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Remembrance, Visuality,  
and Crisis in the Balkans  
(17th-20th Century)*

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ARTIFICATION OF MEMORY:  
“TRENCH ART” AND REMEMBERING  
SERBIAN SOLDIERS FROM THE GREAT WAR

**Abstract:** Objects made from war *matériel*, munition shells and arms whose primary military function is transformed by the act of artification emerged as a phenomenon in European visual culture during and after WW1. These objects, belonging to the category of Trench Art, are visual cultural testimonies of the Great War. The character of these objects, hybrid in many ways, positions them between decorative and folk art. Serving a distinctly memorial or commemorative function, these objects are intertwined with the context of war, and through different strategies of artification they become new objects of secondary use holding great value as items and documents of visual culture. In Serbia, numerous museums and private collections hold objects of remembrance of WW1, but these remain largely understudied and, in many cases, have not been analyzed methodologically. Trench Art objects have an important place in sacral public spaces as military markers connected with memories of fallen soldiers. With the intention of systematizing the above-mentioned objects of war visual culture, we will interpret them in a wider European context, pointing to the process of their transformation from primary war *matériel* to becoming a bearer of new, complex meanings through artistic intervention. A great number of material objects of Trench Art belong to the study of the history of art and visual culture. Attesting to the materiality of the period, the character of these objects varies greatly and is defined by the personal relationships to the Great War of the Serbian soldiers and civilians who crafted them. Additionally, the objects hold a public symbolic function in expressing certain aspects of social ideology in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

**Keywords:** Great War, Trench Art, artification, Memory, Serbia.

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World War One was the first large-scale conflict to take place during the era of industrialization, and this period was also one in which visual culture played an important role (Saunders 2004).<sup>1</sup> Visual culture, a powerful tool for propaganda and communication, was also the product of the social context of the time. Besides being a global conflict, WW1 gave rise to visual culture phenomena which unified the experiences of those who participated in it (Saunders 2001: 476–488). The war, which entailed strategic trench warfare and the use of explosives, gave rise to numerous objects crafted using available war materials by soldiers, civilians, and prisoners of war. Military waste became a new artistic medium, transformed by the artification process to become a bearer of new meanings. At the same time, these objects remained connected to the context in which they were produced, as war and the remembrance of fallen soldiers became the primary themes of Trench Art (Saunders 2003; Saunders 2009: 37–55).

Works of Trench Art are displayed in numerous museums and private collections in Serbia but these tend to be inadequately classified, as is also the case in other European countries (Saunders 2000: 44). An attitude of ambivalence towards their artistic value determines their liminal space in many collections where they are classified, for instance, as memorabilia, realia, or as the personal belongings of prominent individuals. At present, there is no consensus on the unifying standardized terminology that defines these objects as Trench Art. Every classification requires well-defined criteria, thus it is necessary here to provide a clear definition of Trench Art (*Grabenarbeit*): “Any item made by soldiers, prisoners of war, and civilians, from war *matériel* directly, or any other material, as long as it and they are associated temporally and/or spatially with armed conflict or its consequences (Saunders 2000: 45; Saunders 2003).”

It is equally important to provide a clear periodization for objects which could be considered items of Trench Art, and to divide them into multiple categories according to their date and place of production. The first group of objects, which displays the greatest variety of forms, refers to objects made between 1914 and 1919 by soldiers on the frontline or rear areas. Generally speaking, this is the smallest category as the manufacture of these objects was restricted to the period of war and demobilization. Typical objects in this category include: cigarette lighters made from bullets, matchbox cases made from scrap brass or steel, letter openers made from bullets and scrap materials, tobacco boxes and cigarette cases, pens made from bullet cartridge cases, finger rings made from aluminum or

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1 This article is devoted to the eternal memory of our beloved great grandfather Živan Smiljanić, a soldier of the Serbian cavalry in the Balkan Wars and the Great War, Bearer of the Commemorative Medal of the Great Serbian Retreat.

brass, miscellaneous personal items decorated with, or made from, bullets or shell fragments, and decorated artillery shell cases (Saunders 2000: 47–49).

The second chronological group refers to Trench Art objects made by a thriving and developed civilian cottage industry. Between 1919 and 1939 artificial objects were most commonly made using metal shells. Using expended metal shells to make Trench Art was technically illegal because these were not considered scrap material. Officially, they belonged to armies and governments who, wherever possible, collected and re-filled them. Trench Art objects were offered as memorabilia and souvenirs and sold to former Allied and German soldiers during the war, and also to war widows, pilgrims, and battlefield tourists between 1919 and 1939. Typical items in this large group are brass shell cases, sometimes shaped and ornamentally decorated, engraved with the name of a battle or inscriptions such as “Souvenir of the Great War,” letter openers, ashtrays made from or decorated with shell cases and bullet cartridges, bullet-crucifixes made of cartridges with Christ figures, decorated shell cases often mounted on a tripod with bullets of varying origin. The nature of these items was mainly ornamental rather than functional (Saunders 2000: 49–52).

