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Soviet War Memorials: The Case of the Victory Monument in Kaliningrad

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With the terror of the Second World War still looming over European cities, Soviet functionaries did not lose time to start legitimizing their version of the war narrative in the public space and began to build monuments to the heroic deeds of the Red Army and the Soviet victory against fascism. One of the most interesting structures of this type was erected in 1945 in the former capital of Prussia, Königsberg. In 1945, this German city along with the northern part of East Prussia was transferred under the Soviet administration according to the agreements of the Potsdam Conference. In 1946, Königsberg, “The King’s City”, named in honour of the Bohemian ruler Otokar II, was renamed as Kaliningrad to venerate the Soviet party figure Mikhail Kalinin who passed away on June 3, 1946. The Victory Memorial in Kaliningrad, also known as the Monument to 1,200 Guardsmen, was designed by two Soviet architects, Sergey Nanushyan (Сергей Нанушьян) who had Georgian ancestry like Stalin, and the Russian Inokenty Melchakov (Иннокентий Мельчаков), in cooperation with a group of sculptors headed by the Lithuanian sculptor Juozas Mikėnas. This complex is important in the history of commemoration of the Second World War (further abbreviated as WWII), but not for its artistic solutions – the context of its creation reflects the aims of Soviet ideology to Sovietize the occupied territories and establish the narrative of the so-called Great Patriotic War (further abbreviated as GPW) that would show it in a favourable

1) Konija lūms kuriamas „Pergalės“
paminklas Kaliningrade.
Luo [Prisiminimai].

Tai buvo 1945 m. vasara pirmoji
prokaris vasara. Iš dabar
meno Rinkos valdyboje
startis inspektoriumi darė
reikalus. Tuo metu
valdybos viršininkas parašė
rašytąjį Augustinus Grietas
paviecia mane per save
i nepasistina su atvykimu
i Kaliningradą (tuo metu
dar ji buvo dar uždus
varius Kaliningradu) karikiai,
kuris atvyko i miesto respublika
Kriašerius mūsų valstybės
partatylis paminklo evakui
stūmiant Karaliaučius.
Jis sušavimi ativerė
piemini to paminklo projektą
Parisake esan atstovas XIII Asuina

Front page of Vytautas Mackevičius' memoirs on the construction of the Victory Monument in Kaliningrad. C. 1970. Lithuanian Literature and Art Archives

light. In this text, the Victory Monument in Kaliningrad is analyzed in the contexts of Soviet monumental propaganda and the ideologization of the history of WWII. The research was prompted by coming across the

memoirs of the artist and Soviet cultural figure Vytautas Mackevičius on the circumstances of its construction, written ca. 1970, in the Lithuanian Literature and Art Archives (further abbreviated as LLMA).¹ While working on the paper on the propaganda visual narrative of WWII in Soviet Lithuanian art,² which is one of the sources for this text, I tried to keep in mind that the Kaliningrad monument was one of the first complexes built in commemoration of the Soviet victory, and up until the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) it remained probably the most distinct example of monumental sculpture of Soviet Lithuania (The Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, further LSSR). After the restoration of Independence in Lithuania in 1990, due to its content steeped in Soviet ideology, the monument fell into oblivion and found itself on the margins of art research. Correspondingly, the study of the case of this obsolete ideological artwork can serve two purposes: 1) to reveal the wider problematics of the formation of Soviet historical memory in the occupied territories of Central Eastern Europe, and 2) to revisit the perception of postwar art heritage.

The issues of the memorialization of the GPW have already received specialized research attention in some countries of the former Soviet bloc; Soviet war memorials are usually analyzed in the contexts of memory conflicts in post-Soviet societies. Michael Ignatieff was one of the first to explore Soviet war memorials,³ Siobhan Kattago described WWII monuments in Narva,⁴ Paul Stangl analyzed the Berlin cases,⁵

¹ Vytautas Mackevičius: Files, draft of the article "How the Monument in Kaliningrad was Developed", Lithuanian Archive of Literature and Art (further LLMA – Lietuvos literatūros ir meno archyvas), f. 314, ap. 1, b. 9, l. 36–44. It is mentioned in the description that the full text was published in the *Dailė* magazine ca. 1970, but the publication has not been found in the magazine's issues from 1967 to 1975.

² Indrė Urbelytė: Antrojo pasaulinio karo atvaizdas sovietinėje Lietuvos dailėje [The Image of the Second World War in Soviet Lithuanian Art], bachelor's final thesis, Vilnius Academy of Arts, 2020.

³ Michael Ignatieff: Soviet War Memorials, *History Workshop* 17 (1984), 157–163.

⁴ Siobhan Kattago: Commemorating Liberation and Occupation: War Memorials Along the Road to Narva, *Journal of Baltic Studies* 4 (2008, vol. 39), 431–449.

⁵ Paul Stangl: The Soviet War Memorial in Treptow, Berlin, *Geographical Review* 2 (2003, vol. 93), 213–236.

