was erected on the territory between the two cemeteries where Soviet and German soldiers are buried.

Architect J.von Reiss implemented the idea of an open-air chapel by connecting two Christian crosses at the same altar. The chapel is a sculptural composition unifying two granite walls with Orthodox and Latin crosses. According to the architect's plan, the crosses of the Western and Eastern Church should remind of the commonality of European peoples [21]. One wall with an Orthodox cross is turned towards the Soviet cemetery, and the wall with the Latin cross - in the direction of the German one. The walls erected at an angle to each other with cut through crosses are located at a point on the axis of intersection of two cemeteries (Figure 3).

The author of the project explained his idea as the embodiment of the idea of combining two cemeteries in allegorical altars, open to the sky, stars and God. The chapel combined and closed the spatial composition. There are a lot of different meanings read through the use of simple, geometric large and small architectural forms (Figure 4).

From above, the complex is perceived as a huge suprematic composition, divided by a road line. Passing the way from the Soviet cemetery through a difficult path, built in a German cemetery, to the Chapel of peace, you feel and learn different signs (vertical, ring, diagonal), sloping and spiral, curving ramps and stairs of the Chapel. All of these components are involved in space organization in different ways. There is nothing deliberate, said point blank, there are no clear and easily readable statements, efforts are needed to read meanings. However, there is no encryption or incomprehensibility of the content. The tragedy and deadly horror of war is felt in every space of this
place. And the reconciliation that the German side wanted to bring here by no means took place. Between the graves of the defenders of Stalingrad and the conquerors who came here to establish a new order, a hard border stretches.

Figure 3. Altar of the Peace Chapel (2016).

Figure 4. Rossoshki Military Memorial Cemetery. Satellite photo (2020).

7. Conclusion
Russia's New Times are marked by a new attitude to history, memory and their expression in space. The issues of understanding history and culture are put differently than in the time of heroic victorious memorials. New requirements are made for monuments: simplicity, sincerity and democracy. The Rossoshki memorial shows these new approaches to the creation of World War II monuments.

The analysis of the problem of perpetuating the events of the Second World War allows us to conclude that the military-memorial heritage is considered as an effective mechanism for the development of historical memory. Military monuments are a kind of memory places that allow you to save collective memory, and their design is carried out more actively compared to other memory places. The main tasks of war memorials and places of memory are to preserve the cultural and historical self-identification of society.

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