The third group refers to objects also made during the period from 1919 to 1939, mainly after the Armistice, and manufactured by various companies connected to the army. These Trench Art objects were fashioned as souvenirs from the “raw” unworked materials of war brought back by returning service personnel. Produced for professional soldiers and offered in stores, these items personalized the soldiers’ memorabilia through distinctive designs. More elaborate than items in the previous category, the forms of these objects were sometimes referred to as “Mounted War Trophies” and functioned as visual reminders of wartime experiences. Typical examples in this category are clocks made from shells and bullets, lamps and candlesticks from the same material, and inkwells shaped from grenades or shrapnel. The manufacture of this type of object ceased by the beginning of the Second World War (Saunders 2000: 52–54).

Objects which fit the three above-mentioned categories and were made by soldiers during the war can be found in Serbia. Trench Art objects belonging to the first category were predominantly produced during the Great Retreat and evacuation to Corfu, as well as on the Salonica Front and in the context of other well-known battles. These objects frequently have personal utilitarian uses, such as different types of drinking cups, tobacco boxes, matchboxes, and other types of dishes. Men’s rings and other types of memorabilia were also produced in large numbers. After WW1 the various objects and souvenirs made out of war material were predomi-

nantly crafted by civilians. The most common objects were decoratively carved metal cannon shells. Close to the third above-mentioned category of Trench Art objects are church polyeleos produced in the Military Technical Institute in Kragujevac.

## Trench Art Objects and Private Memory

Objects of everyday military life produced during the Great War and memorabilia produced after its ending played an important role in shaping and nationalizing the private sphere (Makuljević 2006: 239–253). Kept in various museum collections, objects dating back to WW1 were treated and categorized in different ways and featured in permanent and temporary exhibitions. This type of material object can also be found in private homes, where it performs a memorial function highlighting the involvement of the householder's ancestors in the Great War. Lastly, many objects of this time, presented without any context, can be found at flea markets – both physical and online – as objects to be traded and collected. More recently, various online platforms have been created by professionals and descendants of those who participated in the war with the aim of digitalizing preserved materials and ancestral memories of the Great War.<sup>2</sup> Instead of systematizing and presenting these collections, we will focus our attention on the phenomenon and characteristics of Trench Art in the Serbian context.

According to the periodization proposed above, wartime objects holding a utilitarian function, including memorabilia such as rings and vases made from munition shells, constitute the first group. The majority of these objects, according to the history of Serbian warfare, appeared following the Great Retreat and then on the Salonica front and other battlefields. The collection at the Užice National Museum includes diverse objects of Trench Art made by soldiers from villages in the Zlatibor region in the period between 1916–18. They were fashioned out of materials available on the battlefield at the time, using simple tools and techniques. The decorative repertoire of these objects consists of motifs of folk art: geometric ornaments and organic motifs such as flowers and leaves, grapevines and images of plums. A central motif that appears on many objects is the Serbian national coat of arms. The majority of these objects feature engraved memorial inscriptions which, aside from names of indi-

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2 See: Смолчић Макуљевић, С. (2014), *Први светски рат у њородичним фотодокументима*, Београд.  
<https://prvisvetskirat.rs/>; <http://славнимпрецима.рб/> [Accessed on April 20, 2021]



**Fig. 1:** Two drinking cups made by soldiers on the Salonica front: „Memory from the European War 1912–1918“, National Museum of Valjevo collection.

viduals and the place and year of their production, also include phrases like “memory of the European war”. Out of a total of twenty-two objects which have been preserved in the museum, a few of them were especially well executed, suggesting that they are probably the work of professional craftsmen mobilized to participate in the war (Macura 1992: 283–287).

Among objects of note in the Užice museum are several small drinking cups of different shapes, including one cup with a handle, which are all engraved in the above-mentioned way (Macura 1992: 284–285). There are also two vessels of this kind in the National Museum of Valjevo, with accompanying inscriptions that identify them as war memorabilia (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> Besides drinking vessels, many other items were produced: trays and wooden cutlery with the inscription “Memory from Corfu,” stored at the Užice museum, a soldier’s canteen box, also at the same museum, produced in June 1917 and decorated with motifs of plums and grapevines, flower vases, an anchor, a snake and an image of a girl holding a cup and pitcher (Macura 1992: 285). In addition to metal, wood was frequently used in the manufacture of cigarette holders, wind instruments such as *frula* and *dvojnica*, and faith-related objects such as crosses or wooden models used to decorate ceremonial bread for the Orthodox feast called *slava* (Macura 1992: 286–287). Ashtrays, aluminum cigarette cases, and matchboxes, like the one from the museum in Valjevo (fig. 2),<sup>4</sup> were also produced, as were letter knives and pen holders fashioned using simply molded metal. An

3 <https://kultura.rs/objekat/3268062-aluminijumska-%C4%8Da%C5%A1a-elipsasta-g;> Inventory no. 8–663–9690; <https://kultura.rs/objekat/3268063-aluminijumska-%C4%8Da%C5%A1ica-gravirana-;> Inventory no. 8–663–9691 [Accessed on April 20, 2021].

