Collective Interments: Ossuaries and Brotherly Mounds in Bulgaria, 1944-1989

Abstract:

Together with the numerous memorial plaques and sculptural representations to ideologically important personalities, the period after 1944 in Bulgaria was marked by widespread practices of interring deadly remains in ossuary casks and of preserving them for public commemoration. Nurtured by propaganda appeals about the eternal memory of the ideology's special dead, the collecting of heroes' relics and their placement in specially prepared casks continued throughout the entire communist period. In fact, ossuaries and brotherly mounds continued to be built well until 1980s, when mortal remains were still looked after, collected, and stored in monumental casks. The current article attempts to present the main contours of ossuary-building practices in communist Bulgaria and to analyze the symbolic meanings that the reunified collective body of the special dead had for the ideology in power after 1944. Based on an overview about the different types of ossuary forms, the paper sheds light on a set of practices related to the dead body, among which the translation of remains from the place of death to the site of preservation; the collective burial into common tombs; and the ideological interpretation about the sites of bodily interment

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