Reuben Fowkes wrote about Eastern European war memorials,⁶ Nurit Schleifman made research on the Victory Park in Moscow,⁷ and Scott W. Palmer studied the Stalingrad memorial.⁸ In Lithuanian art research, the subject of visualisation of the GPW and Soviet war memorials has not been consistently explored yet. A book on the history and propaganda of the memorial by Stasys Budrys published in 1965 should be considered the most outstanding attempt to analyze the Kaliningrad monument.⁹ The author collected material in Lithuanian and Russian archives, and had access to the accounts of contemporaries, but the publication is teeming with ideological judgement clichés that appealed to the client as well as propaganda pathos. Certainly, in this respect it is an authentic document of that period. The larger part of the factual material presented in the book can serve as a valuable source for a contemporary researcher. In Lithuania, the topics of war memorials and the memory of the GPW were partially addressed in the texts by Rasa Antanavičiūtė and Zigmąs Vitkus,¹⁰ but a systematic analysis of Soviet war memorials is lacking.

With the aim to understand the function of postwar Soviet war memorials in the newly occupied European territories, we have to make a brief detour to discuss the basic aspects of the understanding of WWII and the GPW. Nazi Germany's invasion of the Republic of Poland on September 1, 1939 is traditionally considered to have signalled the start of WWII, and the surrender of Imperial Japan on September 2, 1945

⁶ Reuben Fowkes: Soviet war memorials in Eastern Europe, 1945–74, *Figuration/Abstraction: Strategies for Public Sculpture in Europe 1945–1968*, ed. Charlotte Benton. London: Routledge, 2017, 11–32.

⁷ Nurit Schleifman: Moscow's Victory Park: A Monumental Change. *History and Memory* 2 (2001, vol. 13), 5–34.

⁸ Scott W. Palmer: How Memory Was Made: The Construction of the Memorial to the Heroes of the Battle of Stalingrad, *The Russian Review* 3 (2009, vol. 68), 373–407.

⁹ Stasys Budrys: *Pergalės monumentas Kaliningrade [The Victory Monument in Kaliningrad]*. Vilnius: Vaga, 1965.

¹⁰ Rasa Antanavičiūtė: *Menas ir politika Vilniaus viešosiose erdvėse: 20 a. pirma pusė* [Art and Politics in the Public Spaces of Vilnius]. Vilnius: Lapas, 2019; Zigmąs Vitkus: *Memorialas atminimo politikoje: Panerių atvejo tyrimas (1944–2016)* [A Memorial in Memory Politics: Research on the Paneriai Case (1944–2016)], doctoral dissertation. Klaipėda University, 2019.

marked its end. In this understanding, attention is focused not only on the course of the conflict, but also on its genesis and the international tension provoked by the aggressive great political powers – the Third Reich and the USSR. It is a fact that an armed conflict involving more than two states began with the Nazi and then Soviet invasion of Poland, but the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and its secret protocols signed in 1939 provide sufficient grounds to consider both totalitarian states – Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which divided Europe into zones of influence – the main aggressors.¹¹ This consensus signifies that “both sides were aggressors seeking to conquer not only each other, but also all the world”.¹² In this perspective, the Soviet Union’s invasion of Poland on September 17, 1939, the war on Finland declared on November 30, and the occupation of the Baltic States in June 1940 should be considered integral parts of the history of WWII and examples of Soviet aggression. After the war, the former allies in the struggle against Nazism started to compete for global influence, and these tensions engendered a new ideological conflict between communism and the capitalist system – the Cold War, which turned the different interpretations of the experience of WWII into an important tool of ideological struggle.

In the postwar period, one of the trickiest tasks for the Soviets was establishing a convincing interpretation of the recent war experience resulting in the occupation of Central and Eastern European countries. In the conditions of confrontation with the West, an ideologized interpretation of the war between the USSR and Germany was placed in opposition to the understanding of WWII that had taken root in the West. In the communist bloc, the Soviet narrative about “the Great

¹¹ Nerijus Šepetyš: II pasaulinis karas pagal Suvorovą: Lemiamas mūšis už desovietizaciją [World War II According to Suvorov: A Crucial Battle for De-Sovietization]. *Naujasis židinys–Aidai* 5 (2000), 254. In the text, books by Viktor Suvorov on WWII are analyzed; see Viktoras Suvorovas: *Ledlaužis: kas pradėjo Antrąjį pasaulinį karą?* [The Icebreaker: Who Started the Second World War?]. Vilnius: Mintis, 2008; Idem: *Paskutinė respublika: kodėl Sovietų Sąjunga pralaimėjo antrąjį pasaulinį karą?* [The Last Republic: Why Did the Soviet Union Lose the Second World War?]. Vilnius: Mintis, 1996; Idem: *Diena M: kada prasidėjo Antrasis pasaulinis karas?* [The M-Day: When Did the Second World War Start?]. Vilnius: Mintis, 2009.

¹² *Ibid.*, 255.