4 <https://kultura.rs/objekat/3268064-aluminijumski-dr%C5%BEa%C4%8D-za-kutiju-%C5%A1i;> Inventory no. 8–663–9692 [Accessed on April 20, 2021].



**Fig. 2:** Metal matchbox case, memorabilia from the Great War, National Museum of Valjevo collection.

example of this is the tulip-shaped penholder, also from the collection of the Valjevo museum.<sup>5</sup> Among objects with a utilitarian function were frames for soldiers' mirrors, the backs of which were richly decorated and engraved with inscriptions (Macura 1992: 286). According to contemporaries like Archibald Reiss, Serbian soldiers were decorating objects already in their possession or making items they did not have due to war shortages. Reiss noted that soldiers "amicably converse with their officers and show them the little pieces which they have made in the trenches." He further noted that sitting in "molehills" for a long time demanded doing something which would banish gloomy thoughts (Rajs 1928: 194).<sup>6</sup>

In addition to military identity tags and bracelets fashioned out of various metals, soldiers often produced rings using artillery shells (Macura 1992: 287). These personal memorial objects sometimes made use of coins. An example of this is the ring with the engraved text "Memory from Salonica 1916"<sup>7</sup> made by Dimitrije Hadži-Mihajlović, a participant in the Great War, using a silver *dinar* coin with the image of King Petar.<sup>8</sup> Another similar object is the ring of Živko Nikolić with the engraved in-

5 [https://kultura.rs/objekat/3268065-aluminijumski-dr%C5%BEa%C4%8D-za-pero--pe; Inventory no. 8-663-9693](https://kultura.rs/objekat/3268065-aluminijumski-dr%C5%BEa%C4%8D-za-pero--pe;Inventory%20no.%208-663-9693) [Accessed on April 20, 2021].

6 Ljubica Macura refers to this source.

7 „A.D.M. Uspomena iz Soluna 1916.“

8 <http://славнимпрецима.срб/Галерија?page=51>; Dimitrije Hadži-Mihajlović (1879–1923), učesnik Velikog rata; [Accessed on April 1, 2021].





**Fig. 3:** Men's ring „Memory to Salonica 1916“, made by soldier Dimitrije Hadži Mihailović (left); handcrafted ring of an empty bullet shell „Memory from Corfu 1916“, made by soldier Živko Nikolić, (right).

scription “Ž.N., memory from Corfu, 1917,”<sup>9</sup> which he personally fashioned out of empty bullet shells (fig. 3).<sup>10</sup>

Decorated cannon shells represent the most common type of Trench Art in the Balkan region. According to the memoirs of Archibald Reiss, Serbian soldiers on the Salonica front decorated cannon shells, which they would then fill with flowers and place on tables in the army canteen whenever officers were expecting to receive prominent guests (Rajs 1928: 213–214). Objects of this kind can be found in numerous museum foundations, as well as in private ownership, and as objects to be traded and collected. Cannon shells were also used during the war, and afterward, as a kind of commemorative item, just as previously described. Aside from the national coat of arms and inscriptions with the place and date of production, cannon shells could also be decorated with official initials of Serbian kings and personal memorial inscriptions. It was not uncommon for materials such as the cannon shells to feature images with a totally profane origin without any reference to war, like the shell from the museum of Valjevo (fig. 4).<sup>11</sup>

Interwar visual culture was characterized by jubilee memorabilia which connected participants in the Great War to one another. In 1923, soldiers of the Šumadija Division gifted Dragutin Pokorni, the conductor and kapellmeister of the King's Guard Orchestra, a candle holder created in Kragujevac (fig. 5).<sup>12</sup> The candle holder has a triangular base and three

9 “ŽN, usp. sa Krfa 1916. g.”

10 <https://prvisvetskirat.rs/licnosti/ucescnici-ratova/nikolic-zivko/> [Accessed on April 1, 2021].

11 <https://kultura.rs/objekat/3268066-vazna-od-topovske-%C4%8Daure-ukra%C5%A1e;Инв.бр.8-663-9694> [Accessed on April 20, 2021].

12 <https://kultura.rs/objekat/2448808-sve%C4%87njak-sa-posvetom-muzi%C4%8Dara-%C5%A1u;HistoricalMuseumofSerbia,Inv.no.1-22-3114>, [Accessed on April 20, 2021].



