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 Tyrrhenian 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*
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