Patriotic War”, starting with the Nazi Germany invading the territory of the USSR-occupied Baltic countries on June 22, 1941 and ending with Germany signing the Instrument of Unconditional Surrender in Berlin on May 9, 1945, was promoted up until 1991. The formulation of the GPW began to be purposefully used in the public discourse with the aim to create the mythology of the given war already in the book *On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union* (О Великой Отечественной войне Советского Союза) published under Stalin’s name in 1942.¹³ The speeches of the Soviet leader included in the book were based on the fact that having assaulted the USSR, the Third Reich broke the nonaggression pact of August 23, 1939, and by this violation of the peace agreement between the two states, it became the main and only aggressor. While emphasizing in its narrative “the treacherous armed assault of Hitlerite Germany on our homeland” on June 22,¹⁴ the Soviet Union assumed the role of a victim joining a morally righteous struggle for the survival of humanity. The role of a fighter for democracy and peace in this narrative, which completely disregards the Soviet aggression in Europe in 1939–1941, enabled the USSR to become a liberating power against fascism.¹⁵ In the war years, Stalin also declared such goals: “Our aim is to help the oppressed European nations in their freedom struggle against Hitlerite tyranny and later allow them to run things in their land they as they see fit”.¹⁶ However, it was not only the Third Reich that was considered a fascist regime – rather, fascism was identified with the capitalist system in general, Nazi Germany being its most distorted version, and in this perspective, Soviet liberation means not only Hitler’s defeat, but also the initiation of socialist revolutions in Nazi-occupied

¹³ Josifas Stalinas: *Apie Didįjį Tarybų Sąjungos tėvynės karą* [On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union]. Maskva: Karinė leidykla, 1942.

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵ “It has become evident to all progressive humanity that the Soviet Union is a steadfast protector of free national development of the people, and an indestructible pillar of struggle for democracy, peace and freedom”; *Tarybų Sąjungos komunistų partijos istorija* [The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union]. Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla, 1963, 541.

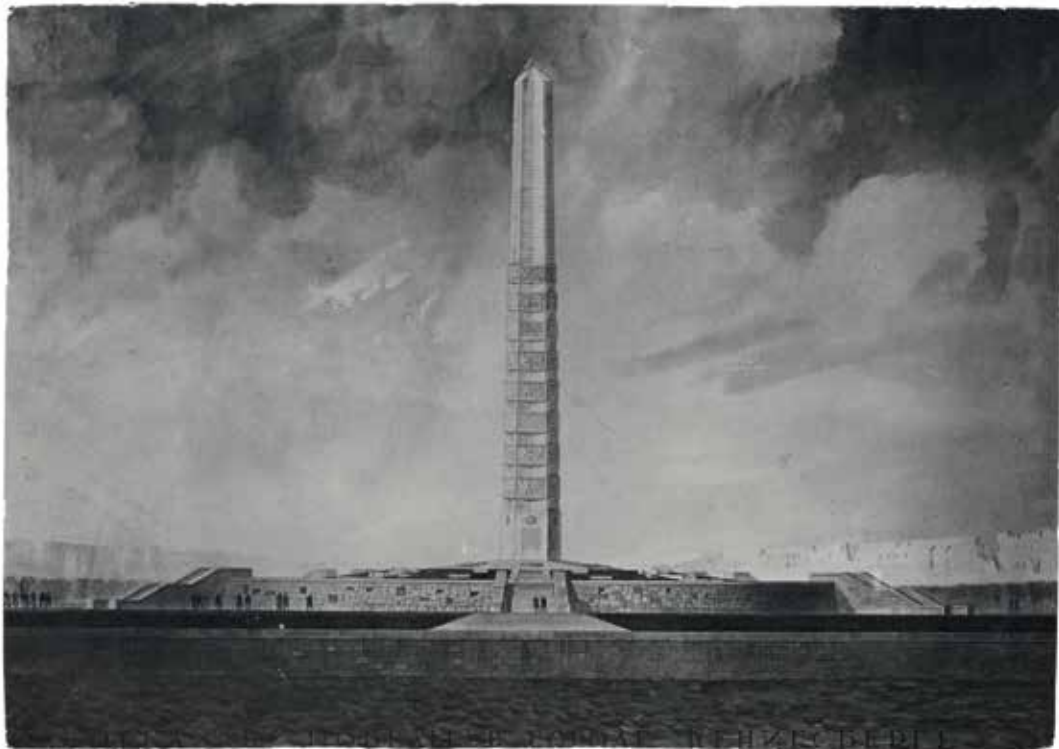
¹⁶ Josifas Stalinas: op. cit., 23.

countries.¹⁷ Without denying that Nazi terror transcended all limits of humanity, it is important to note in the context of the Soviet narrative that the latter aimed to build the images of purely irrational atrocious evil, whose “main goal was killing everything alive”,¹⁸ and Soviet peacemakers – liberators of ordinary working people. Thus, the concept of the GPW conveys the Soviet understanding of WWII, whose key narrative element was the ideological struggle for the communist world order. The defensive aims – “purging the entire Soviet land from the German fascist occupiers”¹⁹ – are enhanced with the goals of a proletarian revolution in Europe, which should be considered the central cause of the Soviet war in the first place. In historiography controlled by the alleged liberator, the negative war experience was exclusively focused on the years of Nazi occupation, which ended with the victory of the Soviet Union, though it is obvious that having occupied the European territories that fell into their sphere of influence according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop secret protocols under the pretext of socialist revolutions, the Soviets had already been involved in the war, and assistance in the struggle for liberation declared by the GPW narrative was only a cover for their expansionist aims.