**Fig. 4:** Left: decorated cannon shell from the National Museum of Valjevo collection. Right: cannon shell vase with King Peter's monogram.

tiers, topped with a cylindrical recipient for a candle. The three levels of the candle holder rest on bullets which act as columns and prop them up, while the base features an image of a lyre dedicated to the famous conductor and hero of the Great War. Purposefully manufactured, these memorabilia represent complex objects which ensure social memory for exceptional individuals who could articulate their private space, emphasizing the military aspects of their identity.

In WW1, women volunteers, nurses taking care of the wounded, and food producers were considered national heroes. At the same time, virtually the entire female part of the population was taking care of children and waiting for their sons, brothers, and husbands to return from war (Mladenović 2007: 769–795). Objects made by Serbian women, such as embroidered textiles decorated with war motifs, belonged to the visual culture of the Great War. The textile collection of the Užice museum features an embroidered handkerchief with a textual inscription which memorializes, in an almost apotropaic form of incantation, one woman's hopes and expectations of her loved one's return from the military front (Ristović 1992: 294).

After the Balkan war and WW1, which lasted from 1912 until 1918 with almost no respite, Trench Art and memorabilia of Serbian soldiers emerged as a means of remembering their participation in these wars. In the interwar period, the past war was depicted as a heroic epoch and an



**Fig. 5:** Candleholder with dedication from 1923 of soldier-musicians of the Šumadija division gifted to the composer Dragutin Pokorni, Serbian Historical Museum collection.

occasion for creating different strategies of active personal and social remembering. Material objects in the possession of individuals were, aside from serving a decorative function, a testament to their participation in the Great War. They represented a sort of private memory and also highlighted their personal militaristic and heroic identity. Objects of the same kind were also a way of materializing the private memory of those who did not survive the war, and of coloring their absence with heroic dignity. Material objects of Trench Art greatly contributed to the character of wider manifestations of visual culture in the interwar period. As such, their private-public role should be more attentively studied.

## Trench Art in the Service of Sacralization of Fallen Heroes' Remembrance

Since society and material culture influence one another, it is worth considering the role of Trench Art in the culture of public remembrance of the participation of Serbian soldiers in the Great War. Spaces of collective memory of fallen soldiers were almost always Orthodox churches built as memorial ossuaries or sepulchers of fallen soldiers. Orthodox churches as final resting places of fallen heroes were spaces of public-private remembrance, articulated through different artistic and symbolic strategies

(Obrenović 2013: 321–347; Manojlović Pintar 2014: 212–215). Trench Art is a more present and visually significant manifestation than previously acknowledged in the discourse of Serbian public remembrance of WWI. The most representative aspects of material culture of this kind are the massive church polyelaios chandeliers, or Horos, installed in church naves, made entirely using army weapons, munition, and other materials. Memorial churches also house vases made out of cannon shells intended for the display of flowers. Specific polyelaios chandeliers made using army materials can be found in numerous memorial churches and ossuaries like the Ružica church on Kalemengdan, the Church of the Holy Assumption of Christ in the village of Krupanj, the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the village of Pecka, the Church of St George in the village of Bela Crkva near Krupanj, and the St Nedelya Church in Desimirovac. One of the most significant church chandeliers of this kind was produced especially for the Temple to the Glory near Skopje.

Aside from such hanging chandeliers, different types of standing candelabra, intended for the lighting of wax candles or oil lamps in front of the iconostasis, were also produced. A monument to the heroes fallen at the Battle of Cer in the village of Tekeris features, at its base, an oil lamp holder made using three Berdan II M1870 rifles with bayonets, as well as a military helmet positioned above them. (Bogdanovic 2018: 467, 470).

When considering this type of church lighting, which is undoubtedly an example of Trench Art as well as a material object of church visual culture, it is important to emphasize its symbolic meaning. Horos with polyelaios is usually installed above the nave in the underdome space of the Orthodox church as a massive hanging construction used for the purpose of illuminating the church. The use of artistically shaped candle holders, oil lamps, polyelaios, and horos in the church space has been linked from the earliest Christian times to the symbol of light as it is interpreted within the Christian tradition (Boyd 1998: 169–174). Horos evokes the image of a starry night, as the candles on it flicker like stars, while the circle of the polyelaios is like the sky above which, in the dome, Christ the Pantocreator was usually visible. Similar to the illuminated horos, the tall wax candles positioned in front of the iconostasis signify the pillar of fire which led the Israeli people through the desert. The light of the flames on candle holders which have many branches reminds believers of the fire of the burning bush. Furthermore, the oil candle lamp, circular in form, symbolizes the flaming chariot in which the prophet Elijah was corporally elevated to the sky. (Venijamin 2014: 40–41). Horos with burning candles and oil candle lamps, situated inside the sacral space of the church, symbolically resembles the image of heavenly Jerusalem in glory (Radojković 1977: 87). The name “polyelaios,” referring to the chandeliers, derives from a monastic

church service during which psalms are chanted. During the chanting of the polyelaios psalms all of the candles are lit reminding us of the many graces which God has bestowed on mankind (Hadži Teofilo 1895: 47–48).

This symbolic meaning of the church polyelaios is wholly in accordance with the sacralized concept of remembering fallen heroes and martyrs of the fatherland, faith, and nation. The ways they are celebrated, through designated days for state ceremonies, created a specific national heorthology (Timotijević 2012: 69–78). Church chandeliers and standing candelabras visually resemble the eternal glory of fallen warriors, simultaneously acting as a guarantee for their liturgical remembrance and memory. This also was in accordance with the intention of the Serbian Orthodox church to Christianize the cults of fallen warriors who, under the strong influence of the nationalization of remembering, acquired qualities reminiscent of ancient ways of celebrating dead heroes which were deeply rooted in pagan antiquity (Borozan 2015: 458–459). Aside from unprecedented destruction, WW1 brought about a need for the institutionalization of national remembrance which resulted in the construction of the cult of the fallen warrior who has given his life for the fatherland. That process was especially visible in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, established by a process of unification following victory in the Great War (Manojlović Pintar 2014: 115–142, 221–235).

During the 1920s and in the service of establishing new state-building traditions and celebrating fallen heroes, numerous memorial churches were built in the shape of monumental ossuaries as a way of materializing memory. In the southern regions of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the most significant construction project was the Temple to the Glory built on the grounds of the military cemetery in Skopje. It was erected in the Byzantine style according to the designs of Konstantin Homenko and consecrated solemnly at the Feast of the Holy Spirit in 1934. A program of frescoes executed by Russian artists was conceptualized as a contemporary reminiscence of the medieval Serbian fresco painting. The ideators of this sacral space were meticulous in their designs for the interior of the church, which was a memorial *topoi* of the fallen heroes as well as of the Karadžević dynasty, unified by the idea of *integral Yugoslavism*. The chandelier and especially the artificated candelabras crafted according to the idea and sketches of lieutenant colonel Radosavljević, contributed greatly to the memorial's dynastic and militaristic character (Kadijević 1997: 166; Borozan 2015: 444–466).

An article published in the Pravda newspaper on the consecration day in May 1934 gives us greater insight into these items of Trench Art in the Temple to the Glory. The article describes lieutenant colonel of the infan-

try regiment Dragomir Radosavljević, the director of the Military-Technical Institute in Kragujevac, as the individual in charge of the sketches and execution of the objects in question.<sup>13</sup> The iconographical description of the chandelier and candelabras help us to formulate a clear idea about the items' visual characteristics and the public's emotional and cognitive reaction, which supplement other, preserved specimens of church chandeliers within the same field of verbo-visual culture. Emphasizing in particular the chandelier and candle holders as the most exceptional and interesting decorative items in the Temple to the Glory, the *Pravda* article brings us an authentic key of their iconographical interpretation: "The most symbolic interior decorations of the Temple to the Glory are, without a doubt, one unusual church chandelier and two candle holders crafted by the director of the Military-Technical Institute in Kragujevac, Mr. Dragomir Radosavljević, lieutenant colonel of the infantry regiment. These are real masterpieces that display the originality of thought of their creator. The polyelaos hanging in the middle of the Temple was built from weapons and munition used by the Allied powers during the last war. With his masterfully crafted work, Mr. Radosavljević succeeded in symbolically representing all the greatness of the victory of Serb and other Allied armies in the last war, and in communicating the greatness of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia built on these successes (*Pravda* 1934: 12).

"A column built from cannon shells of all calibers runs through the middle axis of the chandelier. The origin of the top shell is an Austrian coastal cannon, caliber 210 mm. Engraved on the shell is a Yugoslavian crown that points towards the entrance of the church and, on the opposing side, towards the altar, since the Serbian crown played an exceptional role in the war. The crown symbolizes the creation of Yugoslavia upon the wreckage of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (our crowns on top of the used shells of the Austrian cannon). Arranged along the underside of the shell are the bullets of our gunshots, which represent our soldiers who protect Yugoslavia. The column is made up of several cannon shells of increasing width, where each segment fits into another one. At the end of the column is a Serbian rapid-fire cannon bullet, at the tip of which hangs a French airplane bomb, ready to fall at any moment. This emphasizes the friendship between Yugoslavia and France as nations that will always selflessly defend one another. Inside the polyelaos, six rifles belonging to the Allied powers are positioned all around, pointing upwards towards the candles. In the middle are crossed sabers. The rifles reach the tips of the top row of candles, which rest on various kinds of bombs belonging to the Allies and which have been arranged in a circular fashion. This is a means of representing the flame of exaltation for freedom which was first lit by the Serbian Orthodox Church, and which

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13 The Institute also produced the church candelabras and standing candle holders in the Ružica Church on Kalemegdan.

helped Allied troops to break the usurpers of freedom. Rifle and machine-gun bullets and shells belonging to the Allied powers are arranged in rows all along the middle axis of the chandelier. Bullets of mixed origin are combined here, representing the permanent ties and inseparability of the Allies. Chains fashioned from bullets are positioned vertically in an arch formation. On the wider, bottom part of the chandelier are three iron bars that cross over each other. These symbolize our national unity, around which is a solid steel hoop – the inseparable Yugoslavia (Pravda 1934: 12).”