¹⁷ The global dominance of communism and the conquering of the rival ideologies, i.e. capitalism, was considered the Soviet guarantee of security. “The Communist Party and the Soviet Government announced their goals: 1. To liberate the European nations from fascist invaders and to help them to restore their independent national states. [...] 4. To introduce an order in Europe that would completely exclude Germany’s new aggression. [...] The victory of the Soviet Union against the fascist aggressors is a victory of the Soviet order and the Soviet armed forces against the imperialist invaders who had been claiming world dominance. The imperialists expected that in the Second World War, the socialist country would be destroyed or irreparably weakened. However, in fact, a number of European and Asian countries, where people’s democracies took hold, fell out”; *Tarybų Sąjungos komunistų partijos istorija*, 525, 541. “The Hitlerite party is a party of imperialists, and the most predatory and plunderous of all the world’s imperialists at that”; Stalinas: op. cit., 18.

¹⁸ *Rekomendacijos moksleivių ekskursijai maršrutu: Paneriai-Pirčiupiai-Vilnius, skirtos tarybinės liaudies žygdarbiui Didžiajame Tėvynės kare atminti* [Recommendations for a School Trip with an Itinerary Paneriai-Pirčiupiai-Vilnius, Dedicated to the Memory of Heroism of the Soviet People in the Great Patriotic War], sud. Danutė Totoraitytė. Vilnius: Lietuvos TSR švietimo ministerija, Respublikinė jaunųjų turistų stotis, 1986, 8.

¹⁹ *Tarybų Sąjungos komunistų partijos istorija*, 521.



A photograph of the drawing of the Victory obelisk in Königsberg-Kaliningrad with the ruins of the city in the background.

1945. Photographer unknown. Archive of Lithuanian National Museum of Art

Postwar Soviet victory monuments in the empire's newly conquered territories served as a tool of consolidating the liberation myth legitimizing the occupations. Immediately following the war, monuments and memorial complexes started to burgeon in the European cities conquered – “liberated” – by the Soviets, where this conflicting heritage still provokes heated discussions in society.²⁰ Part of the monuments

²⁰ For example, regarding the Victory Monument in Riga. See *In Latvia, signatures are collected again for the monument to Soviet soldiers to be dismantled*, [interactive] *15min.lt*, October 1, 2017 [01.08.2021], <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/pasaulis/latvijoje-vel-renkami-parasai-kad-butu-nuverstas-sovietiniam-kariam-skirtas-paminklas-57-861022>

dedicated to the Russian Liberation Army were characterized by a rather simple solution. For example, on June 29, 1945, an IS-2 armoured vehicle placed on a five-metre-high stone base was unveiled in Prague; it had to symbolize the first tanks that entered the capital of Czechia and liberated it from the Nazi occupiers (in 1991, it was painted pink by the sculptor David Černý and transferred to the open-air exhibition of military equipment in the Vojenské technické muzeum Lešany). This standard scheme was replicated many times in other locations in the Soviet Union – in 1970, a T-34 tank was built in Narva, circa 1962, an IS-2-type armoured vehicle was erected in the 6th fort in Kaunas, etc. However, in many conquered European capitals, more complex sculptural monuments or memorial complexes, better adapted to state ceremonies and other visitation rituals, were built. For example, in 1945, in Vilnius Square in the centre of Warsaw, a monument with bronze figures of soldiers symbolizing the common Polish and Soviet struggle in the war was erected (dismantled in 2011). In 1947, a bronze soldier in memory of the liberators of Estonia from Nazism rose in Tallinn (it was transferred to the Soviet war cemetery in 2007). The first large-scale architectural complex dedicated to the liberating struggle of the Red Army was unveiled in Vienna on August 19, 1945. The monument consists of an 8-metre-high column balustrade with sculptural groups in its upper corners arranged in a semi-circle, and a column with a bronze figure of a Soviet soldier in the centre of the square. Several months later, a similar memorial, albeit of considerably more massive classical proportions, was erected in the ravaged Tiergarten park in Berlin. Six stocky columns and a spiring pedestal with a bronze figure of a Soviet soldier in the centre formed a curved silhouette of the complex. When the Tiergarten park found itself in the territory of West Berlin, two new memorial complexes were built in 1947–1949 on the site of the cemetery of Soviet soldiers in the eastern side of the city, in the area of Pankow and Treptow; the latter due to its more convenient location in the city became the central monument in the German Democratic Republic dedicated to celebrate the Soviet victory in the war.²¹

²¹ Stangl: *op. cit.*, 217.



Juozas Mikėnas's sculpture *Victory* for the monument in Königsberg-Kaliningrad.
Photographer unknown. Lithuanian Literature and Art Archives

Meanwhile, in Soviet Russia, the programme of so-called commemoration of the GPW in public spaces was lagging behind – though Soviet architects proposed a conversion of one of the highest peaks in Moscow, Poklonnaya Hill, into a memorial to the Red Army as early as 1942, Stalin froze the project, and it was not until 1958 that the works of building a victory memorial in the capital of the Soviet Union were resumed and continued up until 1995.²² Researchers also note that the first monuments to the GPW in Russia more often placed focus on the figure of the great leader, Stalin, who allegedly led the country to victory, rather than the self-sacrificing struggle of the Red Army – for example, in the central Square of the Fallen Fighters in Stalingrad (today, Volgograd),

²² Ibid., 214.