This description should be interpreted in light of the concept of *integral Yugoslavism* as the official cultural and political state ideology born out of the negation of ethno-national particularisms of the three constitutional ethnicities of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and which emphasized, conversely, a hybrid Yugoslavian national identity (Dimić 1996: 285–328). The interpretation was, at the same time, in accordance with the public politics of the idealization of war allies (Manojlović Pintar 2014: 171–174). The verbal description of the polyelaios inside the Temple to the Glory became a paradigmatic image of the fight for freedom and the notion of Yugoslavism, as was also the case with its replicas which can be found in the aforementioned memorial military mausoleum churches. Through spatialisation of complex statal Ephemeral spectacles in Serbian Orthodox churches, fallen soldiers were nationalized as the heroes who built the nation while being sacralized by the Serbian Orthodox Church, which intended to emphasize their religious and ethnic identity (Lajbenšperger 2009: 191–199). Candelabras crafted using war material and made in the Military-Technical Institute in Kragujevac, are the conceptual design of lieutenant colonel Dragomir Radosavljević, who would have certainly been familiar with Trench Art. They are also a reflection of complex state politics which militarized the church liturgical space in a very sophisticated way, keeping in mind all the complex theological meanings of the polyelaios.

The text published on the occasion of the consecration of the Temple to the Glory in Skopje offers us a description of two standing candelabras intended to be placed in front of the iconostasis, adjacent to the Royal Door: “In addition to this polyelaios, lieutenant colonel Mr. Radosavljević also made two candle holders, which are both interesting and symbolic, as decorations for the Temple to the Glory. These candle holders are also made from cannon shells of various calibers, with bases constructed using three cannon bullets. A portrait of the late King Peter is engraved on the central shell of the right chandelier, close to the entrance of the church. An image of field marshal Putnik is engraved to the right of the image of the king, and to the left is field marshal Stepa Stepanović. In the middle of the shell below the first one is a portrait of the French field mar-



**Fig. 6:** Pair of polyelaios chandeliers from the Ružica church, Belgrade.

shal Franchet d'Espèrey. To his left is a representation of the field marshal Živojin Mišić, and on the right is an engraved image of field marshal Petar Bojović. On the shells of the candelabra positioned on the opposite side are the image of HRH King Alexander I and his associates on the territory belonging to the Third Army: Mr. Milan Nedić, the commander of the army, Radovan Obradović, the general of the division, and others. In short, the polyelaios and candelabras made by Mr. Radosavljević for the Temple to the Glory are the most beautiful and most interesting decorative items in this church (Pravda 1934: 12).” The candelabras in question, through their chronotopical unity, emphasize and memorialize the images of two Serbian rulers alongside commanders of the Serbian army in times of war and peace, symbolically portraying them as those who are lighting the way for the nation from the past into the future. Standing candelabras of this type, made using cannon shells, are also kept in a church located in the village Krupanj dedicated to the Assumption of God thus we can assume that, like the polyelaios, they were made by the same Military-Technical Institute.

The above-described way of furnishing military memorial churches, by supplying them with objects designed according to the conventions of Trench Art, was utilized in the renovation of the Ružica Church on the Kalemegdan fortress in Belgrade. This temple served as a garrison church for the military crew in the fortress from the end of the 1870s until the bombing of Belgrade in 1915 when it was badly damaged, losing its bell tower and the apsidal side of the church. The Military-Technical Insti-



tute in Kragujevac made two large polyelaios for this temple, as well as two metal relief icons, all made using war materials. The chandeliers were made using cannon shells, sabers, bayonets, and rifle and gun munition (fig. 6). The first bronze icon, depicting the birth of the Holy Virgin, was placed over the side entrance of the church, while the second icon, representing St George, was positioned over the portal at the entrance to the bell tower. In addition, the Institute in Kragujevac produced two statues of warriors, one from the medieval period of Emperor Dušan, and another depicting soldiers who fought in the Balkan Wars, which are located in front of the side entrance of the church. The sculptures of soldiers were made according to a blueprint drawn up by the architect Krasnov, and cast from leftover war material pointing to the military character of the church. Two large chandeliers, which are preserved in the Ružica Church, are frequently described as unique examples of their kind (Božović 2010: 18–19). In reality, however, they belong to a group of polyelaios produced in the Military-Technical Institute in Kragujevac with the intention to mark the church space as military-memorial in character.