Bronius Pundzius's sculpture *Offensive* for the monument in Königsberg-Kaliningrad. Photographer unknown. Lithuanian Literature and Art Archives

which was a site of fierce battles in 1942–1943, a monument to the party leader was erected.²³ The difference in war memorialization in the prewar territory of the USSR and the countries occupied during the war can be related to the narrative of the liberating mission promoted by the Soviets. War monuments had to symbolize the new – Soviet – phase of the development of the occupied country and its future rebirth in the world free from fascist dictatorship. The monuments praising the self-sacrificing liberation struggle of the Red Army as the source of the new life shaped the spaces for state commemorations and other official veneration rituals aimed to instil the sense of gratitude to the Soviet Union in the

²³ Nina Tumarkin: *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*. New York: Basic Books, 1994, 101.

conquered communities and in this way to bring these territories into the family of the republics that had been Sovietized before the war.

It is not surprising that the construction of war memorials in the German lands was highly problematic. While analyzing the Treptow complex in Berlin, Paul Stangl draws attention to the well-nuanced iconography of the monument, which was intended to disengage the German people from their unconditional identification with Nazism, and alongside, to establish the Soviet narrative in the German collective consciousness. The monument represents a Soviet soldier clasping a rescued German girl with his right hand, and smashing a swastika symbolizing the Nazi regime of the Third Reich with a sword in his left hand.²⁴ Even more interesting in this context is a memorial to Soviet soldiers killed during the Königsberg offensive on April 6–9, 1945, which was ceremoniously opened on September 30, 1945. The monument built in the historical German lands shows the resolution of the totalitarian regime to radically reshape the local cultural landscape. A researcher of the identity formation of Kaliningrad residents Yury Kostyashov notes that East Prussia became the Soviet Union's "war trophy"; "there, communism had to be built by new settlers who arrived to live in the region en masse, rather than the residents converted into the new faith, who were subject to deportation."²⁵ The new settlers of the Kaliningrad region mostly came from the Russian provinces,²⁶ whose residents "had already been considerably maimed by the Bolshevik regime",²⁷ thus, the Victory Monument in Kaliningrad, though architecturally similar to the layout of the Tiergarten complexes, of Vienna and Berlin, had nothing to do with the propaganda myth of the liberating struggle, aimed to

²⁴ Stangl: op. cit., 216.

²⁵ Jurijus Kostiašovas: Prūsiskosios dvasios išvayimas. Kaip formavosi Kaliningrado srities gyventojų istorinė sąmonė pokario metais [The Expulsion of the Prussian Spirit: The Formation of the Historical Consciousness of the Residents of the Kaliningrad Oblast in the Post-War Years]. *Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis*, t. 18: *Antrojo pasaulinio karo pabaiga Rytų Prūsijoje: faktai ir istorinės įžvalgos* [The End of the Second World War in East Prussia: Facts and Historical Insights], sud. Arūnė Liucija Arbušauskaitė, 2009, 275–312.

²⁶ Ibid., 309.

²⁷ Ibid., 310.

Sovietize the occupied residents. The memorial was arranged around the central compositional axis – a 26-metre-high grey granite obelisk, semi-encircled by a 140-metre-long dressed granite wall with bronze sculptures on both sides. The main sculptural groups of *Victory* and *Offensive* were created by Juozas Mikėnas and Bronius Pundzius, and other works – the busts of the generals Sergey Poletski (Сергей Полецкий) and Stepan Guryev (Степан Гурьев), decorative garlands, emblems, wreaths and granite reliefs – were executed by Rapolas Jachimavičius, Petras Vaivada, Napoleonas Petrulis, Klemensas Jarašiūnas, and Bronius Petrauskas. For the centre of the composition, the authors chose the classical version of victory commemoration seen in European squares since the times of classical antiquity – the so-called victory column. Usually, the top of the triumphal column is crowned with a sculpture of a military leader, or an allegorical personification of the nation etc., and the column itself is sometimes adorned with images of successful battles. The version of the column in Kaliningrad did not have a sculptural group on top, though the Vienna and Berlin memorials built at the same time boasted bronze soldiers. Instead, the sculptors created a grey granite pentagonal obelisk seen from bird's-eye view as a Soviet pentagonal star. In 1985, an analogous solution was used for the Soviet Victory and Liberation of Latvia Monument in Riga. Modelled after classical examples, the Kaliningrad monument is decorated with recessed Egyptian-style reliefs depicting the battles for Königsberg, carved by Bronius Petrauskas and Klemensas Jarašiūnas.²⁸ Three bands of reliefs represent the parts of the army that fought to gain the “war trophy” – the infantry, the artillery, the aviation, and the tank crews, – and the upper part is decorated with lowered flags paying tribute to the deceased. Another three bands of the obelisk comment on the history of the Königsberg offensive, epitaphs praise Soviet soldiers and echo the key motif of a morally righteous struggle characteristic of the GPW, as seen in the phrase “НАШЕ ДЕЛО ПРАВОЕ МЫ ПОБЕДИЛИ” (“Our cause is just [thus, – *I. U.*] we won”) carved in the third tier from the top. Thus, the monument for the soldiers

²⁸ Budrys: op. cit., 20.



Granite relief representing the contribution of the aviation during the battle for Königsberg.

Photographer unknown.

Lithuanian Literature and Art Archives



General view of the obelisk with the inscription "НАШЕ ДЕЛО ПРАВОЕ МЫ ПОБЕДИЛИ" ("Our cause is just [thus, – I. U.] we won").

Photographer unknown. Archive of Lithuanian National Museum of Art

of the Red Army killed during the offensive marked the transformation of Königsberg into Kaliningrad and the beginning of the Soviet history of the Russified region.

Speaking about the Kaliningrad monument, it is interesting to note not only the Prussian context, but also the involvement of sculptors from Soviet-reoccupied Lithuania in the project. According to the archival documents of the Board for Art Affairs of the LSSR – a governing body of art institutions and companies, on the basis of which the Ministry of Culture of the LSSR was later founded, – the artist Vytautas Mackevičius,



Red Army soldiers and an unidentified artist in front of the sketch of the memorial in Kaliningrad. 1945. Lithuanian Literature and Art Archives

who worked as the head of the Board's Art Department from August 1944, travelled to Königsberg at least twice – on May 18–29, 1945²⁹ and from May 31 to June 30 of the same year.³⁰ Thus, the first trip took place a bit more than a week after the surrender of the Third Reich and slightly more than a month after the seizing of Königsberg. The artist writes that in the summer of 1945 (rather, in the first half of May, as in summer, construction works were already in full swing) in Vilnius, the then-deputy head of the Board, writer Augustinas Gričius, introduced him to

²⁹ Files of organisational activity and staff management of the Board for Art Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR, LLMA, f. 289, ap. 1, b. 1, l. 412.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 423.



Red Army soldiers and an unidentified artist in front of the memorial obelisk.
1945. Photographer unknown. Lithuanian Literature and Art Archives

a military officer from Kaliningrad, “who had come to our republic to invite our sculptors to build a monument to the soldiers who perished in the Königsberg offensive. He brought with him the first draft of the monument”.³¹ He vividly describes the reality of that time in his memoirs:

And here we are, going on a military vehicle to Karaliaučius. Where the roar of cannons has faded away only recently, several months ago. Devastating views of war pass before our eyes in all their starkness. Vilkaviškis, Kybartai and Eitkūnai are demolished, and the roads of Prussia are also destroyed by bombs. In some places ruins are still smouldering. [...] It's a warm summer night – we enter Karaliaučius, that beautiful citadel of Prussian militarism. In the depth of the night our headlights sweep over the horrific ruins of the huge city. The

³¹ LLMA, f. 314, ap. 1, b. 9, l. 36.

night is warm and the rancid smell of dead bodies pervades the air. We pass this huge cemetery of a city.³²

The memoirs end with a contrasting detail about the memorial's construction site:

An enormous number of different materials had been brought to the monument site. There was a towering heap of dressed granite blocks.³³

The rapid construction of the monument against the background of the still smouldering city in ruins showed the Soviet ambitions to build a new world, which was brought into existence by the victory in the war. Though we have no data about the original project of the memorial, another exceptional feature of the Kaliningrad monument comes to the fore – Soviet architects worked in cooperation with Lithuanian sculptors, though the sculptural groups for analogous projects in Berlin and Vienna were created by artists sent from Soviet Russia. According to Soviet historiography, the monument was built on the initiative of the 11th Guards Unit and its general Kuzma Galitsky (Кузьма Галицкий), but it is obvious that this decision could not have been taken without Moscow's blessing or possibly even initiative. Having studied the history of this monument in 1965, Stasys Budrys, most likely referring to the memoirs of Justas Paleckis, a long-term chair of the presidium of the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic,³⁴ wrote that after “the victory against Germany, a delegation from the LSSR headed by Justas Paleckis visited Karaliaučius. A wish was expressed that Lithuanians should join the project [of the monument – *I. U.*]. Several days later, Lithuanian sculptors arrived in Karaliaučius”.³⁵ The functionaries asserted that this work “will also be a monument to the

³² Ibid., l. 38–40.

³³ Ibid., l. 44.

³⁴ Stasys Budrys's archive includes manuscript material for a book about the memorial in Kaliningrad containing hints to his meeting with Paleckis. Unfortunately, the author's handwriting is almost illegible. See Files on the creative work and activity of Stasys Budrys, LLMA, f. 189, ap. 1, b. 39, l. 95.

³⁵ Budrys: op. cit., 9.



Red Army soldiers and the unidentified artists on the construction site, 1945.
 Photographer unknown, Lithuanian Literature and Art Archives

liberators of Soviet Lithuania, and the chosen site is historically related to our people's past."³⁶ Here, attention is drawn not only to Königsberg's historical links to the context of Lithuania Minor, but also to the war facts – the Ukrainian-born general Ivan Chernyakhovsky (Иван Черняховский), under whose command the troops of the Red Army “liberated” Vilnius on July 13, 1944, was killed in East Prussia. Besides, Budrys noted that two smaller obelisks built at the memorial wall were dedicated to the memory of the heroes of the 11th Guards Unit related to Lithuania, who had never reached Königsberg – the war nurse Yelena Kovalchuk (Елена Ковальчук), killed near Alytus and buried there, and the major Anatoly Sergeev (Анатолий Сергеев), buried in

³⁶ Ibid., 9.