An inscription about the renovation of the Ružica Church impressed on the marble board above the entrance reminds us that this military church was furnished and decorated for the eternal peace and memory of the souls of “Serbian heroes fallen on the battlefield for the glory and pride of the Great and United Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes,” emphasizing the notion of Yugoslavism in the church space once again (Božović 2010: 21). In terms of the interpretation of the function of this church, as well as its affiliation with other military memorials, it is worth noting that there is a memorial ossuary to the soldier-defenders of Belgrade near the church, by the Jakšić tower, which represent a symbolic unity with the Ružica Church. The ossuary was built in 1937 after the reconstruction of the Jakšić tower and during the construction of the church of St Petka, and in it are stored the mortal remains of Serbian fighters killed in battles in and around Belgrade in the war of 1914–1918 (Obrenović 2013: 234–236; Manojlović Pintar 2014: 213–214). Alongside a metal laurel wreath which hangs on its iron gate, the ossuary is marked with a cross made from two cannon barrels, which could also be considered objects of Trench Art.

Dedicated to the Holy Assumption of God, the memorial church and ossuary of warriors fallen at Mačkov Kamen and other nearby battles was erected in the village of Krupanj in 1932. The interior was furnished with different objects which could be characterized as Trench Art (fig. 7). The church was built according to the ideas of architect Momir Korunović, while the fresco decorations and iconostasis were painted by Živorad Nastasijević in 1930–31. Inside the church, under the dome of the nave,



**Fig. 7:** Polyelaios and candelabras in front of the iconostasis made of war material, memorial church in Krupanj.

there is a polyelaios made entirely from war materials and trophies, including bayonets, sabers, hand grenades, and various shotgun shells. The two standing candelabras positioned in front of the Royal Doors were also constructed using war materials and donated to the church by members of the Sokol Society in Belgrade (Đurđev 1997: 99–117; Lajbenšperger 2009; Obrenović 2013: 155–157).

The Church of the Ascension of the Holy Virgin in the village of Pecka, with its memorial ossuary of the warriors of the second Morava division, was consecrated on October 17, 1934. This church too was built according to the designs of architect Momir Korunović, on the site of an old military cemetery where members of the second Morava division killed on the Rožanj and other battlefields were buried. Sepulchers where around 400 fallen warriors were buried are situated inside the church, on its north and south sides. A bell tower was erected on the southwestern side, under which lies a crypt holding the bones of some 200 warriors translated from the village of Pričevići and Stava (Ćirić 2006: 90; Obrenović 2013:



**Fig. 8:** Trench Art chandelier  
from the memorial church in the village Pecka.

251–252). A huge chandelier made entirely of war materials hangs inside the temple, consisting of a central axis built using cannon shells of various calibers. Three circular light-bearing fixtures hang from the chandelier, at the top of which is a decorative spherical construction made using firearm shells. The polyelaios makes use of military sabers and numerous shells of various sizes and calibers. The lower part of the chandelier consists of “flowers” fashioned from hand grenades surrounded by shells (fig. 8). The object in question is entirely typologically similar to those found in the Ružica Church in Belgrade and the church in Krupanj.

Notable decorations at the Memorial Monument of Russian Glory at the New Cemetery in Belgrade include a candle holder made out of three Russian Berdan rifles and munition, located in the crypt. There is also a polyelaios made out of Cossack sabers *Кубанское казачье войско* presumed to have been produced in the Military-Technical Institute in Kragujevac (Bogdanović 2018: 250–251, 260).

The likeness of all the aforementioned church candelabras, the similar construction of their central axes made out of cannon shells, as well as the use of sabers, bayonets, and chains made from firearm shells which are, in every example, transformed into spherical decorations at the top of the polyelaios, all point to their having a shared creator. The hanging church chandeliers and standing candelabras in the Ružica Church, just like the grand polyelaios and standing candelabras in the Temple to the Glory in Skopje, were produced in the Military-Technical Institute in Kragujevac. The available historical data identifies lieutenant colonel Dragomir Radosavljević as the author of the designs, which were then executed by the craftsmen of the Kragujevac institute. Colonel lieutenant Radosavljević can be considered the first known Serbian designer of Trench Art objects, which have a complex public memorial function. Aside from emphasizing the military character of memory of the fallen warriors through the symbolism of light which it embodies, the church polyelaios acquired the Christian eschatological sense of redemption and hope in future salvation.

The practice of using military material like cannon shells for building a mobile altar for church services on the open battlefield has been documented among the French army during the Great War (Saunders 2002: 27). Bullet shells of firearms are also used as material in the construction of Crucifixions intended to be complex objects of memory connecting victims and their descendants to sites of wartime suffering (Saunders 2000: 56–57). In rethinking the purpose of these items it is worth noting that objects such as the Crucifixions clearly Christianize military sacrifices, ascribing to them a deeper social and religious context.