Marijampolė.³⁷ Thus, the Victory Memorial not only symbolized the heroic end of the war and the military power of the Soviet Union, but also the intention of the Soviets to establish the GPW narrative as soon as possible. It is also confirmed by the fact that the sculptural group *Victory* composed by Mikėnas, even though devoid of extraordinary artistic merits, almost immediately received all-union acclaim and in 1947 was awarded the Stalin prize – the state’s highest award for an artwork that offered its winner a place in the Soviet artist elite along with a number of privileges. The award given to the sculptor served political purposes, as the awarded work was more actively brought into public circulation, widely discussed in the press, included in publications representing the country’s art, etc.³⁸ Based on the presented excerpts, we can assert that the involvement of Lithuanian artists in creating the monument was a political and ideological act programmed by the regime, which aimed to engage the not-yet-Sovietized Lithuanians who were being prepared for a new wave of Sovietization, in the narrative of the common struggle of the nations of the USSR against Nazi Germany. In other words, the sculptural groups of the Kaliningrad monument marked an ambitious start of the Sovietization of culture and artistic life in Lithuania.

Speaking about the situation of artists in the occupied countries, one is always tempted to apply moral judgement and divide the artists into conformists and non-conformists, though the majority of creators fall into the grey zone in between these two opposite categories. Today, it is difficult to pinpoint the relation of the Lithuanian sculptors to the implemented commission in Kaliningrad, as the witnesses of the monument construction are long gone, and the surviving memories are rather scarce and unreliable. Mackevičius mentions that “Mikėnas, Pundzius, Vaivada, Jachimavičius and Petrulis eagerly accepted the commission. Everyone was impressed by the idea presented by the Army that it was a large-scale figurative composition, which was outlined in the

³⁷ Ibid., 23–24.

³⁸ *Monumentalioji skulptūra: Atvirukų rinkinys* [Monumental Sculpture: A Collection of Post-cards]. Vilnius: [s.n.], 1961.

above-mentioned original draft”.³⁹ However, in Mackevičius’s memoirs, the particulars of the creative process give way to a detailed account of the “military care” that they received:

It is with pleasure that I remember the military care that was lavished upon ~~our representatives of Lithuanian art~~ [crossed out by the author – *I. U.*] from the very first day. How can I forget how we were bathed in a military sauna? The sauna was installed on the premises of an apartment house. Water was heated in barrels placed on the roof. We were greeted by perky soldiers who had been given a task to bathe us. They ask us to undress. We start to look around. The sculptor Pundzius seems worried for some reason. I ask him: What’s the matter, Bronius? He says that his underwear is all holey and he feels embarrassed to undress. One of the soldiers apparently gets the picture and suggests that Bronius throw his underwear out of the window, as he will give us new – trophy – underwear. And here we are, being whipped with birch twigs as we lie on wide army benches. Strong military hands are brushing our still [illegible – *I. U.*] bodies. In particular, Jachimavičius’s and Vaivada’s flanks give a cracking sound (at that time these two still looked like Oswiecim inmates). First, we are splashed with some pretty hot water, and finally, with a bucket of ice-cold water each. We put on various kinds of trophy underwear stamped with German eagles and, as if having gained a second wind, plunge into creative activity. We were invited for dinner by the head of army supplies. The dinner was highly ceremonial and trophy French drinks were served.⁴⁰

Analogous details appear in the ceramic artist Liudvikas Strolis’s brief account about Mikėnas and the construction in Kaliningrad:

This is how it went with this Kaliningrad monument. [...] They stayed over a month in Kaliningrad. [...] While staying there, they collected trophies, had meetings with the army commandment, the military would come to sit for them even with tanks, showing how more or less they looked combat-ready. They were taken very good care of, were given food rations and some schnapps. I told them: While you are there, get us some trophy truck in Kaliningrad. And they brought back a truck [...] an old-type small Soviet truck. We had a lot of trouble with it later, as it was old, the army didn’t want to give us a better one.⁴¹

³⁹ LLMA, f. 314, ap. 1, b. 9, l. 38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 41–44.

⁴¹ This handwritten account has been found among the Juozas Mikėnas Files, which have been transferred to the LLMA but not systemized yet. LLMA, f. 820, blocks of notes, l. 56. The memoirs of Juozas Mikėnas’s godson, architect Algimantas Mikėnas, also found among these

While reading these memoirs, it seems that the artists emaciated by war deficiency were concerned about everyday life issues rather than ideological or moral positions. The above-mentioned schnapps – German vodka, – military care and prizes showed the typical ostentatious attention to culture and artists in the Soviet Union. However, while enticing the creators with various privileges, in exchange Soviet functionaries demanded a demonstration of unconditional loyalty to the regime.⁴² Certainly, this topic needs separate research, but it is obvious that the commission of the Kaliningrad monument became an invaluable possibility for Lithuanian sculptors to get established on the Soviet art scene as well to bring home some trophy underwear.

In the postwar period, as the former allies of the anti-German coalition started to compete for global influence and this conflict grew into the Cold War, different interpretations of WWII became an ideological weapon of the conflicting parties. In this context, Soviet war memorials should be considered geopolitical tools of the totalitarian regime, which helped



A soldier posing for Juozas Mikėnas's sculpture *Victory*, 1945–1946. Photographer unknown. Lithuanian Literature and Art Archives

files, contain a mention that the sculptor brought him a trophy German watercolour from Kaliningrad, but no other information about the memorial construction is provided.

⁴² Danutė Blažytė-Baužienė: 1941 m. Lietuvių meno dekados sovietinis projektas tautinės kultūros naikinimo kontekste [The Soviet Project of the Lithuanian Art Decade in the Context of Destroying the National Culture], *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis* 2 (2006), 119.

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Копия письма тов. Пересторонина Василия Прокопьевича,
проживающего в Свердловской обл, Куваншского района,
ст. Азнатская, ул. Привокзальная д.1

- - -

В Областной Государственный архив г Калининграда
от Пересторонина Василия Прокопьевича, старшего сержанта
бывшей 11 гвардейской армии. Год рождения 1912.

Прошу вашего подтверждения в том, что я был "моделью" при скульптурных работах по строительству памятника в г. Калининграда, названного героями-гвардейцам при взятии Кёнигсберга.

Я был направлен для этого командованием 11 гвардейской армии в звании награды за заслуги перед родиной в годы Великой Отечественной войны и безупречной службу с 1934 по 1945 год.

Познакомил я в г.Каунас скульптору Микенас в сентябре 1945 года. Эта скульптура война /моя копия/ со значком в руках установлена на левом крыле памятника.

Как, как снявшемуся с воинского учёта, этот документ очень нужен.

Прошу не отказать в моей просьбе.

Для убеждения вас прилагаю фотографию, но прошу выслать её обратно с ответом.

Подтверждение высылайте по адресу:

Свердловская обл.
Куваншский район
ст Азнатск-я
ул Привокзальная д 1
Пересторонину В.П.

16 мая 1963 года.

A letter of a Red Army soldier Vassily Perestoronin asking to confirm that he had posed for Juozas Mikėnas's sculpture *Victory*.

1963. Lithuanian Literature and Art Archives

to spread the propaganda myth of liberation in the newly-occupied territories with the aim to legitimize the occupations. Thus, we can assert that the victory monuments that started to be built in the first postwar years in Europe's conquered territories not only consolidated the Soviet military power, but also signified the rapidly implemented programme of establishing the GPW narrative. It is important to note that in Soviet Russia itself, the issues of the memorialization of the GPW were bogged down, as the narrative of the alleged liberation was important only in the countries affected by the Soviet expansion policy. Thus, Soviet war monuments were intended to mark the legitimacy of Soviet rule and the beginning of the new life, and contribute to a more rapid Sovietization of local residents by means of building new spaces of official rituals. The Kaliningrad monument is distinguished in the context of contemporaneous complexes, as it did not have direct links to the liberating struggle of the Red Army – in the German lands settled by newcomers from the Russian provinces, the mythology of liberation lost its relevance and was not needed, as none of the local inhabitants had been left in the territory. The monument to the soldiers of the Red Army killed during the offensive was focused on the narrative of the self-sacrificing and glorious Soviet victory, and marked the transformation of Königsberg into Kaliningrad as well as the beginning of the region's Soviet history. Furthermore, the involvement of Lithuanian artists in the monument construction should be considered an ideological action of the occupational regime, which aimed to include the Lithuanians in the narrative of the common struggle of the nations of the USSR against Nazi Germany as quickly as possible. In other words, the Kaliningrad memorial complex and the sculptural groups decorating it marked an ambitious start of the Sovietization of Lithuania and Königsberg.

Indrė Urbelytė

Sovietiniai karo paminklai: Pergalės paminklo Kaliningrade atvejis

Straipsnyje analizuojamas Pergalės monumentas Kaliningrade – vienas ankstyviausių sovietų karo memorialų, skirtų Raudonosios Armijos kovoms Antrajame pasauliniame kare pažymėti, kurį realizavo sovietų reokupuotos Lietuvos skulptorių komanda. Tekste remiamasi maždaug 1970 m. dailininko ir ryškaus sovietinės kultūros veikėjo Vytauto Mackevičiaus rašytais prisiminimais apie šio komplekso statybas, aptariami kiti Sovietų Sąjungos užkariauotose teritorijose iškilę Antrojo pasaulinio karo memorialiniai kompleksai. Siekiant išnarplioti ideologines Kaliningrado monumento potekstes ir atskleisti platesnę sovietų monumentaliosios propagandos programą, dėmesys kreipiamas į ideologizuotą vadinamojo Didžiojo Tėvynės karo naratyvą. Galiausiai, sparčios komplekso statybos interpretuojamos kaip Lietuvos ir Karaliaučiaus intensyvios sovietizacijos pradžios ženklas.