One item in the permanent exhibition of the Jewish Museum in Vienna is a ceremonial *Hanukkah* lamp made entirely of firearm and rifle shells and other munitions. This ceremonial candle-holder, taking the form of a menorah with nine branches, is the work of a member of the Sarajevo Sephardic Jewish community mobilized to participate in the Great War as a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army (Rechter 2001; Penslar 2013: 166–194). The symbolic meaning of light, also connected with the feast of *Hanukkah* and the narrative of the miracle which took place in the Temple of Jerusalem after the victory of the Israelis against the Hellenistic army, is merged with the individual desire for the survival of Jewish participants in the Great War. Strategies of private remembering of WW1 by members of Jewish communities were based on the same concept of the sacralization of victims, as well as in hope of a miracle salvation. Another example exists in the Serbian Jewish community, in which the process of artistic articulation of the monument to Jewish soldiers fallen in wars between 1912 and 1918, situated at the Sephardic cemetery in Belgrade, adopted a symbolic image of weapons which visually tied the memorial entity with the

Great War. Weapons such as a rifle with a bayonet, military sabers, and the *šajkača*, a Serbian military hat, as well as stone cannon grenades, appear as iconographical elements of this memorial, giving the mausoleum a distinctly militaristic character (Dautović 2013: 46–54).

The category of Trench Art emerged as a distinct phenomenon in visual culture after the Great War, with which it is most commonly associated. The creation of objects with a practical and decorative purpose during the war reflected a simple need to restore order and was a means of escapism in a time of crisis. This phenomenon, like many others similar to it which are visually connected with periods of trauma, appear unsettling as they link victims and perpetrators (Hellinger 2003). Remaining understudied and on the margins of scientific attention, their cathartic potential was lacking. Preserved objects testify to the continuity of life, the need for aestheticization of reality and the creation of a permanent memory of intense emotional war experiences. The objects created during the war became, after its ending, a reminder to survivors of these experiences. Memorabilia made using war material also kept the memory of the deceased alive, as well as the reason for their tragic departure, because wars justify absence. Private memory and the use of Trench Art objects carries numerous meanings, without draining their symbolic potential. This is especially evident in church chandeliers, which connect fallen heroes with divine light, and visually embody the collectivity of sacrifice for the fatherland. These complex installations made using military materials with their sacral and memorial function are a unique phenomenon in the recent culture of remembrance and in church art. Terminological clarity and precision offered by the term “Trench Art” when applied to manifestations of a national visual culture, facilitates to a great extent a methodological approach in the study of numerous unpublished and understudied objects in the domain of war materiality.

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### АРТИФИЦИРАЊЕ СЕЋАЊА: „РОВОВСКА УМЕТНОСТ“ И ПАМЋЕЊЕ СРПСКИХ ВОЈНИКА ИЗ ВЕЛИКОГ РАТА

**Апстракт:** Током и након Првог светског рата као појава у визуелној култури Европе јављају се предмети начињени од ратног материјала, чаура и оружја чија примарна милитарна намена уметничким чином бива преиначена. Овакви предмети обухваћени термином „рововска уметност“ сведочанства су визуелне културе епохе Великог рата. Карактер ових предмета по много чему хибридан смешта их између примењене и народне уметности, меморијске и комеморативне функције, везујући их непосредно за ратно окружење, али и различите стратегије артифицирања којима постају нови објекти драгоцени за визуелну културу. У бројним музејским и приватним колекцијама на подручју Србије налазе се методолошки нераспознати предмети сећања на Први светски рат. Објекти рововске уметности имају значајно место и у сакралном јавном простору као милитарни маркери повезани са меморијом на пале ратнике попут полијелеја израђиваних у крагујевачком Војно-техничком заводу за бројне спомен цркве из међуратног периода. Ове сложене инсталације од милитарног материјала, сакралне и меморијске

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намене, јединствена су појава у новијој култури сећања колико и црквеној уметности. Настojeћи да поменете артефакте ратне визуелне културе систематизујемо, тумачићемо их унутар ширег европског контекста указујући на процес трансформације од почетног ратног материјала који уметничком интервенцијом постје предмет нових сложених значења. Предмети рововске уметности као артифицирани објекти припадају проучавањима историје уметности и визуелне културе. Сведочећи о материјалности епохе ови објекти варирају од личног односа који су српски војници и цивили обликујући их исказивали спрам Великог рата до њихове симболичке јавне употребе и рефлексије одређених аспеката друштвене идеологије Краљевине Југославије.

**Кључне речи:** Велики рат, рововска уметност, артифицирани предмети, сећање, Србија